

Census disaster highlights print power

THE country's first online census - which cut out millions of copies from the print run - has proved an unmitigated disaster, with website crashing and remaining offline while the majority of people were trying to upload their details.

Thanks to the website fail - which is variously being blamed on international hackers or public overload - only two million of the estimated 10 million online forms were completed yesterday, and what was supposed to be a triumph of online technology has turned into a national debacle.

The chiefs at the ABS blame

an overseas attack, while the government minister responsible is flatly contradicting this and blaming an overloaded system. If it is a hack it highlights the serious concerns expressed by many Australians about online data breaches, which of course are not possible with paper census forms which have served the census since 1911.

In the latest development the Australian Privacy Commissioner has weighed in, commencing an investigation into the ABS and the census, aimed at ensuring personal data is being protected.

The last census in 2011 used

print as its only form, and passed off without incident, with 14.5 million forms - printed by IPMG - completed. This time around only around a third of that number were produced - printing by Print Media Group, distribution by IVE - with some 10 million forms set to be filled in online, which did not happen. At least half a million Aussies that did not receive a paper form have already requested one, with that figure now set to skyrocket.

Kellie Northwood from lobby groups Keep me Posted and Two Sides Australia says, "Paper should have been the primary media, with an opt-in for online.

We lobby for whatever is easier for the consumer, and clearly paper census forms are easier on every level, as last night conclusively proved.

"There has been so much confusion about the online form, in the weeks leading up to it, on the night, and now this morning. Australia can do better than this. Australia doesn't have the infrastructure to deal with cyber attacks, but we have world leading print and distribution facilities. We will be lobbying Canberra in two weeks' time on this point, and on the move by corporates to charge for paper bills."