



Because Being Counted Counts

**COUNTING the Robinvale & Euston
communities in the 2026
CENSUS of Population & Housing**

Community Voice Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 18 months, an informal yet impactful partnership between the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Robinvale Euston Workforce Network (REWN), local government, and the broader community has operated. This collaboration has fostered openness, trust, and a willingness to work together towards the shared goal of achieving a more accurate Census of Population and Housing (Census) count in 2026 for the Robinvale, Euston, and surrounding areas – communities long affected by significant population undercounts.

One initiative of this collaboration was the commissioning of research to carefully hear the breadth of community voice in identifying the barriers and enablers to Census participation. Drawing on extensive community engagement the process sought to amplify underrepresented voices, share reliable Census information what the Census is and why it is important, and lay the groundwork for a locally tailored Census engagement strategy.

Overarching findings from the research note:

- ✓ **Persistent Undercount:** Independent research over the past two decades consistently shows actual resident numbers are 2.2–2.9 times higher than official Census counts. This undercount perpetuates disadvantage and limits access to essential services.
- ✓ **Diverse and Transient Population:** Robinvale and Euston have culturally and linguistically diverse, often transient populations, including seasonal workers and those in hidden, over-crowded and non-traditional housing, who face unique barriers to Census participation.
- ✓ **Systemic Barriers:** Language limitations, form complexity, lack of understanding about Census purpose, privacy concerns, and fear of authority all hinder engagement. Barriers are compounded for those with low literacy or limited digital access.
- ✓ **Community Strength and Goodwill:** There is significant local interest and goodwill to engage with the Census, backed by dedicated ABS Field Staff, trusted community leaders, and local organisations. Efforts by past Census Field Officers have laid a strong foundation and should be both replicated and extended.
- ✓ **Gatekeepers and Conduits:** Certain groups—especially Landlords, Labour Hire Companies, and Approved Employers—can either block or facilitate participation. Engaging these “gatekeepers” and utilising “conduits” such as community leaders and young people is critical.

Themed findings, shown in the table below, offer more specific detail around 12 nuanced areas.

LOCAL CHALLENGES / CONTEXT	CENSUS COMMUNICATION	CENSUS ACCESS
1. Under-represented groups	5. Clarifying WHAT the Census IS (and IS NOT)	10. Access to the Census
2. Key geographical areas	6. Clarifying WHY the Census is important – messages that make sense	11. Supporting Census completion
3. The scale of overcrowding	7. Key promotional, marketing and communication messages	12. Census 'Gatekeepers' and Census refusal
4. The local ABS Census Workforce	8. Key promotional opportunities and platforms	
	9. Key conduits to community	

Drawing on these findings three strategic recommendations are offered (more detailed actions are provided in pages 15-16 of this report):

1. Ongoing investment at a place-based level in the form of an action group to support the work and efforts of the ABS in the lead up to the 2026 Census. This workgroup could be known as the Census 2026 Action Group (C2026AG);
2. Secure additional resourcing (e.g. financial, community goodwill, in-kind) to deliver an extended Census campaign (nominally the Census 2026 Campaign) and carry the Census Chorus (see research); and
3. Shared discussion, agreement and creation of an authorising environment to do things differently in a place-based way – including implementing local strategies in Robinvale, Euston and surrounds to increase Census engagement and participation.

The collaborative, community-driven approach adopted over the past 18 months has demonstrated real value and generated momentum for change. With sustained investment, cross-sectoral partnerships, and a focus on locally relevant solutions, Robinvale, Euston, and surrounding communities can significantly improve Census participation—ensuring fairer representation and resourcing for all. The next steps will depend on maintaining this spirit of openness, building on current successes, and strategically targeting efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

BACKGROUND, IMPETUS & METHODOLOGY

There is an important historical context to the collaborative investment in a more accurate population and housing count for the communities of Robinvale, Euston and surrounds through the ABS Census.

The undercount of the Robinvale, Euston and surrounds population has been well-known for at least a quarter of a century.

In efforts to rectify this known undercount Swan Hill Rural City Council has invested in two separate population research studies for Robinvale and Euston and later Robinvale only. Comparison of population data from these studies with the nearest corresponding Census population data is shown in Table 1. at the end of this section.

Research by Success Works in 2005 (The Robinvale Mapping Project) indicated the ABS Census of Population and Housing significantly undercounted the combined Robinvale and Euston populations. Through its research Success Works suggested a combined Robinvale and Euston population of 6,000 to 8,000 with a harvest season influx of 8,000 to 10,000 (February to April annually)¹.

At the nearest Census collection point to the Success Works research, the 2006 Censuses, the Euston Locality reported a population of 462 people and the Robinvale Statistical Local Area reported a population of 3,965 people. Together this suggested a combined Census population of 4,427 compared to the Success Works figure of 6,000-10,000 people.

Later research by Geografia in 2019 (Robinvale Population Determination: Briefing Paper²) estimated a Robinvale SA² (only) population of 7,900 residents, ranging between 7,000 in November to 8,800 in March (again reflect the harvest season influx)³.

At the nearest Census collection points of 2016 and 2021, the Census reports a Robinvale SA² population of 3,313 and 3,740 respectively compared to the Geografia figure of 7,000-8,800 people.

Geografia concludes *"What is most obvious is the relative similarity: quite different methodologies deployed by different people over time have produced similar results. This adds to the argument that the estimates are robust as they all point to a total actual resident population that is around 2.2-2.9 times the ERP and this has been consistent over the last decade."*

Based on this research Swan Hill Rural City Council formally reports a Local Government Area population of 25,805 people as opposed to the 2021 Census reported population of 21,403, with the increase attributed to the undercount of the Robinvale SA². In line with this position Council erected signs at the entrance to the Robinvale town noting a community population of 8,000 people. Council now stands by the findings of the 2005 and 2019 research which suggests a resident population for Robinvale of 2.2-2.9 times the population reported by the ABS Census of Population and Housing.

In February, June and August 2024, in a continued effort to work collaboratively in this space, Swan Hill Rural City Council in partnership with the Robinvale Euston Workforce Network (REWNN, auspiced by the Colman Foundation), commenced meeting with the ABS staff, both local governments and state government departments from both Victoria and NSW, philanthropy and key community stakeholders. The purpose of these meetings was to galvanise improved participation in the 2026 Census. Goodwill, curiosity and a desire to do better has guided all involved.

Towards this end, two in-person workshops were held in October 2024. The first workshop heard from community and industry and the second from identified key organisation partners. The initial findings from these workshops informed the commissioning of this research.

¹ The Success Works research used a range of methods, including interviews with local people and the collection of specific data (school enrolments, hospital admissions, Maternal and Child Health Service birth records, supermarket transactions) and applied a range of assumptions to these data sets to reach an informed estimate for the population of Robinvale-Euston.

² <https://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/our-council/plans-strategies-documents/plans-strategies/robinvale-housing-population-determination-briefing-paper.pdf>

³ The two most reliable methods deployed in this study use bank transaction data and water usage data (with the former considered the more reliable of the two methods).

Drawing on recommendations from the workshops held in October 2024 across February to July 2025 the REWN partnership invested in a series of community voice gathering sessions throughout Robinvale, Euston and surrounds. The intention was to hear closely and deeply the voices of those community cohorts suspected of not participating in the Census regarding the barriers and enablers they experienced. These sessions also provided an opportunity to share timely and targeted information resources about the upcoming 2026 Census, dispel common myths and encourage participation.

Customised Session Resources are show in APPENDIX 1 and a brief Research Methodology in APPENDIX 2.

The community voice sessions provided significant insights into improved Census engagement and participation themes which are discussed in the following section. Each theme is presented in summary form with evidence of the community’s voice shown through direct quotes.

A second, less intended, category of insights was also shared by community which focussed on systemic barriers to Census engagement and completion at the level of Census form design and implementation process. This second category of insights is relevant as it speaks to the longer-term challenge of sustainable, widespread and meaningful Census participation. For Robinvale and Euston (and many similar communities) efforts for an increase in Census participation must occur in the lead up to EVERY Census collection period because a key cohort of known ‘non-participants’ are highly transient or have significant access barriers (or both). As such, without significant changes to the Census form and process both the ABS and communities are left in a vacuum of ‘starting over’ with Census education and awareness every five years. These systemic barriers are discussed in more detail in Appendix 3.

TABLE: Population research data comparative to Census population data

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH POPULATION DATA	CENSUS POPULATION DATA	SCALE OF UNDERCOUNT
Success Works (2005) 6,000-10,000	Census (2006) 4,427	1,573 - 5,573
Geografia (2019) 7,000-8,800	Census (2016) 3,313	3,687 - 5,487
	Census (2021) 3,740	3,260 - 5,060

Whilst collaboration to improve the accuracy of future Census counts continues it is important to also remember the urgency of this work for the people living in the Robinvale, Euston and surrounding communities. In truth the enduring inaccuracy in population measurement is, potentially, perpetuating inequalities and disadvantage to these communities. As an example; research by Swan Hill Rural City Council in 2023 (The Robinvale Early Childhood Education and Care Consultation) revealed the current supply of regulated childcare provided only one licenced place for EVERY ten children aged 0-5 years across the communities of Robinvale, Euston and surrounds.

