



Australian Bureau of Statistics
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Ref: MC26-000045

Senator Dean Smith
Senator for WA
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Smith

Thank you for your correspondence of 5 August 2026 concerning the integrity of the 2026 Census. Here are my answers to your questions:

1. *Is the ABS aware of the "Census – Not religious? Mark no religion" campaign and the questionnaire currently being circulated by the Rationalist Society of Australia, the National Secular Lobby and associated organisations?*

The ABS is aware of the "Census – Not religious? Mark no religion" campaign. It is one of several campaigns circulating around the 2026 Census question on religion and other topics.

2. *Does the ABS consider it appropriate for advocacy organisations to conduct campaigns that encourage or recommend particular responses to Census questions, and if not, what concerns does the ABS have about such campaigns?*

The ABS is grateful to the many groups, including cultural and religious organisations, that are encouraging participation in the Census and helping their communities to complete the form accurately. Many of these groups and organisations consult with the ABS and invite us to fact-check their guidance.

The ABS is concerned when advocacy encourages people to respond in a manner that is inconsistent with the intent of the question. The question on religion asks what is a person's religious **affiliation**, which may be different from their practice of, or participation in, religious activities. It is important that the question is answered accurately and according to an individual's own beliefs regarding their religion.

3. *Has the ABS assessed whether campaigns of this nature have the potential to influence responses, undermine the accuracy or integrity of Census data, or diminish public confidence in the Census?*

When the ABS becomes aware of campaigns we assess them for accuracy, reach and impact. If campaigns are found to be factually incorrect, we take action to encourage accurate completion and maintain public confidence in the Census.

4. *What representations, concerns or complaints has the ABS received regarding this campaign or similar campaigns, and what action, if any, has the ABS taken in response?*

The ABS has responded to a small number of public and media enquiries asking if we were aware of the "Census – Not religious? Mark no religion" campaign.

The ABS released public guidance on 6 August [reminding Australians to answer the religion question according to their own beliefs](#).

5. *Has the ABS engaged with the organisations conducting this campaign, or any other stakeholders, regarding its potential impact on the integrity of the Census?*

The ABS has had previous interactions with organisations involved in the campaign. For example, the "Census26 – Not Religious?" campaign has previously requested ABS review the campaign's proposed website content instructing people how to request a separate form for reasons of privacy to ensure it provided accurate information. The ABS did not review or have any prior awareness of the questionnaire.

6. *Has the ABS taken steps to satisfy itself that this campaign is lawful and categorially does not risk the integrity of the Census?*

The ABS has not sought legal advice related to this campaign. We have not seen evidence that would suggest the campaign poses a risk to the integrity of the Census. We will continue to monitor our public channels for questions or feedback on this issue.

7. *Does the ABS intend to issue any public guidance reminding Australians that Census responses should reflect their own circumstances and beliefs, rather than recommendations made by third-party advocacy groups?*

The ABS released public guidance on 6 August [reminding Australians to answer the religion question according to their own beliefs](#).

8. *Has the ABS raised this issue with the Australian Government or the responsible Minister, or sought additional legislative powers or other measures to better protect the integrity, credibility and independence of the Census from the organised attempts to influence responses?*

The ABS has alerted the responsible Minister to the media statement we released on 6 August.

9. *More broadly, what policies, protocols or safeguards does the ABS have in place to respond to organised campaigns by advocacy groups that seek to influence how Australians answer Census questions, regardless of the issue or viewpoint being advanced?*

The ABS has established protocols for the management of misinformation on media and social media that presents a risk to the ABS's reputation or to public confidence in the Census. We are actively monitoring media and social media for misinformation. Where we identify misinformation, we take action based on its potential impact and reach. This action can include hiding or turning off social media comments on ABS posts, reporting posts or comments to social media platforms, issuing a correction request to a media outlet or publishing a media statement clarifying an issue.

A question on religion has been included in the Census since Australia's first Census in 1911 and is important for understanding how the religious affiliation of Australians has evolved over time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Gruen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'D' and a trailing 'n'.

Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Statistician

7 August 2026

Released under FOI Act