



**Australian
Privacy
Foundation**

<http://www.privacy.org.au>

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<http://www.privacy.org.au/About/Contacts.htm>

2 August 2016

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull
Prime Minister of Australia
House of Representatives
CANBERRA ACT 2600

cc. Bill Shorten
cc. Richard Di Natale

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: 2016 Census

On 18 December 2015 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) announced it would retain the names provided by Australians obtained in the 2016 Census to enable a "richer and dynamic" statistical analysis. This is a significant departure from the previous laudable practice of the ABS destroying identifying information before data analysis.¹

The Australian Privacy Foundation was not consulted about the proposed changes to the Census by the ABS. The ABS also did a Privacy Impact Assessment that was not independent and fell drastically short of public expectations given the scope and sensitivity of the information involved.

Australians have serious privacy concerns arising from the proposed operation of the 2016 Census. Privacy is not just about secrecy it is about the control of personal information. Many Australians feel strongly about when and how their name may be used. This shows a privacy conscious society which is positive and should be encouraged. Unfortunately, the ABS's threats of prosecution are not helpful in resolving this issue.

Please also note the article on our website at https://www.privacy.org.au/Papers/ABS-Census_2016_and_Privacy_v8.pdf by Bill McLennan (former Australian Statistician), arguing that name cannot be collected on a compulsory basis.

In addition, retaining the names and addresses of Australians necessarily presents a high risk of unauthorised access and creates a "honeypot". Highlighting this risk, we note that there the ABS has reported 14 data breaches since 2013.

Given these many issues with the manner in which the 2016 Census project has been pursued, it can be no surprise that the level of public concern is very high. It appears very

¹ It is noted that in 2006 and 2011 the ABS kept 5% of personal identity data. There was no consultation on this of which APF was aware.

likely that the previous record levels of non-response, incomplete returns, and inaccurate and downright fanciful responses to individual questions, will all be greatly exceeded.

The APF supports the objectives of the Census in obtaining aggregate statistical data to enable forward planning for the benefit of all Australians. Name is not reasonably necessary for this purpose. The current position of the ABS is causing civil disobedience which may affect the accuracy of the data obtained. We are keen to avoid this outcome and ask you to urgently announce that:

1. Name is voluntary
2. If using the online form where name is mandatory a pseudonym can be used
3. No-one will be prosecuted for failing to provide their name

We look forward to your urgent response.

Yours sincerely,

Three handwritten signatures are displayed in a row. The first signature is in blue ink and appears to be 'Kat Lane'. The second signature is in black ink and appears to be 'David Lindsay'. The third signature is in black ink and appears to be 'David Vaile'.

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