SUBMISSION

2026 Census Topic Consultation

28 April 2023

Friday, 28 April 2023

2026 Census Topic Consultation

Dear Dr David Gruen,

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

We have over 1,200 member organisations, reaching more than 20% of the Australian labour market.

We believe the 2026 census is an opportunity to collect better data on cultural background and LGBTIQ+ communities. Our research shows that these identities can have a profound impact on individuals' experiences of inclusion or exclusion at work. Therefore, our recommendations are:

1. That the ABS consider replacing the current Census questions about ancestry, with DCA's first core measure, which asks respondents:

   How would you describe your cultural background? Your cultural background is the cultural/ethnic group(s) to which you feel you belong or identify. This background may be the same as your parents, grandparents, or your heritage, or it may be the country you were born in or have spent a great amount of time in, or you feel more closely tied to.

2. That the ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables is added to the census.

Please feel free to contact myself or Cathy Brown, Director of Communications and Advocacy, on 0424 578 698 or advocacy@dca.org.au, you require any further information about this matter.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Annese
Chief Executive Officer

CONTENTS

ABOUT US

Who we are

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We provide unique research, inspiring events and programs, curated resources and expert advice across all diversity dimensions to a community of member organisations.

DCA's Membership represents over 20% of the Australian workforce

DCA's prestigious group of over 1,200 members is drawn from business and workplace diversity leaders and includes some of Australia's biggest employers. Our membership reaches over 20% of the Australian labour market.

About our members

1,200 member organisations, including almost 40 ASX100 Listed companies.

Our members are drawn from across the corporate, government and not-for-profit sectors and vary from small to large workforces in size.

Our founding members include ANZ, AMP, BHP, Boral, Coles, IBM Australia, Myer, Orica, Rio Tinto and Westpac.

DCA's Members are listed on our website here: https://www.dca.org.au/membership/current-dca-members.

Our belief, vision and mission

- Our **belief** is that diversity and inclusion is good for people and business.
- Our **vision** is to create a more diverse and inclusive Australia.
- Our **mission** is to encourage and enable Australian organisations to create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

What we do

DCA, formerly known as the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment Ltd, was established in 1985 as a joint initiative of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia to demonstrate the business community's commitment to equal opportunity for women.

Our focus since then has expanded to cover all aspects of diversity in employment, reflecting changes in practice to embrace all areas of the diversity of human resources.

DCA is not government funded – its income is generated from membership fees, sponsorships and services to business/employers.

Our Research

DCA works in partnership with members to generate ground-breaking evidence-based diversity and inclusion resources that enables Australian organisations to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

- **DCA research is grounded in the contributions of people with lived experience.** DCA projects use expert panels, focus groups, think tanks and surveys to make people with lived experience central to the project findings.

- **DCA resources are ahead of the curve.** They establish leading diversity thinking and practice, enabling Australian organisations to re-imagine and reconfigure the way they manage talent in today's dynamic operating environments.

- **DCA resources drive business improvement.** They are high impact, driving business improvement through providing evidence-based guidance on how to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

- **DCA resources are practice focused.** They respond to the information needs of industry leaders and the people they employ.

- **DCA resources speak to the Australian context.** DCA projects generate leading diversity thinking and practice that speaks to Australia's unique and distinctive institutional, cultural and legal frameworks.

- **DCA resources considers all diversity dimensions.** The full spectrum of diversity dimensions are investigated including age, caring responsibilities, cultural background and identity, disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, social class and work organisation.

DIVERSITY
COUNCIL
AUSTRALIA

POSITIONING

The importance of taking an intersectional approach

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

DCA's work over many years has recognised how intersectionality impacts the experiences of diverse women in Australian workplaces. For example:

- DCA's *Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) women in Leadership*[1] research explored how the intersections of two key marginalising characteristics - race and gender - are still operating in workplaces to lock CARM women out of leadership.

- DCA, WGEA & Jumbunna's research, *Gari Yala: Gendered Insights*[2], found that Indigenous women who are also carers experience 'triple jeopardy'. That is, the combination of these three aspects of their identity overlap to amplify their experiences of discrimination and exclusion at work.

- DCA's *Class at Work*[3] research shows that 45% of women from self-identified lower classes reported having experienced discrimination and/or harassment of some type.

- DCA's *Out at Work*[4] recognised the 'double jeopardy' that LGBTIQ+ women face, where the combination of being a woman, and having a non-heterosexual identity combine to make it more difficult for them, relative to cisgender-gay-men or cisgender-heterosexual-women, to progress in the workplace.

- DCA's *Capitalising on Culture and Gender in ASX Leadership*[5] found that culturally diverse women experience a 'double jeopardy' when accessing leadership roles due to their gender and cultural background. This double jeopardy results in a 'glass-cultural ceiling' in which invisible organisational barriers lock out culturally diverse women from accessing leadership positions in their workplaces.

A note on binary language used in this submission

While gender does not exist in binary categories, these categories still have very real effects.