SUMMARY OF THEMES - Improved Engagement and Participation in the 2026 Census of Population & Housing

The following themes for Improved Engagement and Participation in the 2026 Census are collated directly from community voice. Each theme is presented in summary form with evidence of the community's voice shown through direct quotes.

The local ABS Census Workforce

Alongside community the research heard from four former Census Field Officers and Area Managers employed by the ABS across previous collection years, some with multiple Census' experience. Learning from this cohort highlighted their passion for the role and commitment to supporting a more accurate Census population count for the communities of Robinvale, Euston and surrounds. Through this research it was clear these staff were well recruited and trained by the ABS.

Identifying both the inherent strengths of these individual, local staff members and the broader process strengths of the ABS in terms of recruitment and training are an important precursor to the remaining themes.

Despite the wide-ranging suite of strategies (discussed in more detail below) used by these various Field Officers in Census promotion and collection, significant increases in population counts for Robinvale, Euston and surrounds remain largely elusive. Through the community voice sessions some systemic flaws in the Census form itself and collection process were identified. In terms of the Census form its length, complexity, inability to be translated were key factors noted. In terms of the Census process, reliance on the Census only as a single source of population data without triangulating data to accuracy test was frequently noted.

Outside the control of the ABS were longer-term concerns regarding sustainability of pre-Census education campaigns. For communities with highly transient populations intensive pre-Census education campaigns were required at each new Census period because of the limited retention of certain cohorts and subsequent limited retention of Census knowledge.

As noted, a key strength of the Census workforce was the range of strategies utilised to increase Census form distribution, participation, completion accuracy and collection. Whilst many of these strategies might be 'standard' Census Field Officer strategies it was the lengths made to successfully implement, such as the number of returns to a household to collect the form, that was a special feature of the Robinvale and Euston workforce. Strategies included:

- ✓ Taking extended amounts of time to explain the importance of the Census and of being counted
- ✓ Multiple visits to homes to collect the form
- ✓ Inquiring about where a form might appear incomplete or has not captured all residents of a house. For example, often a form might only list two residents yet "the garage door is open and there are six beds lined up in the garage with Pasifika men sitting on them or a form says the property is home to three adult men and there are children's shoes at the front door and children and woman's clothes on the clothes line."
- ✓ Encouraging people to at least do the first few pages to facilitate some level of counting
- ✓ Attendance at trusted community locations and events such as local churches to address parishioners / congregation
- ✓ Collaborating with key partners such as MVAC to reach the First Nations community respectfully and strategically
- ✓ Providing additional information and form completion sessions at places people trusted such as the Robinvale Resource Centre and Network House, including the use of interpreters to facilitate. One Field Officer noted more than 100 Census forms were completed at Network House using this strategy
- ✓ Census posters displayed at high-frequency locations such as the supermarket in the diversity of languages
- ✓ Newsletters through the Almond Board and Table Grape Growers Association to reach Labour Hire Contractors and growers through high-credibility sources

"My [relation] was a past Field Officer, the lengths they went to were huge, back to the same house five times."

"Field Officers need to do everything that they did in 2021 and even more, they need to also do what you are learning through these conversations with community."

"There is nothing more that Field Officers / Supervisors can do to get the form done, the efforts they go to are huge – those processes are fine, comprehensive. The gap is in education of the importance of the Census / the purpose."

"In my collection Zone I found 40 more houses that were listed for me to collect from."

To further facilitate the success of these strategies past Census Field Officers noted the importance of ensuring the diversity of the Census workforce reflected the actual community population and that this diversity was reflected in all Census advertising. To facilitate this, it is essential to circulate Census workforce recruitment materials in different languages and to share these widely across the community. It was also noted that the workforce must be of an adequate scale to give the required time to supporting form completion.

"Census staff must be known and trusted."

"Is the Field Officer workforce of 14 enough? Could there be an extra cohort recruited just for form filling support across Census week?"

Under-represented groups

Drawing on advice from the community the following cohorts were identified as underrepresented in Census participation. It should be noted though that a lack of participation is not limited to these cohorts:

- ✓ Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community members, especially those with limited English language, those working (and living) on horticulture properties, those moving between communities (and often States) for work, those working illegally⁴, and those who may have fled persecution in their home country
- ✓ People living in boarding houses, over-crowded housing, transient housing systems, alternate housing (such as shopfronts)
- ✓ First Nations community members
- ✓ A cohort of Australian born (not First Nation) community members who do not see the importance of / value in completing the Census form
- ✓ Community members with lower levels of literacy (this was clearly identified as BOTH overseas and Australian born community members)
- ✓ Young people

"Many shop fronts in Robinvale are also residences and are likely being missed by the Census Field Staff. Local knowledge is so important, a 'drive around' of the communities and mapping of hidden and not obvious residences' will provide important information in this space."

"It was common to knock on doors and see people through the window duck down and hide. The yellow collector's satchel would have contributed to people's fear."

"I experienced a lot of people who claimed to work in Robinvale but live in Melbourne where they are collecting Centrelink payments. These people would not do the Census for fear of government, authority, backlash, fear of being 'sent home' and facing persecution... Messaging must take away the fear – where does my information go – this is especially so for Cambodian people."

"People were scared of the government but also scared of not doing the right thing. People were mostly happy to do the right thing providing they understood they were safe and how to complete."

"As a previous Census Field Officer, connecting to the Pacific Islander community is one of the things we did not do well."

"The hardest to reach group are the seasonal workers."

"Workers are scared to complete the form... People working here illegally are afraid to complete the form."

"People are genuinely fearful of sharing their information."

"Immigration comes through about once per year. If this happened before a Census you would find no one here, not one door would open on any home with a worker in it."

"The illegal workforce is significant. Vaccination numbers during Covid are proof of this."

"Boarding houses, pickers huts, caravan parks are often home to illegal workforce and are very hard to capture. There is cultural pushback from these groups, fear of authority and government is significant."

⁴ The scale of the illegal workforce was highlighted during Covid. MVAC data shows they provided 3,675 Covid vaccinations to non-Medicare card holders. Locally it is understood that other vaccination providers were doing the same, including the Robinvale Pharmacy and Robinvale District Health Service (RDHS).

"Some people can't read or can but might not understand the big words on the form."

"Many community members are illiterate or not tech savvy – not just newly arrived community members, community members who have been here their whole lives too."

"In 2011 there was an Immigration raid three weeks before the Census and this impact was noticeable in the count achieved by the Census."

Clarifying WHAT the Census IS (and IS NOT)

Throughout community conversations there was some confusion about exactly what the Census is, including what it looked like and its purpose.

- ✓ There was some ongoing confusion between the Census and voting, with comments such as "I don't vote" or "I've already voted" offered when the Census form was raised. Showing a hard copy of the 2021 Census form was useful but some confusion continued. This was especially noted amongst the First Nations community
- ✓ The simplest message that seemed to resonate with people was that the Census was about 'being counted' – the 'count' includes both people and homes

"I was a founding member of the Euston Preschool, population projections were a huge component of then being able to gain funding – we understand the importance of counting."

Clarifying WHY the Census is important – messages that make sense

An enduring theme amongst community voice sessions was that the community did not understand the purpose of the Census - why populations needed to be counted. Promotional materials must focus on why being counted is important. Key observations included:

- ✓ Being counted accurately means the community receives services and supports that better reflect the size and needs of the community – especially important in this messaging is:
 - Housing
 - Policing levels
 - Doctors and medical services
 - Hospital, aged care and primary care services
 - Childcare
 - Education

"We fall short in educating people about the importance of the Census – that is the biggest failure."

"Promote the Census as important to ALL demographics – we all need essential services..."

"We wouldn't have Drs, the Co-Op or Aged Care without people being counted."

"Being counted gives us a voice. The form is Your count, Your say."

"In some countries the Government does not count people, that is a completely foreign concept. In some countries the government does not regulate, safeguard, monitor in any way."

"The Pacific Islander community will have large family groups, not just their own children but extended family as well – including older family members – need to pitch to this group that doing the Census will mean more supports and services for the people they care about. Like Planned Activity Groups for elders."

"The selling points are improved roads, housing, education, healthcare."

"People don't do the Census because they don't understand it [the form itself] and the don't understand why it is important. Help people understand those two things – HOW to do the Census and WHY it is important."

"Robinvale College has had 52 new students enrol this Semester, this shows growth in our population."

"People do not realise the PURPOSE of the Census – the importance of being counted for funding for services."

"Engagement messaging needs to include 'the why', it needs a 12-month lead time, it needs to engage young people as form fillers. It needs to create a sense of urgency – that we are not getting what we need, that we have missed out for too long."

