



Census
For a brighter future

2016 Census of Population and Housing: Submission Form for Content or Procedures, 2016

Before completing this form

Pre-submission reading: Before making a submission, please read the following information paper [Census of Population and Housing: Consultation on Content and Procedures, 2016 \(cat. no. 2007.0\)](#). This paper sets out initial proposals from the ABS on content and procedures for the 2016 Census and invites comment from the public.

Preparing your submission: Submissions for the inclusion of a new topic or the modification of an existing topic require detailed justification against the following criteria to facilitate assessment:

- The topic is of current national importance.
- There is a current need for data on the topic for small population groups and/or at the small area level.
- There are no other suitable alternative data sources available for the topic.
- The topic is suitable for inclusion in the Census.
- There is likely to be a continuing need for data on the topic in the following Census.

If you wish to make a submission on any aspect of the Census, you will need to complete the following form. **A separate submission will be required for each topic or aspect** of the Census you wish to address.

We advise that you look at the questions being asked and prepare your submission before starting your form. **The on-line submission form does not have a save function.** Therefore once you start you will need to complete it, or start over if you exit out of the form, unless you have saved your content in another location.

Lodging submissions

Please lodge your submission for the 2016 Census content or procedures using either this submission form or the online version at <https://secure.abs.gov.au/census/submissions.NSF>

Please return the completed form to 2016census@abs.gov.au (if completed electronically). If you are submitting a paper version of this form, please return it to:

2016 Census Submissions
Australian Bureau of Statistics
Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616

Due Date

The submission period is open from 6 November 2012 - 31 May 2013.

Help

If you have any queries about the submission process please visit www.abs.gov.au/census, email 2016census@abs.gov.au or telephone 1300 135 070.



Contact details

Q1. Please provide contact details of the person to contact regarding this submission.

Note: These details must be completed as anonymous submissions will not be considered. * Denotes mandatory fields

Name:

Title:

First name*: [David](#)

Surname*: [Nicholls](#)

Postal address*:

PO Box/Apartment, Flat or Unit No (if any): [Private Mail Bag 6](#)

Street No.:

Street Name:

Suburb: [Maitland](#)

State/Territory: [South Australia](#)

Postcode: [5573](#)

Country, if not in Australia:

Phone number: [08 8835 2269](#)

Mobile number:

Email address*: info@atheistfoundation.org.au

Q2. Do you agree to allow the ABS to publicly refer to the information provided in this submission as a statement of your, or your organisation's, views on the relevant topics or procedures?*

Note: The ABS may make public the views put forward in this submission. However, the ABS will not publish the names of persons or organisations making submissions unless you have given permission to do so.

Please select a response below:

- [Yes, I agree](#)
 [No, I do not agree](#)



Preliminary information

Q3. Are you are completing this submission as a*:

Please select a response below:

- Private individual not representing any organisation? ▶ **Go to Q7**
- Representative of an organisation or government department?** ▶ **Go to next question**

Q4. What is the name and address of your organisation?*

Note: For organisations with offices at more than one location please indicate the address where your head office is located.

Name of organisation: [Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc](#)

Address of organisation*:

PO Box/Apartment, Flat or Unit No (if any): [Private Mail Bag 6](#)

Suburb: [Maitland](#)

State/Territory: [South Australia](#)

Postcode: [5573](#)

Q5. What is your position in the organisation?

Position Title: [President](#)

Designation/Level

/Role:

Q6. Which sector best describes your organisation?

Please select a response below:

- Government Sector / Australian Government
- Government Sector / State / Territory
- Government Sector / Local
- Private sector (fewer than 20 employees)
- Private sector (20 or more employees)
- Other (please specify):
- [Not For Profit Organisation](#)



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Submission for the 2016 Census of Population and Housing

Please answer, in as much detail as possible, the following questions:

Q7. Does this submission relate to*:

Please select a response below:

- A new topic? ▶ **Go to next question**
- X** Change to an existing topic? ▶ **Go to next question**
- The exclusion of a topic? ▶ **Go to Q16**
- Some other aspect of the Census? ▶ **Go to Q19**

Q8. What is the name of the topic?*

Note: Please use the topic names listed in *Census of Population and Housing: Consultation on Content and Procedures, 2016* (cat. no. 2007.0), if appropriate. Please specify other topics.

Religious Affiliation



Q9. Please define the topic and/or describe modifications you are proposing to this topic for the 2016 Census.*

The current Census question with regard to religious affiliation seems to be based on an historical context when the vast majority of Australians identified with a particular religion. The question, as it stands, assumes people have a religion and the non-religious are covered almost as an afterthought, with a 'No religion' box at the end of the list of religious faiths. At the 2011 Census about 25% of people identified themselves as having 'No religion'. Based on current trends this could well be nearer 35% by 2016. In order to reflect the breakdown of religious affiliations accurately we consider that the question needs to be altered.

The problem we see with the current question is its leading nature. By assuming that people have some sort of religious affiliation we would suggest that the final figures are not a true reflection of the actual numbers. People answering this question are shown a number of faiths before having the option of 'No religion'. We would argue that people who were raised with a particular faith, but no longer have a religious affiliation, would be more likely to choose a faith with the question in its present form. This would lead to misleading data which is in no one's interest. This inevitably results in distorted data, which obviously diminishes the value of the question.

As evidence of this we think we should look at the data coming from New Zealand. In many ways New Zealand has a similar demographic to Australia yet the numbers not affiliated with any religion are much greater than in Australia. In the 2006 Census 34.7% identified themselves as having 'No religion'. Based on current trends this will be nearer 40% by the time of the latest Census. This number is significantly higher than Australia and we believe that this can partly be explained by the wording of this question. In New Zealand the question is asked "What is your religion?" and the first option is 'No religion'.