However, DCA recognises that there are people whose experiences and identities cannot be captured by the use of binary language, and these limitations should be acknowledged whenever binary language is used.

Should the Census include a race measure?

In our research[6], it has become clear that to effectively understand experiences of marginalisation and discrimination in Australia there is a need to include a race measure in the Census.

However, for such a measure to be widely accepted and understood it will require extensive consultation with community and industry groups, work which DCA plans to undertake over the coming year.

INTRODUCTION

Counting Culture: Towards a Standardised Approach to Measuring and Reporting on Workforce Cultural Diversity in Australia

A piece of research that we believe will be helpful in formulating the 2026 census questions DCA's [Counting Culture: Towards a Standardised Approach to Measuring and Reporting on Workforce Cultural Diversity in Australia](#). A synopsis of this report is attached to this submission.

Produced with the University of Sydney Business School, and sponsors City of Sydney and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), *Counting Culture* is a standardised approach for defining, measuring, and reporting on workforce cultural diversity in a respectful, accurate and inclusive way.

We developed this research because Australian employers advised us they were missing out on important business opportunities by failing to effectively measure the degree and breadth of culturally diverse talent in their leadership team, workforce, customer base, and labour market pool.

Counting Culture guides businesses through how best to count cultural background, language, religion – and even global experience – for maximum organisational benefit. Critical in a country where the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports nearly half (49 per cent) of Australians have been born overseas, have one or both parents born overseas, where over 300 languages are spoken at home, and where more than 300 ancestries are identified with.

The *Counting Culture* approach was designed to be practical for employers (even if they had limited in-house resources and expertise to count cultural diversity) and inclusive for employees (i.e., experienced as respectful and meaningful).

The report recommends organisations use three Core Measures, supplemented where space and resources allow by two Additional Measures.

In our submission, DCA recommends that the ABS consider replacing the current Census questions about ancestry, with DCA's first core measure, which asks respondents:

> *How would you describe your cultural background? Your cultural background is the cultural/ethnic group(s) to which you feel you belong or identify. This background may be the same as your parents, grandparents, or your heritage, or it may be the country you were born in or have spent a great amount of time in, or you feel more closely tied to.*

RECOMMENDATION 1: CULTURAL BACKGROUND

DCA recommends that the ABS consider replacing the current Census questions about ancestry, with DCA's first core measure from *Counting Culture*, which asks respondents:

> *How would you describe your cultural background? Your cultural background is the cultural/ethnic group(s) to which you feel you belong or identify. This background may be the same as your parents, grandparents, or your heritage, or it may be the country you were born in or have spent a great amount of time in, or you feel more closely tied to.*

Further, we recommend that the response options are the cultural/ethnic groups listed in the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG).

Finally, for reporting on the data collected under this question, we recommend the reporting categories recommended in *Counting Culture*:

Reporting Categories

We recommend an approach adapted from the ABS's ASCCEG classification structure. This is a hierarchical structure based on 4 levels, from most specific to broadest, as summarised below.

Cultural Background		
Specific	278 x specific cultural/ethnic groups (from the ASCCEG)	
Narrow	**14 x narrow cultural/ethnic groups** (adapted from ASCCEG broad and narrow groups)	1. Indigenous Australian 2. Australian (excl. Indigenous Australian) 3. New Zealander (not Maori) 4. Maori, Melanesian, Papuan, Micronesian, and Polynesian 5. Anglo-European 6. North-West European (excl. Anglo-European) 7. South-East European 8. South-East Asian 9. North-East Asian 10. Southern and Central Asian 11. North American 12. South and Central American and Caribbean Islander 13. North African and Middle Eastern 14. Sub-Saharan African
Broad	**8 x broad cultural/ethnic groups** (adapted from ASCCEG broad groups)	1. Indigenous Australian 2. Australian (excl. Indigenous Australian) 3. New Zealander and Pacific Islander 4. Anglo-European 5. Other European (excl. Anglo-European) 6. Asian 7. Americas 8. African or Middle Eastern
Broadest	**2 x broadest cultural/ethnic groups** (adapted from ABS 'Main English-Speaking Country of Birth' approach)	1. Main English-speaking background 2. Non-main English-speaking background

Looking for the above classification system of cultural/ethnic groups?
DCA members can request this classification system (in Excel form) from DCA.

FOR EXAMPLE: For a respondent who identifies as having a Vietnamese cultural background, their cultural background would be classified as **Vietnamese** at the specific level, **South-East Asian** at the narrow level, **Asian** at the broad level and **non-main English-speaking background** at the broadest level.

