



**BY EMAIL:** [ministre.industrie@ic.gc.ca](mailto:ministre.industrie@ic.gc.ca)

July 13, 2010

The Hon. Tony Clement, P.C., M.P.  
Ministry of Industry and Minister Responsible for Statistics Canada  
C.D. Howe Building, East Tower, 11th Floor  
235 Queen Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H5

Dear Minister:

**Re: Cancellation of the Mandatory Long-Form Census Questionnaire**

As the single authoritative voice of the marketing, survey and public opinion research and market intelligence industry in Canada, the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) is writing to convey our concern about the Government's decision to cancel the mandatory long-form census questionnaire and to urge you to reconsider. Our concern revolves around the impact this decision will have on the availability, quality and reliability of essential data that is collected about Canadians once every five years.

The data generated by the long-form census questionnaire provide decision-makers in the public and private sectors with a deep and rich set of facts about Canadians, facts that are reliable at the local, regional and national levels. The robustness and reliability of the data is due to the huge sample involved (one in five households), and because response is mandatory.

Whilst your Government has proposed a new National Household Survey (NHS) -- which would have a wider distribution (one in three households) than the long-form questionnaire -- the response rate to it will likely be substantially lower and the resulting data less robust, given that hard-to-reach segments of the population will not likely be included among respondents. The experience of survey researchers and social scientists is that those in lower income groups, ethnic minorities, and the most wealthy citizens are least likely to answer questions voluntarily. This would lead to skewed data and doubts about the accuracy of information that is relied upon by public policy and business decision-makers.

Without robust census data, it will be exceedingly difficult for governments to respond effectively to shifting patterns of need in the populace or to introduce changes that provide the greatest value for money. One particularly problematic outcome of the elimination of the mandatory long-form questionnaire would be the eradication of the only reliable, national source of information on aboriginal educational achievement.

MRIA is aware that the Government may have looked to the U.S. in making the decision to eliminate the long-form questionnaire. However, there is a critical difference between what the Americans have done and the proposed new Canadian census process. Whilst it is true that the U.S. has eliminated the long-form from its decennial census, the complementary piece to the new American census approach is telling.

The U.S. Census Bureau has introduced a new American Community Survey (ACS), an ongoing statistical survey which is being sent to approximately 250,000 addresses monthly (or 3 million households per year). The ACS will regularly gather data about Americans and their households, their education, income levels, and other demographic information, data which was previously secured only via the long-form. Response to the ACS is mandatory.

Here at home, data generated by the Canadian census long-form questionnaire constitute crucial input for the sample designs of other national surveys. The long-form data are also combined with other survey data to compute and extrapolate rates for key social and economic indicators. For example, local health authorities can use their own survey data combined with census data to calculate rates of health service utilization and many other vital statistics. Also, the statistically reliable data generated by the long-form questionnaire make it possible for MRIA members to use national census data to adjust their survey results to be nationally representative.

MRIA cannot stress strongly enough that without data from the long-form census questionnaire as a point of reference, all Canadian survey results – including those from the National Household Survey – may be biased on important dimensions such as income, education, housing status, and many others. Researchers across the country, working on projects in all areas of public policy and business decision-making, will have no data with which to correct for these biases. It will also not be possible for researchers to compare numbers from census to census, and analyze trends.

We submit that the Government based its decision with respect to the long-form questionnaire on anecdotal information that some Canadians perceive it to be an unwarranted intrusion. We are not aware of any hard data from a survey or other evidence-based information that this view is held by a majority -- or even a significant minority -- of Canadians.


MRIA submits that from a bigger picture perspective, the opposite view is more accurate. Because the mandatory long-form questionnaire generates more reliable data, it actually limits intrusion by reducing poorly targeted marketing communications that would otherwise be sent to consumers.

Finally, we believe that the decision to replace the long-form questionnaire with a National Household Survey does not represent good value for Canadian taxpayers, given the additional costs that will be required to distribute the NHS to a larger proportion of households and, thereafter, to secure an adequate response rate.

We therefore urge Cabinet to reconsider and reverse its decision to eliminate the mandatory long-form census questionnaire.

MRIA would be pleased to discuss this issue with you in greater detail, at your convenience. Should you wish to contact the Association, please do so through our Executive Director, Mr. Brendan Wycks, at 1-888-602-6742, ext. 8724 or by email at [bwycks@mria-arim.ca](mailto:bwycks@mria-arim.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edwin Gibson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Edwin Gibson, CMRP  
President

c.c.: Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada