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Shadow Assistant Minister to the Shadow Treasurer
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Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Statistician and Chief Statistician
Australian Bureau of Statistics
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Belconnen ACT 2616

Via Email: david.gruen@abs.gov.au

5 August 2026

Dear Dr Gruen,

Matters Concerning the Integrity of the 2026 Census

I write regarding recent media reports concerning the "Census – Not religious? Mark no religion" campaign being conducted by the Rationalist Society of Australia, the National Secular Lobby and associated organisations ahead of the 2026 Census.

The Australian Census is one of the nation's most important statistical exercises.

Its credibility depends upon Australians providing accurate responses that reflect their own circumstances, free from organised campaigns seeking to influence how particular questions are answered.

According to recent reporting, the organisations involved have developed and distributed an online questionnaire that, depending upon an individual's responses, recommends they either record "No religion" or use another category when completing the Census.

The questionnaire invites participants to consider factors such as attendance at religious services, prayer, and views on contemporary social issues before recommending how they should answer the Census religion question.

As you would recall, I have questioned you on several occasions during Senate Estimates regarding preparations for the 2026 Census, including the proposed treatment of the religion question and the importance of maintaining confidence in the integrity of Census data.

During Estimates in both June and November 2024, we discussed the consultation process undertaken by the ABS, including your engagement with religious and secular organisations, the testing of alternative approaches to the religion question, and your confirmation that responsibility for determining the wording and structure of the question rests with you as Australian Statistician.

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You also advised the Senate Estimates Committee that the ABS was carefully considering stakeholder views and evidence before determining the question that would best capture accurate information on religious affiliation.

Against that background, I am concerned that organised campaigns encouraging Australians to answer the religion question in a particular way may have the potential to compromise the integrity of the Census, undermine public confidence in its results, and facilitate an inaccurate use of Census data in future policy and planning decisions.

I would appreciate your advice on the following matters:

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?
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?
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?
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?
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?
6. Has the ABS taken steps to satisfy itself that this campaign is lawful and categorically does not risk the integrity of the Census.
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?
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 organised attempts to influence responses?
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?

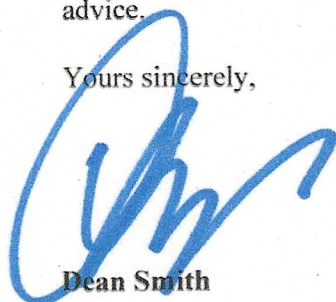
The Census underpins decisions on public policy, service delivery, infrastructure planning and the allocation of resources across Australia.

Maintaining confidence that Census data represents Australians' genuine responses, rather than responses shaped by organised advocacy campaigns, is essential to preserving its credibility and value.

If it assists, I am comfortable with your response to this letter being made public.

Given the proximity of Census night on Tuesday, 11 August, I would appreciate your earliest advice.

Yours sincerely,



Dean Smith

Released under FOI Act