We also note that changes to the list of religious categories are made each Census to reflect the numbers received in the previous census period. The order seems to vary to give priority to the popularity of each faith.

However, this does not apply to the 'No religion' option, which is tucked away at the end every time. Surely, if 'No religion' is to be treated as a religion as far as this question is concerned, then, in the 2016 Census, it should be in second place behind Catholics by the ABS's current formula.

As such we propose three options that will achieve fairness and higher quality data. They are listed in our **preferred option** order.



Option 1.

Change the format of the question to:

DOES THE PERSON HAVE A RELIGION?

For the NO answer, go to question X (next)

For the YES answer, WHICH RELIGION? Catholic, Anglican, Hindu, Jewish etc.

Option 2.

The New Zealand option

As in the current question but with the 'No religion' option at the top of the list.

Option 3.

As in the current question but with 'No religion' given suitable prominence in accordance with the numbers it obtained at the previous Census.

Q10. Criteria 1: The topic is of current national importance.*

Note: What specific purposes will the data be used for? Please consider the following when addressing this criteria:

- Uses in policy-making, long-term planning, social and economic applications.
- What benefits will flow from this data.
- The consequences if this topic was not included in the 2016 Census.
- In particular, please consider what activities could not take place or would be significantly reduced or degraded in quality.

Data arising from the religious affiliation question is used in the assessment of planning applications for the development of religious facilities and accompanying traffic and other considerations. The current bias in the question leads to inflated figures for religious affiliation and hence inflated estimates of need and use for planning purposes.

Religion and its attendant influence on the Australian political process is apparent in many of the functions of government, a recent example being the degree of access religious bodies have to government funded education facilities and the government policies which facilitate this access.

Accurate census data reflecting the actual proportion of the population subscribing to religious belief is required to ensure the equitable distribution of these substantial funds.

Q11. Criteria 2: There is a current need for data on the topic for small population groups and/or at the small area level.*

Note: Please consider when addressing this criteria:

- At what geographic level will data from the topic be required?



- For which population groups will the data from the topic be required?

Please specify why the data would be useful at this level.

The AFA has, in recent years, held two major global atheist conventions in Australia. This has led other like-minded groups to explore the possibility of holding other, similar, events. Having accurate statistics of the number of non-religious people in the country will help us, and others, to determine the feasibility of holding future global events here. It also helps us attract more eminent speakers to travel to Australia.

Q12. Criteria 3: There are no suitable alternative data sources available for the topic.*

Are there any alternative data sources available for the topic? If yes, please specify and consider the following in relation to these data sources when addressing this criteria.

- Why are these data sources not appropriate for the purposes indicated in the first criteria?
- Will these data sources provide high quality data for the entire population, and/or for small population groups and/or at the small area level?
- Name of alternative data source and organisation responsible if known.

Q13. Criteria 4: The topic is suitable for inclusion in the Census.*

Note: Please consider when addressing this criteria that Census topics should not:

- Upset people by invading their privacy to an unacceptable degree. The information you will get from such a topic would be subject to bias and will affect other data used and collected in conjunction with it.
- Be subjective (i.e. likely to have varying interpretations for individuals, such as "How would you rate your overall health status").
- Seek information which may not be generally known such as "where was your maternal grandmother born".
- Be complex to code or difficult to process. You should consider the way answers would need to be classified.
- Require people to remember things they are unlikely to be able to, for example "What was your income five years ago".
- Seek opinions or attitudes.
- Require more than one or two questions to obtain the required information.
- Require an overlong explanation or instructions to ensure an accurate answer. If the type of question needed cannot be understood with minimum of explanation, it is not suitable or appropriate for inclusion in the Census.

Q14. Criteria 5: There is likely to be a continuing need for data on the topic in the following Census.*

Note: Please consider the following when addressing this criteria:

- Will there still be a need for data on this topic at the time of next Census in 2021, and into the future?

Q15. Please also consider the following points in relation to the topic and include in your submission*:

- What data output items will be required for the topic? (Please provide details of the output categories required and, if appropriate, ranges/descriptions for each category.)
- What cross-classifications will be needed with other Census topics?
- Could this topic be included on a 10-yearly cycle rather than a 5-yearly cycle?



Q16. Is there any topic which you consider should be excluded from the 2016 Census?

Please select a response below :

- No** ▶ *Go to question 19*
- Yes** ▶ *Go to next question*

Q17. What is the name of the topic which you consider should be excluded from the 2016 Census?

*Note: Please use the topic names listed in *Census of Population and Housing: Consultation on Content and Procedures, 2016* (cat. no. 2007.0, if appropriate. Please specify other topics.*

Q18. Why do you think that this topic should be excluded from the 2016 Census?

Q19. Would you like to provide any further comments on the proposals for the 2016 Census?

No

Q20. Would you like to attach a file to support your submission?

- Yes, I would like to attach a file
- No, I would not like to attach a file**

Acknowledgement

Once the ABS has received your submission, we will send you or your organisation a letter of acknowledgement, either by post or email.

What happens after submissions close?

Following assessment of submissions, final recommendations on the nature and content of the 2016 Census will be discussed with the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) in late 2013. The ABS will then make a submission to the Government, including recommendations on the nature and content of the 2016 Census. A decision on the content of the 2016 Census is expected to be known by the end of 2014. People who have provided submissions will be advised of the outcome.

Thank you for your interest in the 2016 Census