

## WHY DID THE ABS MOVE TO THE ASGS?

In 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) began a review of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC). This involved an expert panel and wide consultation with external stakeholders.

This review identified several deficiencies with the ASGC:

1. It was unstable, as the main structure needed to be reviewed annually.
2. The regions of the main structure were not consistent in population size.
3. The regions were not designed to give the maximum geographical detail for the published data.
4. The regions often did not represent the underlying settlement pattern and socio-economic relationships.
5. The ASGC did not encompass all the regions used by the ABS into a single framework.
6. The ASGC did not have any accepted mechanism to incorporate new regions.

The way in which the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) addresses each of these issues is dealt with below.

### 1. Stability

The ABS Structures within the ASGS (i.e. those structures the ABS defines) will not change during the five years between each Census of Population and Housing.

The Statistical Areas Level 1 to 4 (SAs 1–4) have been designed to accommodate future growth, and therefore, remain stable over ten to twenty years. However, some statistical area units will be overtaken by development. This will largely be dealt with by splitting the SAs 1–4 rather than redistribution, thus preserving the previous boundaries in the newer version of the ASGS and allowing time series data to remain intact.

The Non-ABS structures (i.e. those structures the ABS does not define), e.g. Local Government Areas, represent regions that are subject to ongoing change. Prior to the next Census of Population and Housing in 2016, the ABS will release revised publications for ASGS Non-ABS Structures. The individual structures will only be updated where significant change has occurred in the past year.

### 2. Consistency

The population ranges within the SAs 1–4 are much narrower than their ASGC equivalents. This means these units are more useful for geographic analysis of population data.

### 3. Geographical detail

Each level of the ASGS is designed to maximise the amount of detail available for various ABS data collections:

- Total population and dwelling counts are available at the Mesh Block level.
- SA1s are optimised for the release of Census data. There are 54,805 SA1s compared with approximately 38,000 Census Collection Districts in 2006.
- SA2s are optimised for Demographic data. There are 2214 SA2s compared to 1,408 SLAs in 2010.
- SA4s are optimised for Labour Force Data. There are 88 SA4s compared with 77 Labour Force Regions in 2010.
- Significant Urban Areas allow the identification of towns with a population of 10,000 or greater, compared with Statistical Districts which identified towns with a population of 25,000 or greater.

### 4. Settlement pattern and socio-economic relationships

The SA2s, SA3s and SA4s of the ASGS are built around the concept of a functional area. A functional area is the area from which people come to access services at a particular centre. The SA2s in regional areas generally represent the functional areas of towns with a population over 3,000 people. All towns with a population over 10,000 can be identified at the SA2 level through the Significant Urban Areas. The SA3s represent the functional areas of towns with over 20,000 people and the SA4s the Labour Markets of the regional and capital cities.

Functional criteria were one consideration in the design of the SA1s. SA1s differentiate between rural and urban landscapes and are more targeted than CDs were. SA1s are usually internally connected by road and keep similar kinds of development together.

Where possible, SA1s align to the officially gazetted suburbs and localities as defined by each State Government and reflect Local Government Area boundaries. In the major cities, SA2s reflect whole suburbs, combinations of related smaller suburbs, or break up larger suburbs.

The SA1s and SA2 boundaries are not designed to replicate existing Local Government Area boundaries.

### 5. Single framework

Many important regions on which the ABS produced statistics were not part of the ASGC, or their relationship to the ASGC was not clear. These included Mesh Blocks, National Resource Management Regions, Commonwealth Electoral Divisions, Indigenous Geography, and Labour Force Regions. This meant that users of ABS data could not obtain material such as boundaries, hierarchies of areas, metadata and other supporting documentation from a single source or of consistent format and quality.

The ASGS brings all these regions under one classification. Furthermore the ASGS clarifies the relationships between all these areas and will ensure boundaries and supporting documentation will be of consistent format and presentation.

## 6. New regions

The ASGC did not have an agreed mechanism for introducing new structures into the classification. The consequence of this was the fragmentation of the ABS statistical geography to meet stakeholder's geographic needs without reference to an overarching framework.

The ASGS provides such a framework. It acknowledges that user needs change with time, and provides a mechanism to cope with these changes. This will ensure the ASGS remains relevant to user needs.

### When will the move to the ASGS be complete in the ABS?

The move to the ASGS is a big change both for data users and for the ABS. ABS collections run on varying time cycles, most encompassing several years. The move to the ASGS began in July 2011. Both the ASGS and the ASGC were current in the period from July 2011 to June 2012. The 2011 edition of the ASGC was the last to be published. The ASGS is now the sole ABS statistical geography.

There are plans for several statistical publications to release data for both ASGC and ASGS for varying periods of time after the changeover.

A summary of the plans for ABS publications that are impacted by the transition from the ASGC to the ASGS is available from the '**ASGS Implementation Schedule for ABS Publications**' chapter of the ABS Statistical Geography web site: <http://www.abs.gov.au/geography>

### Where can I get further information?

More information on the ASGS is available on the ABS Statistical Geography website: <http://www.abs.gov.au/geography>

Any questions or comments can be emailed to [geography@abs.gov.au](mailto:geography@abs.gov.au)