



# Informing the Nation

## Open access to statistical information in Australia

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statistics for informed  
decision making

# Overview

- About the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and National Statistical Service (NSS)
- Access to ABS statistics
  - From charged to free access
  - From “all rights reserved” to “some rights reserved”
- Open access and Public sector information
- Enablers of open access
  - Open licensing
- The ABS has come a long way

# Canberra, Australia



# About the ABS

- Australia's official statistical organisation
- ABS Mission is to assist and encourage informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by leading a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service
- Both a legislative and long-standing commitment to the Australian community to publish the results of all statistical collections we conduct
- <http://www.abs.gov.au>



# National Statistical Service



- The National Statistical Service (NSS) is the community of government agencies and their statistical activities
- Led by the ABS as Australia's national statistical organisation
- Building a rich statistical picture for a better informed Australia
- <http://www.nss.gov.au>

# Four principles support the NSS

1. Shared values
2. Building skills, knowledge and **accessibility**
3. Making rich content easily available
4. Consistency of practice and implementation

# Access to ABS statistics

- Access to information is fundamental to democracy -statistics are essential for informed decision making
- ABS has had a continually increasing philosophy of access for all
- Both change and continuity in ABS policy over time
- Change from user-pays to taxpayers-pay
  - Government user pays policy in late eighties required payment for most access to ABS statistics
  - But equity of access to selected statistics retained
  - Government cost recovery principles introduced in 2005 led to three levels of ABS information:
    - Basic Information Set – free access for all
    - Additional Information Set – recover cost of providing access
    - Commercial Information Set – commercial pricing

# However...

**Access to information alone is not  
enough to ensure it is used for  
maximum benefit...**

**Open access enables innovation,  
collaboration and  
facilitates informed decision making**

# Open access and Public Sector Information

- ABS information is Public Sector Information (PSI)
- PSI = information collected and compiled using taxpayers' funds
- Growing global movement calling for open access to PSI
- Open access involves
  - free access
  - open formats
  - open licensing
- Open licensing means
  - “liberalised” rights to use the information
  - change from “All rights reserved” to “Some rights reserved”

# Drivers for change

- **Societal expectation**
  - demand for transparency of public sector information
  - access to information essential to democracy
  - Use of internet increase demand for information, including public sector information.
  
- **Increasing demand to "mix and match" ABS data with other information**
  - we have the technology to make it happen cheaply and more easily
  - people want to enhance data and create new products
  - need for collaboration and innovation, and Web2.0 technologies can facilitate this

# How can we enable this change?

- Open licensing
- Open standards
- Open formats
- Collaboration

# What is Open Licensing?

- Although data has been free on the ABS website since 2005, redistribution of information was subject to licensing
- A licence is a document that specifies the permissions and restrictions associated with the use of a work
- The licensing process itself can pose a barrier to effective use (or re-use) of information
- An open licence is one which grants permission to access, re-use and redistribute a work with few or no restrictions

**ABS needed to have a simple, open and internationally recognised framework for its statistical licensing**

# Why open licensing?

- all works are subject to copyright law
- without licensing, use of others' works is limited
- perceived barriers posed by traditional licensing
- open licensing will maximise economic and social returns by raising awareness, adding value, or creating new works, through
  - Enabling sharing of works
  - Incorporating usage rights in the works

**Sharing of information is fundamental to  
development and innovation**

# Cutler Innovation Review 2008

“... need for an Australian National Information Policy (or Strategy) that optimizes the generation and flow of ideas and information in the Australian economy . . . for social and economic benefit.”

“Australian governments should adopt international standards of open publishing as far as possible”

**The solution needed to be simple...**

# Creative Commons

- Creative Commons (CC)
  - Offers “flexible copyright management tools for creative work”
  - International standard
  - Creators choose the rights they pass on with their work
  - <http://www.creativecommons.org.au>
  
- Government Information Licensing Framework (Australia)
  - Encourages use and re-use of PSI
  - Uses Creative Commons + 1 GILF restrictive license
  - <http://www.gilf.gov.au>

# Creative Commons

## A simple answer

- Creative Commons:
  - **Uses a standard approach to clarify responsibilities** for using, sharing and re-using data.
  - Can be searched with Google!
  - Is internationally recognised
  - Can be understood by users with confidence and certainty
  - Means that data from a wide range of sources can be matched together, with confidence that the licensing conditions are common.
- This creates an environment which will **optimise the flow** of ideas and information for social and economic benefit.



# Creative Commons widens the use of ABS statistics

- Attribution 2.5 Australia licence: 
- enables ABS data to be free to use, re-use and distribute, even commercially\*
  - data is more available to facilitate research and promote wider use of statistics
  - no limit to quantity of data
  - facilitates creativity and innovation