In *Counting Culture* we recommend the following approach for reporting on respondents with 2 cultural backgrounds:

As respondents can select up to 2 cultural backgrounds, we used the pilot data to explore the most meaningful reporting categories to use. On this basis and influenced by the New Zealand Census reporting categories approach to a similar question on ethnicity, we propose the below:

- *Reporting on Your Workforce Diversity? Use Specific, Narrow, Broad or Broadest Categories, and 'Total Responses'*
    - *Use Specific, Narrow, Broad or Broadest Categories. You could report on specific categories (e.g., the top 3 specific cultural groups among workers are Australian, English, and Irish), narrow (e.g., 5% of workers have a North East Asian background), broad (e.g., 10% of workers have an Asian background), and/or broadest categories (e.g., 40% of workers have a Non-Main English Speaking background)*
    - *Use 'Total Responses'. Count the total number of responses. People with more than 1 cultural background are therefore counted twice – once for each cultural/ethnic group they identify with. For example, an Australian Chinese person would be counted once in the 'Australian' group AND once in the 'Chinese' group.*

There is currently no widely used standardised approach for defining, measuring, and reporting on workforce cultural diversity in a respectful, accurate and inclusive way.

Currently, many Australian workplaces ask employees about their country of birth, and while this is a useful measure in some ways, just asking about 'country of birth' fails to capture Australia's diverse cultural fabric.

We consulted widely in developing this report, including with many culturally diverse Australians and experts in data collection. We believe these measures to be an accurate and respectful way to understand much more about our community than our current data sets allow.

In preparing our submission, DCA met with the ANU's Centre for Asian-Australian Leadership ("CAAL") and Centre for Social Research and Methods ("CSRM") to compare our findings in this research area. DCA supports the approach developed in CAAL and CSRM's Counting for Change research project to include in the Census a new demographic question on ethnicity.

RECOMMENDATION 1: DCA recommends that the ABS consider replacing the current Census questions about ancestry, with DCA's first core measure, which asks respondents:

How would you describe your cultural background? Your cultural background is the cultural/ethnic group(s) to which you feel you belong or identify. This background may be the same as your parents, grandparents, or your heritage, or it may be the country you were born in or have spent a great amount of time in, or you feel more closely tied to.

RECOMMENDATION 2: SEX, GENDER, VARIATIONS OF SEX CHARACTERISTICS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION VARIABLES

DCA strongly supports the inclusion of questions on sexual orientation, gender identity and variations of sex characteristics in the Census.

We are aware of the extensive and thorough consultation that went into the development of the _ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables_. Adding these questions to the Census is crucial for fostering an evidence-informed environment for policy, program and service planning. What's more, having a better understanding of the diverse make up of Australia is critical in fostering a more inclusive society for everyone.

Our research shows that these identities have a significant impact on the way people experience inclusion and exclusion at work. Our Inclusion@Work Index 2021-2022 found that:

- LGBTIQ+ workers (45%) report significantly levels of experience with discrimination and/or harassment than non-LGBTIQ+ workers (23%)

Collecting accurate data on LGBTIQ+ communities by asking the right questions on sexual orientation, gender diversity or variations of sex characteristics will enable policies that support LGBTIQ+ people and promote inclusion in the workplace and in the community more broadly.

> RECOMMENDATION 2: DCA recommends that the ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables is added to the census.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe the 2026 census is an opportunity to collect better data on cultural background and LGBTIQ+ communities. Our research shows that these identities can have a profound impact on individuals' experiences of inclusion or exclusion at work. Therefore, our recommendations are:

1. **DCA recommends that the ABS consider replacing the current Census questions about ancestry, with DCA's first core measure, which asks respondents:**

   How would you describe your cultural background? Your cultural background is the cultural/ethnic group(s) to which you feel you belong or identify. This background may be the same as your parents, grandparents, or your heritage, or it may be the country you were born in or have spent a great amount of time in, or you feel more closely tied to.

2. **DCA recommends that the ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables is added to the census.**

ENDNOTES

[1] Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O'Leary). *Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia, 2023.

[2] Evans, Olivia (2021). *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): gendered insights,* WGEA Commissioned Research Report in partnership with the Jumbunna Institute of Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia, Sydney, Australia, accessed at: https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/gari-yala-speak-truth-gendered-insights.

[3] Diversity Council Australia (Brown, C., D'Almada-Remedios, R., Dunbar, K., O'Leary, J., Evans, O., and Rubin, M.) *Class at Work: Does Social Class Make a Difference in the Land of the 'Fair Go'?,* Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2020.

[4] Diversity Council Australia (Brown, C., O'Leary, J., Trau, R., Legg, A.) *Out At Work: From Prejudice to Pride,* Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2018, accessed at: https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/out-work-prejudice-pride.

[5] Diversity Council Australia (Shireenjit, J., O'Leary, J., Legg, A. and Brown, C.) *Capitalising on Culture and Gender in ASX Leadership,* Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2017, accessed at: https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/capitalising-culture-and-gender-asx-leadership

[6] Diversity Council Australia, *Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action.*
Diversity Council Australia (P. Anderson, V. Mapedzahama, A. Kaabel, and J. O'Leary), *Racism at Work: How organisations can stand up to and end workplace racism*, Diversity Council Australia, 2022.