- ✓ The example of being able to attract stores such as McDonalds restaurants were an important 'selling point' amongst younger community members and also a cohort of the CALD community. Other businesses were also noted - a visiting veterinary service, Aldi supermarket, and eligibility to enter buying groups for 'chain stores' – all relying on a critical mass population before considering a new market

"I'll do the Census if it gets us a Maccas."

"The message is easy – do the Census and you might get Maccas, tell your friends."

"We applied to be part of the Betta buying chain but they refused because we did not have the minimum population required."

"Educate people about how important the Census is – more schools, drs, housing, Maccas, Subway and other private business - that would drive motivation in local community. Show them what would be an improved result, what business case could be established if the census numbers reflected actual residents living in the area."

"They [businesses] look at the census data and think there is not enough population there to make the business case stack up."

- ✓ Messaging about WHAT the Census is and WHY it is important must start 12 months out. There needs to be a significant lead time
- ✓ Local organisations can be supporting this process in a meaningful way in the lead up to Census Field Officers being recruited, trained and becoming operational
- ✓ There is strong community goodwill to support a community engagement strategy that would support the work of the ABS and Census Field Officers
- ✓ All Census messaging must be made available in multiple languages and any images must be of local people. Care must be taken to ensure all relevant permissions are gained

Access to the Census – the Universal Front Door

Across several key cohorts, including First Nations community members and CALD community members, many admitted having never seen a Census form. This appeared to be the case for 'locals' and itinerant workforce alike. It highlighted the need for specific advertising of safe and public locations to collect Census forms from (the Universal Front Door concept) and working with potential Census 'gatekeepers' to facilitate greater access to all of community:

- ✓ Advertise locations around the Robinvale and Euston communities where Census forms can be picked up from for people who do not receive a form or need additional forms (due to household size). Form collection locations should be places of trust – schools, preschools, Swan Hill Rural City Council (SHRCC) Robinvale Resource Centre, Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative (MVAC), Robinvale District Health Services (RDHS), Robinvale Network House, English Language Café (SMECC) and Robinvale Community Library
- ✓ Advertise the ABS automated paper form request service on 1800 130 250
- ✓ Offering alternate collection locations recognises feedback that some 'landlords' may not hand forms on to tenants and that many homes (including family homes) will have more than six occupants
- ✓ Access to the internet and computers is limited within the community so providing safe free access to computers for form completion is important – utilise identified 'safe' spaces such as those noted above

"I know a person who has been in Robinvale 18 years who did not recognise the Census form and could not recall ever completing the form."

"If we can't find your front door or someone keeps us from it [gatekeepers] then you need to know where our Front Door [safe collections location] is."

"There needs to be well advertised central points where people can go to get the form or support filling it in."

"No access to tech, not being tech savvy – that's an issue."

Supporting Census completion

During the course of community conversations the need for expanded investment to enable support for form completion was identified.

- ✓ Provide clear advice on how and where to access Census form translation support
- ✓ Form completion help must be provided from trusted and known places including as many of the form collection points identified above as well as pop up hubs at popular / high frequency businesses and locations
- ✓ Advertise widely the ABS free call number for Census form completion help (1800 512 441), in-language help through the Translating and Interpreting Service (131 450) and the purpose designed *Lesson Guide for the Census* available from the ABS
- ✓ Visuals are important – use large scale poster copies of the Census form displayed in prominent locations. Include information such as - this is what the Census looks like, this is how to fill in the form – use 'speech bubbles' at each key question on the Census to explain completion, include advice that you DO NOT need to enter your name

"The Census is too long and lots of people can't read."

"The ABS must support with translation, just because families have English as a second language, does not mean they can read English."

"Support from local interpreters in language is essential."

- ✓ Recognise the important role of family and friends in supporting Census completion. Encourage community members to seek out support from people they trust / know. It is widely acknowledged that children in families (including quite young children) are routinely supporting their parents / older family members with the filling in of forms

"I do all the form filling for my family." Pasifika Homework Club participant

"Harness the community to help with form filling... Jack Dang out from of supermarket."

Key promotional, marketing and communication messages

In addition to the 'why' complete the Census theme there were also a number of important messages identified by the community which would support and encourage participation in the Census. These included:

- ✓ An important message in encouraging Census participation is that you do not need to put your name on the Census form – this is especially important amongst young people and some cohorts who were born overseas. Not needing to include your name on the Census was the most frequently mentioned 'enabler' of Census participation

"Participation would be much higher if people knew they did not need to put their name on the form."

"Not putting your name on the Census would make more people do it – we don't need to know who you are, just that you are here. We need you here, we want you to stay and be happy and well."

- ✓ The Census is safe: Your information is not shared with anyone / Immigration, Home Affairs, Housing, Centrelink will not see your information / Your name is not stored with your data. Fear of being 'found' by immigration was frequently mentioned. It was further noted that messaging about 'safety' would be most effective when shared / promoted by trusted locals. Messages from Government indicating 'safety' was noted as having little meaning to people with a well-founded fear of government or a general distrust of government / authority

"Emphasise don't need to include name, you are safe, there is no chance of being harmed."

- ✓ Privacy was a frequent concern so reinforcing the message that Government agencies do not 'talk' / share information is key. This was an important learning in both directions – for example; one participant noted they do not need to do the Census because they already give all that information to Centrelink (and Centrelink will pass it on)
- ✓ Partial completion is better than no participation at all – recognise that many don't start (or start and don't finish and submit) the Census form because of its length. Inform communities that partial completion can still be an important voice in counting our population and their information will still be processed by the ABS

"Some people did not like to share some information – income especially – I'm not answering that, why do they need to know that?"

"People do not want to share their private information."

- ✓ Where Census forms can be collected from – multiple accessible and locally 'safe' locations / 'friendly places' is an important component of the messaging. This is not just for those in worker accommodation, many Pasifika families are large and will require a Household form and multiple individual forms to capture all residents

"Polynesian families won't ask for additional forms, so may only complete for 6 when there might be 8-10 in the home, some are afraid of being considered a boarding house, it's important to stress that this rule does not apply to large families."

- ✓ Where Census form access and completion help is available from – if the form is not delivered to your home you can pick up from [these places / people], if you need help you can go to [these places / people]
- ✓ That the Census form can be completed over Census week – but information entered must be as for Census night. This will give people more time and flexibility to participate – preventing the understanding that if you did not do on Census night you cannot do later or that you have 'missed your chance'
- ✓ Encourage a 'pay it forward' ethos. Members of the itinerant workforce would say "I am only here for 3 months", but messaging that reinforced the reality that someone else will take their place next month or next year might encourage Census completion for the benefit of the 'enduring workforce'
- ✓ If you are in Robinvale / Euston / surrounds on Census night you must do the form, even if you don't have a Visa

Key promotional opportunities and platforms

In addition to the actual content of messages was advice from community regarding important opportunities and platforms through which to share this messaging. This further builds on the concept of physical access to the Census form and completion help – the Universal Front Door concept.

- ✓ There must be a high volume of **local** advertising in the lead up to and during the Census period, with frequent and consistent messaging across the diversity of cultures and languages

"We are a beautiful rich, diverse community, but that makes it so hard to then successfully target in any one way. We need a very multifaceted approach to actually reach everyone."

- ✓ Social media including videos of well-known locals speaking in language will be an important strategy to promote the Census and form completion. Language groups mentioned included Malay, Vietnamese and Mandarin. Facebook was noted as an important platform including the SHRCC facebook page, Komuniti Malaysian Robinvale Euston facebook page and the Mandarin facebook page in Robinvale / Euston. The message in these videos should be simple and reflect the key messages noted in the preceding section

"Interview local people in different languages, use layman's terms, keep it simple – videos on facebook. Say the actors are from – Robinvale, Swan Hill, Euston – show they are local."

- ✓ Hold dedicated Census days / events which include a 'reward for effort' component such as free food or an incentive. For example; MVAC Sausage Sizzle, Robinvale Community Library / Our Place all day morning tea. Have Census Field Officers set up small tables to privately facilitate support to complete forms at these events

"BBQs work well, will get more men along."

"We serve up a beautiful meal in a warm room and still only 8 people come. But a meeting recently offered \$60 vouchers to participants and everyone went - even the Asians - it is about finding incentives that people value."

- ✓ Utilise key trusted locals / friends / networks to promote to all of community that their information is safe
- ✓ Young people are an important Census messenger – utilise opportunities to educate students at Robinvale College, St Marys and Euston Primary School as well as the two local Homework Clubs (Robinvale College and SHRCC)

regarding the importance of the Census and how to complete the Census form. Many families rely on their children for all form filling / written English tasks

"Children and students are important in getting the message into homes and helping with form filling. We need to focus part of the Census campaign into schools."

"It's good that Field Officers are employed by the ABS, but to do the Census well the Robinvale / Euston community needs an awareness and activation budget for the lead up and during the Census, discretionary funds for high impact local efforts."

