

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of business case

To provide advice to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on the optimal means of increasing the capability of the statistical community of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) through the use of technology. Also, to provide advice on structuring the National Statistics Strategy (NSS) Hand Book for web access, particularly in the context of making it accessible to developing nations such as in the Pacific Islands.

### 1.2 Overview

The report will address:

- Appropriate roles for the ABS to undertake in reaching the above goals.
- How to capitalise on the ABS's current technological capabilities, in particular assessing the viability of providing the ABS's Learning Management System (LMS) to the PICTs.
- Identifying the most beneficial learning activities to include in any program.
- Highlighting the main obstacles to achieving these outcomes.
- Presenting workable solutions to these challenges.

The project will entail:

- Informing PICT National Statistical Offices (NSOs) about the potential benefits of the LMS.
- Gauging likelihood of their use of the LMS.
- Designing interface and access methods for PICT NSOs.
- Facilitating the expansion of the resources available through the LMS by partnering with regional institutions such as the

Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) that share similar goals.

The main reasons for the project are:

- To meet the ABS's goals in relation to assisting the statistics community of the PICTs.
- To harness the potential of new and emerging technologies.
- To address the inequalities of skills and resources experienced by the PICTs.

### 1.3 Background

The ABS, like the rest of the international statistical community, is constantly evolving its statistical capabilities including in the area of information technology. However, this development is uneven on a global scale, which is a problem affecting the entire community as statistics are such a vital part of policy formation at both the national, and increasingly, global levels. The ABS and other international organisations concerned with statistical issues have been involved with the Pacific Island region in a number of ways over many years. Nevertheless, the growth of the internet and the use of computers more generally is presenting the need to prepare for the future and the opportunity to embrace the possibilities offered by this medium to enhance the region's informational capabilities. This would allow governments to make more informed decisions regarding the well being of their peoples.

By producing better quality statistics, the PICTs can research and formulate economic, social, environmental, and cultural policies more effectively as well as measure the impact of policy decisions (SPC Strategic Plan) and as the ABS Corporate Plan points out "a good statistical system is an important pillar of a robust democracy." (ABS, 2000)

According to the SPC's Statistics Section Strategic Plan (2003-2005), "better information" is a key priority for the Pacific Islands (PI) and there is a need for further technical assistance in order to meet international statistical standards. Therefore well-developed statistics organisations such as the ABS have a vested interest (as do their stakeholders—namely the Australian government and people) in the continued progress of statistical capabilities throughout our region.

The ABS is about to make its LMS completely operational for internal users and is interested in exploring the possibility of providing access to external users such as the Pacific Islands. The implementation of the LMS within the ABS represents the culmination of their recognition of the potential for Online Learning and Training (OLT), including administrative benefits, availability, cost reductions and other efficiencies. While this process is ongoing and relatively new, the potential benefits for other countries are already apparent, but have not yet been fully explored.

#### 1.4 Context

The project is in line with:

- The objective expressed in *Introduction to ABS and its IT Environment: an information pack for vendors: 'Systems Integration With External Organisations'* of the "need to provide infrastructure that is more integrated with the external environment to support business process that cross organisation boundaries." (ABS, 2003).
- The ABS' Corporate Plan (2000): Objectives- "An active contributor to international statistical activities that are important to Australia or our region." (ABS, 2000, p12)
- 'Forward Work Program 2003-04 to 2005-06' Objective of "An expanded and improved national statistical service." (ABS, 2003, p2)
- It is also commensurate with the ABS policies of helping developing nations to help themselves, and of providing assistance that will offer long-term benefits. (ABS, 2002)

- This project will be an extension of the ABS' role of providing documentation on ABS practices, one of four main types of technical assistance provided by the ABS to developing countries. (ABS, 2002)
- However, it is still a new initiative and represents a major step in regards to cooperation with our near neighbours.