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Q150 Statistical Stories

Statistical Boundaries

Local government boundaries started in Queensland in 1859 when it was still part of New South Wales. Brisbane was declared a municipality on 7 September 1859 under the *Municipalities Act 1858* (NSW). The Town of Ipswich was next on 3 March 1860, followed by eight other municipalities under this Act: Toowoomba on 19 November 1860, Rockhampton on 13 December 1860, Maryborough on 23 March 1861, Warwick on 25 May 1861, Drayton on 19 July 1862, Gladstone on 20 February 1863, Bowen on 7 August 1863 and Dalby on 21 August 1863.

The *Municipal Institutions Act 1864* was the first Queensland local government legislation and a further nine municipalities were created under this Act: Townsville on 15 February 1866, Gayndah on 28 November 1866, Clermont on 21 January 1867, Roma on 21 May 1867, Allora on 21 July 1869, Mackay on 22 September 1869, Copperfield on 10 May 1872, Cooktown on 3 April 1876 and Charters Towers on 21 June 1877. Statistical collections by the Registrar-General used these boundaries.

The early Queensland censuses of 1861, 1864 and 1868 used the local government areas in the presentation of statistics. These censuses also used what were known as 'police districts', and in 1868, 'pastoral districts' were used too. Only the settled districts were included.

Census districts were established for the 1871 Census and figures were calculated for the earlier censuses using these districts. Census districts in the early years often covered a larger area than the cities and other local government areas we are familiar with today; for example, Caboolture census district included the Sunshine Coast area while Logan census district included the Gold Coast.

Queensland was also divided into administrative divisions and these were used for a range of purposes, including for the presentation of statistics. The Southern division extended from the New South Wales border north to about Bundaberg and west to the Northern Territory border. The Central Division was centred on Rockhampton and went from Bundaberg to just south of Mackay and inland to the NT border. The Northern Division covered the area from Mackay north and west, with Townsville as the main city. These divisions were used into the early decades of the 20th century.

The *Divisional Boards Act 1879* resulted in the creation of 74 new divisions covering all areas of the colony not already covered under the 1864 Act and the *Local Government Act 1878*. Not all divisions functioned immediately, with considerable delays in some areas. Numerous boundary changes occurred over the next two decades, together with amalgamations, split-offs and new divisions formed.



On 31 March 1903, the divisions became shires under the *Local Authorities Act 1902*. Following this legislation, boundary changes continued to be frequent and regularly there were conflicting views about where the actual boundaries occurred. Councillors and ratepayers frequently petitioned the State Government to move from one shire to another, which sometimes resulted in the formation of new shires while other shires were abolished or merged.

The census districts continued to be used in censuses, albeit with many changes at each census. These were used until the 1911 Census. After this, local government areas and amalgamations of these areas were used to present statistics.

Statistical divisions were in use by the 1933 Census. These consisted of convenient groupings of local government areas and have been used extensively in the presentation of statistics to the present day. Various changes have occurred in statistical divisions over this period. This has included amalgamations of divisions in the western part of the state, and boundary changes coinciding with local government boundary changes.

Statistics have been presented for urban centres and localities, or their equivalent, since the 1947 Census.

During the 1960s, the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) started to be used for statistical boundaries. As described by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the ASGC is a hierarchical classification system of geographical areas and consists of a number of interrelated structures. It provides a common framework of statistical geography and enables the production of statistics which are comparable and can be spatially integrated.

Its concepts are based on the work of Professor G.J.R. Linge undertaken in the mid 1960s. The urban/rural concepts were applied for the first time to the results of the 1966 Census. The concept of a capital city statistical division (SD) was implemented for the 1971 Census. A complete restructure of the statistical geographical classification for the whole of Australia based on the work of Linge was implemented for the 1976 Census. The concepts and classification rules were formalised to create the ASGC in 1984. An urban centre is currently defined as an area with population of 1,000 or more people. A (rural) locality is an area with 200-999 people.

Since the 1980s, the increasing importance of satellite positioning systems has meant that there are benefits to Australia in adopting a new mathematical surface on which a mapping or coordinate system is based (called a datum) which is compatible with the geocentric (earth centred) datum used by satellite systems such as the Global Positioning System (GPS).

In 1988, the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) decided to adopt a new geocentric datum as the basis for calculating locational coordinates. Another review was undertaken in the early 2000s. Today, the ASGC Digital Boundaries, 2006, contains the digital boundaries developed using 'mesh blocks' as a new micro-level geographical unit for statistics. These mesh blocks were trialled during the 2006 Census, and will be fully incorporated in the 2011 Census.

There are 314,369 spatial mesh blocks covering Australia with most residential mesh blocks containing approximately 30 to 60 dwellings. Mesh blocks have been designed to be small enough to aggregate accurately to a wide range of spatial units and thus enable a ready comparison of statistics between geographical areas, and large enough to protect against accidental disclosure of identifiable information about individual respondents. The value of the mesh block concept is that



they can readily be used for the development of other administrative data boundaries and can provide a relatively accurate approximation for comparing boundaries across time.

In Queensland, three new statistical divisions were formed in 2006 out of the previous Moreton Statistical Division: Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and West Moreton to reflect the size and diversity of this area of south-east Queensland. Following recommendations of the Local Government Reform Commission, Queensland's 150 local government authorities were reduced to 74 from 15 March 2008, including 30 regional councils, 7 city councils, 1 town council and 36 shires councils (including 12 Aboriginal shire councils).

We now find ourselves at a point in history only dreamt of by our forefathers. The Deputy Registrar General, the Reverend Robert Creyke, in [The Second Annual Report on Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths, 1861](#), declared:

... the publication of a reliable map showing, where possible, the various divisions of the Colony into Counties, Parishes, and Municipalities, also showing the boundaries of the Electoral, Registration, Police or Commissioners' Districts, would be of great use, and will I think be found necessary, before any attempt can be made to amend them.

Today we have the maps and the mesh blocks to be able to not only amend statistical boundaries but to compile clear and accurate statistics congruent with any boundary.

References

Informing a Nation: The Evolution of the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1905 to 2005	For useful information on technical developments which gave rise to some of these changes, see chapter 8. Available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics site at www.abs.gov.au .
Queensland Past and Present: 100 Years of Statistics, 1896-1996	A copy of this publication was made available under the OESR Q150 Statistical Collection at www.oesr.qld.gov.au . See chapter 1 of the publication.
The Second Annual Report on Registration of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1861	A copy of this publication was made available under the OESR Q150 Statistical Collection at www.oesr.qld.gov.au .
Collecting Statistics in the 19th Century	This is one of the OESR Q150 Statistical Stories, available at www.oesr.qld.gov.au .
1216.0.55.001 - Review of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification, 2007	For information relating to the development of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification, see these two publications on the Australian Bureau of Statistics site at www.abs.gov.au .
1216.0 - Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), Jul 2008	

