



ABS goes rogue: Orwellian plan to store Census Name and Address for years

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has unilaterally decided to store all Australians' name and address collected in the 2016 census for years to come. This is a change to its longstanding and widely supported policy not to keep that identifying information after the census was complete.

In 4 months, on Census night 9 August 2016, all Australians will be compelled to provide their names and addresses to ABS contractors, along with other detailed personal information. Each day Australians don't comply with a direction to provide data, they now incur a criminal fine of \$100. Until they do.

The change was done in December without any meaningful consultation; a key report was slipped out before Christmas Eve, with another change last week. It is a breach of trust, a high-handed and arrogant abuse of legislative power. This is a very different ABS to the one Australians used to know and trust.

Gemma Van Halderen, General Manager at the ABS, told the [Australian Privacy Foundation](#) (APF) on 31 March that the ABS was taking this radical direction because "technology has changed," and "there has also been a shift in public perception and expectations about the use of their data."

APF's Mr David Vaile said that Ms Van Halderen's claim that "changes in technology" and the supposed change in Australian's attitudes would support a more privacy-intrusive approach by the ABS was wrong, and displayed bad faith with the Australian public.

"Changes in technology have, if anything, increased the risk, so the ABS decision to store our names and addresses for years is all the more worrying. It creates an irresistible 'honeypot' for hackers and cyber criminals in an age when no IT security can keep out 'motivated intruders'. Serious data breaches are now a real and increasing danger. Retaining Name and Address will also attract the scores of agencies with powers of compulsory access to data. Data-matching is easier, cheaper and more intrusive than ever before. It may only need the stroke of a pen or a tweak of a regulation for the Government to use the data for other purposes, should it decide to do so," said Mr Vaile.

APF Vice Chair Kat Lane said that Ms. Van Halderen's claim that somehow the public would now be comfortable about their personal information being stored in one big virtual database for four years – presumably until just before the next census, when it would be stored for another four years, continuing indefinitely – is wrong.

"Australians value their privacy, they used to trust the ABS, and they would be alarmed by this sneaky change to the way their personal information will now be stored. They may be horrified to know that the name and address of everyone in their household will now be retained, without consent, so it is no longer anonymous," said Ms Lane.

ABS initially wanted to hold this information 'indefinitely'. In the face of widespread opposition it backtracked, and appears in disarray. But a change to four years is hardly better, and could as easily be reversed. Creating a national database of everyone's personal information on a rolling four year basis is a danger to your privacy, and intrusive overreach by a Government which seems increasingly contemptuous of the universal right to privacy and security of sensitive personal information.

Australian Privacy Foundation calls on the ABS to immediately reverse its misconceived and dangerous policy to store all Australians' Name and Address data for years. If it doesn't, the responsible Minister, Alex Hawke, must rein in this rogue department. The recalled Parliament should also pass the overdue Data Breach Notification law (promised for the Data Retention spy plan) and the Privacy Tort law, so Australians have a right to be told if their data is breached, and legal protection they could rely on.

ABS' Letter 31 March: https://www.privacy.org.au/Campaigns/Census2016/ABS_ltr_APF_160331.pdf

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