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SMEs advised to view census in a positive light

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THE cooperation of companies, including the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to provide accurate information for the Economic Census 2011 is vital in determining the success of the Government's policies to boost the country's economic growth and development.

The census, which covers 943,000 companies, is the first of its kind in that its findings cover both big companies as well as SMEs in different businesses and sectors.

Malaysia Statistics Department chief statistician [Datuk Wan Ramlah Wan Abd Raof](#) says companies should cooperate fully to facilitate the smooth running of the census as it will help policymakers to formulate sound strategies for the development of various industries.



Wan Ramlah: 'The census will help the Government in the formulation and monitoring of national plans, policies, etc.'

For SMEs, she adds, the census will aid policy planners to further develop this segment because they will be able to gauge the businesses' success and failures and better understand the issues they face.

“Broadly, the census will help the Government in the formulation and monitoring of national plans, SME master plan and other economic policies, and in setting a benchmark for the compilation of national accounts. It will enable companies to gauge competition, market share, benchmark and measure business performance,” she told *StarBizWeek*.

SMEs form an important segment of the country's economy, judging from the fact that it currently contributes 31.2% of the nation's gross domestic product and makes up 59% of total employment. In totality, this segment accounts for 99% of the business establishments in the country.”

Ramlah adds that the challenges in carrying out the census mainly stem from the fear and reluctance of companies to divulge information. This may be due to the fact that they do not understand the importance of the census or fear that the findings and data collected will fall in the wrong hands, like competitors and other unauthorised parties, she says.

She emphasises that companies should not fear because the compilation of data and information is governed by the Statistics Act, 1965. Under this Act, she says, the contents of the individual returns are confidential and will not be divulged to any person or institution outside the Statistics Department. If the information is leaked, Ramlah says, the employee responsible will be punished.

The economic census is conducted every five years and the last one was conducted in 2006 for reference year 2005. The latest census has an additional question on environmental compliance in view of the importance of this subject to businesses.

The Economic Census 2011 will include data on SMEs as the last SME census was undertaken in 2005. The 2011 census will cover all economic activities in the country agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction and services.

She says combining the two censuses helps save costs for the department. The allocation for the current exercise, she adds, is RM44mil; the last SME census alone cost twice as much.

The results of the census will be released in June 2012. The information will be disseminated in 20 publications (based on the economic activity) and one on SMEs.