

2003.7. National Census, 2006: Religion Question

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To the Australian Bureau of Statistics we made the following points on the **2006 Census**, in reference to the "religion" question:

- We proposed changing the current question "What is the person's religion?".
- The current question elicits misleading responses, and thus produces inaccurate data.
- It does not inquire about present religious practice. Many people therefore mark the religion of their parents though they do not identify with these beliefs.
- The question implies that each person is expected to be religious and puts a negative connotation on the answer "No religion", the last choice after listed denominations.
- We strongly support the proposal to put "No religion" at the top of the listed categories.
- Past Census figures did not reflect the marked departure from religious practices and the general continuing secularisation of the Australian population. Surveys of church attendance report significant decrease.
- Many important grants and allocations are made on the basis of Census data. Thus the question should seek to determine the number of people who actually use these subsidised services.
- We propose that the question should be "Does the person have a religion?" with No or Yes, followed by a list of major denominations. A subsidiary question should ask: "Is the person an active religious participant? No . . . Yes . . ."
- In its present form the question will continue to elicit misleading data and be at variance with other surveys.

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