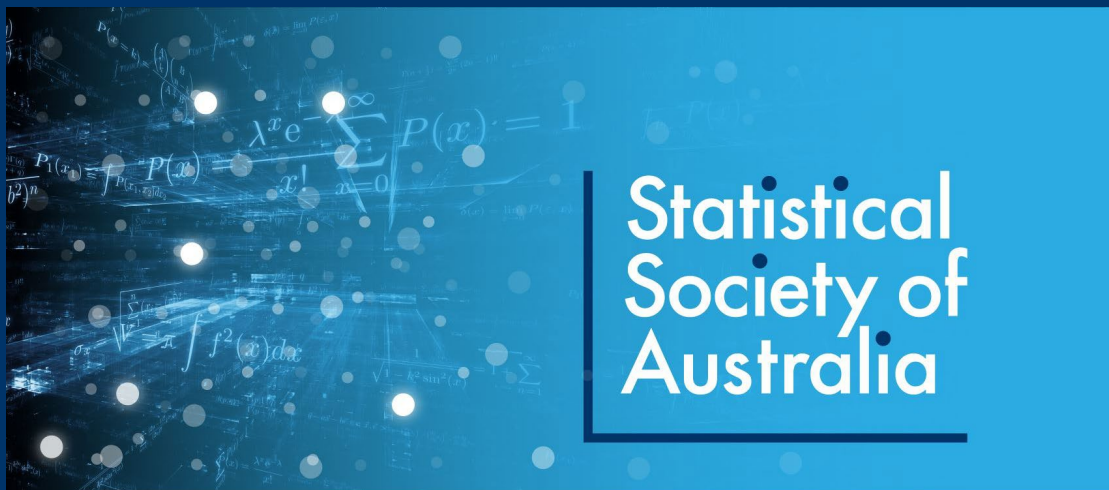


**From:** [Statistical Society of Australia](#)  
**To:** [Contact us](#)  
**Subject:** Stats Matters & Events  
**Date:** Thursday, 29 February 2024 3:57:25 PM



## STATS MATTERS & EVENTS

29 February 2024

Today is a special day indeed: 29 February! Happy birthday to all the poor souls who only get to celebrate every four years. A quick check revealed that the next time 29 February falls on a Thursday will be in 2052. Who knows if the newsletter still goes out on Thursdays by then? I doubt it. Will there even still be a newsletter? I would think that some major inventions will have been made by then, changing the way we communicate. We'll see.

This week's newsletter is all about official statistics:

New Statistical Performance Indicator (SPI) data released by the World Bank shows Finland scoring the highest among 186 countries for the second year in a row. Where did Australia rank? See the [article below](#).

Australian Statistician Dr David Gruen recently delivered a speech on "The Rise of Big Data and Integrated Data Assets". You'll find a [summary](#) of the four-page transcript further down, with a link to the full speech.

And finally, below you'll find [an article](#) on the 55th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in New York, which started on 27 February and winds up tomorrow. Titled "Better Data, Better Lives", it hosts Chief

Statisticians from member countries across the globe, including the Australian Statistician, David Gruen and Deputy Australian Statistician, Brenton Goldsworth.

[Marie-Louise Rankin](#)

Executive Officer

*Read newsletter in your [browser](#)*

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### **In this newsletter:**

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[How big data and integration are shaping Australia's future](#)

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### **Charting Progress at the 55th UN Statistical Commission**

Last Tuesday the 55th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission commenced in New York under the banner "Better Data, Better Lives." This Commission, founded in 1946, serves as the apex entity within the global statistical framework, assembling Chief Statisticians from member countries across the globe. Australia was represented by the Australian Statistician, David Gruen, and Deputy Australian Statistician, Brenton Goldsworth.

The Statistical Commission acts as the principal authority for international statistical operations, tasked with the establishment of statistical standards and the enhancement of conceptual and methodological frameworks, as well as overseeing their execution both nationally and globally. It supervises the activities of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and operates as a Functional Commission under the UN Economic and Social Council. Comprising 24 member nations of the United Nations, these members are selected by the UN Economic and Social Council, adhering to a principle of equitable geographical representation, with each member serving a four-year

term.

The delegates discussed key topics including the System of National Accounts, official statistical principles, social and climate change statistics, among others. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the 10th anniversary of its General Assembly adoption, highlighting its significance in shaping standards and methodologies for national statistical systems.

In addition to formal meetings, the Commission's session featured a rich array of side events, both virtual and in-person, covering topics like "Beyond GDP," the future of population data systems and data governance. These events aim to address emerging issues and foster discussions on making the Commission more representative and inclusive for future challenges.

Click [here](#) to read about an interview conducted with Linda Hooper of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, speaking about the important work the Commission undertakes.

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## **How big data and integration are shaping Australia's future**

On 23 February 2024 the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen AO, delivered a speech about "The Rise of Big Data and Integrated Data Assets", presenting a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of data analysis and emphasising the impact of big data and the integration of data assets on public policy and service delivery. He addressed the digital revolution's role in the proliferation of data sources. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was highlighted as a key player in utilising this data for policy and service improvements.

