

# Access to privately held data – Australia’s experience

## Recap on working paper 1

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**Australian Bureau of Statistics**  
Informing Australia’s important decisions



# Our experience before COVID-19

- ▶ Supermarket scanner data (transactions)
- ▶ Introduced 2012
- ▶ Large supermarkets (Australia has 4)
- ▶ Represent 25% of weighted prices which make up our consumer price index
- ▶ Provided voluntarily, under ongoing written agreements
- ▶ Preferable to supermarkets than previous price data collection arrangements
- ▶ Detailed information about transactions generated from interactions between customers and businesses – generally more detailed than survey data from businesses

# And then COVID -19

- ▶ New statistical requirements
  - Economic uncertainty
  - Need for up to date information on economic responses of individuals and businesses
  - Need to understand patterns and trends in personal movement in real time
  - Need it fast
  
- ▶ Attention quickly turned to micro data held by the private sector
  - Largest financial institutions (Australia has 4 main banks)
  - Largest retail businesses
  - Electricity and communications data

# What did we do?

- ▶ The Australian Statistician contacted CEOs to seek support
- ▶ Strong and quick support from major companies
- ▶ Two major topics to be resolved:
  - (1) data supply arrangements
  - (2) privacy and confidentiality of data

- ▶ We only acquired de-identified, aggregated microdata from the private sector
- ▶ Dealt with under existing law
- ▶ Confidentiality of the data protected by our legislation
- ▶ We committed to each company in writing to:
  - (1) only use their data as input to aggregated data
  - (2) never release to a third party

# Data supply arrangements

- ▶ Voluntary - not compelled by law
- ▶ Mix of existing pro forma data supply agreements and licence agreements
- ▶ We had to seek legal advice on intellectual property and financial liability
- ▶ We agreed to accept data in whatever format it was in
- ▶ We agreed to use whatever secure technology the business used for data transfer
- ▶ Agreements in place within 2 months of pandemic hitting Australia

- ▶ National statistics on inflation, business sales, household consumption and gross domestic product
- ▶ Near real time consumer and business responses to the pandemic – supply chain resilience
- ▶ More timely than existing statistical publications
- ▶ More granular levels of data
- ▶ No provider burden for individuals, businesses or households
- ▶ Close to real time insights into personal and household movement
- ▶ Used by governments to shape support policies

# Normalising this data

- ▶ Upfront flexibility on data formats and transfer technology = fast receipt during the pandemic
- ▶ But leaves operational challenges to be normalised now:
  - How we partner with the private sector on an enduring basis
  - How we adapt our organisational capabilities to manage and use privately held micro data
  - How we adapt our business to a more balanced use of private micro data beyond survey supplementation



# From crisis mode to business as usual

- ▶ To maintain voluntary settings, health of our relationship with private providers is key. How do we do that well?
- ▶ What level of private sector data dependency and supply security risk are we ok with?
- ▶ Private companies are offering future data supply and data access models if we want their data. Is that ok?
- ▶ How can we reduce the provider burden on private providers across all of the data types we ask them for?
- ▶ How can we streamline and standardise the data supply agreement and governance processes?
- ▶ How can we standardise the data supply pipeline across all providers?

# Adapting our capabilities

- ▶ Use of cloud based solutions to ingest, store and process data at scale
- ▶ Building the capabilities to deal with higher frequency data
- ▶ Using the data as an organisational wide resource – not an input to just one survey or product
- ▶ Standardising many bespoke supply arrangements and technology solutions into standard arrangements used by all
- ▶ Clarifying internal roles and responsibilities for data supply negotiations and provider relationship management
- ▶ Adequately funding data management and technology needs

**Thank you**

