

Statistical Clearing House Annual Report 2011-12

Statistical Clearing House Role

The Statistical Clearing House (SCH) was established in 1997 in response to a recommendation by the Small Business Deregulation Task Force that a central clearance process be established for business surveys conducted by the Australian Government.

The SCH objectives are to ensure that surveys are necessary, well designed and place minimum burden on business respondents. All surveys that are directed to businesses that are conducted by or on behalf of any Australian Government agency (including the ABS), are subject to clearance by the SCH.

The SCH pays particular attention to eliminating duplication and ensuring that business surveys conducted by the Australian Government follow sound statistical methodologies and practices.

2011-12 SCH Approval Activity

During 2011-12 the SCH reviewed the scope of 156 surveys. Of these, 89 were in scope for a full SCH review, 22 were classified as 'In-scope - not to be reviewed'*, 38 were 'Not in scope' and 7 were cancelled after submission (Table 1). Of the 89 surveys found to be in scope in 2011-12, 63 were approved within the financial year and 26 were in various stages of review at the end of the reporting period.

Table 1: Number of surveys reviewed by SCH, 2007-08 to 2011-12

Financial year	In scope for review	In scope not to be reviewed*	Not in scope	Cancelled	Total
2007-08	73	20	27	16	136
2008-09	66	9	34	4	113
2009-10	76	15	32	34	157
2010-11	95	10	9	6	120
2011-12	89	22	38	7	156

* 'In scope - not to be reviewed' are surveys where the respondent burden is minimal, i.e. the number of businesses to be contacted is 50 or more but less than 200 and the total time taken for all businesses to complete the survey is less than 200 hours.

In 2011-12 the SCH approved a total of 77 business surveys undertaken across the Australian Government (Table 2) which includes 63 submitted in 2011-12 and 14 submitted in the previous reporting year. The ABS, ATO, DoHA, DEEWR and the DIISRTE were the five key agencies that conducted business survey collections in 2011-12. Note that the SCH reviews many surveys that only require a review every three years and therefore may not have been reviewed in the last two years.

Table 2: Number of SCH approved surveys by Agency, 2011-12 and 2010-11

Agency	Approved surveys		High Profile surveys	
	2011-12	2010-11	2011-12	2010-11
ABS	13	17	6	4
ATO	13	10	2	1
DoHA	12	9	3	1
DEEWR	8	17	2	3
DIISRTE	8	7	0	2
DHS	4	4	0	0
DIAC	3	0	1	0
ABARES	2	12	1	11
Other agencies	14	20	0	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>26</i>

In 2011-12 there were 15 High Profile surveys reviewed with key agencies being ABS, ATO, DoHA and DEEWR (Table 2). High profile collections include business surveys that either approach over 5,000 businesses, have a responding sample of over 2,000 businesses or are undertaken using a list of businesses provided by the ABS.

Survey purpose

The Australian Government conducts business surveys for a number of purposes which can be broadly classified into three categories

- for statistical purposes;
- to support policy decisions; and
- to measure the impact of service delivery (including client satisfaction surveys).

In 2011-12 the SCH approved 20 surveys conducted for statistical purposes, 18 surveys to support policy decisions, and 39 surveys to measure the impact of service delivery.

Impact of SCH on the Australian government business surveys

The SCH review process often results in improvements that assist in reducing the burden on businesses and raising the quality of surveys being conducted. The improvements usually include one or more of the following:

- layout and design changes to questionnaires
- undertaking questionnaire testing
- increasing follow-up procedures to improve response rates
- changes to sample design methodology and
- interpreting data from surveys with low response rates.

SCH Online Tool

During 2011-12 the SCH released online Scoping and Information Templates on its website to allow survey managers to submit survey information and supporting documents electronically. The introduction of the online templates enables survey managers to get instant scoping decision on their proposed surveys and facilitates preparation and submission of information more efficiently.

The SCH maintains a network of Statistical Liaison Officers (SLOs) in most Australian Government departments and agencies. SLOs act as a communication point between the SCH and areas within agencies that run surveys of businesses. The SCH meets formally with SLOs twice a year by means of the Statistical Clearing House Advisory Forum (SCHAF). The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the SCHAF was reviewed in early 2012 and a revised TOR incorporating the expanded role of SLO members was released in April 2012.

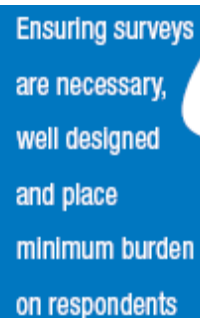
SCH staff are also available to meet with individual agencies to discuss issues with surveys, SCH review processes and to enhance statistical capability.

For more information about the Statistical Clearing House:

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