



**The Hon Michael McCormack MP**  
Minister for Small Business  
Federal Member for Riverina

Ms Kat Lane, Dr David Lindsay and Mr David Vaile  
Vice-Chairs  
Australian Privacy Foundation  
Secretary@privacy.org.au

Dear Ms Lane, Dr Lindsay and Mr Vaile

Thank you for your letters dated 2 August 2016 and 4 August 2016 to the Prime Minister regarding concerns around the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) retaining the names and addresses collected in the 2016 Census of Population and Housing. As the Minister responsible for the ABS your letter has been provided to me for response. I appreciate you writing to express your concerns about this matter and I understand senior officials from the ABS have already spoken with you in recent months about similar concerns.

The retention of names and addresses collected in the Census will provide a richer and more dynamic statistical picture of Australia. Collection of names has been a feature of all past 16 Censuses dating back to 1911 in order to ensure the quality of important official statistics. This improves the accuracy of Census responses for all persons in the household and important statistics on issues such as Indigenous life expectancy.

In line with the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, I am confident the ABS's existing practises and obligations will ensure no information will be released in a way that would enable users of Census data to identify any individual or household. Names, addresses and Census data will be stored separately at the ABS and made anonymous. The ABS has an unblemished record in terms of the safe collection, storage and use of personal information from the Census.

In recent Censuses, names and addresses have been destroyed at the end of Census data processing, approximately eighteen months after the Census. This has reduced the value of the Census. The ABS, following public consultation, decided to retain names and addresses for longer, but no later than, August 2020 to ensure that the ABS can better meet the statistical needs of Australia and provide greater statistical evidence about key policy issues over the next four years.

I understand names and addresses will only be retained while they hold significant value and the case for retention will be periodically reviewed, consistent with Australian Privacy Principles. Names and addresses will be destroyed if there is not a compelling case for retention.

In relation to your concerns around the operation of the online Census form and sub-contracting to a subsidiary of IBM, the ABS has engaged IBM to provide online form development and hosting solutions for the Census. The system is hosted within Australia and has been subjected to significant independent security assessment and testing. The Online Census has been built in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Government Protective Security Policies and Information Security Standards. The online form system has been subjected to significant security assessments and testing, which has been developed with advice from Australian Signals Directorate. These assessments included security reviews of the code and penetration testing (ethical hacking) by IBM, ABS and independent security experts.

Thank you for raising these concerns with me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael McCormack". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**MICHAEL McCORMACK**

9/8/16