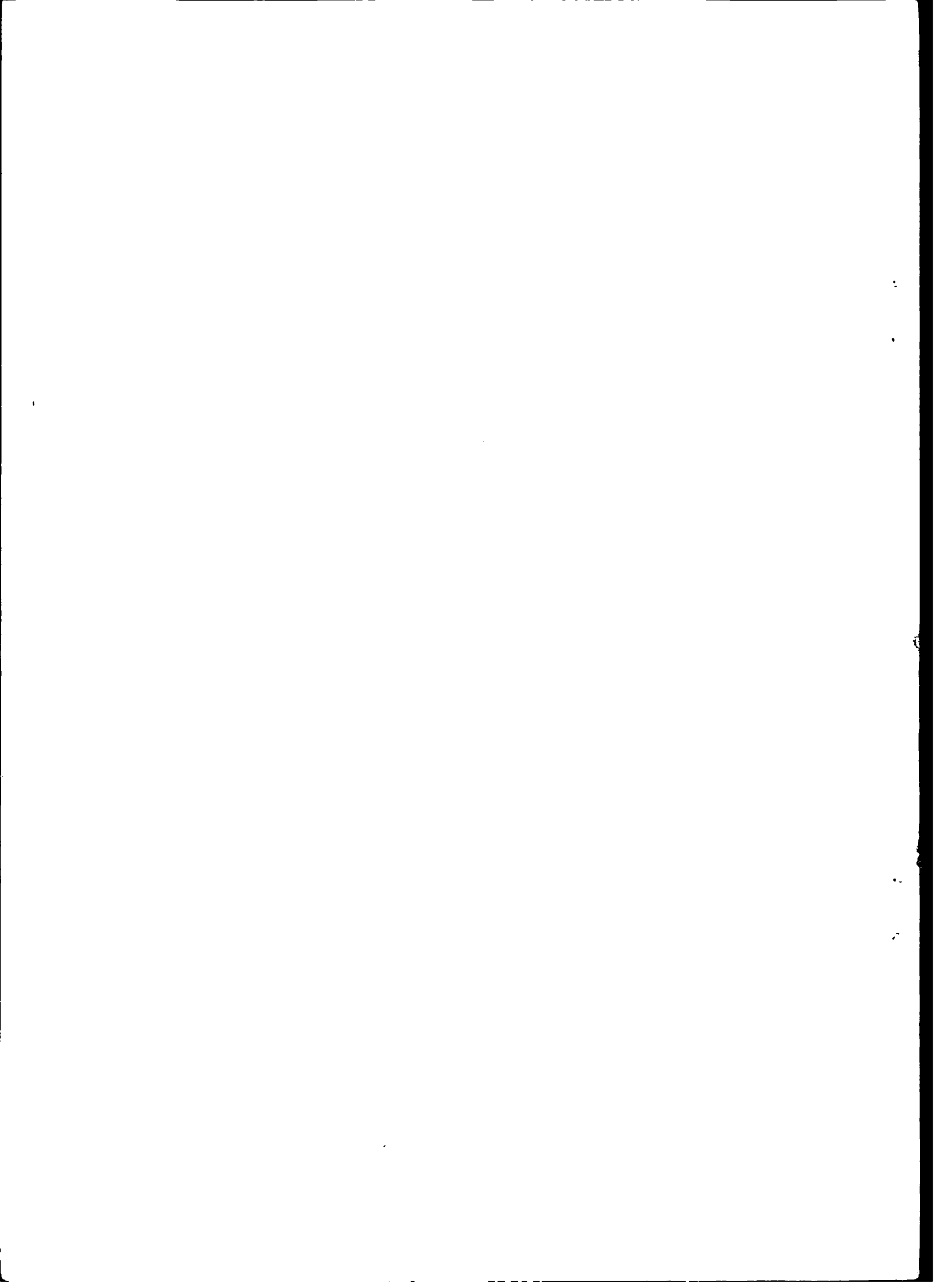


THE 1981 CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING



**AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines major aspects of the Census of Population and Housing to be conducted on Tuesday 30 June 1981 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It will be the tenth census to be held nationally. The first was in 1911 and since 1961 a census has been held every 5 years.

The census and associated surveys are the sources from which estimates are made of the population in each State and Local Government Area. In addition, statistical information is provided on such matters as the age distribution of the population, household composition, population movements, birthplaces and birthplaces of parents, educational qualifications, incomes, occupations and employment, and characteristics of dwellings.