- ✓ Advertise and utilise trusted events, organisations, businesses and community groups, each presenting their own Universal Front Door opportunity

EVENTS	ORGANISATIONS	BUSINESSES	COMMUNITY GROUPS
○ MVAC NAIDOC week (July) ○ MVAC Family Fun Day (July) ○ Almond Blossom Festival (August) – this will be post the Census but still an opportunity	○ Robinvale Resource Centre* ○ Robinvale Network House* ○ Service NSW bus (Euston Club carpark) ○ Robinvale Community Library	○ Sasso Hub ○ Robinvale Chinese Restaurant ○ Bank ○ Pharmacy ○ Asian Supermarkets ○ Euston Club ○ Euston Post Office	○ Footy / Netball Club ○ Churches ○ Our Place groups ○ Homework Groups

* Have a history of supporting with form completion over multiple Census periods

"The Euston Club, everyone goes there, imagine a 'Census Party' there with form filling help on hand and all staff asking 'Have you done the Census yet?'"

"You must engage with churches as well. Many of the Vietnamese population attend the Catholic church, more than 100 people. The Indian and Tongan populations are attending church too."

Census 'Gatekeepers' and Census refusal

Several cohorts within the Robinvale / Euston community were identified by community as 'gatekeepers' to Census participation in terms of preventing access to the Census form or discouraging form completion. Significant were:

- ✓ Landlords were identified as possible 'gatekeepers'. It was noted that landlords might not pass on Census forms where they have rented properties meant for 4-6 people to larger numbers of people in 'boarding house' style accommodation. Participants agreed that landlords might not pass on Census forms because they do not want to be 'caught' running 'boarding houses' outside of the regulatory requirements
- ✓ Strategies to either get landlords 'on board' or by-pass them are important considerations, access to forms at other locations are a part of this – pop-up stands, through trusted sources / organisations, markets etc. It was noted that sometimes landlords are also the Labour Contractor and engaging this cohort required specific care and strategies
- ✓ It was suggested that Labour Contractors (independent of whether they are also landlords) may be gatekeepers through various means – not passing on forms, telling hired labour they will complete the Census for them (but not doing so), or telling hired labour not to participate in the Census. It was noted that Labour Contractors are a critically important lever in increasing Census participation. APPENDIX 4 adds some locally gathered explanation to this cohort.

"If a contractor said fill the form in, they (hired labour) would fill it in"

"Labour Contractors will not want Census Field Officers going directly to their staff, seeking them out in their homes etc, they would want the approach to go through them as the Contractor."

"So often (when collecting) people would say 'no one is living here' and I could see six people and washing on the line. Or growers would say 'oh no there just using the house to have smoko' – people would just refuse."

"Sometimes people would just want to get rid of me so they would say 'My boss will do it with me' or 'My boss has already done it for me'."

"If you see them in the weeks before the Census they say 'I won't be here then'. If you see them in the weeks after the Census they say 'I wasn't here then'. Growers will say 'Oh no they have only just arrived'."

"We really need a landlords database so this group can be reached well. It needs to include the 'unofficial' landlords, all the unregistered boarding houses."

"Contractors are a whole different kettle of fish, they also don't want the government to know their information. Educating them on the importance of the Census is the key thing, flyers need to be in multiple language. The message is to make sure we have the services to keep your workforce well – housing, medical... Educating them that filling out the Census is not connecting them to Immigration."

Key conduits to community

Alongside the gatekeepers identified above several cohorts were identified as key 'conduits' into the community. Guidance specific to these cohorts included:

- ✓ 'The Count' (the Census) requires a collective plan between the horticultural sector stakeholders – growers, Labour Hire Companies, Approved Employers and the workforce
- ✓ Certain cohorts within the horticultural industry especially were identified as requiring a clear understanding of the specifics and benefits of the Census – these cohorts included: labour hire companies and contractors, industry representative bodies (PALM scheme, Table Grape Growers Association), large companies (OLAM, Select Harvest), Job Networks (MADEC, CVGT). It was routinely noted that if well informed about the purpose and benefits of the Census these cohorts could be significant enablers to completion
- ✓ Growers were identified as key enablers of the process and as a cohort invested in achieving increased Census participation
- ✓ Different 'conduit' cohorts will need different strategies to connect with and gain their trust. Engaging with these groups will require the use of highly trusted individuals who may act as a 'go between' for industry cohorts and Census Field Officers. This would assist with potential return of Census forms and meaningful information within forms
- ✓ Labour Hire Companies and Labour Contractors (Approved Employers) are significant in enabling their workforces' engagement in the Census. It was suggested that significantly improved Census participation would be achieved by engaging with this cohort through co-designed Census information sessions and strategies for reaching their workforce. A localised explanation of the Horticultural labour landscape is provided in Appendix 4

"I can bring 300 workers into one room for you to talk to" LHC representative

"There needs to be better engagement of the grower cohort."

"There are several Thai Labour Contractors who frequent the Euston Club."

"Bosses, growers and contractors – they need to encourage their workforce to complete the Census."

Community members noted the need to 'create a chorus' about Census participation. Key community cohorts identified as important conduits for Census messaging. This included:

- ✓ Young people were identified as key to supporting Census messaging and form completion and as important 'chorus' voices in their own homes and the broader community. The community voice sessions identified that CALD young people especially will already be supporting form completion / written English requirements within their family's home so networks such as the SHRCC Homework Club and local schools were identified as important for message distribution
- ✓ Community leaders and trusted community members were also identified as central to sharing messaging regarding Census purpose and participation. It was noted as important to create a 'buzz' at Census time encouraging community members to ask friends, family, neighbours and networks - Have you done your Census form? It was important to normalise Census participation including through encouraging people to 'help your neighbour' complete the Census

Key geographical areas

Locally the community members who informed this research were quite clear about those geographical areas of the community with a high density of workforce residences / boarding houses.

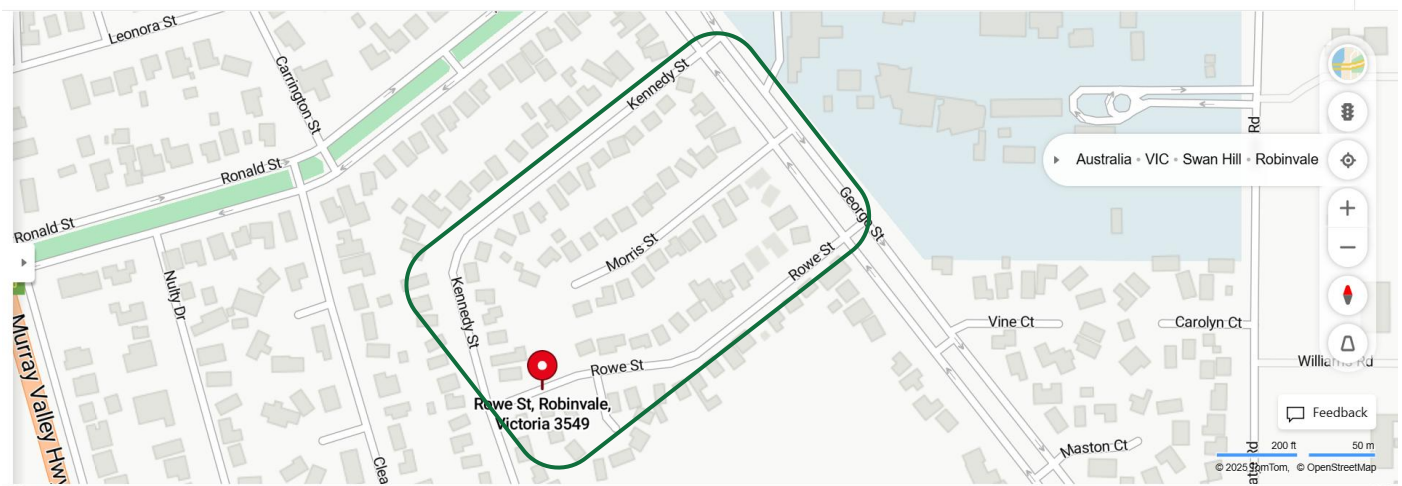
In Robinvale this included the George, Kennedy, Rowe, Morris St intersect, Bromley Road and Warlen Avenue (although this list is not exhaustive). Apparently vacant shopfronts along Perrin Street (the central business street in Robinvale) were noted as being converted to accommodation yet frequently not identifiable as accommodation that operates within a regulatory model. Areas on the outskirts of the community were also identified including the Zara Lane accommodation and Happy Valley and Salamaua Road intersection accommodation areas.

It is essential that Census Field Staff collaborate with community and the ABS to identify and effectively target these key geographical areas as high impact collections zones.

"The Club Courtesy Bus is always being called to George St. We've had situations where a resident from a certain address has been banned from the Club but you can only 'ban' a name not an address because there might be 10 other residents at that address."

"One of the significant boarding house / workforce accommodation areas is the George, Kennedy, Rowe, Morris St area – there would be more than 1,000 people in this small area alone – this should be a collection focus area. There should always be two people collecting together in this area for safety reasons."

"Empty shop fronts in Perrin Street are filled with people who are living there."



The scale of overcrowding

The scale of residential overcrowding and the volume of unregistered boarding houses were frequently mentioned by the community engaged through this research. It was noted that an accurate Census count will rely heavily on all residents of a house / property participating in the Census.

