

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Okay, I think it's time to make a start, I'd like to welcome everyone and conduct the acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the country throughout Australia, and recognize their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging. We'd also like to thank our Webinar week sponsor, Super Choice, for supporting this event. Now, I'd like to introduce our speaker today, John Shepard is the general manager leading the Industry Statistics Division at the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In this role, John has responsibility for most of the business statistics produced by the ABS and is focused on ways to make this information timelier, and more relevant, while reducing the burden of business surveys. So, if I can hand it over to John, thank you. Right, thanks. I'd like to remind everyone, as we go through the presentation, please send your questions through the chat, or use a QA function, thanks for that.

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): Thanks Ian. I'm not getting feedback there, am I, I think that's okay. Good to see some familiar names in the attendee list. I spoke at this webinar series about six months ago, just as we're kicking off a couple of these projects, so thanks Ian for inviting me back to talk a bit about where we've got to, and also about some of our future directions as well. And there will be some time to have a bit of chat given that it's a smallish group, we can have a bit of a chat at the end, I am happy to kind of work through some questions and things, but I'll kind of run through the presentation first. So, Maggie, we might just go to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So, I just want to talk a bit about and remind people, I don't think I touched on some of this the last time, but the key shifts that we're looking to achieve over time with our business statistic strategy at the ABS, and then I'll give you an update around some key projects that sit under that. So, reporting through accounting software, streamlining, large business reporting, and monthly business turnover indicator, which we'll talk a bit more about, which is out on Friday this week. And as I say, I've got some time for comments and questions at the end. To just the next slide, please, Maggie.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So, in terms of our business stats strategy, I've been at the ABS now for just over two years, and one of the things I've really been focused on is how we can evolve as an organization and how we can evolve, particularly in the way that we interact with businesses, and how we make things easier in particular. But also given most of the time I've been at the ABS, we've been in a pandemic, there's never been a greater thirst for data, and there's never been a greater thirst for timely indicators. So, one of the features of the ABS is high trust, long series of very reliable indicators that come out around things like the labour force, and obviously, the big one is GDP. So, our national accounts are released each quarter, but those things are predominantly currently collected through surveys, which take time and effort. It takes time to collect, takes time to process and therefore by the time they

come out, there's often quite a lag on terms, when some of those measurements come out. So, for example, with GDP, it's a couple of months after each quarter, and clearly, there's a lot of interest at the moment on what's happening month to month, and particularly as restrictions ease. How quickly the economy's going to bounce back. At the moment, we have very few monthly indicators, monthly retail trade is one example, but that has its limitations. It's currently about 3000 retailers that we survey each month, that only measures these days, about 35% of household spending, because of the way people are spending has changed so much. Other than that, there's things like job vacancies and a couple of other monthly indicators, but most of our key economic indicators come out quarterly with that lag that I spoke about. So, there's a real desire to get more timely data and indicators. And I'll talk in part of this presentation about what we're doing in that regard, and how we're using the data. That second shift is making greater use of big data, which not only enables us to put data out more timely to be able to get a better rate, it gives us far bigger sample, which means that we can actually achieve that fourth thing on this slide, which is being able to provide more granular data including regional breakdowns. Again, with the pandemic in particular, we've seen restrictions here unevenly across the country, and not just at state level but at regional level as well. So, a lot of our main headline indicators are only at best broken down to state. And even then, there's some kind of caveats on the smaller states because their samples just aren't big enough. If we were to make our samples big enough to be able to break the data down from a survey perspective, one, we'd be hitting a whole lot more businesses with surveys, but two it would be a far more expensive exercise to run as well. And we would still have even a greater lag, because we'd have more data to process there. So, there's really a signalling a shift here to greater use of big data, and the ABS has always got good data from the ATO but is looking to expand. We've expanded that with single touch payroll data coming across in the last 18 months. But also, we've been working with the banks, for example, and got debit and credit card transaction data coming in, plus a range of other data sources as well, that are helping us to think about this differently. All that helps us reduce business burden, and in not only reducing business burden, we also want to be able to give back something to businesses. And I'll talk a bit about our accounting software project, where we're very much making that offer for businesses who submit to us through their software, that we will actually provide a direct report back, a tailored report about those businesses and businesses like theirs, which will give them that comparability that they seek. But there's also potential to give them data about potential customer base as well.