Also the census provides data for studies relating one or more of these characteristics to others; for example, the localities in which people born in a particular overseas country were living at the census date, the main occupations and industries they worked in and their educational qualifications. As another example, those planning transport facilities can study the main traffic flows within a city and the methods people used to get to work, relating these to average income levels and the availability of motor vehicles to households.

Although the census collects information about individuals and households, it does so entirely in order to compile statistics about groups or categories. Strict procedures are enforced to ensure that information about individuals and households is available only to officers processing the census forms. Under no circumstances is such information conveyed to people or organisations, including Government departments, outside the Statistics Bureau.

Planning for the 1981 Census began in mid-1977. In November 1977, the public, business organisations and Government departments were invited to make submissions on topics they wished to see included in, or excluded from, the census. The submissions received were carefully examined, possible questions were tried out on small numbers of representative households and preliminary proposals were then published by the Statistics Bureau in February 1979. Discussions followed with major users of census data and other interested persons in all States, and further testing of possible census questions took place.

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council has been fully consulted throughout these processes.

TOPICS COVERED BY THE CENSUS

Substantially fewer questions will be asked in the 1981 Census than were asked in 1976. In terms of numbered questions, the reduction is from 53 to 34. In terms of the total numbers of answers required from the respondent the reduction is from 68 to 43.

The topics are considered to represent a reasonable balance between needs for data expressed by users, the appropriateness of the census as a means of collecting particular kinds of data, the difficulty with some topics of formulating questions likely to get accurate and consistent answers from households, and the desire that completing the forms should not impose too great a task on households.

A description of the topics with their uses follows:

Name

There have been some objections to the requirement to provide names, primarily by people concerned about privacy or confidentiality.

Names and addresses are not retained in the Bureau's census records. It is however essential to obtain names and addresses on forms in order to be able to set up satisfactory collection, processing and evaluation procedures.

In the *collection* phase the census collector needs names in order to provide a contact point in each household when collecting the completed census forms and to ensure that census forms are obtained for all households located. In the *processing* phase, names are used to assist in producing statistics on the size and composition of families. *Evaluation* techniques, to determine the quality of census data, rely on comparing follow-up surveys with census forms for a small sample of households. Without names and addresses it would be impossible to carry out this measure of the quality of census data.

The Bureau's interest in names ceases at that point and in fact names are not included in the computer record from which results of the census are compiled. Following the evaluation stage, the census forms and collectors' records, which include names, are destroyed by pulping under supervision, so that it becomes impossible even for Bureau officers to locate census information relating to a particular individual or household.

As far as can be ascertained, an anonymous census has never been conducted in any country. Therefore, in investigating the possibility of such a census in Australia, there was no overseas experience on which the Bureau could draw. The results of several tests undertaken by the Bureau in Australia indicated that an anonymous census would have severe adverse effects on the accuracy of the information obtained. This is particularly so if an anonymous census were to be combined with the provision of an envelope in which respondents returned the schedule; the combination would produce high levels of unanswered questions and census forms being returned blank. In the absence of names on forms it would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain the missing information by follow-up action. It is hoped that the measures taken by the Bureau to protect the confidentiality of information supplied in the census and an associated public awareness campaign will help to overcome concern about supplying names.

Demographic

Age, Sex and Marital Status

These topics provide basic census information and practically all statistics relating to people are enhanced in value when classified by age, sex and marital status.

Relationship to Person One

This question allows different types of family groups and the structure of family groups within households to be identified; it is used for demographic and urban studies and in analyses of changing family characteristics over time. The term 'household head' used in past censuses has been replaced by 'person one' (i.e. the person who is listed in the first column of the census form) which is thought to be more acceptable in view of changing social attitudes and living patterns.

Duration of Marriage and Whether Married previously

This information together with the data on number of babies is used in the analysis of fertility differentials.

Number of Babies

Total issue of all women is needed for fertility analysis and the study of trends in population movement.

Internal Migration

Place of Usual Residence

This question is used to establish the Local Government Area in which persons usually live, as distinct from where they were on census night. This information is used to estimate the usual population of each Local Government Area, which is more relevant for some purposes than the actual population at census night.

Place of Residence One Year Ago and Five Years Ago

When compared with the response to place of usual residence, these questions establish internal migration patterns and are used in forward planning for housing, transport, education and health services.

Ethnicity

Birthplace

This question identifies the size and composition of overseas born groups within the community.

Period of Residence

When cross-classified with other census data, and compared with data from previous censuses, answers to this question are used to analyse how the characteristics of new settlers in Australia change over time and to examine the propensity of particular birthplace groups to remain in Australia.

Citizenship

This question establishes the size of groups eligible for voting and provides a measure of the propensity of different birthplace groups to become citizens.

