

FECCA submission to the Review of 2021 Census topics

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Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Online <https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/census-topics/>



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ABOUT FECCA

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations.

FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

FECCA has frequently provided advice to the ABS with regards the data collection questions, methods and accessibility for CALD Australians. The ABS has been commended by FECCA on numerous occasions for the attention it pays to ensuring CALD Australians are fully reflected in national data gathering exercises.

FECCA thanks the ABS for the opportunity to provide input into the review of the 2021 Census topics.

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What is your submission about?

The need for language proficiency data to be gathered more broadly than currently represented in 'main language other than English spoken at home'. Namely FECCA suggests the inclusion of a supplementary question to 'Main Language spoken at Home' which allows respondents to identify their preferred language and any other languages spoken and which have not been captured by the Census questions.

Area of interest: Cultural diversity

Topic which relates to you submission: Main language other than English spoken at home

This topic is of national importance:

FECCA suggests that the census question which invites individuals to list their 'Main Language Other than English Spoken at home' could be altered to capture more accurately the data on multilingualism and individuals' preferred language.

In order to maintain consistency across Census data sets, FECCA suggests that a supplementary question could be a method by which data sets across Census years are maintained but more nuanced and richer data sets captured. For instance, a supplementary question could invite individuals to list their main languages other than English and to identify their preferred language.

This would allow for more accurate data on language diversity, language retention and multilingualism in Australia which could be used for a wide range of policies and inform services offerings across government, industry and community.

The overall data collected would result in a richer and more accurate profile of languages spoken across Australia.

There is a need for data from a Census of the whole population:

Mapping the linguistic diversity of the whole population can only be done at a comprehensive level via the Census. This will allow for the capture of small and geographically dispersed

populations and ensure that the richest possible picture of Australia's linguistic diversity is reflected in the Census collection.

The topic can be accurately collected in a form which the household completes themselves:

It is easy for members of the household to name the languages they speak and to list these either by entering the text or via a drop-down menu.

The topic would be acceptable to Census respondents:

Many Australians speak more than one language but this is not currently captured accurately or fully by the question 'Main language other than English spoken at home'. The suggested change seeks the inclusion of a supplementary question to capture this data. This is neither controversial, intrusive nor offensive as the Census already captures data on language spoken.

The topic can be collected efficiently:

The data to be collected in the supplementary question will not require extensive instructions nor lengthy explanations and could be captured by a single supplementary question.

There is likely to be a continuing need for data on this topic in the following Census:

There will be an ongoing need for this data as Australia continues to accept migrants and as households become more diverse. This data will be useful for social planning around language services to assist Australians to access information and opportunities in their preferred language.

There are no alternative data sources or solutions that could meet the topic need:

FECCA is not aware of any comprehensive and consistent data collection of this kind either by the ABS or any other organisation.