"There are houses in Robinvale with their backyard filled with caravans. This whole backyard is so unsafe – a fire would be devastating, there are health issues."

"Contractors will not admit how many people they have in their housing, over-crowding is a huge issue. Whole families are living in one bedroom."

"In Robinvale you rent a room not a house, a room rents for \$300."

MOVING FORWARDS – Recommendations, Actions and Recommended Leads

Responding to the themes identified by community for improved engagement and participation in the 2026 Census is multifaceted because of the diversity of the Robinvale, Euston and surrounding communities and the range of Recommended Leads in supporting and enacting change.

The three strategic recommendations from this research are:

1. Ongoing investment at a place-based level in the form of an action group to support the work and efforts of the ABS in the lead up to the 2026 Census. This workgroup could be known as the Census 2026 Action Group (C2026AG). The action group commits to continue meeting and working together on a monthly basis from this point until September 2026 – with a review to follow after that. Consideration for secretariat support for the action group will need to be discussed and confirmed;
2. Secure additional resourcing (e.g. financial, community goodwill, in-kind) to deliver an extended Census campaign (nominally the Census 2026 Campaign) and carry the Census Chorus (see research); and
3. Shared discussion, agreement and creation of an authorising environment to do things differently in a place-based way – including implementing local strategies in Robinvale, Euston and surrounds to increase Census engagement and participation.

Place-based solutions and ideas from the community voice sessions are documented below to assist with directing and harnessing the work of the action group. These solutions and ideas are not listed in priority order – but are intended as a selection of options which can form the basis of an action plan to be implemented over the next twelve months - depending on the time and resources available.

Themed findings from the preceding section are grouped into three broad areas: Local challenges / context, Census communication and Census access.

LOCAL CHALLENGES / CONTEXT	CENSUS COMMUNICATION	CENSUS ACCESS
> Under-represented groups > Key geographical areas > The scale of overcrowding > The local ABS Census Workforce	> Clarifying WHAT the Census IS (and IS NOT) > Clarifying WHY the Census is important – messages that make sense > Key promotional, marketing and communication messages > Key promotional opportunities and platforms > Key conduits to community	> Access to the Census > Supporting Census completion > Census 'Gatekeepers' and Census refusal

To support the implementation of identified actions within these themes Recommended Leads are grouped into four broad cohorts.

THE ABS	COMMUNITY	INDUSTRY	LOCAL ORGANISATIONS	LOCAL GOVT
> Australian Bureau of Statistics > ABS Field Officers > Government agencies (ex. Local Govt)	> Community members > Community groups > Trusted community representatives⁵ > Gatekeepers > Conduits	> Growers > Representative boards and bodies > Labour Hire Contractors > Approved Employers > Local businesses > Gatekeepers	> Local services and organisations (RDHS, SMECC, MVAC, Schools) > Local partnerships, collaborations and networks (inc. Our Place Robinvale, EPAC, REBA)	> Balranald Shire Council > Swan Hill Rural City Council

⁵Trusted community representatives may not be (self) appointed community leaders but rather trusted members of the specific cohort or community. Trusted community representatives were frequently named through the research and were well-known within the cohort and relied on in times of challenge or crisis for support. Trusted community representatives may overlap with business owners, church leaders or community group chairs, but are not synonymous with this cohort.

1. Local challenges / context

Themes identified under the banner of Local challenges / context included: *Under-represented groups*, *Key geographical areas*, *The scale of overcrowding* and *The local ABS Census Workforce*. Identified actions are as follows:

Action	Recommended Lead and additional supporting bodies
Ensure a comprehensive and widespread understanding of the barriers and enablers to Census participation across Robinvale, Euston and surrounds through promotion of the REWN 2025 <i>Because Being Counted Counts</i> report findings.	Local government, Local Organisations
Recruit ABS Field Officers with comprehensive local knowledge and representative of the diversity of the Robinvale, Euston and surrounds communities (attention to cultural diversity, religious diversity, young people, high profile trusted community members and those with relational trust with identified gatekeepers).	ABS with support from Local Government and Local Organisations
Fund the recruitment of additional ABS Field Staff to increase ground presence and support for form completion in identified key geographical areas and under-represented cohorts.	ABS
Provide a mechanism for an anecdotal capture of the scale of overcrowding in these high-density areas to facilitate a deeper understanding of the actual population.	ABS
Actively learn from previous ABS Field Staff, both through this research and additionally, to ensure the Census 2026 Campaign builds on past successes.	Past and current ABS Field Staff and C2026AG
Collaborate to map key residential areas with a high density of worker accommodation, registered / unregistered boarding houses, horticultural block accommodation and non-traditional housing (such as shopfronts).	ABS with support from Local Government and Community

2. Census Communication

Themes identified under the banner of Census Communication included: *Clarifying WHAT the Census IS*, *Clarifying WHY the Census is important*, *Key promotional, marketing and communication messages*, *Key promotional opportunities and platforms* and *Key conduits to community*. Drawing on community voice identified actions are as follows:

Action	Recommended Lead and additional supporting bodies
Deliver an extended Census campaign (including locally co-designed resources and promotional materials; activation of key local community members, groups and organisations; and the delivery of Census events).	ABS and Local Government
Co-design, with the diversity of Robinvale and Euston community, key resources (in multiple formats) outlining the WHAT and WHY of the Census. Draw on all community voice advice ⁶ gathered through this and any further research. Deliver through multiple mediums and languages commencing by 12 months prior to the Census.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff, C2026AG, Local collaborations, Local Government and key community members
Collate a range of local images including both people and places to use throughout the Census 2026 Campaign, ensure all images are current, relevant and have all necessary permissions.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff and C2026AG
Building on this research, comprehensively catalogue all local and immediate regional promotional opportunities and platforms. Create a Census 2026 Calendar of delivery for the 12-month lead up to the Census.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff and C2026AG
Circulate all co-designed resources and the Census Calendar broadly through the Community, Industry & Business and Local Services, Organisations & Agencies cohorts (identified in Recommended Leads table).	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff and C2026AG

⁶ Including you do not need to put your name on the Census form, your information is safe, you are safe, government agencies do not share your information, partial completion is OK, Census forms and form filling help is available (from who and where) and that the Census form can be completed over Census 'week'.

Give additional time and effort to ensuring the 'Key Conduits to Community' ⁷ receive all resources. Lean on the extensive levels of community interest in and goodwill for Census success evidenced through this research.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff and C2026AG
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3. Census Access

Themes identified under the banner of Census Access included: *Access to the Census*, *Supporting Census completion*, and *Census 'Gatekeepers' and Census refusal*. Drawing on community voice identified possible solutions include:

Action	Recommended Lead and additional supporting bodies
Across the Census period identify and clearly promote a range of locations where Census forms and form filling help can be accessed from – the Universal Front Door concept. There should be multiple locations across the Robinvale, Euston and surrounds community including sites identified in this research. These locations should be both fixed (within existing settings including businesses and services) and as flexible 'pop-up hubs' in agreed high exposure / high traffic spaces.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff and C2026AG
Work with the ABS to support local 'informal' form fillers with accessible FAQs and 'How To' Census form resources (in key languages) to safeguard a robust, high-integrity process. Recognise this informal network already exists and is key in increasing Census participation.	ABS, 2025/2026 ABS Field Staff, past and possible 'informal' form fillers
Co-design with young people strategies to broadly engage young people across the Robinvale, Euston and surrounds communities in carrying the Census Chorus and becoming skilled 'form fillers' in their own homes and communities.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff, schools, Homework Clubs and C2026AG
Co-design with identified Gatekeepers strategies to broadly engage Gatekeepers across the Robinvale, Euston and surrounds communities in raising awareness of the Census amongst their peers and key under-represented cohorts.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff and C2026AG
Create a contact list of landlords including registered and unregistered. Drawing on identified relationships of trust plan and deliver Census information sessions to this cohort in the lead up to the 2026 Census.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff, Local Government, landlord representatives, C2026AG and key community members
Map the Labour Hire Company and Approved Employer network locally. Drawing on identified relationships of trust plan and deliver Census information sessions to this cohort in the lead up to the 2026 Census.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff, LHC / Approved Employer representatives and C2026AG
Create a contact list of local growers. Drawing on identified relationships of trust plan and deliver Census information sessions to this cohort in the lead up to the 2026 Census.	2025/2026 ABS Field Staff, grower representatives and representative bodies and C2026AG