And I mentioned the last one about that desire for more granular data, including regional breakdowns. If you have a look at what we're releasing, currently, each fortnight in the jobs and wages, release, weekly payroll, jobs and wages, we've been able to get that down, not every release. But we have gone down as far as SA 3, which is quite a low-level regional view of what's happening with jobs and wages across the country. And that's, as I said, becoming really popular. So just moving to the next slide, Maggie.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): And so, I'd talk firstly about how we funded last year's budget to do three proofs of concepts. One was, and I'll talk about this one first, which was the small and medium enterprise reporting through accounting software. We've been running this project for about; we've finalized the report in the last couple of months. Just go into the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So, the aim here was to look at how we can significantly reduce burden on small and medium businesses in particular. Although you'll see in a later slide, we don't have huge samples of small business, it's certainly nothing like the size of the Single Touch Payroll file. It's not everyone that has to report. But we do have businesses that roll through samples over a three-year period. So, we do touch a lot of businesses, we have businesses that get caught up in multiple surveys. In any survey for a small business without the resources to deal with it is actually a burden, it actually takes them time away from actually running their business and making money and growing the business. So, our challenge here was to look at how we can use natural business processes in this case, accounting software building on what's happened with Single Touch Payroll, to get data in without compromising the integrity of our official statistics.

So being able to get important data to feed into those things and not compromise the stats we are doing was a key part of the challenge here. We focus initially on the quarterly business indicators survey that was seen as the best match to what was available in the accounting ledger. And some of the feedback we got through we did a data hack which was sponsored by DSPANZ, but also included some of the big accounting software providers. Some of the key factors that came out of that was the time taken to complete surveys was one measure, but also the language and concepts used were challenging and confusing for small businesses based on the system of national accounts, which is a comparable standard across the world. The national statistics that therefore the language of those might be okay if you're in a large business, and you've got accountants working for you that can actually figure out what some of those things mean, was not stuff that actually was particularly relevant always for smaller businesses or, particularly able to be willing to interpret it.

And finally, there's that inconvenience or surprise factor. Again, small businesses don't get a lot of surveys. So, to get your first survey, it's kind of what is this? Is it legit? Is it a scam? How do I go about it? How do I log on to this ABS portal? Do I need authentication etc, etc. So that's also part of what kind of came out of that. So just moving to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So, what we came up with in the report and in the proof of concept that we did, as I said, working closely with software providers and working with accountants, tax agents, bookkeepers as well to have input to this was a solution where

we would look to draw summarize ledger data by an API from accounting software. And importantly, what we're targeting here is a solution, its not using standard business reporting. It's really a lightweight API aimed at packaged software users with little software customization. So, the idea is that the ABS develop an app or an application that's available in the software stores of the cloud accounting providers, and which already, there's a range of applications you would be aware of in those stores that a business can access and take their data into to do different things. The idea would be we build the application, the business is able to get their data from their software in there, there's an initial mapping of data that needs to be done, which we think can be done in about 20 minutes for QBIS. And then largely after that, it's an automated repeat submission. So, the effort goes into mapping your accounts, to the data requirements that we've set in the application. And then each quarter, you actually go back in, you're prompted, you're able to just resubmit or submit that and we think we could actually automate that as well for businesses who wanted that to happen as part of it.

