

PRONATALISM AUSTRALIA

Supporting family formation and generational renewal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Census creates decade-long gap in family size data as fertility rate hits record low

Pronatalism Australia has called on the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Government to restore the Census question on the number of children a woman has ever given birth to, and keep it on a five-yearly cycle. The question was not asked at the 2026 Census on 11 August this year. Last collected in 2021, it will not be collected again until 2031.

The ABS accepted during its topic review this year that “there is a data need”, but judged the case for collecting it every Census weaker than for other topics.

Founder Andrew Glover disagrees.

“A ten-year cycle for this question made sense when fertility was higher and moved slowly. It is much harder to justify a ten-year gap when the fertility rate has dropped to its lowest level on record and continues to fall”.

Pronatalism Australia points to the ABS’s own forecasting record that underestimated the rate of fertility decline the country has experienced recently. The lowest of three scenarios in its 2018 population projections assumed fertility would settle at 1.65 babies per woman by 2027. Australia was already below that in 2024, at 1.48.

“Australia’s fertility rate has dropped much faster than the ABS thought it could. This demonstrates the need for high quality data on this issue that only the Census provides”, Mr Glover said.

“We do not just need to know how many babies were born last year. We need to understand who is managing to form the family they want, who is not, and what circumstances go with having fewer children than hoped for.”

Birth registrations produce the annual fertility rate, a snapshot of one year with little detail. The Census records how many children women have actually had so far in their lives, alongside age, location, education, income, employment, housing and migration. It also lets researchers see how the same birth cohorts look at successive Censuses, showing how much delayed childbearing is impacting fertility statistics.

Pronatalism Australia wants a commitment to collecting the topic in 2031 and every five years afterwards.

“When the demographic picture changes this fast, our priorities need to change with it,” Mr Glover said.

“Whatever else Australia chooses to count, how many children Australians actually have should be measured at every Census. We cannot hope to turn around declining fertility if we only choose to collect our best data once a decade.”

— ENDS —

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ABOUT PRONATALISM AUSTRALIA

Pronatalism Australia is an independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting cultural norms, public policies and community institutions that support family formation, childrearing and generational renewal. The organisation advocates for a more family-friendly Australia in which people are better able to achieve their family aspirations and future generations can flourish.