Birthplace of Parents

Answers to this question are used to determine the origins of the Australian population and to study the impact of population movements from particular countries through to the second generation.

Religion (optional)

Religion is the only non-compulsory question in the census. The data are used in planning educational and religious facilities, obtaining a measure of the growth and decline of religious groups in the population, for sociological studies and to assist in identifying particular ethnic groups.

Identification of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders

This question identifies the number of people who regard themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island origin.

Education

Attendance at an Educational Institution

This question asks if attendance is full-time, part-time or not at all. With responses to other labour force questions, it assists in determining the activity of all persons 15 years and over who are not in the labour force.

Highest Qualifications Obtained

This question establishes the incidence of people with particular qualifications and is used in manpower studies and in measuring changes in levels of educational attainment.

Age Left School

This question measures the educational attainment of those without post-secondary qualifications and is used for the same purposes as the data on 'highest qualifications obtained'.

Use of English

This question is used to indicate the number and location of those persons requiring English language training.

Income

Amount of Income (in ranges)

Practically all statistics are enhanced when cross-classified with income data. Particular uses are by health, education and transport planners, and public and private welfare agencies.

Labour Force

Occupational and Employment Status

These questions provide a basis for analysing labour force changes and the participation of particular groups (e.g. married women under 25 years of age) in the labour force.

Occupation

Data on occupations are used in labour force and manpower studies and regional planning.

Industry

Employer's name and address and kind of industry are used to provide uniform industry coding. Industry data are used in the analysis of workers by industry for

manpower studies and the study of minority groups in industry. The address, coded to areas, is used in journey to work studies of traffic flows. The name and address are not included in the computer record.

Hours Worked

Data on hours worked are used in cross-classifications with data on occupation and industry.

Mode of Travel

Mode of Travel to Work

The data are used in urban transport planning and (in conjunction with data on location of place of work and home) in journey to work studies.

Dwellings

Number of Rooms

This question gives an indication of the size of dwellings and provides a measure of housing utilisation.

Mortgages

The data are used in studies of mortgage payments in relation to income levels and other characteristics, e.g. occupation or type of family. With the data on rents, the mortgage information becomes an important measure of housing costs.

Rent

This question is used with income data to indicate areas of need and provides a basis for planning by State Housing Authorities. The Bureau uses rent data in the calculation of weights for rental costs in the Consumer Price Index.

Motor Vehicles Garaged

The data provide a measure of access to private transport, estimates of potential use of public transport, and estimates of traffic volumes and flows.

Material of the Dwelling, Type of Dwelling Structure and Reason Dwelling Unoccupied

The collector is required to provide details on the material of outer walls and type of dwelling structure (e.g. house, townhouse, semi-detached unit etc.) containing the household from which the information was collected and, where the dwelling was unoccupied, the reason for this as best as can be ascertained. The data are used for analysis of the housing supply, changes in living arrangements and housing patterns.

Detailed information on factors having a bearing on the choice of census topics is set out in a document: *Topic Evaluation and Proposed Questions* available from the Statistics Bureau.

SURVEYS LINKED TO THE CENSUS

A number of post-census surveys are conducted by the Statistics Bureau to provide a measure of the quality of census data.

For the 1976 Census the following studies were undertaken:

(i) **Dwelling Coverage Check** – by checking a sample of collection districts, an estimate of the number of private dwellings missed at the census is made; these data provide users of the dwellings data with an indication of their quality and are used by the Bureau for evaluation of collection procedures. In the 1976 Census 1% of collection districts were checked in this fashion.

(ii) **Persons Coverage Check** – a representative sample of the population is interviewed to ascertain the extent of under-enumeration of persons. The interview documents are matched to the census forms to identify cases of duplication or omission. The estimate of under-enumeration for each State is used to adjust population totals which then become a basis for population estimates. In the 1976 Census the sample comprised two-thirds of one percent of all dwellings.

(iii) **Census Content Check** – a sub-sample of the Persons Coverage Check Sample is asked selected census questions by trained interviewers to assess the consistency of their responses. The answers to interviewer questions are compared with those on previously completed census forms. The information provides an indication of the quality of census data and is also used to evaluate census questions and procedures. In the 1976 Census, one-sixth of one percent of dwellings were included in this check.

Although evaluation of the 1981 Census will take place along similar lines, at this stage the exact size and organisation of the surveys has not been determined.

CONDUCT OF THE CENSUS

Census Staff

The census field operation is controlled and conducted jointly by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Electoral Office. Permanently employed Divisional Returning Officers in the Electoral Office become Divisional Field Supervisors for the census and they are responsible for the recruitment, training and general supervision of temporary census staff.

