

The present act has two clauses on this topic, one of which is not necessary. The new section reaffirms, in slightly different language, that no information which is identifiable shall be disclosed about any individual or firm.

On the premise that information obtained from another agency should not acquire a greater degree of secrecy than was provided by the original collector, simply because it was passed on to D.B.S., as specific proposal is made in this bill for the release by D.B.S. of such information to the degree permitted in the supplying agency, provided that such agency agrees to the arrangement.

The present act permits release of lists of companies, firms or other organizations by "type of product" produced or "dealt with". These terms require some rather difficult points of interpretation. As a result, the equivalent section in the bill attempts to set out in more specific language what is, in practice, meant. The application of this exemption to the secrecy provision has provided a useful service and has not been a source of complaint by respondents. An additional exemption introduced in the bill would provide for the publication of size ranges, based on employment, into which companies, firms or other organizations fall. This information is not considered to be sensitive and is frequently available from non-bureau sources, but not in a form readily usable by various research, planning and other agencies. In many cases, publication of employment-size distributions might be the only industrial information D.B.S. could make available for certain small geographic areas.

The present act exempts from secrecy all information about hospitals, universities and similar non-commercial institutions other than financial information, because the activities of these agencies are already of a public nature.

A related change proposed for the secrecy provisions would provide that any return made to D.B.S.—and any copy of that return in possession of the respondent—is privileged and shall not be used in evidence in any proceedings whatever, except in respect of proceedings relating to the administration or enforcement of the Statistics Act. This provision will assist the bureau in obtaining complete and accurate information from respondents and assure them that their file copies are protected.

The Dominion Bureau of Statistics now has extensive co-operative arrangements with provincial and federal departments which are designed to avoid duplication. A single questionnaire is usually used, and the two agencies jointly utilize the results. It is proposed to provide more formally for such arrangements, for which consent of the respondent is an essential condition. A further step toward greater co-ordination and integration is being proposed in the bill, to recognize the special status of provincial statistical offices which can meet certain standards of operation and secrecy similar to D.B.S.

[Hon. Mr. Robichaud.]

The intent of this section is to recognize the increasing need for statistical information in the provinces and to encourage increased co-operation while, at the same time, to help minimize the burden on respondents. A significant feature of the clause is that exchanges for specified surveys would be permitted only with respondents' knowledge, but would not require formal consent.

The Government has considered it essential to limit the areas of exchange to those where the provincial agency has the power to collect, and to establish strict conditions in the act for a provincial statistical agency before the Dominion Bureau of Statistics may enter into such an agreement, in order to maintain confidence of the respondents in such an arrangement or agreement. As I stated previously, this is an important change in the Canadian statistical system.

The bill also proposes giving the Chief Statistician access to income tax returns of corporations and unincorporated businesses, organizations and individuals. At present, the Dominion Statistician—and honourable senators will note the proposed change of title—under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act, has access to corporate income tax returns for statistical purposes. Access to returns of other businesses would enable D.B.S. to replace sections of certain questionnaires sent annually to small businesses. This reduces the reporting burden on many thousands of small businesses, while at the same time providing considerable savings to the Government and improving the quality of the statistics.

Access to returns of individuals would provide a method of obtaining much needed information, which is very costly to collect otherwise, for developing new and improved statistics on consumers, such as income, finances and population movements, without increasing the reporting burden on the individual. There is an urgent need for this kind of information by government departments responsible for such matters as regional economic expansion, poverty programs, and other social and economic programs.

All the information so obtained would be given special security attention as recommended by the Royal Commission on Taxation, even though the normal secrecy provisions of the Statistics Act are themselves very stringent and, in fact, are at least as restrictive as those of the Department of National Revenue. It is not intended to actually bring completed returns into the offices of D.B.S. I am informed that the Department of National Revenue supports this change in the Statistics Act, and believes that it would have no adverse effect on relations with taxpayers. It would appear that many taxpayers believe that D.B.S. already has such access.

I have already referred briefly to the extensive consultation and co-operation which take place between D.B.S. and the provinces. This has been in effect since the bureau's inception. Whereas the bureau is responsible for producing statistics on a great variety of subject-matter