In his speech, Gruen elaborated on the concept of big data, exemplified by the Single Touch Payroll (STP) system, which provided crucial, near real-time employment data during the COVID-19 pandemic. This data allowed for the creation of new statistical publications and insights into the labor market that were previously unattainable through traditional survey methods. He also pointed out the shift towards using cloud computing for data analysis and the use of big data for real-time economic insights, such as household spending and CPI indicators.

Integrated data assets were another focus, with Gruen detailing how the linkage of various administrative datasets allows for comprehensive analysis of individual and business behavior. The ABS hosts two significant integrated data assets, PLIDA and BLADE, which have supported numerous research

projects and policy evaluations. An example study on the relationship between COVID-19 vaccination status and mortality among older Australians showcases the power of integrated data in answering complex public policy questions.

The Australian Statistician's speech concluded by highlighting the importance of both big data and traditional surveys in providing a nuanced understanding of societal trends and informing public policy. Gruen expressed optimism about the future of empirical research and program evaluation facilitated by these data assets, highlighting the role of big data and integrated data assets in enhancing the quality of public policy decision-making.

Read the full speech and see the graphs visualising key-points [here](#).

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## **Finland tops the global charts again: The world's premier statistical system**

Finland's statistical ecosystem has been acclaimed as the best in the world for the second consecutive time, according to a World Bank comparison involving 186 countries. This comparison evaluated statistical systems using over fifty indicators based on data from 2022, with Finland achieving a top score of 93.6 out of 100, a slight increase from the previous year. Norway and Canada followed in second and third places, respectively. Australia's overall Statistical Performance Indicator was 89.9, placing it in the top quintile.

The success of Finland's statistical system is attributed to its collaborative national approach towards continuous improvement, involving more than ten organisations besides Statistics Finland. This cooperative framework has facilitated access to high-quality registers and efficient data utilisation across organisational boundaries.

The World Bank's indicators for statistical performance assess various aspects, including data use, statistical service quality, data product quality, data production sources and production resources. Finland excelled with full scores in data use and data infrastructure but scored below 90 in data sources and products.

Comparatively, the median score was 70, with high-income countries averaging over 80 and low-income countries around 55. Since 2016, when the World Bank began these comparisons, there has been a noticeable improvement in scores, with an average increase of 12 points among countries.

The World Bank emphasises the vital role of national statistical bodies in the

economy, providing essential data for socio-economic development decision-making. The ongoing evaluation and enhancement of statistical systems are crucial for informed social decision-making, highlighting the importance of high-quality statistics globally.

Read the full article [here](#). Learn more about the Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) [here](#).

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### **Tribute to former ASA President Dr Dionne Price**

It is with great sadness that we learned this week of the passing of former President of the American Statistical Association (ASA), Dr Dionne Price. Our condolences are with Dionne's family, friends and colleagues. The ASA provided a tribute available [here](#).

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### **SSA's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee: calling for new members**

The SSA's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee is looking for new members, and if you're keen to ensure that the SSA is an equitable, diverse, and inclusive society, we invite you to join us.

The EDI Committee meets once every 6 weeks, and works towards ensuring that our Society is equitable, inclusive and diverse. To find out more about what the EDI Committee has done in the past, and aims to do in the future, please visit the SSA website [here](#).

If you're interested in learning more or joining the committee, please get in touch with our [Executive Officer](#) by March 21.

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### **Mentioned in previous newsletters:**

#### **Election of Executive Members**

Members are advised that the Executive positions of Secretary and Treasurer will become vacant at the Society's Central Council Annual General Meeting in 2024.

Members of SSA are invited to submit nominations for the two positions to be

vacated. Nominations must be in writing and signed by the nominator(s), and must be accompanied by a written and signed statement from the nominee accepting the nomination. Nominations should be submitted to the SSA President ([president@statsoc.org.au](mailto:president@statsoc.org.au)) or to a Branch President before 1 May 2024.

**Doug Shaw**, Secretary

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### **The Tjanpi Award for best Student paper in Environmental Statistics**

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2023 Tjanpi Award, the annual student prize for best student paper in environmental statistics, sponsored by the SSA Environmental Statistics Section. To be eligible a student must be:

- An author of a paper that has been accepted during 2023, having made a substantial contribution to the work
- A student as of 30 June 2023
- A current member of the SSA and the Environmental Statistics Section

The winner will receive \$500 and will be asked to present in an invited session on environmental statistics at the next annual stats conference.

Please submit your nominations to [eo@statsoc.org.au](mailto:eo@statsoc.org.au) (self-nominations welcome), with Tjanpi Award submission in the header, by 5 PM AEDT Friday 1st March 2024, including:

- Full name, institution

- Paper, as one pdf file.

- Letter of support from supervisor or other academic at the institution, confirming student status of applicant and describing the student's role in the paper.