Approximately 2,500 group leaders and 30,000 collectors will be recruited for short term field duties. Each group leader is responsible for approximately 12 collectors who themselves are responsible for the delivery and collection of census forms from an average of 200 dwellings. In addition, special collectors are recruited to undertake census duties in large establishments, e.g. hospitals, hotels, gaols, and to enumerate persons in transit on trains, buses, planes, etc.

Secrecy Provisions

All temporarily recruited staff (group leaders, collectors and special collectors) are required to sign an undertaking of fidelity and secrecy as prescribed under

the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. This Act provides that an officer who has signed the prescribed undertaking will not, without lawful authority, alter any document or form, wilfully sign any untrue document or form and will not divulge the contents of any form filled up or information obtained in the course of his/her duties. Offenders are subject to prosecution. Permanent staff employed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Electoral Office are also bound by the provisions of the *Census and Statistics Act*.

Every effort is made to avoid having collectors work in the same area as they live thereby avoiding, as far as possible, the collection of information from people they know personally. However, in rural areas, where fewer applications are received for collector positions, it is often not possible to ensure that collectors do not know, or are not known to, a householder. In such circumstances, collectors will be instructed to offer householders an envelope in which to seal the completed form.

Delivery and Collection of Census Forms

Collectors are responsible for the delivery of census forms to all households prior to the census day and again for collection after census day. On delivery, the collector is instructed to make every effort to contact the householder to explain the purpose of the census, answer any queries and to arrange a convenient time for collection of the census form.

The special collectors recruited to deliver and collect the forms in large establishments (hospitals, hotels, gaols, etc.) are usually the proprietors or managers of the individual establishments. Likewise, the persons in charge of trains, buses, planes, etc in transit on census night are usually recruited as special collectors for the enumeration of persons travelling throughout census night. Under these circumstances each person receives a form on which he/she replies to the person questions and seals the completed form in the envelope provided.

Collectors are trained to provide help on request to any persons who have difficulty in completing the census forms.

Maintenance of Confidentiality

Anonymity of data records

Name and address are **NOT** transferred to the computer file.

Destruction of census forms and collectors' record books

Census forms and collectors' records books, all of which contain names and addresses, are all accounted for and destroyed under strict supervision immediately after processing. Destruction is carried out by pulping to ensure that no papers are able to be reassembled in a readable form.

Collection envelopes

Any person who does not want his or her completed form to be seen by the collector will be able to obtain from the collector an envelope in which to seal the form. The sealed envelope will be passed unopened by the collector to the group leader, who will then check the

form for completeness and, if necessary, initiate any action to have the form completed by the householder. Individual members of a household may request a separate form and envelope in which to record and seal his/her census information. Where a separate form is issued for an individual the householder is only required to record the person's name on the main form and indicate that a separate form has been completed. Persons in non-private dwellings automatically receive envelopes with their forms.

In exceptional circumstances, a householder may post a completed form to the appropriate Census Office. However the information provided has to be inspected for completeness at some stage and this is most easily done by the collector. Also it becomes more difficult to ensure that forms have been completed for every household if forms are not returned to the collector.

Special Assistance in Completion of Census Forms

Several methods are being designed to provide assistance in understanding the nature and purpose of the census and in completing the census form. These involve the use of interpreters for persons who have language problems, aboriginal collectors in areas where there is a large aboriginal population and a telephone enquiry service for general public enquiries. Experience has shown that such services have been beneficial in allaying any fears and in solving any problems that persons may have concerning the census. Attention will be drawn to the availability of special assistance as part of a public awareness campaign.

Non Co-operation

All persons, excluding diplomatic personnel listed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, are required to complete census forms and collectors are instructed to ensure that contact is made and completed forms are collected. Those people who do not co-operate are approached by senior staff who endeavour to overcome problems or objections and who, where necessary, outline fully the consequences of non-compliance. Prosecutions will be considered only after these measures have failed. It is expected that the mounting of a public awareness campaign on the uses of census data will keep problems of non co-operation to a minimum.

RESULTS OF THE CENSUS

The census is the only statistical collection which involves every person in Australia.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics will be requesting the co-operation of all Australians in this national undertaking and will in turn be providing every assistance to make the completion of the census form as easy as possible.

The Government has agreed that all forms from the 1981 Census will be processed with a minimum of delay and that the sample processing carried out for the 1976 Census will not be repeated.

It is expected that the final population totals will be released in March 1982. Production of main tabulations will commence soon afterwards.

