



Australian
Library and
Information
Association

25 August 2009

Government 2.0 Taskforce Secretariat
Department of Finance and Deregulation
John Gorton Building
King Edward Terrace
Parkes ACT 2600
email: submissions@gov2.net.au.

Dear Government 2.0 Taskforce

RE: Towards Government 2.0

1 I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Government 2.0 Taskforce. The submission is attached.

2 It is very timely for a review of the potential to provide better access to government information and interaction with government now that the 2.0 technologies have emerged.

3 ALIA believes that a strong democratic Australia can only be achieved by engaging with public and other libraries to deliver digital:

- (a) Connectivity
- (b) Content
- (c) Capability.

4 Overall a clear, targeted strategy is needed to deliver social inclusion in the digital environment. A digital economy can only be build by a community with digital access, digital content that supports their lives and digital skills.

Yours sincerely

Sue Hutley
Executive Director



Submission to Government 2.0 Taskforce from the Parliamentary Librarian

25 August 2009

Background

1 The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the peak body representing the library and information services sector. It represents 6000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users.

2 ALIA's first objective is "To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy". Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas.

3 Libraries and information services have a fundamental concern for the preservation of information contained in the published and documentary record in order to ensure enduring access. ALIA is committed to the preservation of the published and documentary record in all formats, and to ensuring enduring access to information.

4 ALIA's policy on access to government information notes:

Government information helps to educate people, stimulate progress and solve complex economic, scientific and social problems. With many new technologies, however, government information has expanded so quickly that basic principles regarding its creation, use and dissemination are in danger of being neglected and even forgotten.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) believes government information should be recognised as a national resource to be developed and preserved in the public interest. ALIA defines government information as information created, compiled, commissioned and/or maintained by all levels of government. ALIA asserts that government information should be publicly available except where restricted by law and offers the following Principles of Access to Government Information.

5 ALIA's principles for access to government information include:

1. The public has the right of access to government information. Government agencies should guarantee open, timely and uninhibited access to government information regardless of format.
2. Governments should guarantee the integrity and preservation of government information, regardless of format (for example, electronic formats). By maintaining government information in the

face of changing times and technologies, government agencies assure government accountability and the accessibility of government business to the public.

6 This submission highlights three major issues: connectivity, content and capability and provides comments on some of the questions raised in the discussion paper.

Connectivity

7 The *Australia's Digital Economy: Future Directions Final report*¹ includes the following contextual data:

COMPARATIVE DATA BETWEEN Australia and OECD countries

Digital Engagement	Australia	United Kingdom	Canada
Households with home access to the internet (as a percentage of all households)	64% (2007 data)	67% (2007 data)	68% (a) (2006 data)
Number of broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2007	23% (2007 data)	26% (2007 data)	27% (c) (2007 data)
Business with their own website (as a percentage of businesses with 10 or more employees)	55% (f) (2006 data)	75% (g) (2007 data)	68% (2006 data)

8 A comparison with OECD (30 countries) finds that Australia is:

- (a) 16th in terms of broadband penetration
- (b) 20th in terms of the average monthly subscription price for broadband
- (c) 3rd most expensive for fixed line services for SMEs

9 The World Economics Forum ranks Australia:

- (a) 14th for network readiness
- (b) 16th for the total number of broadband internet subscribers per 100 population
- (c) 20th for monthly high speed broadband subscription charges
- (d) 25th for accessibility of digital content
- (e) 35th for the quality of competition in the internet service provider sector
- (f) 29th for the lowest cost of broadband.

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http://www.dbcde.gov.au/digital_economy/future_directions_of_the_digital_economy/australias_digital_economy_future_directions/final_report

10 There is then a challenge for Australians to have easy affordable access to broadband and Internet content.

11 The lack of broadband access and affordable Internet access remains a very significant issue in Australia – both for individuals and the libraries that support them. The National Broadband Network represents a major commitment by the government that we hope will enable the majority of the population to overcome this barrier.

Content

12 While there are many resources published on government agency web sites, there is a significant question as to whether sufficient information is made available in a form that enables it to be accessible.

13 Not all government publications are available online. The Australian National Audit Office ² found this year, for example, that only 90% of parliamentary papers are available online. Significantly less were available in previous years.

14 For a real digital citizenship to be achieved online government content is require that is comprehensive, easy to find, easy to use, supported by access through libraries and consistent. Research funded by Australian government also needs to be made freely available to build the real and digital economy

15 ALIA notes that in some areas information that was previously available online is no longer available, for example:

- (a) Funding of particular roads and railways on a year-by-year basis is now only available at the level of total funding for a given road for the period 2008-09 to 2013-14 through the Department of Infrastructure web site. The Minister's Budget media press releases contain only aggregate figures.
- (b) Statistics on income support payment recipients have not been published annually since the annual statistical overview for 2005;
- (c) The former Government released a range of health data by federal electorate (eg bulk billing, Medicare safety net figures, private health insurance membership). The most recent information available on the web site <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/electoratereport-index> is for 2006.