What that does from a solution perspective is it protects the software providers from change here, because the change could mostly occur in that application. But it also means a very light build, or a light development process for the software providers. Knowing that that's actually a bit of a barrier, given the range of initiatives that are on the go at the moment, including STP 2, we knew that we had to come up with something that wasn't heavy or hard to implement. Particularly given the initial number of users and I'll come back to that. Our target is to get to somewhere around 100,000 businesses over some years, over five years, I think it is. So, it's not anywhere near the 800,000 employees that were there for STP, and there isn't a mandate to use this as there was for STP. This will be an option that we offer as an easier channel for businesses to use rather than logging on and then waiting through a survey each time they send it. We are also looking to remove unnecessary or complex questions for small businesses as well in the survey, and we see an opportunity to collect more relevant items that small businesses do have, like margins and working capital, detail as well. All of which are of interest from understanding how businesses are going and from a policy settings perspective as well, but not things that we currently collect on our surveys.

The last point is part of actually removing unnecessary or complex questions by making better use of data we already collect via other means, as an example the STP data, whereas on the quality business indicators survey at the moment, we're still asking for wage amounts. We see the opportunity to actually replace that with STP data as well as part of that and remove that detail from the data request. There are numbers here just on this slide about how many we see that are impacted over time, and this is part of this three-year rolling sample, but we see something like our sweet spot; we think it's less than 100 employees, but with the ability to extend that to 100 to 199 employees. Somewhere around that, over a three-year cycle, we have something like 68,000 businesses that would be impacted, sorry, over two of those three-year cycles, so over six years. Just moving to the next one, Maggie.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So just a bit of a contrast in terms of what would be different under this solution. We go from an eight-page QBIS survey form with up to 25 questions to this tailored online app with simpler to follow business questions, and the ability to automatically prefill each time you need to submit the data once you've done that initial setup piece as well. So, you go from something like 40 minutes to an hour, down to 5 to 10 minutes each time you actually send one of these through. The added incentive, which we're putting in here is that tailored data report a benchmark report back to the business, and that would again, see where their business is amongst its cohort on a whole range of indicators that are of relevance, like margins, etc. But we would need to co-design, and what's most useful there. It's really about what other businesses like mine are achieving, but also, we think there's the ability to better tailor potential client reports through that as well. Just moving to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): As part of the proof of concept, we actually did an independent market study, run by EY Sweeney to look at potential takeout rights, and just from an initial ask with, you know, the best you can do with a phone kind of survey, asking whether businesses who would be in our quarterly business indicators survey felt about taking up something like this without having seen it. We had around 54% said that they would be interested in adopting a solution like this, and it grew to nearly 75% support when bookkeepers and accountants were asked the same thing. Certainly, part of our thinking here was this solution will much better enable one, for us to identify the involvement of accountants and bookkeepers. We don't currently separately authenticate them, they come in through one log on at the moment. We get a contact name and phone number for the business, we don't know whether that's their accountant or bookkeeper or the business owner, or the business admin person. This would actually give us a better handle on this, but also enable accountants and bookkeepers to do submissions on behalf of many of their clients as well as part of it. So just moving to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): We'll talk about implementation. One other point I wanted to make is, I mentioned we're looking to get up to 100,000 businesses using this, what we would actually like to do is make this so easy and make the data back so beneficial, that we would actually look to grow the number of businesses sending us data; and the power of that is, that actually increases the utility of the benchmark report. It means we can be more granular with it, the more data we collect through there, but it also means we can develop really meaningful and useful indicators about small business across the economy, again, to better inform government policy decisions. That is a bit of a gap at the moment; getting timely, detailed, granular data about how small businesses are going in closer to real time. I mentioned the lags at the moment we get on some of our surveys which don't achieve that. So, in terms of implementation, we're working through the process of getting approval to establish an ongoing project to take this forward. We'll look to establish a stakeholder reference group, including