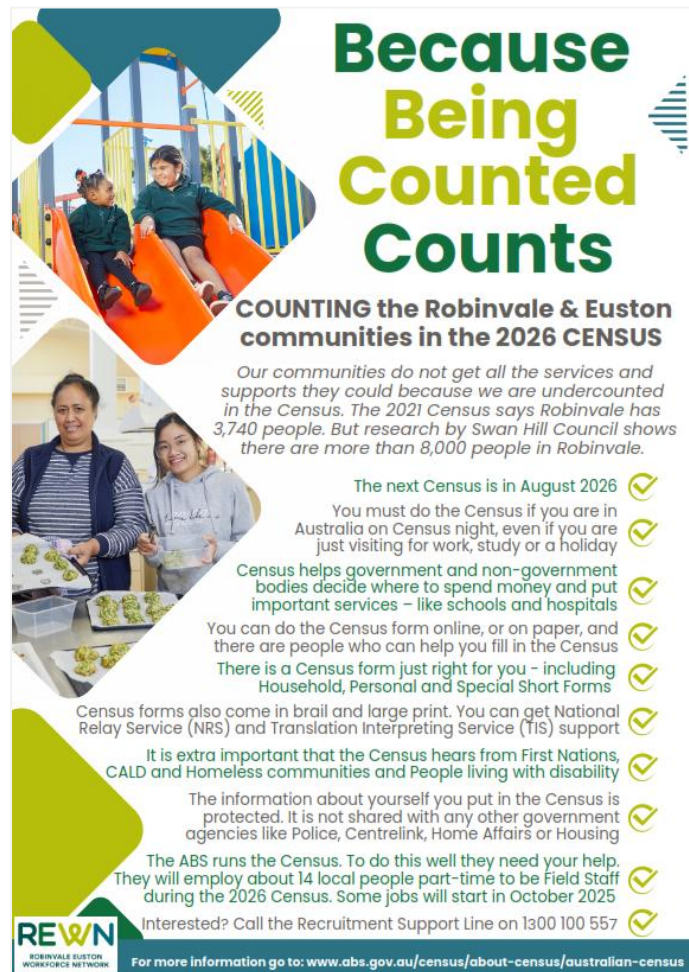
Together, these collaborative and locally informed strategies underscore a strong commitment to ensuring the 2026 Census is accessible, inclusive, and representative of the diverse Robinvale, Euston, and surrounding communities. By engaging directly with young people, gatekeepers, landlords, labour hire networks, and growers - supported by tailored resources and genuine community input - this initiative lays the foundation for effective Census participation and lasting trust. The insights gathered from the community voice sessions have been instrumental in shaping approaches that honour local knowledge and relationships, ensuring every voice is valued and counted in the national story.

As we move forward, the next steps will focus on implementing these strategies across the identified cohorts and maintaining ongoing community collaboration. We encourage all community members and stakeholders to continue their active involvement, ensuring the success of the 2026 Census and strengthening the fabric of our communities.

⁷ Including Young people, Landlords, Labour Hire Contractors, Approved Employers and Growers.

APPENDIX 1 – SESSION RESOURCES

Resource #1 – Detailed Handout



Because Being Counted Counts

COUNTING the Robinvale & Euston communities in the 2026 CENSUS

Our communities do not get all the services and supports they could because we are undercounted in the Census. The 2021 Census says Robinvale has 3,740 people. But research by Swan Hill Council shows there are more than 8,000 people in Robinvale.

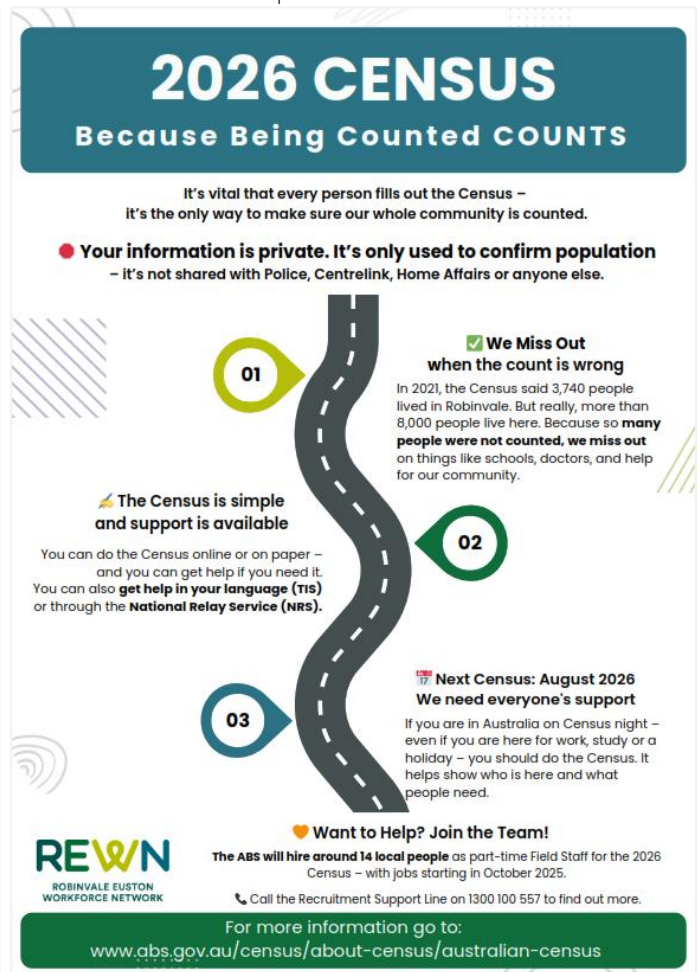
The next Census is in August 2026

- You must do the Census if you are in Australia on Census night, even if you are just visiting for work, study or a holiday
- Census helps government and non-government bodies decide where to spend money and put important services – like schools and hospitals
- You can do the Census form online, or on paper, and there are people who can help you fill in the Census
- There is a Census form just right for you – including Household, Personal and Special Short Forms
- Census forms also come in brail and large print. You can get National Relay Service (NRS) and Translation Interpreting Service (TIS) support
- It is extra important that the Census hears from First Nations, CALD and Homeless communities and People living with disability
- The information about yourself you put in the Census is protected. It is not shared with any other government agencies like Police, Centrelink, Home Affairs or Housing
- The ABS runs the Census. To do this well they need your help. They will employ about 14 local people part-time to be Field Staff during the 2026 Census. Some jobs will start in October 2025

Interested? Call the Recruitment Support Line on 1300 100 557

For more information go to: www.abs.gov.au/census/about-census/australian-census

Resource #2 Simplified Handout



2026 CENSUS

Because Being Counted COUNTS

It's vital that every person fills out the Census – it's the only way to make sure our whole community is counted.

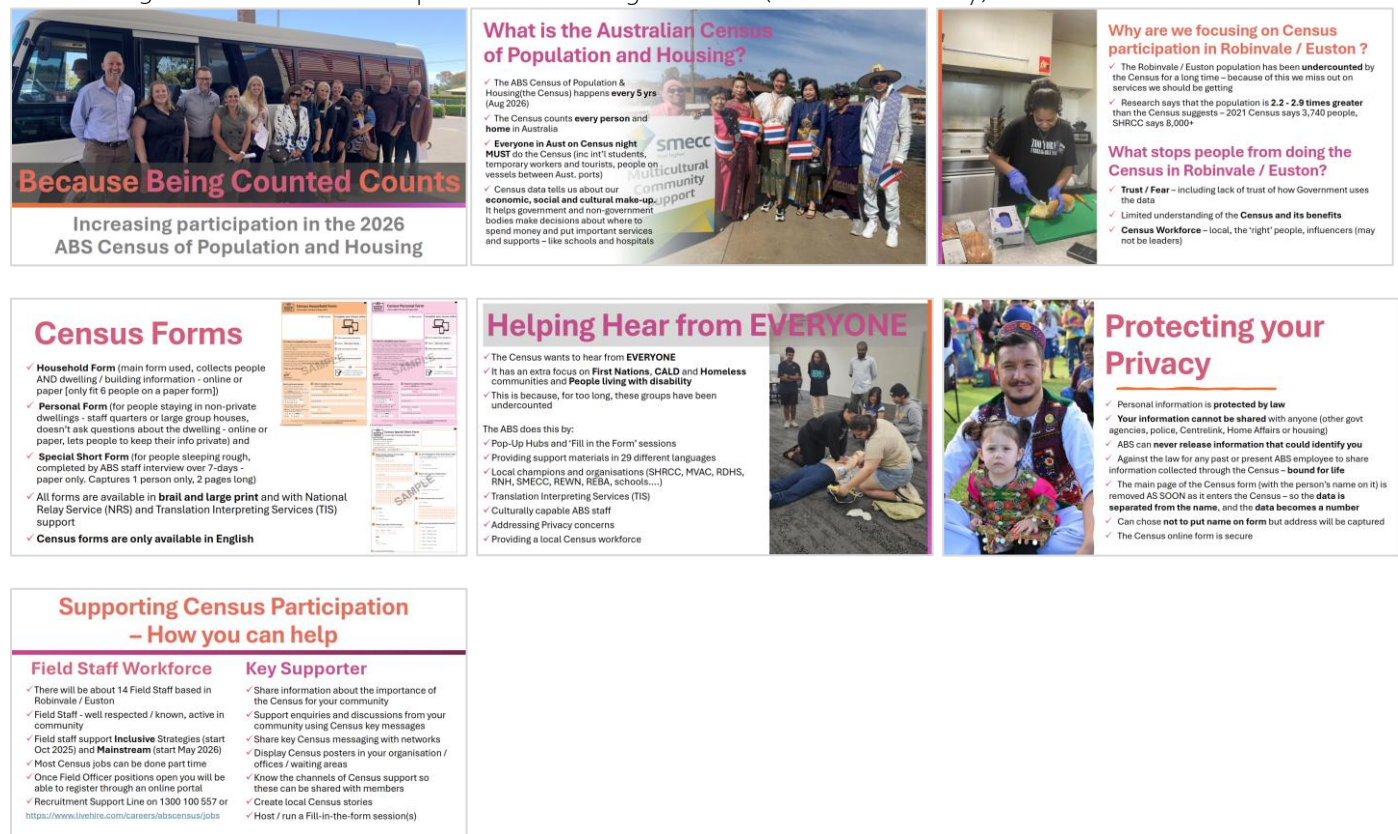
- Your information is private. It's only used to confirm population** – it's not shared with Police, Centrelink, Home Affairs or anyone else.