16 Many government agencies, such as the National Health and Medical Research Service and Medical Research Council, commission high quality research. Much of the research funded through these schemes is tied up in scholarly journals rather than being available freely through the web. Other countries have delivered

² Australian National Audit Office *Online Availability of Government Entities' Documents Tabled in the Australian Parliament*, Canberra, ANAO, 2009. http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/2008-09_Audit_Report_37.pdf

schemes which ensure that publicly funded research is available to those than funded it – the public. The US National Institute of Health, for example, has mandated free community access to publicly funded research in 2008. Its policy is clear: “Enhancing public access to archived publications resulting from NIH funded research)” requires the outputs of research (manuscripts) to be deposited in PubMed Central. Making this research available produces significant public good: it enables quick and effective access to publicly funded research, while reducing duplication and creating a platform for collaboration.

17 ALIA encourages the publication of government information, particularly relating to government expenditure and government funded research. Wherever possible geocoded/mapping system accessible information should be published.

18 We encourage digitisation of information currently available only in paper form, particularly information that has, and will continue to have, historic value, particularly parliamentary and legislative materials.

19 In addition to Commonwealth information, state and territory information needs to be accessible to develop an understanding of the implementation of government policies across many policy areas. We encourage, for example, all state and territory transport departments to publish information to a higher level than currently occurs, and for it to be able to be used to compare activities across the nation.

20 Permanent access to government information is vital. If engaging the wider community with government is a key goal of the taskforce, the need for government information on former and ongoing policies to remain available online as a tool from which to develop better government policies and services is critical.

21 Currently maintaining long-term access to government information has not been successfully achieved. A number of agencies currently consider that providing up-to-date information means that older information, such as reports are not provided online. The Workplace Authority, International Air Services Commission, Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and Australian Government Solicitor (AGS) only make their current annual reports available online, for example. Superseded reports are removed from the internet when new annual report are published, thereby severely limiting access by the Australian community to information on the operation of these agencies in previous years.

22 In addition when an election is called government entities withdraw press releases and other information from the Internet.

23 Only a national repository for at least selected resources would solve the problem of long-term access to many government online resources. The National Library of Australia established a web archive, Pandora (Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia), in 1996. As Australia's Web Archive, it contains a growing collection of copies of Australian online publications and is now built in collaboration with nine other Australian libraries and other cultural collecting organisations. Without recognition or additional funding the

service cannot be reasonably comprehensive. For each agency to build a preservation archive would be unnecessarily duplicative and expensive. We need leadership in this area.

Capability

24 Australians need to have skills to be able to effectively use the Internet including the digital resources available:

- (a) Public libraries need to be supported to provide training and support to the community to access government services and information including Gov2.0 services;
- (b) Online services need to be user focused and easy to use;
- (c) Digital services and resources need to be accessible to those with disabilities.

25 The Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that illiteracy is a significant issue. Their study Adult Literacy and life skills survey ([http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0Main+Features12006%20\(Reissue\)?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0Main+Features12006%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument)) found that approximately 7 million (46%) Australians aged 15 to 74 years had scores below the level regarded by the survey developers as the "minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy" for prose. Results for document literacy were similar to prose.

26 Compared to other countries Australia ranked in the middle of each scale with 57% of the population achieving minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy" or more on the prose scale, 57% on the document scale, 50% on the numeracy scale and 32% on the problem solving scale. Of the seven countries, Norway ranked highest on the prose scale (66%), document scale (68%) and on the problem solving scale (39%), with Switzerland ranking highest on the numeracy scale (61%).

27 Those with literacy scores on or above "the minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in were more likely to have used the Internet. 79% of this group used the Internet for email at least a few times a week compared to 40% of people with scores below this level

28 Effective use of the Gov 2.0 services and public sector information requires support in the community to both tackle literacy and digital literacy and to support effective use of government services online. Public libraries are key providers of these services.

29 Public libraries have had to pick up the burden of supporting public use of government services. A recent study of New South Wales public libraries (Environmetrics 2004, State Library of New South Wales 2004 <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/pln/projects/summary.pdf>) found:

- (a) **“Increasing demand.** Most librarians report increasing client use of individual Government websites, for both content information and process or transaction based purposes.
- (b) **An invisible draw on resources.** While libraries were aware of some high-demand government online services, librarians rarely had an overview of all government services accessed by their clients...”

