



Australian Library and
Information Association

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Dear Mr Archer

The Australian Library and Information Association strongly applauds the move by the Government to provide access to its many data sets, while understanding and respecting data security and privacy issues.

The data held by Commonwealth Government agencies is enormously important to Australians and access will provide significant benefits to citizen engagement and responsiveness. Greater use of data can contribute to national productivity, development of innovative services, education, research and other social benefits. In many ways the government is custodian of data that belongs to Australians, and should consider data management policy in this light.

Maximum benefit from increased availability of data can only be achieved if the data (government and other, such as that held by universities) is aggregated and made available with significant computer resources for data manipulation and analysis. We encourage you to consider architectures and access in light of the need for interoperability and aggregation.

The framework for data management needs clear and transparent policies and protocols. We are concerned that the protocols and policies of agencies are currently not available on their web sites and thus not transparent to citizens and the research community. We encourage development of practices where there is a requirement for open publication of these documents – this is very consistent with the Open Public Sector Information Principles of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

(http://www.oaic.gov.au/publications/agency_resources/principles_on_psi_short.html). A compliance program for agencies would be very valuable to ensure this occurs.

Keep in touch, find ALIA online. www.alia.org.au

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We encourage agencies to establish more creative opportunities to support research access to data. The Australian Bureau of Statistics for example, developed an approach that enables questions to be asked that would involve access to data that would not be made public. They will run the queries/statistical analysis and look at the result of the enquiries to see if the findings will breach privacy/confidentiality rather than if the questions involve accessing confidential/privacy protected data.

Finally, where data can be made available through the web, whether in full or in summary/analysed format, this should occur. Currently the summary data reports are very valuable and widely used. It is a tragedy that government does not have an approach that ensures long term access to these resources, and we are concerned that big data may be treated in the same manner. Our research has shown that there is a problem with current management of government information available through the web. Within 10 years up to 75% of research reports and publications disappear – stopping citizens access to information. This is a policy issue that needs to be addressed.

I note that you have been invited to talk on big data during Information Awareness Month by the ACT Group of ALIA. I do hope that you, or someone from your office, are able to give a presentation.

Yours faithfully

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