



The Road to Open Access – Story of the Australian Bureau of Statistics

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statistics for informed

decision making

Access to information: a key to open government

“Public access to government held information allows individuals to better understand the role of government and decisions being made on their behalf”



*Jimmy Carter displays his Nobel Prize.
Photo courtesy the author.*

Jimmy Carter

Growing movement for open Govt and access

"Our commitment to openness means more than simply informing the American people how decisions are made. It means recognizing that government does not have all the answers, and that public officials need to draw on what citizens know." — President Barak Obama, 1/21/09, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ope/>

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2009 Text A+ A-

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FEATURED TOOL: FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM DATA

Provides recipient and disbursement information each quarter for the Direct Loan and Federal Family Education Loan Programs by postsecondary school.

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Open Government: Berners-Lee and the UK to Show Obama How It's Done

Written by [Marshall Kirkpatrick](#) / June 10, 2009 9:12 AM / [5 Comments](#)


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"So that government information is accessible and useful for the widest possible group of people, I have asked Sir Tim Berners-Lee who led the creation of the world wide web, to help us drive the opening up of access to Government data in the web over the coming month." Can't you picture Barack Obama making that statement? He didn't though; that was the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown in a statement about electoral reform, according to [a report from Charles Arthur of the Guardian](#).

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Making it easier to peek under the kimono

By [Kable](#) - [Get more from this author](#)

Posted in [Developer](#), 23rd October 2009 09:41 GMT

The Cabinet Office has opened a pilot website making government data more widely available.

Declaration of Open Govt

The Australian Government's support for openness and transparency in Government has three key principles:

- **Informing:** strengthening citizen's rights of access to information, establishing a pro-disclosure culture across Australian Government agencies including through online innovation, and making government information more accessible and usable;
- **Engaging:** collaborating with citizens on policy and service delivery to enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought; and
- **Participating:** making government more consultative and participative

Lindsay Tanner, 16 July 2010

ABS Timeline on Open Access

- June 1985 – Australian Govt “User Pays” policy implemented in ABS
- Jun 1995 - ABS website launched
- Jul 2005 - **Free ABS publications** on the web
- Dec 2005 - **Free ABS statistics** on the web
- Dec 2008 - ABS adopts **Creative Commons** Attribution 2.5 Australia licence for website (CC BY licence)
- Jan 2009 – President Obama’s statement on Open Govt
- Jun 2009 – PM Gordon Brown’s statement on Open Govt
- Jun 2009 - Australia Govt appoints Gov 2.0 Task Force
- Oct 2009 – NSS website adopts **CC BY licence**
- Feb 2010 – ABS adopts **CC BY licence** for information consultancy products
- Jul 2010 – Declaration of Open (Australian) Govt



The Journey to Open Access

- User pays policy around 1985
 - Requests for services exceeded capacity
 - Pricing
 - as a demand control mechanism
 - provides signal for services priority setting
 - Significant cultural change
- Policy used almost world wide
 - US agencies excepted

Seeds for change on Open Access

- Australian academics turning to American data for research
- European NSOs
 - Statistics, Public Goods, and Priceless

Agents for Change

- Advent of the internet
 - Transaction cost substantially reduced
- PC Report on Cost Recovery
 - Obstacle was revenue foregone and downstream impacts
- Opportunity for Govt funding on new initiatives
 - More content vs free PDFs?
 - Internal ABS lobbying
 - Govt support

From free PDFs to Free Statistics

- Affordability?
- Opportunity
 - 100th birthday gift to the Nation
- ABS kudos in public fora

Why open licensing?

- Pioneers and visionaries
 - Brian Fitzgerald, Anne Fitzgerald, Neale Hooper, Tim Barker and Peter Crossman
- ABS to be “first cab off the rank”?
 - Value proposition?
- “Seeking forgiveness rather than permission” to adopt CC BY license
 - CCA; ABS

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What did people say?