some DSP representation in early 2022. And we'll also be looking to run an EOI process around that same time to establish direct communication about the project with the interested parties, including DSPs. Just move into the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): This is one of our other deregulation projects, I'll just talk briefly about this one still in motion. I think we've got about a month to go and again, on a six-month proof of concept, predominantly a co-design we're doing here with select large businesses who would be great to be involved, just moving to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So large businesses are particularly significant to our statistics, because of the significance they have to the overall economy. So, they get selected in multiple surveys, some groups, some large groups can report upwards of 100 or 200 surveys per year across 30 plus different surveys. So, our footprint with large businesses is quite large, it's quite onerous, it's quite cumbersome. Yes, they have the resources, sometimes they have dedicated people who deal with government reporting and government surveys to do this, but it's not easy. And as part of this project, we've actually contacted about 10 large businesses and out of that got three large businesses who are doing a bit of a deep dive with us and some co-design work to identify pain points, but also importantly, to work up solutions, which will include some technology solutions. It's quite a different challenge than the small businesses obviously, with the package software. It's a much different kind of challenge as we saw with STP for large business, but we are looking at where technology can help as it's evolved. One of the features currently of a lot of these large businesses and how they handle their surveys is a bit like early days talking about STP. There's a lot of Excel involved, there's a lot of Excel workbooks, macros, all sorts of stuff that's been built up over time to pull together the data that ABS requests in their surveys, but it is not streamlined and it's quite clunky.

The businesses are reporting across many different topics, I mentioned labour force, turnover income, there's a whole range of other things that they get surveyed about. There's some overlap in those surveys currently. The due dates that we asked for surveys don't align with business processes necessarily, when the data is ready to be sent, that's a tension that we need to resolve. Our communication is uncoordinated with these businesses, there can be too many different parts of the ABS communicating and contacting different parts of large businesses. So, it's hard to get a handle on both sides of the entirety of that and change over the surveys is not well controlled. So, there isn't a big incentive at the moment to do a lot of automation, because individual surveys can actually change over time, which means any solution is kind of problematic in that current state. So that's something we're really looking at as well.

And lastly, the misalignment of data requested. The data we request and the way we'd like businesses to break down their data for us, in a statistical sense doesn't necessarily match the structures that large businesses have or when large business structures change that can also cause problems. So just moving to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): I've mentioned that we're working with three businesses on a proof of concept. Some of the early opportunities that have been identified there are around mapping the natural reporting systems to our requirements so looking at where the data comes from and try to map all of that and see where that takes us. Looking at more centralized contacts, in the ABS and in the business, and then looking, as I mentioned, at opportunities around use of infrastructure and technology to support collection and validation of data. And certainly, that could involve the cloud warehouses that a bunch of these businesses pull data into. Now a lot of them are pulling data into Cloud to do some of the broader management reporting. So, there is an opportunity to kind of reimagine a lot of this, but we will need to streamline what we asked for but also stabilize it, as I said, from a change perspective to get true investment here. So, this project winds up in the next kind of month, in terms of the proof of concept, we will then kind of pull that together and again, look at what does that mean, where are the opportunities for projects coming forward out of that, to achieve some of that kind of streamlining and where the technology opportunities as well.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So monthly business turnover indicator I mentioned, we've got a new indicator coming out this Friday. So, I'll just flip to the next slide.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): This is part of a project that we were also funding last year's budget to do, it was looking to exclusively use big data sources to produce three new monthly indicators. The first one is business turnover using monthly business activity statement data, we have got business activity statement data from the ATO for a long time. However, we have not used it as an indicator in its own right, we have generally used it to confirm our survey data and as a kind of quality check. We've done a proof of concept on this over the last four months and showed that we actually can get a very solid indicator, which we could put out monthly, which gives a really nice lead to GDP when it comes out or certainly an aspect of GDP. So, the program we put forward was to come up with more timely indicators, more granular indicators over time, looking at how we actually are trying new systems again in the cloud, that actually allow us to blend these big data sources with our survey data, which our current bespoke survey systems don't support. So, we've got a new cloud based processing and analytical platform and this will allow us to move away some of our legacy systems.

