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**The five-yearly Australian census is essential for improving local government productivity.**

Local governments and local communities are deeply concerned about the consequences of losing the five-yearly Australian Census of Population and Housing. The census is an important asset that is a unique primary data source, providing the singular most important evidence base for local government decision making.

Specifically, local government has the following concerns regarding the federal government’s proposal to cancel the 2016 Census.

1. **Effective allocation of resources**

Regular census updates are fundamental to local government decision making and resource allocation. The census provides accurate population counts, Index of Disadvantage calculations and dwelling counts, each of which form the basis for allocating resources to local government and by local government to communities. Planning decisions for community facilities and infrastructure are all reliant on census data for accurate and timely decision making about local areas. This is particularly pertinent for areas undergoing rapid change such as new growth areas, growing established areas, ageing areas and regions in decline.

1. **Understanding ageing, growth, change and social cohesion**

The loss of a regular census will mean the end of reliable demographic data on small areas and small population groups. This will significantly decrease our ability to understand and address important contemporary challenges such as social cohesion, ageing, childcare and housing affordability.

1. **Measuring housing affordability**

The census provides us with a very important 'stock take' of dwellings every five years. Without it, dwelling estimates are unreliable. Keeping an excellent evidence base of dwelling stock is key to economic and social development, as it is fundamental to understanding, quantifying and managing population growth. By maintaining sufficient housing stock, local governments can influence one of the key drivers of housing affordability.

1. **Understanding local economies**

It is not widely understood how important census data is to understanding economics at the sub-regional level. The census journey-to-work data set provides us with the only reliable snapshot of economic profiles at the small geographic level (suburbs and towns). This data is widely used by economists and planners to develop economic strategies for local government. Given the significant contribution small business makes to the Australian economy, local economic strategies are critical. Economic Development is a newly developing and increasingly important profession in local government. It would be a significant setback for this important and strategic activity to have to use an unreliable evidence base.

1. **Certainty increases productivity**

The loss of regularly updated census data introduces unnecessary debate about data accuracy and relevance of the evidence. The census, as it is currently published by the ABS, is undisputed as providing the basis for the official population, household and dwelling numbers for the nation, no argument and no debate. Certainty is directly related to increasing productivity levels in the economy, because significant resources will be wasted on disputing the base evidence in the absence of the regular census.

1. **The basis for fair elections**

The Electoral Commissions rely on regular census counts for recalibrating electoral boundaries, an important issue for all levels of government. The ability to define and review electoral (ward) boundaries with indisputable evidence (the census) is essential to democracy. This is why conducting the census is a constitutional requirement.

1. **No alternative**

If the five-yearly census is to be discontinued, a better alternative needs to replace it. No better alternative has been put forward. The proposal to undertake ten-yearly census with intra-census surveys is simply cost cutting and not an improvement to the collective knowledge of the demographic and economic make-up of Australia’s communities.

We the undersigned urge the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the federal government to consider the needs of local communities and continue to undertake a five-yearly census.