

RegData Australia Technical Documentation

QuantGov

September 15, 2022

1 Purpose

RegData Australia is part of the RegData project that looks to quantify the regulation in a given state's regulatory code and other regulatory documents. RegData Australia focuses on the regulatory codes of the federal Australia government and the six federated states within the country, not including the internal and external territories. The quantified regulatory codes will allow researchers to directly test the effect of regulation on economic outcomes in Australia.

2 Content

RegData Australia quantifies both Acts of Parliament and Subsidiary Legislation for the Australian commonwealth and the six federated states of Australia. The main metadata file for each jurisdiction includes restriction counts and word counts for each regulatory document.

Federal:

- RegData Australia federal datasets are in version 2.3 and contain time series data ranging from 2005-2022 for Legislative Instruments, 1973-2022 for Acts, and 2018-2022 for Notifiable Instruments.
- Data includes restrictive phrase counts for all three forms of legal documents.

States:

- RegData Australia State datasets are currently in version 2.3 and contain data for the years 2019-2022. Refer to the *period code* variable for the specific date that the data was downloaded.

- Data includes restrictive phrase counts and complexity metrics for both regulations and statutes.

3 Technical Notes

Federal and State:

- Users can safely aggregate document restriction counts and can group restriction counts or word counts based on an item of metadata, such as by ministry or agency.
- The following websites were used to obtain the text that was quantified for RegData Australia:

[Australian Federal](#), [New South Wales](#), [Queensland](#), [South Australia](#), [Tasmania](#), [Victoria](#), and [Western Australia](#)

Federal:

- For more information on the type of documents collected in RegData Australia Federal datasets see the [What Is It](#) page provided by the Australia Government. We collect three primary categories of documents at the federal level: **Acts**, **Legislative Instruments**, and **Notifiable Instruments**. While none of these three categories are directly equivalent to a body of “regulations” as in the United States, both legislative and notifiable instruments are subsidiary legislation created through enabling legislature, and all three categories contain language restricting private action.
- Note that aggregating legislative and notifiable instruments together in a time series may result in a spike in restriction and word counts around the year 2016, as notifiable instruments were only made available online beginning that year, though they existed in effect prior to this date. The process of making these instruments available is still ongoing.
- Metadata at the federal level for years 1973-2018 was collected as a snapshot of the documents that were in force on the 31st of December for each year. Therefore, any document that is not in force on the 31st of December (e.g. even documents that expire on December 30th) for a specific year, is not included in the metadata for that year. All metadata for 2018 onward is a snapshot as of the date of collection.
- The date ranges for the three main datasets in RegData Australia Federal were chosen based on the [Australian Government’s website](#) about page and our team’s quality assurance process. The about page

recommends specific dates that are the most accurate for each document type. Our quality assurance process then reviewed source documents and the resulting data to narrow the recommended years to a range that had stable numbers.

- Even though each dataset has gone through days of quality assurance checks, the data is only as good as the source documents. Some source documents were not uploaded by government officials, uploaded to incorrect areas, were scanned in a format that is not readable by computers, or were marked with incorrect end dates due to administrative lag. While the data is highly accurate, it is always recommended to spot check source documents when the data is not being used in aggregate.
- Data at the federal level includes documents that were stored as HTML, PDFs (that do not need OCR'd), and RTF files (found often in the Acts data). This is well over 99% of the documents for the selected date ranges.
- Some older acts do not appear in the datasets until the mid-1990s, resulting in a steep increase in word and restriction counts, particularly between 1992 and 1995. This is a reflection of the source documents and thus may be the result of an archival error. For example, the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936 first appears in our database in 1994 because that is the first year the Act is amended and in effect since 1977. However, given the act is regularly amended multiple times a year and perpetually in effect in recent decades it is likely that the inactivity from 1977 to 1994 is due to a lack of historical records or reporting by the source website. Researchers should caveat historical comparisons to reflect the improvement in record keeping and reporting since 2000.
- There is one drop in the federal historical regulation dataset that should be noted. In 2013, a large subset of annually updating regulations were repealed. While this may be accurate, it is more likely that the regulations' end dates were incorrectly entered on the website or were not repealed properly. Some examples include: *Insurance (prudential standard) determination No. 4 of 2006*, *Financial Sector (Collection of Data) (reporting standard) determination No. 9 of 2006*, etc.

State:

- For close introspection of specific regulations, use the metadata combined with the provided website links to verify the data. This project did its best to collect regulatory text for each state, but every state is different and has unique methods for publishing regulations and related materials.

Citation: If you use this data, please cite:

McLaughlin, Patrick A., Jonathan Nelson, Stephen Strosko and Michael Gilbert. RegData Australia (dataset). QuantGov, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, 2022. <https://quantgov.org/regdata-australia>.

Current Version: 2.3