- 01 The Census is simple and support is available**
You can do the Census online or on paper – and you can get help if you need it. You can also **get help in your language (TIS)** or through the **National Relay Service (NRS)**.
- 02 We Miss Out when the count is wrong**
In 2021, the Census said 3,740 people lived in Robinvale. But really, more than 8,000 people live here. Because so **many people were not counted, we miss out** on things like schools, doctors, and help for our community.
- 03 Next Census: August 2026 We need everyone's support**
If you are in Australia on Census night – even if you are here for work, study or a holiday – you should do the Census. It helps show who is here and what people need.

Want to Help? Join the Team!
The ABS will hire around 14 local people as part-time Field Staff for the 2026 Census – with jobs starting in October 2025.
Call the Recruitment Support Line on 1300 100 557 to find out more.

For more information go to: www.abs.gov.au/census/about-census/australian-census

Resource #3 PowerPoint Slides for presentation to organisations (not to community)



What is the Australian Census of Population and Housing?

- The ABS Census of Population & Housing (the Census) happens every 5 yrs (Aug 2026)
- The Census counts every person and home in Australia
- Everyone in Aust on Census night MUST do the Census (inc int'l students, temporary workers and tourists, people on vessels between Aust. ports)
- Census data tells us about our economic, social and cultural make-up. It helps government and non-government bodies make decisions about where to spend money and put important services and supports – like schools and hospitals

Why are we focusing on Census participation in Robinvale / Euston?

- The Robinvale / Euston population has been **undercounted** by the Census for a long time – because of this we miss out on services we should be getting
- Research says that the population is **2.2 - 2.9 times greater** than the Census suggests – 2021 Census says 3,740 people, SHRCC says 8,000+

What stops people from doing the Census in Robinvale / Euston?

- Trust / Fear** – including lack of trust of how Government uses the data
- Limited understanding of the Census and its benefits
- Census Workforce** – local, the "right" people, influencers (may not be leaders)

Census Forms

- Household Form** (main form used, collects people AND dwelling / building information - online or paper (only fit 6 people on a paper form))
- Personal Form** (for people staying in non-private dwellings - staff quarters or large group houses, doesn't ask questions about the dwelling - online or paper, lets people to keep their info private) and
- Special Short Form** (for people sleeping rough, completed by ABS staff interview over 7-days - paper only. Captures 1 person only, 2 pages long)
- All forms are available in **brail and large print** and with National Relay Service (NRS) and Translation Interpreting Services (TIS) support
- Census forms are only available in English

Helping Hear from EVERYONE

- The Census wants to hear from **EVERYONE**
- It has an extra focus on **First Nations, CALD and Homeless communities and People living with disability**
- This is because, for too long, these groups have been undercounted

The ABS does this by:

- Pop-Up Hubs and 'Fill in the Form' sessions
- Providing support materials in 29 different languages
- Local champions and organisations (SHRCC, MVAC, RDHS, RNH, SMECC, REWN, REBA, schools...)
- Translation Interpreting Services (TIS)
- Culturally capable ABS staff
- Addressing Privacy concerns
- Providing a local Census workforce

Protecting your Privacy

- Personal information is **protected by law**
- Your information **cannot be shared** with anyone (other govt agencies, police, Centrelink, Home Affairs or housing)
- ABS can **never release information that could identify you**
- Against the law for any past or present ABS employees to share information collected through the Census – **bound for life**
- The main page of the Census form (with the person's name on it) is removed AS SOON as it enters the Census – so the **data is separated from the name, and the data becomes a number**
- Can choose **not to put name on form** but address will be captured
- The Census online form is secure

Supporting Census Participation – How you can help

Field Staff Workforce

- There will be about 14 Field Staff based in Robinvale / Euston
- Field Staff – well respected / known, active in community
- Field staff support **Inclusive Strategies** (start Oct 2025) and **Mainstream** (start May 2026)
- Most Census jobs can be done part time
- Once Field Officer positions open you will be able to register through an online portal
- Recruitment Support Line on 1300 100 557 or <https://www.livehire.com/careers/abs-census-jobs>

Key Supporter

- Share information about the importance of the Census for your community
- Support enquiries and discussions from your community using Census key messages
- Share key Census messaging with networks
- Display Census posters in your organisation / offices / waiting areas
- Know the channels of Census support so these can be shared with members
- Create local Census stories
- Host / Run a fill-in-the-form session(s)

APPENDIX 2 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The community voice sessions were designed to hear firsthand from community how the ABS Census workforce might better reach and engage the Robinvale, Euston and surrounding communities and encourage their participation in the 2026 Census.

Prior to creating the resources (shown in Appendix 1) and conducting the community voice gathering sessions both the REWN Manager (Lois O'Callaghan) and independent social researcher (Rachael Williams) underwent training with members of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing *Inclusive Strategies and Engagement* team. This training ensured Lois and Rachael were able to share accurate information in their conversations with community and through the customised resources. The Robinvale Our Place team also reviewed and provided essential localised comment on the resources that were developed.

Lois and Rachael conducted all community voice gathering sessions. Whilst each session was tailored to the specific audience, all sessions were conducted in a casual conversational style to create an atmosphere of safety and ease for participants. Sessions varied in length from 40 minutes to up to 2 hours depending on the size of the group and the approach required.

In total 13 community voice gathering sessions were held across the following cohorts:

- ✓ Tuesday 20th May – Session #1 - MVAC Elders group lunch
- ✓ Thursday 29th May – Session #2 - English Café staff, participants and volunteers
- ✓ Thursday 29th May - Session #3 - Resource Centre staff, Robinvale Network House manager, Our Place staff
- ✓ Thursday 5th June - Session #4 - Euston Club staff
- ✓ Thursday 5th June - Session #5 - previous ABS Census Field Staff member
- ✓ Tuesday 17th June - Session #6 - Labour Hire Companies
- ✓ Tuesday 17th June - Session #7 - previous ABS Census Field Staff member
- ✓ Tuesday 24th June - Session #8 - MVAC Elders group lunch
- ✓ Tuesday 24th June - Session #9 - Robinvale / Euston youth, SHRCC Homework Club
- ✓ Monday 30th June - Session #10 - previous ABS Census Field Staff member
- ✓ Monday 30th June - Session #11 - Euston Progressive Advisory Committee (committee of Balranald Shire Council)
- ✓ Monday 7th July - Session #12 - previous ABS Census Field Staff member
- ✓ Monday 7th July - Session #13 - Robinvale Euston Business Association and Rotary

APPENDIX 3 – SYSTEMIC CHANGES TO THE CENSUS PROCESS

Whilst the focus of the community voice sessions was on how engagement and participation in the 2026 Census might be increased many community members spoke clearly about issues that were more systemic and enduring. These identified barriers were not within the scope of changes possible for the 2026 Census. However, they should be considered as part of this report as they represent significant community voice. Key learnings are identified below in themes.

The Census is only available in English

Without exception all community engaged through the research noted the importance of offering the Census form in languages other than English.

"Not delivering the forms in other languages would really limit participation, the ABS is asking the community to do something already difficult in another language."

"The ABS must support with translation, just because families have English as a second language, does not mean they can read English"

"The form can only be completed in English! That's an issue."

Remove request for participant name on Census form

It was also universally noted that the request to include your name on the Census form was a significant barrier to participation for many community members, including those involved in the research and their peers. When the researchers shared advice from the ABS that the Census will still be accepted and processed without a name community members were aligned in their agreement that the request for name be removed from the form.

"If this is not needed why doesn't the Census just remove the name question altogether – make it easier for people?"

Census complexity and length

A consistent feedback theme from community was that the current Census is both too long and too complex in terms of both language and question form. This was further exacerbated for large families and large group households where the form is required to be completed for multiple people. A solution was suggested through offering a Part A and Part B Census form – where Part A captured core information and was quick to do and Part B extended Part A to include the full current Census form. This is not dissimilar to Canada's dual short- and long-form questionnaires.