30 The communities increased reliance of public libraries for support for use of government services has been unanticipated by those producing these services. Only a small number of agencies provide training and information support to public libraries in this role. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Library extension program is a good model of extending information to Australians through public libraries through activities based in all states and territories.

31 Research into public libraries in the United States echoes this finding:

“Public access to the Internet and computers is transforming public libraries into de facto e-government access points... This new role for public libraries is not just user-initiated. Government agencies now refer people to public libraries to receive both access to and assistance with online services.” (Bertot, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleid=CA6359866>).

32 Overall a clear, targeted strategy is needed to deliver social inclusion in the digital environment. A digital economy can only be build by a community with digital access, digital content that supports their lives and digital skills

Questions

Question 1:

How widely should policy to optimise the openness of public sector information be applied? Should it be applied beyond government departments and, if so, to which bodies, for instance government business enterprises or statutory authorities?

All government entities including national, state, territory and local governments as well as GBEs and statutory authorities, should all participate in providing public domain information through online access to useful and meaningful data, that is, more than contact details

Question 2:

What are the ways in which we build a culture within government which favours the disclosure of public sector information? What specific barriers exist that would restrict or complicate this and how should they be dealt with?

In addition to working with specific agencies on case studies, funding for projects could assist the development of better practices.

Question 3:

What government information would you like to see made more freely available?

See above

Question 4:

What are the possible privacy, security, confidentiality or other implications that might arise in making public sector information available? What options are there for mitigating any potential risks?

Privacy considerations are important. They should not be used to unnecessarily limit access to aggregate data.

Question 5:

What is needed to make the large volume of public sector information (a) searchable and (b) useable? And in each case, what do we do about legacy information in agencies? How might the licensing of on-line information be improved to facilitate greater re-use where appropriate?

The current discovery service, publications.gov.au, does not provide effective access. There is a real question here as to how much is or should be left to Internet search services such as Google and Bing and how much government needs to reinvent a purpose-designed search system. It is essential that public sector information be discoverable through the normal range of search services, which requires good titling, metadata and management of resources for long-term access.

Question 6:

How does government ensure that people, business, industry and other potential users of government information know about, and can readily find, information they may want to use, for example, the use of a consolidated directory or repository for public sector information?

RSS feeds and alerts on Australia.gov.au and agency web sites are very important. Encouraging the adoption of standards for metadata and content to public domain information that is published online that can be searched by web crawlers is important for effective access.

Question 7:

Should governments mandate that information should be only kept and stored in open and publicly documented standards? Could such a stipulation raise costs or reduce flexibility?

Information should be stored in a way that is compliant with international standards to make data easily reusable.

Question 8:

What approaches should the Government use to allow information to be easily shared?

A national repository would be an important step in addressing this issue for data and information.

Question 9:

How can the initiatives and ideas of agencies be harnessed for the benefit of agencies across government? How can duplication of effort be avoided?

No comment.

Question 10:

Are these complaints and appeals processes sufficient? Are additional processes needed for government as it engages in the Web 2.0 world?

No comment.

Question 11:

What should government do to foster a culture of compliance with information and records management policies and best practice?

No comment.

Question 12:

What recordkeeping challenges are posed by both the re-use of government information, and in the mechanisms of development of government policy and practice through interactive citizen engagement?

No comment.

Question 13:

How does government manage the costs and risks of publication of inaccurate information?

No comment.

Question 14:

What criteria might we adopt in ensuring that agencies make data available in a reasonable time-frame? (And how might we define a 'reasonable time-frame'?)

No comment.

Question 15:

It often takes quite some time to compile and create consistent and reliable data – especially for large data sets. When is it appropriate to release limited and possibly less accurate data and where is it appropriate to wait for higher quality and more extensive data? Where various principles are in some tension with each other, for instance quality and cost or timeliness, how should trade-offs be made?

Information needs to be provided in a time frame that makes is useful. There are inevitably trade offs between quality and timeliness. To withhold data from publication for years to make it perfect would, for example, make the data unnecessarily expensive and ineffective. ALIA suggests that users of data and information resources be asked about their needs.

Question 16:

What can we do to better promote and co-ordinate initiatives in this area? How can we draw key departments together?

No comment.

Question 17:

What sort of public sector information should be released under what form of copyright license? When should government continue to utilise its intellectual property rights?

ALIA notes that Copyright is contained within the Copyright Act 1968. We recommend that conditions of use be clear and easy to understand. Government information should be able to be freely reused for educational, private research and community activities.

