

Census disaster highlights power of print

by April Glover

The country's first online census - which cut out millions of copies from the print run - has proved an unmitigated disaster, with the 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 on census night, and what was supposed to be a triumph of online technology has turned into a national debacle.

The ABS is blaming 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



Debate: online census form

incident, with 14.5 million forms – printed by IPMG - completed. This time around only around a third of that number were produced – printed by Print Media Group, distributed 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.

“Clearly paper census forms are easier on every level, as last night conclusively proved.”