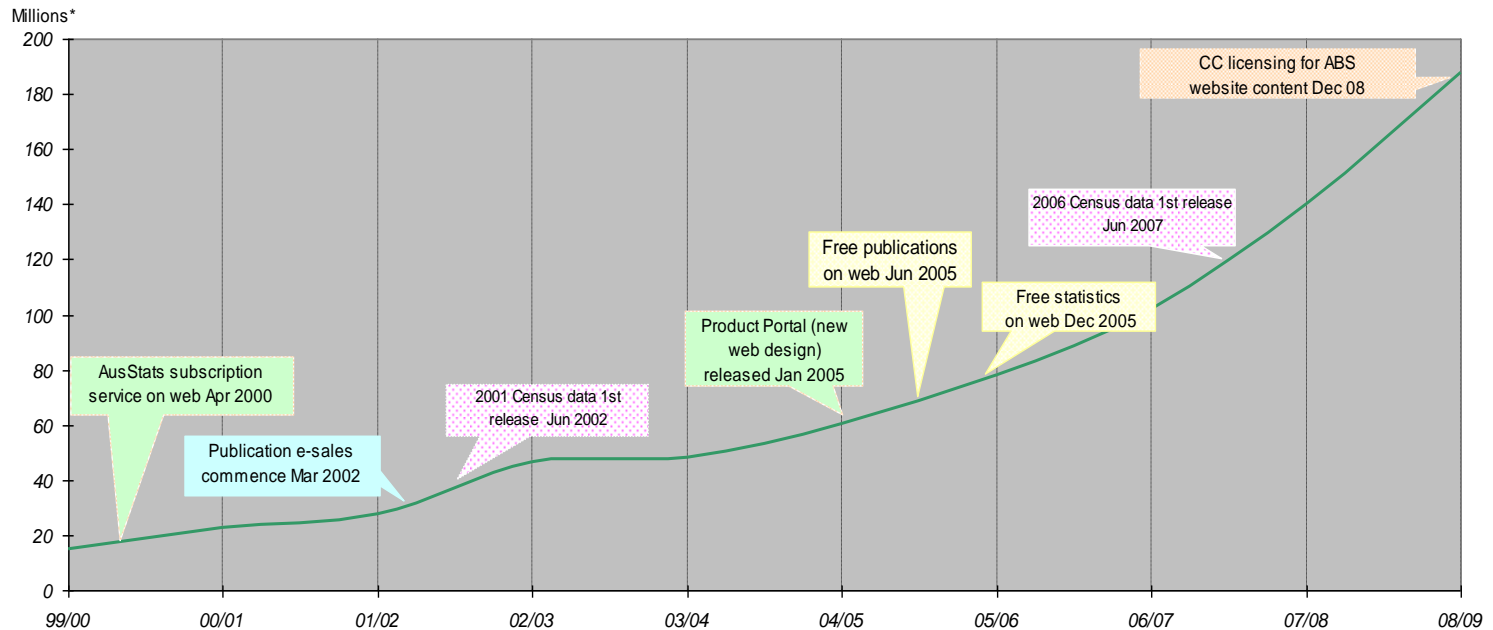
“The ABS move is only one (though a very significant one for Australia) of a number of recent developments in the international movement to provide public access to publicly funded resources.”

- CC Australia – Dec 2008

Open access accelerates use

- The ABS website averages **1.5 million page views** per week
- Took 5.5 years to double from 30 million page views to 60 million before 2005; and only 2 years to double after 2005

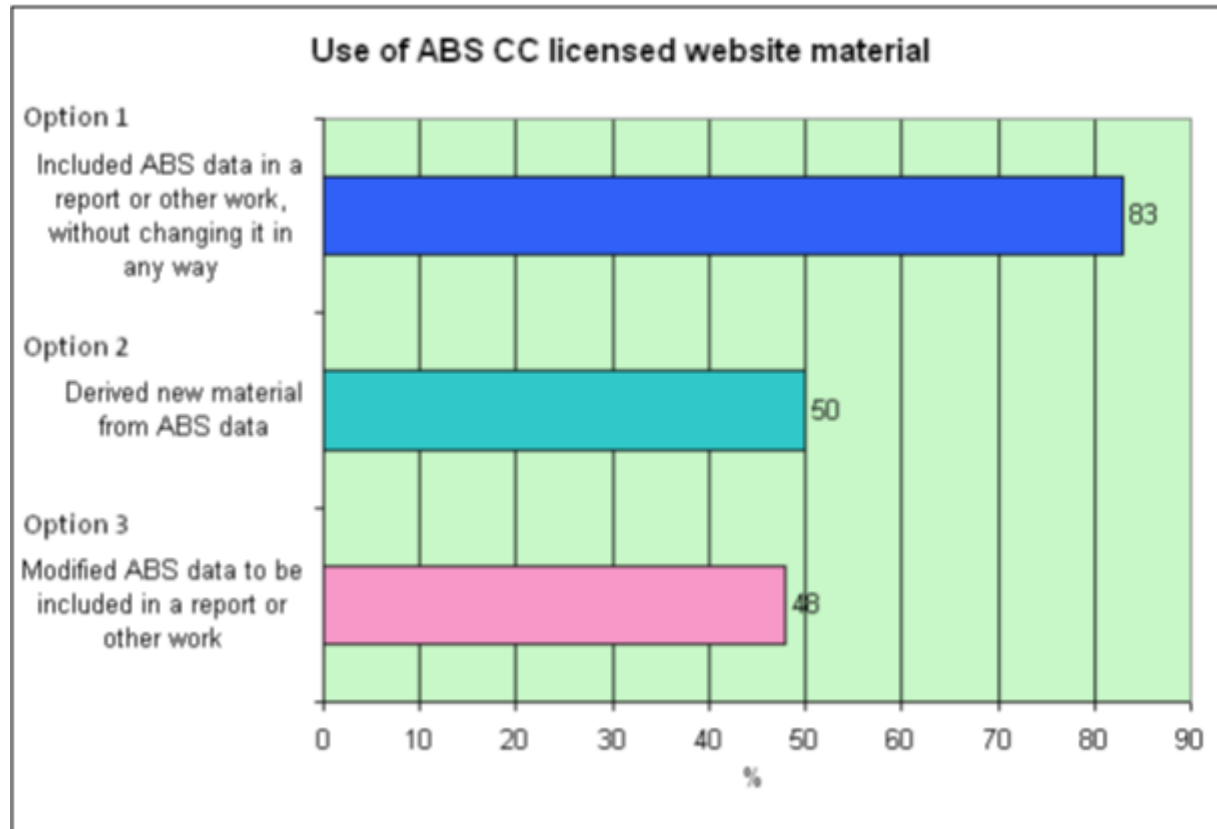
ABS Website Activity Dec 1999 to Jan 2009