Lastly, another important component, this is still about reducing reporting burden on business, because we will look to reduce and retire some of our existing surveys. I mentioned the retail trade survey earlier, going to 3000 businesses each month but not really measuring household spend very widely. The next project in this program is to look at using the bank data to actually put out a household spending indicator each month. We think between that and the business turnover indicator that is a path for us away from running a retail trade survey every month, which again will reduce the burden on those 3000 businesses that have to do that. But this Friday, our business turnover release will come out at 11:30 Friday morning (15th October 2021). It will actually have an index. It runs a bit like jobs and wages; we've created an index from a time last year, I can't remember the date, where every month and we've got data going back here 10 years to show the trend. But effectively, it'll be showing a monthly series on that index that goes to include July month and August month. So, we'll be putting out a steer effectively for 13 Industries. It's not for every industry because the BAS doesn't map well to every single industry, but it does for most of them. So, 13 industries will come out with that index trended over that period, and that will be the first kind of heads up on how businesses have been going in July and August through our official statistics other than the jobs and wages release. So, it will actually give us a signal on turnover for those 13 Industries over that period. So that's kind of a big deal. After we run that, this Friday, we'll be looking to put that out each month from then on. So that will become a regular part of our outputs, using that monthly activity statement data.

I mentioned the household spending is next we're looking to do that from April next year, we're doing a whole bunch of work before then to actually get ready for that. And then our employee earnings was aiming to use Single Touch Payroll Phase 2 data to create a monthly employee earnings indicator. Again, which will allow us to retire or replace some elements of some of our labour surveys as well. So, each of these has that component of actually making it easier for businesses as we deliver as well. I'm conscious that the STP 2 date has been moved, and so that data will take some time to mature. We do have a reliance on STP 2 to really get that third project out and the current target for that was kind of towards the end of next year, and that's why that one is third because of the reliance on Single Touch Payroll Phase 2. Just moving to the next slide,

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): I think this one highlights just the timing that we achieve here. So, what this just shows is that the current lag, if you look at the top line, on how our business is tracking on turnover in April, currently wouldn't be represented in our quarterly business indicator survey released until the end of August, because it's caught up in a quarterly survey that encompasses April to June. By the time we put the survey out, people complete it, we process it, and then we release the data, that's that kind of lag. Whereas with our new monthly indicator, you'll see here that our April month data will actually be released in the future in early June. So, it's about, I think, six weeks after the reference period, which is actually a huge improvement in timeline as well and something that will be really welcomed as we kind of

come out of lockdowns and things over the next few months. So we go to the next slide, which I think might be questions.

Slide change

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): So probably no need for a show of hands, I know we haven't got a huge amount of people, but probably got a few that have come on since I started. I am interested just to, and I'll bring up my participants view here, just to get a sense from participants about interest in the implementation of the accounting software, API link, interest in this idea of taking benchmark data back from ABS to display to clients in some way through the software, and any other big data opportunities that you could see that the ABS could potentially tap into was my last question.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): I was going to ask John, is data back going to be a continuing theme with the ABS?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): Absolutely. That is definitely something and look not only that, I think some other agencies are kind of paying attention to this as well. It's seen as something that the government needs to do more of, not just sort of suck data in, but actually put data back out to actually help business to develop and grow. I've kind of had this thought, since I joined the ABS, how much great data we actually have on our website but knowing how little time businesses have to actually tap in and find the relevant data for them. So, this idea of pushing data back that's tailored and relevant and making it easy, for me is a real goldmine of opportunity. So, it'll be something that we definitely try to expand and tap into further, as we do more work here.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Yeah, the other thing is, I noticed there is a trend globally around something called data driven government. I just wondered how much of this is driving, repositioning the ABS as the way to sort of underpin a more data driven government?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): Yeah, absolutely. Look, it's a good point, and the ABS has actually been in the process for a while of developing professions. They started with the HR profession to try and get better practice across the different agencies. One of those is one around digital that has been led out of the DTA, and I think that's moved now to PM&C. Then there's a data profession, which is actually led by the ABS, and so David Gruen, the statistician, is actually the head of that data profession. So, we're very heavily involved in dealing with other agencies very much around we've got our own data strategy that's just been published, if you haven't seen it, it's on our website, but also being much more involved in lifting the bar on data capability across the APS and for that matter, we're doing a lot of joint recruitment. So, we're recruiting data graduates, for example, on behalf of the whole APS, and then we've got some programs where we're actually moving people around agencies as well to kind of grow their knowledge and understanding of what different agencies do. It's a very big focus, capitalizing

