



The Honourable Tony Clement

Minister of Industry

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cc. Jennifer Ditchburn, *Canadian Press*

July 9, 2010

Dear Sir,

We are writing in support of the position of the former Chief Statistician of Canada, Ivan Fellegi¹ on behalf of the statistical community, researchers and business people, teachers, students, and all those that rely on Statistics Canada data to support economic, financial and policy decisions on matters of considerable importance to Canada. As you know, the Government of Canada has made plans to replace the long census form with a voluntary survey next year. Reportedly, this decision was taken with little or no consultation with Statistics Canada, the agency responsible for the survey. We sincerely hope, in the interests of maintaining the high quality of information that our national statistical agency is famous for, that the decision is reversible.

It appears that the decision to drop the long form was not made for budgetary reasons, since the proposed survey will go to one third of Canadian households, more than the 20% that received the long census form in the past. If a reasonable number of these survey forms is returned, the survey will cost far more than the long form census, while the information provided is subject to substantial bias and likely of little use to policy makers.

Voluntary census forms are like voluntary tax forms. Those who return them can hardly be expected to accurately represent those who do not. For this reason, the Statistics Canada website says explicitly "If you have been contacted for the Census, the Labour Force Survey, a business survey or an agriculture survey, you have to participate because these surveys are mandatory as per the Statistics Act". Is it unreasonable for the Canadian government to obtain unbiased statistical information in areas critical to planning for the future of Canada: business and trade statistics, the aging population, education and income? Should those who collect and spend our tax dollars on matters determined to be in the public interest not do so with the most informed statistical information possible?

¹ Chief Statistician of Canada 1985-2008, Honorary member and Gold medalist of the SSC, Fellow of the ASA, holder of the Officer of the Order of Canada, La Médaille de la ville de Paris, many honours including several honorary doctorates.

We view it as surprising that decisions are made limiting the ability of experts at Statistics Canada to carry out a mandate for the benefit of Canadian policy makers, educators, small business, and science, without consulting these same experts. We respectfully submit that, in the interests of both cost and retention of the Canadian reputation for the quality of statistical information, the decision to replace the long form by a voluntary survey be revisited, reformed and reversed.

Respectfully yours,

Don McLeish, President, *Statistical Society of Canada*²

Bovas Abraham, Past-President, *Statistical Society of Canada*

John Brewster, President-elect, *Statistical Society of Canada*

Sastry G. Pantula, President, *American Statistical Association*³

² Society representing over 1000 statisticians in Canada and internationally (www.ssc.ca)

³ The leading professional association for statistics in the U.S.A. and internationally (<http://www.amstat.org>)