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Acting Australian Statistician

Ms Deborah Anton
Interim National Data commissioner
Australian Government Solicitors Building
Level 4, 4 National Circuit
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Dear Ms Anton

ABS submission in response to *Data Sharing and Release Discussion Paper, September 2019*

The ABS supports the Data Sharing and Release legislative reforms, and commends the comprehensive engagement and consultation undertaken to date by your Office to produce the September 2019 Discussion Paper.

Building and maintaining community trust in government data activities is central to the data reform agenda's success. The ABS relies on the trust of households, businesses and other data suppliers to provide their information to the ABS. Without this trust the ABS could not produce the official statistics to inform important decisions.

Consistent with previous responses, the ABS remains concerned about the potential impact of secrecy provision overrides on community trust. A proliferation of data sharing under the Data Sharing and Release Legislation and increasingly sophisticated ways of using data will require a commensurate improvement in transparency, consultation and engagement with the community about how their data is being used and protections that underpin its safe use. The ABS looks forward to working with your Office to advance activities to address this challenge.

The ABS supports the establishment of accreditation and other controls to oversight the data system and ensure that organisations and individuals have the skills and capabilities to protect, manage and use data safely and effectively. However, as has been noted in the Discussion Paper, it is critical that the right balance is achieved between the controls implemented, and the potential for the system to become too onerous. Community trust may be compromised if the safeguards are not robust enough; while the objective of enhanced data access and sharing could be undermined if administration of the safeguards is too cumbersome. Initiatives, such as electronic Data Sharing Agreements, which reduce administrative overheads are encouraged.

The National Data Commissioner has an important role to champion greater data sharing while promoting safe data sharing practices. However, your Office is one voice among many. The public sector more

broadly must contribute to building community support for good data use and sharing. Vocal backing of the positive outcomes data sharing facilitates also needs to come from academics, researchers, community organisations and businesses who are able to contribute to public good outcomes through better access to government data. Broader support and acceptance for the reforms will be challenging without these supportive voices.

Finally, further investment in data capability of APS staff and the infrastructure they use is needed to position the public service to maximise the benefits of safe data sharing for all Australians.

The ABS looks forward to continued engagement in relation to the draft legislation and working more broadly with your Office to support reform of the public sector data system.

Yours sincerely,


Luise McCulloch

10 October 2019