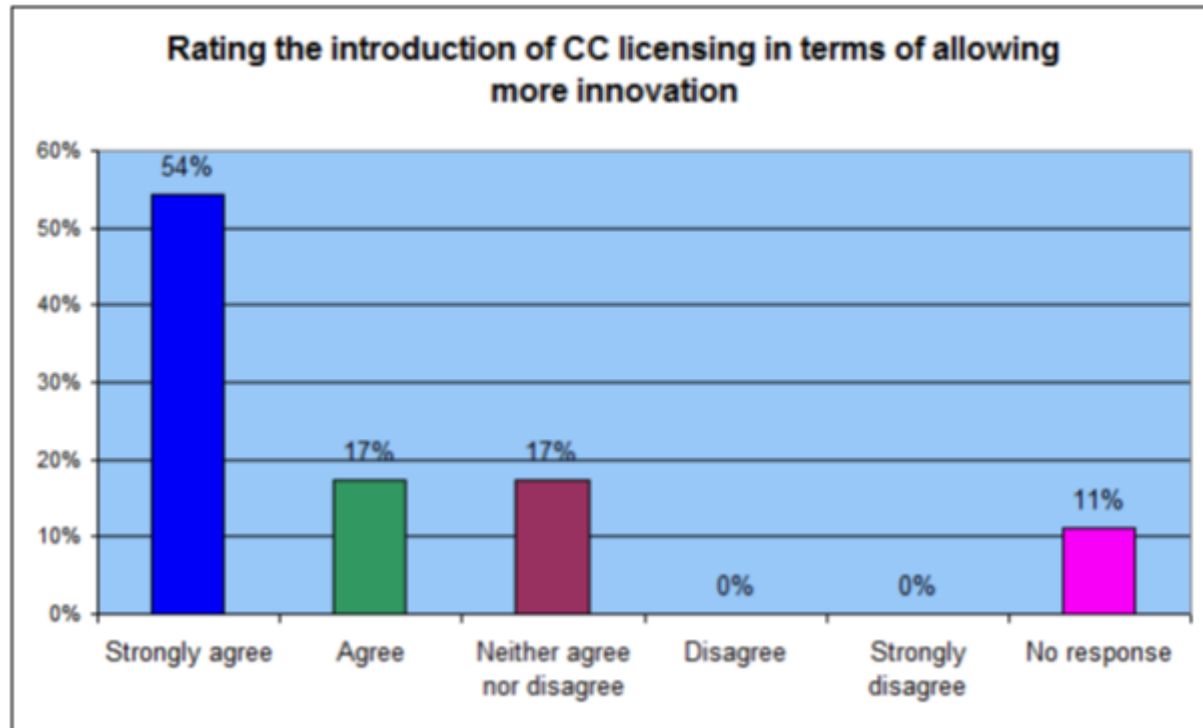
More importantly

- Sharing of information is
 - vital to innovation
 - fundamental to the successes of many branches of science
- Unpublished report by Professor John Houghton show a benefit/cost ratio of 4
- What does the community think?

In which ways(s) did you take advantage of CC?



CC contributes to innovation?



ABS has come a long way....

The long and winding road that leads to your door [of open access]” - the Beatles

- From charged access to free access
- From “all rights reserved” to “some rights reserved” – ABS only requires “attribution” for the use of our statistics
- Vital in:
 - liberating ABS data for better decision making, innovation and creativity
 - Supporting democracy

The End