"We have 7 people in our home and I only completed the Census for 3 of us – and I can read and write well." [Degree qualified session participant]

"Could have a Census brief version – address, number of people in house, ages and then the longer version if people want to offer up more details... participation would be much greater if Census allowed this."

"People don't do the Census because they don't understand it [the form itself] and the don't understand why it is important. Help people understand those two things – how to do the Census and why it is important."

"In my home we would need a long form [Household form] and four short forms [Individual forms] that is a lot of work and time for my family."

"Do we really need all the information the Census collects – can there be a short version of the census? How much more simple could the Census form actually be? How much of the form actually needs to be completed for the response to be counted?"

"It takes too much time, and the fine is irrelevant compared to the time taken. People value their time more than the cost of the fine."

"Reducing the number of compulsory questions and reducing the amount of questions overall."

"If a contractor is helping their workers do the Census that is a huge amount of work for the contractor – we are asking a lot of people who are already very busy. It's the same for a grower helping their workforce."

The collection timing has challenges

The August Census collection period is not the peak population period in Robinvale and Euston. Whilst it is unrealistic to change the Census collection date, a mechanism for recognising the population service and support needs during the peak period is important. Additionally, all of community engaged in the Census conversation agreed that even though the Robinvale / Euston population is at its lowest during August the full population is still not accurately counted.

"Across March / April / May Euston Club ranks in the top 10-20 Clubs in all of NSW in terms of revenue, sometimes as high as 6th in big harvest years. By June / July 50% of all horticulture industry workers are gone and by August / September / October most of the workforce is gone. At this point the Euston Club slips to a revenue ranking in the top 90-100 Clubs in NSW."

"We're getting counted in our quietest time of year (workforce wise) which is why we are suffering in the busiest time of year."

"August is the wrong time of the year for Robinvale and Euston, our maximum population is March/April."

"The August collection date is flawed for the Robinvale / Euston communities from the start. This is our quiet time so the peak population is not counted and so cannot be planned for and supported accurately through services."

"The Table Grape industry especially has a large surge and fall in workforce, by August pruning is finished and there is nothing else happening."

"This loss of population has been especially obvious the last few years because of the increased cost of living pressures. Itinerant workforce that might have 'wintered' in Robinvale and Euston and not worked are now chasing the work and heading north. People chase work and money."

The burden is placed on communities

Several community voice sessions expressed concern that both the social and economic costs and burden of proof for Census failures was borne by the community. Community members felt strongly that the Census system was flawed and that, given the Government collects significant amounts of data through a multitude of platforms, it should be the ABS's responsibility to accurately test their data, not the community's. Community members noted that communities continue to work and advocate in this space in an effort to gain the funding, supports, services and infrastructure their communities should rightfully have.

"Can't the ABS accuracy check the Census number against other sources to confirm count – pings on mobile towers, water use, EFT transactions at the supermarket, workforce registered through the PALM scheme?"

"The PALM program – no excuses there – this population is mapped as they move around the country, they [Palm Scheme] know the people who have Visas and where they are."

"Can we advocate to the ABS that they can triangulate the data to be more accurate in the count – is it just about distracting the regions from the real issues, keeping us busy trying to get an accurate count. That's their job."

"There are systemic issues – the count 'date' being one, but also failure by the ABS to accuracy check their own data, instead placing the burden back on to busy communities to advocate and argue for their rights and needs."

"There is community apathy about the Census, low level of trust in Government is not just from overseas born community members – there's already too much overreach by our government."

"If it is just about collecting data – do what SHRCC did in terms of counting population – that was far more valuable and accurate, counting bank transactions etc. Why can't the ABS at least check their count is accurate through using a couple of other measures?"

"The Census should be done through a range of data collection strategies, not through the form."

*"Would SHRCC do another piece of population research?
This was the most valuable for our community, this is what we need."*

"Population planning data is proven to be incorrect for communities across both Victoria and NSW. Demographers in local government use an assumption of reducing population over time based on long term trends in rural areas – does not take into account localised variances."

APPENDIX 4 – UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL HORTICULTURE LABOUR LANDSCAPE

Mechanisms for recruiting a horticultural workforce to the scale required to meet industry needs has evolved over many decades. It is essential that the Census process and Field Officers understand this landscape and how to reach and gain the trust of this significant cohort.

The Labour Hire Company, Approved Employer (sometimes referred to as Labour Contractors, Direct Employers or Host Employers) and Grower relationship has a range of sensitivities (based on historical experiences) which need to be understood prior to establishing a plan of action. Understanding these sensitivities would be worth the investment given the significant returns for the community which could be gained through a specific engagement strategy with this cohort.

Learnings from the community voice sessions (including a session held with Labour Hire Companies) are as follows:

- ✓ 'The Count' (the Census) requires a collective plan between the sector
- ✓ Workforce brought into Australia through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme⁸ is a very busy, high turnover sector, so if we were to try to educate the actual 'on-ground' workforce we would need to re-do this every Census. A more sustainable approach is to work with Labour Hire Companies (LHCs) and Approved Employers (AEs) as these individuals are more enduring and would likely be consistent between Census periods
- ✓ A dedicated team or resource to engage with LHCs and AEs would be ideal – Census Field Staff will need a specific knowledge set to do this well. But if done well the gains in population count could be significant and have a positive impact beyond Robinvale / Euston, i.e. the learnings may have potential for replication to other regions across Australia that rely on the PALM scheme workforce
- ✓ Approved Employers are typically sole operators who are from a range of countries / cultural groups. They then recruit workforce from their own countries – sometimes more than 10 at any one time - and offer these staff to the Labour Hire Companies or directly to the growers. These individuals brought in by the contractors are paid by the contractors who are paid by the farms / Labour Hire Companies
- ✓ It was noted that Approved Employers are NOT likely to be comfortable with the Census Field Officers going directly to their staff. They feel strongly that the approach to staff should be handled by them as the AE
- ✓ It is recommended that the engagement strategy work through the LHCs and AEs as they are the gatekeepers for the trust relationship
- ✓ LHCs can employ staff (PALM Scheme workers) directly OR can work through an AE – so there is a hierarchy of either 2 or 3 layers – both the LHCs and AEs must be engaged by the Census
- ✓ Each LHC has their own Welfare and Wellbeing staff member (or team) who may be a helpful resource in ensuring census completion
- ✓ In the countries the PALM Scheme draws from the Census is a completely foreign concept, as a result workforce brought to Australia via the PALM Scheme do not understand why we need to 'count' people. Not everything is regulated or has a policy in their home country, so the Census concept is very foreign
- ✓ *Tree Minders* and *Top of the Crop* are large local LHCs (*Top of the Crop* absorbed what was *Plant, Grow, Pick*)
- ✓ Approved Employers will have 'toolbox' meetings daily / weekly – depending on the time of year – where staff work for the day / week is outlined. These 'toolbox' meetings would be a great opportunity for the AE to show the Census form and request it is completed
- ✓ Some growers are also their own LHC and may preference handling Census enquiries and conveying this to their workforce
- ✓ AEs must have Australian Citizenship to be able to set-up and operate their business – so this cohort will have good English language skills (written and spoken)
- ✓ The 'pitch' for getting hired workforce to complete the Census is that it will improve the availability of health care and housing in the Robinvale and Euston communities – this will help them keep their workforce well / healthy. The 'Pitch' is that an accurate count enables us to advocate for and look after 'your workforce'
- ✓ One LHC has 2,000 workers in Robinvale from January to May, this drops back to 1,000 'maintenance' workers from May – September. So already the Census is NOT counting the peak population BUT engaging LHCs and AEs well will have a significant positive impact of the Census count accuracy

⁸ The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to hire workers from 9 Pacific islands and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available. Through the PALM scheme, eligible businesses can recruit workers for short-term jobs for up to 9 months or long-term roles for between one and 4 years in unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled positions. The PALM scheme helps to fill labour gaps in rural and regional Australia and nationally for agriculture and select agriculture-related food product manufacturing sectors by offering employers access to a pool of reliable, productive workers. It also allows Pacific and Timor-Leste workers to take up jobs in Australia, develop their skills and send income home. <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/>

- ✓ The undercount in Census creates community disharmony because the influx in population creates shortages in key services and resources (including grocery items) in the community
- ✓ The seasonal workers program has engaged a GP as a private provider to be available for online Dr appointments due to the wait time locally for GP appointments
- ✓ Lack of accommodation was noted as another key issue
- ✓ Some AEs give up their private home to accommodate staff in busy periods
- ✓ Citrus and grape growers are allowed to have dongas on their blocks
- ✓ The ABS could accuracy check their Census count data with the PALM Scheme administrators who will know exactly how many of the PALM Scheme workforce are in Robinvale / Euston at the time of the Census and also the number of Approved Employers in Robinvale / Euston
- ✓ Movement of the PALM Scheme workforce is closely mapped as the AE must report the movement of all staff if they leave Robinvale / Euston to work elsewhere
- ✓ The PALM Scheme also has a Country Liaison Officer (CLO) for each of the 10 PALM Scheme countries. CLOs are based all over Australia but would be important in supporting informed Census messaging