on the kind of data explosion that's been there for a while and making far better use of existing data rather than everybody just going and collecting their own.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): How does that bring you into play though with some of the commercial data providers? Do you see there is a conflict there or is it more one of co-existence?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): It's interesting, and again, this is something that I've seen change in the time I've been at the ABS, it's complementary to each other, I'll say that. I can't say much more collaboration and sharing of actual work here, I think, the commercial providers and we, see a space for both of us and a kind of sweet spot for both of us to be in. I think we all think that we end up with better services and better outcomes by working together on a bunch of things, and I've seen really good collaboration across some of the commercial data providers whereas when I started it was almost like there was this real- conflict is the wrong word- but competition almost between ourselves and some of the private sector and that we had to be better than each other. I think there's definitely a shift to saying, actually, if we work together, we can all kind of thrive here and play a role.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Okay now that's great. I know that it's early stages and you said there's still work to do, but for those that are interested, is there likely to be assistance to software developers from the ABS in trying to adopt some of the solutions you're proposing, assistance in the form of incorporating your API, you know, technical assistance, that sort of stuff?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): Certainly, in terms of - but that's something we've got to kind of develop- so yeah, depending on how the project goes and how successful it is, we'll look at how you know what sort of support we can provide how much we can leverage, potentially, some of the other agencies who have strong kind of software, technical software houses. It's not something that we have done a lot of at the ABS, so how much we can build that capability ourselves versus leverage other agencies is something we'll need to work through; but definitely, we'll be looking to develop our relationships out with DSPs, both in terms of data in and data out, that's something we definitely need to do more of and certainly grow a relationship. So, you know, DSPANZ is a key part of that, obviously, but saying people other than me here most of the time, and seeing some of the other ABS folk, I'm sure will be welcomed.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Good, and I'm sure you realize with DSPANZ that about 60% of our members are payroll providers. So, one question is, how likely is it that the STP reporting could prefill some of the ABS reports that are traditionally being filled by payroll at the moment?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): My view is it won't need to be prefilled because we'll already have the data. So, we're getting the data from the tax office, we're getting the whole