*\* a small number of exceptions*

**ABS only asks for acknowledgement as source of the data**

# Creative Commons

➤ Four elements

1. Attribution



2. Non-commercial



3. No Derivative



4. Share alike



➤ Elements combine to make up licenses

# Six types of CC licenses



**Attribution**



**Attribution – Share Alike**



**Attribution – No Derivatives**



**Attribution – Non-Commercial**



**Attribution – Non-Commercial – Share Alike**



**Attribution – Non-Commercial – No Derivatives**

# Major milestones in open access to statistics

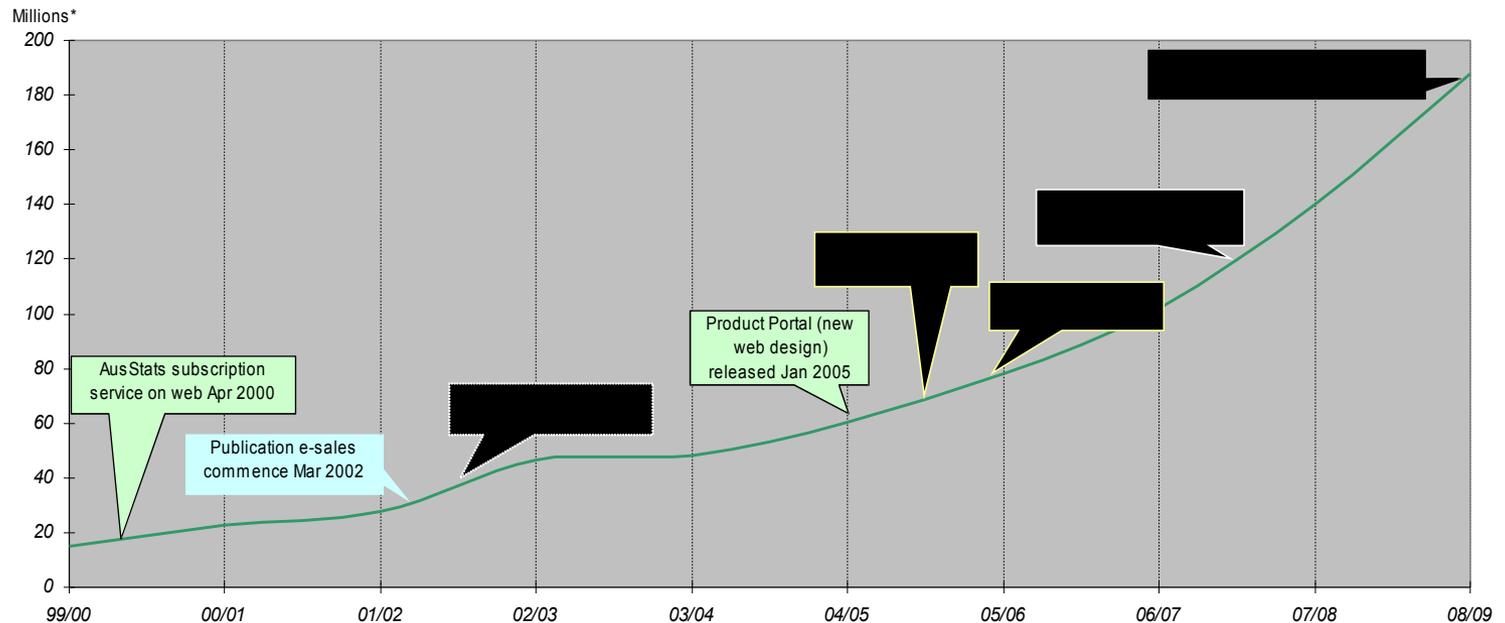
- June 1995 - ABS web “statsite” launched
- April 2000 - “AusStats” goes on-line
- March 2002 - e-sales of ABS data commence
- May 2004 - NSS website launched
- 2004 – National Data Network pilot commenced
- July 2005 - Free publications on the web
- Dec 2005 - Free statistics on the web
- Dec 2008 - ABS adopts Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Australia licence for website
- Oct 2009 - National Statistical Service website adopts Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Australia licence



# Open access accelerates use

- The ABS website averages **1.5 million page views per week**
- Took 5.5 years to double from 30 million page views to 60 million before 2005; and only 2 years to double after 2005

ABS Website Activity Dec 1999 to Jan 2009



\*Number of web pages viewed

# The future?

- One size does not need to fit all
  - Different statistical products could have different licences
  
- Licensing beyond the website
  - Also considering application of CC beyond the website, e.g. customised data

# Other enablers of open access

- Open formats
  - published specifications for storing digital data
  - more work to be done to open up access to ABS products – not all in open, easy to re-use formats
  - provide data in recognised open formats
  - provide data rather than products
  - Open standards
  
- Open standards
  - publicly available
  - has various usage rights associated with it
  - internationally recognised
  - ABS focus on improvements to metadata – data that describes our data

# Collaboration

- Australian Government agencies are actively and increasingly collaborating to bring together a variety of information that will add richness to data
- the output of such collaborations will enable better decision making
- Commonwealth Spatial Data Initiative (CSDI)
  - integration and sharing of spatially enabled Australian government administrative data
  - ABS leading data Standards & governance component
- Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS)
  - ABS collaboration with Victorian State Government
    - A state-wide integrated monitoring and reporting system that is directly linked to policy

# ABS has come a long way

- From charged access to free access
- From “all rights reserved” to “some rights reserved” – ABS only requires “attribution” for the use of our statistics
- Vital step in supporting democracy and in liberating ABS data for better decision making

# ABS has come a long way...

“The ABS move is only one (though a very significant one for Australia) of a number of recent developments in the international movement to provide public access to publicly funded resources.”

CC Australia – Dec 2008