

Foreword

Measuring a nation's progress – providing information about whether life is getting better – is one of the most important tasks that a national statistical agency can take on. For over 100 years, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has been measuring Australia's progress through the multitude of statistics we publish relating to Australia's economy, society and environment. However, for the most part, our statistical publications have tended to focus on each of these three broad areas in isolation.

There is continued public interest in the interrelationships between economic, social and environmental aspects of life. There have been, for example, debates about the sustainability of economic growth and a recognition that the environment is neither an inexhaustible source of raw materials nor capable of absorbing an unlimited amount of waste. Similarly, progress relates to social concerns – health, education and crime – and whether and how economic growth benefits those areas. Around the world a consensus is growing that countries and governments need to develop a more comprehensive view of progress, rather than focusing mainly on economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product.

The past few years have seen the ABS develop and produce *Measures of Australia's Progress* (MAP) as a contribution to this discussion. It is important to recognise that in MAP we are not claiming to have included everything that is important to progress in this country. The suite of indicators provides the statistical evidence to allow the assessment of progress by users – those who formulate and evaluate policy, researchers and the community.

The first edition of MAP, then called *Measuring Australia's Progress*, was published in April 2002. It was an intentionally experimental publication and it was always our intention that the publication would further develop and evolve over time. The second edition was published in April 2004, which incorporated a number of changes to strengthen the publication based on comments received. This second edition followed the same format as the first. In April 2005, a smaller web-based product was released which incorporated more recent data for the headline indicators.

This is the third full edition of MAP and follows a similar format to the 2004 edition. As is the nature of an evolving product, a number of changes have been incorporated into this edition.

- ◆ The *Environment* dimensions have been restructured to move towards relating the indicators to the fundamental aspects of the environment, namely the natural landscape, the air and atmosphere, and oceans and estuaries. There have been no changes to the headline indicators.
- ◆ There is a feature essay on *Life satisfaction and measures of progress*.
- ◆ The *Family, community and social cohesion* chapter has been reviewed to further embrace ideas around social capital.
- ◆ More international comparisons have been incorporated throughout the publication, in addition to the essay on this topic.

As in past editions, a number of people assisted by reviewing material in this edition and I would like to acknowledge their valuable contribution.

Measures of Australia's Progress will be released in some format every year and will continue to evolve. Over the coming months we will seek feedback about the publication to ensure that it continues to meet user needs. Your suggestions and comments would be most welcome and they should be sent to Kirsty Leslie at the address below.

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