Question 18:

When should agencies charge for access to information? Should agencies charge when they are providing value-added services? What might constitute 'value added services' (eg customisation of information)? In what circumstances should agencies be able to recover the costs of obtaining the information or providing access? A common model in the private sector is 'freemium' distribution whereby many, often most, users are supplied with some product or service for free whilst others pay for use in large scale commercial enterprise (for instance AVG anti-virus) or for some premium product (for instance Word Web). Are there similar models for public sector information and/or do they merit further consideration?

The Library encourages government agencies to make information available freely as far as possible. This would reduce costs and thus charges.

Question 19:

How can government take advantage of public private partnerships to increase access to public sector information without unduly constraining opportunities for third parties to use and reuse the information?

No comment.

Question 20:

What international activities relevant to this Taskforce should the Taskforce be considering and what needs to be done to improve cross-border use and interoperability of information?

No comment.

Question 21:

How can best practice be facilitated, identified, rewarded, and further propagated?

By leadership supported by a sustained resourced program.

Question 22:

Have you engaged with the Australian government via a Web 2.0 channel? Which one/s? If so, why and what was your experience? If not, why not? What can be improved?

No comment.

Question 23: How can government capture the imagination of citizens to encourage participation in policy development and collaboration between citizens and government?

No comment.

Question 24: What sort of privacy issues might dissuade individuals from engaging with government via collaborative technologies? What sort of steps can we take to ensure that personal information is used appropriately? What options are there for mitigating any potential privacy risks?

No comment.

Question 25:

How can government make it easier for people to engage on policy and other issues and make sure the opportunities are as open and accessible as possible?

No comment.

Question 26:

What trade-offs must be considered between government using commercially available and popular online platforms and ensuring inclusive participation with all members of society and how should those tradeoffs be made?

No comment.

Question 27:

How can public servants comply with the APS values³ and other protocols whilst still participating in online engagement? Should existing rules including legislation be changed and/or adapted to facilitate greater online engagement?

No comment.

Question 28:

How does government provide sufficient room for personal debate and passionate dissent but still ensure appropriate levels of moderation in online forums? Should moderation be 'outsourced' and if so in what circumstances and how? How might volunteers from the commenting community be selected to moderate?

No comment.

Question 29:

What are the barriers to fostering a culture of online innovation within government? Which of those barriers should be maintained in any Government 2.0 initiatives? Which of those barriers should be removed? How should this be achieved? What different norms can or should apply to Government 2.0 efforts?

No comment.

Question 30:

To what extent can government assist the uptake of Government 2.0 by centrally providing standard business management guidance and tools to avoid agencies having to 'reinvent the wheel' when considering their own online engagement guidelines?

No comment.

Question 31:

How can government engage with individuals and stakeholders to support the development of innovative policies, programs, practices and service delivery? Are there good examples of where this is happening?

No comment.

³ <http://www.apsc.gov.au/values/index.html> and <http://www.apsc.gov.au/conduct/index.html>

Question 32:

To what extent can we promote such an approach in the public sector and are there any examples of emerging practice?

The ABS LEP program is a good example of increasing the capability of libraries and thus the public to effectively use their information resources.

Question 33:

How can such expertise be governed so as not to unduly stifle innovation?

No comment.

Question 34:

To what degree is the opportunity for Government agencies to participate in the Web 2.0 world inhibited, or severely compromised, by issues such as security? How might this problem be overcome, in general and by individual agencies, within current legal and policy parameters and how might these parameters be changed to assist in overcoming these problems?

No comment.

Question 35:

What role could the proposed OIC play in encouraging the development of Government 2.0? Are there practical recommendations the Taskforce might make about how the OIC might best fulfil its functions in relation to optimising the dissemination of Government information?

No comment.

Conclusion

33 Australia has been an early adopter of many technologies. Government has not yet adopted much of Web 2.0 technology.

34 ALIA recommend that the Gov 2.0 Taskforce give consideration to addressing the issues as follows:

- (a) **Connectivity:** government needs to recognise that many Australians, particularly those in regional Australia, cannot download publications, such as PDF's, let alone effectively access data. Any new services should be accessible to all Australians regardless of location.
- (b) **Content:** Government information has not been kept up to date or made available for long term access effectively yet. ALIA recommends supporting a national archive of information to ensure long term access (Pandora), adoption of new standards for publication and publication online without charge of government funded research. In addition government agencies should release in an easy to use accessible form much of the information that they currently hold;
- (c) **Capability:** Effective access to Gov 2.0 and information requires a community with the skills and support to access resources and services.

It is not enough simply to put information/services up on a web site. Australia's public libraries pick up much of the support for access to government online. We recommend that digital literacy programs be funded, with public libraries roles recognised and support provided by government agencies publishing services online.