STP file, we will get the STP 2 file when it gets there. So, we'll just take those questions out of the reports. So, when you say prefilled, it'll prefill what goes back out in terms of the data tailored data reporting, yes, but in terms of what we collect, there's no point as collecting STP data from a business when they've already submitted to the government through the ATO. So, we'll take it from there, might be right with the reporting out, we will look to put that back in context of that business's performance. So that's my analysis, someone is going to love us for this. Good to have old friends or I should not say old friends, good to have friends on the line.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Now, you did say that you're doing some pilots, and you're engaging with some clients, for members that are interested, what would be the best way for them to get involved or to help out?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): It'll be through that expression of interest, so we'll put something out in the new year, now we've got a bit of work to do to establish, obviously, a business case and a project plan or kind of project to take this forward. So, in the new year, we anticipate coming out, and we'll actually do come out through DSPANZ, and actually do a bit of an expression of interest for those who want to be involved either in co-designing and developing the solutions that as they end up, or actually those who want to be involved in either getting, you know, allowing businesses to submit data through them or allowing to take data back through them. So, that's probably the best way at this stage, given where we're at in the year.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Okay. Yeah, just dropping back to my question around the data driven government and ABS, repositioning that. How is the ABS, therefore, influencing government and other government agencies to implement data strategies, because, you know, there's sort of a yin and yang in that?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): Yeah, absolutely. So, a bit of it is just happening, because I think, you know, a lot of agencies now are putting in place Chief Data officers, I've certainly seen far more of that. Most Chief Data Officers want to put in place a data strategy, I know we've had a range of agencies come to us to have a look at what we did. It feels like it's kind of something that's taken off. Even though we haven't had a data strategy, per se for very long, that has actually been used as a bit of a model by a few other agencies. There's definitely a lot of conversations happening across the APS and including much more rotation of staff including senior staff. So, I think that's part of it, as well, we get asked frequently to second staff from the ABS into other agencies as well. That's something we've got to manage carefully because we have a lot of good expertise that goes out into other agencies and sometimes it's hard to get them back, but we do see the benefit in doing that. Similarly, we get other agency secondees in, so I think just part of a future APS which everyone wants is a much more connected and joined up APS that shares and works together on things and doesn't go out alone and duplicate what others are doing. So, a lot of that you'll see a lot more of I think over the next little while, but there's definitely some really good moves on that and there's been a lot of work that David Gruen himself has done, which you can see, I think, again, probably through

our website, but certainly through some of our social platforms a lot of interviews that David has done with both the public and private sector leaders about the data profession, and how do we grow and build it.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Okay, now, not meaning to put you on the spot here, but I did participate in AICD's update this morning, and one of the topics that did come up was around AI. One of the issues associated with AI is -and I might not have the phrase correct- but data bias. That you know, a lot of AI is driven by large volumes of data; but that data can be biased in ways that then mean the algorithms are biased. To what extent is that an issue that the ABS gets involved in or has a view about?

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): From certainly a methodology area, we've got a very strong methodology area that is very interested in bias and has, for a very long time, designed our surveys. We do have a random survey technique and the main percentage of our large businesses get selected, a very big focus on making sure that what we're getting is representative and not biased. So, there is definitely some strong expertise in that, that's been also very much the case, as we have progressed this initiative around accounting software for example. So, I know that that's something. Again, the reason they're trying to grow a big cohort of small businesses, if we were looking to replace 10-15 thousand small businesses that respond to surveys now, with the same number through accounting software, we know there would be a bias there, to those that have prepared to use software to report, and it wouldn't represent those that still aren't there yet or aren't prepared to do that. So, it's something very front of mind, and also a methodology area is progressing some significant AI initiatives as well, machine learning, etc, on a range of things. So, again, that's an expertise that they lend out to other agencies again, at the moment in the APS. So, we've got some really good stuff here around bias, it is a real issue, and that's something that's actually got a lot of expertise here to deal with it.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Excellent. Well, I think that's probably a good point for us to conclude on. So, I'd like to thank everyone for their attendance. I'd also like to, again, thank our webinar week sponsor, Super Choice for supporting this event.

Now I'd like to remind everyone not to forget the session later today, session four, which is Voice Biometrics, the New Zealand experience at 2pm. It is actually interesting, because facial recognition gets so much PR, but you know, New Zealand has over 70% penetration of voice prints, and I think you know, it's sort of a quiet story, but a very interesting one.

I would like to remind everyone that this session has been recorded, it will be made available to attendees, and on the DSPANZ website over the coming weeks. Follow up questions can be sent through to hello@dspanz.org. On that note, I'd like to thank everyone and thank you, John, for making the time available today.

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): No, thanks for having me, and thanks for the comments and things that have come through as well. It's good to see a bunch of familiar people with familiar names at least, and I can't say the people.

Webinar Host - Ian Gibson (DSPANZ): Well, alright thank you.

Guest Speaker - John Shepherd (ABS): Thanks, everyone.