David Warton

Chair, Environmental Statistics Section



Central Australian landscape dominated by Tjanpi, photo by Sara Winter

*Tjanpi is the Pitjantjatjara word for Triodia, a spiny tussock-forming grass that dominates the vegetation across more than 20% of Australia's land mass. It is a long-lived plant that makes deep roots and can withstand the harshest of conditions. It can grow over decades into characteristic ring formations three metres in diameter. As a source of food and shelter, Tjanpi is fundamental to life in some of Australia's most extreme conditions, being central to highly diverse ecosystems dominated by termites and ants, as well as reptiles, birds and small mammals. It has also been traditionally used by Indigenous people for a range of purposes, including building shelters, making an adhesive resin, basket weaving, fishing and using its seeds as a food source.*

*Tjanpi is an analogy for the Environmental Statistics student award – because the development and application of appropriate statistical techniques is fundamental to good environmental research, and our hope is that the recipient of this award will grow over the coming decades to become central to a diverse range of interesting research endeavours!*

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## SSA Events

### WA Branch AGM 2024 (Alex Jenkins)

12 Mar 2024, 5:15 PM – 7:00 PM (AWST), Cheryl Praeger Lecture Room, The University of Western Australia

While non-members are welcome to attend, please note that voting on Branch matters is restricted to SSA WA Branch members. Post AGM proceedings, Mr. Alex Jenkins from the WA Data Science Innovation Hub (WADSIH) will deliver the guest address. In his presentation Alex will speak on WADSIH's work with data and AI, including opportunities with synthetic data. He will discuss the implications of AI, language models, and embedding models for industry and research. Furthermore there will be a discussion on potential areas of collaboration between WADSIH and the Statistical Society of Australia and its members.

Members will receive the AGM agenda, proxy forms, and pertinent documents via email. In case these documents elude you by the preceding Monday, kindly contact the WA Branch Secretary.

Commencing at 5:00 PM, members and visitors alike are invited to partake in pre-AGM networking with wine and cheese. Subsequent to the meeting, all attendees are welcome to join us for dinner at a nearby restaurant.

To register click [here](#).

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### **SSA Vic & Tas AGM**

19 Mar 2024, 5:30 PM – 6:00 PM (AEDT) @ Staff Tea Room, Peter Hall Building, The University of Melbourne OR CSIRO, 3-4 Castray Esplanade, Battery Point, Hobart OR online via Zoom

Join us for the SSA Vic & Tas annual general meeting, where we will recap on our last year and vote in the new council for 2024. The annual report will be made available closer to the date of the AGM.

Following the AGM we will be hearing from Helen Baird, Program Manager a/g of the Standards, Classifications and Business Register Branch at the Australian Bureau of Statistics on how the ABS develops standards. To find out more and register for the talk, visit the [event page](#)

To register for the AGM you must be signed in to your SSA member account.

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### **Statistical Consulting Network Monthly Meet-Up**

29 March 2024, 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM AEDT, held online

Come along with your thinking cap, maybe a problem, and some lunch!

The Statistical Consulting Network invites you to their monthly meet-up, a virtual lunchtime meeting where statisticians help each other out with problems that they aren't sure how to deal with. This virtual meeting is held on Zoom at lunchtime on the last Friday of each month, 12:30-1:30 PM (AEDT). We start each meet-up with announcements, or occasionally a special topic discussion, then discuss problems that attendees have brought along with them.

We also have a Slack workspace where members of the consulting network can communicate between meetings, or post problems or relevant materials they would like to discuss during a meeting.

[Zoom link](#)

Password: 660145



[Slack Workspace link](#)

## Other events

Women in Data Science Worldwide | @ Australian Data Science Network

Join us online!  
Tuesday, 12 March

Australia's  
Rising  
WOMEN IN DATA SCIENCE  
WiDS  
Stars

#WiDS2024 AustralianDataScience.net REGISTER: 

AUSTRALIAN DATA SCIENCE NETWORK

**Celebrate International Women's Day with Australia's Rising WiDS Stars!** (*WiDS = Women in Data Science*): The Australian Data Science Network introduces you to more than two-dozen women in Data Science from around Australia who are quickly becoming rising stars in the field. They'll share their journeys, why they're in Data Science and what they're doing, and explore the issue of gender equity in STEM and what they experience in their careers and studies. Each person will speak for 10 minutes.

- Online & Free
- Tuesday, 12 March
- 12 pm AEDT – 5 pm AEDT (come when you can and stay for as long as you'd like! There will be 5 new speakers every hour)
- More info/Register [here](#)

## Assessing the risk of bias in studies evaluating the effects of interventions and of exposures

21 Mar 2024 (AEDT) – 22 Mar 2024 (AEDT), Ground Floor Conference Rooms, Monash University, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, 553 St Kilda Road, Melbourne

Professor Julian Higgins, University of Bristol, will be leading this two-day (in-person) workshop, providing a unique opportunity to learn from the lead developer of the risk of

bias tools. The course is designed for those undertaking systematic reviews, synthesizing evidence for guidelines, or generally interested in how to appraise studies. For registration information, please see [here](#).

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## **Current Vacancies in SSA's Career Centre**

[Senior Lecturer](#)

Western Australia

Curtin University

Seeking a talented and well-qualified statistician with expertise in areas that strengthen the profile of statistical teaching and research.

[View All Jobs](#)

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If you have news from the Australian statistical community to share in Stats Matters and Events, please get in touch [with us](#)! We love getting feedback too.

[Unsubscribe](#)