

**First Forum**

**Seoul, Republic of Korea, 24-26 October 2011**

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## **Country Report of Australia\***

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## Australian Government

# Global Geospatial Information Management Country Report – Australia (AUS)

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### **Australian geographic context**

Australia comprises a land area of about 7.692 million square kilometres. At five per cent of the world's land mass, Australia is the planet's sixth largest country.

Australia is governed at a national level by the Australian, or Commonwealth, Government, and at a state level by the independent State and Territory governments. There are six states in Australia: New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA), Tasmania (Tas.), Victoria (Vic.) and Western Australia (WA). The six state parliaments are permitted to pass laws related to any matter that is not controlled by the Commonwealth under the Australian Constitution.

There are ten Australian territories outside the borders of the states. Two mainland territories, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT) and one offshore territory, Norfolk Island, that have been granted a limited right of self-government by the Australian Government. Seven territories are governed only by Commonwealth law. They are: Ashmore and Cartier Islands, Australian Antarctic Territory, Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Coral Sea Islands, Jervis Bay Territory, Territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands.

### **The Australian spatial data infrastructure environment**

The Australian Government's federated approach to technology-related development and growth has meant that Australia's spatial data infrastructure (SDI) environment is characterised by a mix of participants, functions, processes and mandates. This mix includes the national peak bodies:

- ANZLIC–The Spatial Information Council, the peak intergovernmental organisation providing leadership in the collection, management and use of location information in Australia and New Zealand.
- The Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), providing leadership, coordination and standards for surveying, mapping/charting and national datasets.
- Geoscience Australia the lead Australian Government spatial information agency.

- The new Office of Spatial Policy (OSP) – incorporating the former Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM). OSP is the Australian Government's central policy unit that will provide direction at a whole-of-government level for the creation, acquisition and management of spatial data across the Commonwealth.

Up until the establishment of the OSP there was no lead Australian Government agency, Minister, or Ministerial Council responsible for national location information policy or governance. It fell to the community of peak bodies to provide much of the de-facto national location governance, policy and standards. In July 2011 the new Office of Spatial Policy was established to take on this leadership role.

In contrast, the State and Territory Government's have well established SDI's, albeit at differing levels of maturity, that are driven by specific needs – primarily land titles, property registration, and conveyance as well as collecting data on natural and physical features – but other data benefits are now being realised. Western Australia's Shared Land Information Platform (SLIP), New South Wales' Spatial Information Exchange (SIX), and Victoria's Land Online are the most recognised.

Within industry and academia there is PSMA Australia Limited (PSMA) an unlisted public company owned by the state, territory and Australian governments. PSMA facilitates at the national level, integration of fundamental datasets from data supplied by Commonwealth, state and territory data custodians. In the commercial sector the Spatial Industries Business Association (SIBA) represents more than 500 companies and organisations working in Australia and New Zealand's private enterprise sector. The research community is represented by the Cooperative Research Centre for Spatial Information (CRCSI) comprising over 100 participants from the private, government and academic sectors. There are also vocational bodies such as the Surveying and Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI), Australia's peak body representing the interests of surveying and spatial science professionals, and the Geospatial Information and Technology Association (GITA) a professional association for geospatial technology specialists.

Despite having such a rich mix of participants and data at all levels of government, industry and academia, Australia has not in the past had a holistic approach to our national spatial information resources. However, the growing consensus that this lack of effective national policy and governance was constraining the contribution that spatial information could make to the day-to-day business activities of all government agencies, industry, and the broader community, led to the establishment of the OSP.

### **Spatial data holdings**

Most of the fundamental spatial data produced in Australia is collected, maintained and distributed by the state and territory government's spatial information agencies, in collaboration with custodian agencies and other data suppliers. Data managed by other entities, such as local authorities, utility businesses (water, gas, electricity) and various state government agencies, is also used to produce state-wide datasets. PSMA Australia for example produces national datasets from state and territory data.

The spatial data produced by Commonwealth government agencies tends to reflect the Commonwealth's direct responsibilities – such as natural resource management and environmental protection – and its national perspective.

For the Commonwealth, Geoscience Australia collects and provides spatial data and products to the government and private sector. These include digital topographic and geological maps, elevation models, and maps of Australia's maritime boundaries and the seabed. This data

supports Australian government functions such as natural resource and marine zone management, and environmental protection; and enables response to emergencies caused by natural disasters and rapid or slow onset hazards.

### **National Drivers**

The demand for reliable and authoritative location information – and an acknowledgement of the value it provides – is rapidly increasing across the Australian Government. The Government has recognised that strategic and tactical leadership are essential components for ensuring coordination and collaboration across a large number of stakeholders from the private sector, academia, research and all levels of government.

Place-based responses are being applied to complex issues such as social, environmental, and emergency management policy. With our increasing reliance on spatial information comes a need for a more integrated and structured approach to ensure that existing, and any new information, is readily discoverable and accessible.

In recent times the Australian Government has undertaken a number of reviews, and announced several reforms, that have considered government information management practices and policy into the future. These initiatives acknowledge the need for a consistent approach across government to develop a framework of principles to guide agencies in the adoption of a national information policy, and to facilitate greater coordination, consistency and openness in government information sharing and management.

Such policy framework initiatives include: Australia's Gov 2.0 policy; Australia's new FOI laws; the establishment of a new Office of the Australian Information Commissioner; and the National Government Information Sharing Strategy.

### **A way forward**

There were a number of initiatives during the latter part of 2010 that provided the basis for expediting a whole-of-government solution to the lack of effective national spatial information capability leadership.

**Commitment to Regional Australia** – The Australian Government committed to better reporting on regional Australia. It was acknowledged that the successful delivery of information and support of regional policies is only made possible if it is supported by consistent, accurately maintained and easily integrated data.

**Spatial@gov Conference** – The 2010 Australian Spatial@gov Conference discussed the spatial capabilities applied to the business needs of the three tiers of government. Delegates called for the Australian Government to provide strong leadership in the coordination and collaboration of Australia's spatial capabilities. There was a view that Australia's governance and institutional frameworks needed to be strengthened.

**Investigation into the Spatial Capability of Australia** – Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB, Director General and Chief Executive of the UK Ordnance Survey, was commissioned by Mr Drew Clarke, the Australian Secretary of the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism (DRET), to undertake an investigation into the spatial capability of Australia. The study considered how the capability could be improved for the benefit of the Australian public sector, private sector and the broader community. The study's outcomes highlighted that without good leadership and high-level champions, Australia suffered from a lack of national strategy to coordinate, develop and use an Australian spatial data infrastructure.

**Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)** – The establishment of the OAIC brought together existing functions of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner,

freedom of information, and information policy. The OAIC's role is to champion open government, provide advice on information policy and practice, assist the public, and promote better information management by government. The creation of the OAIC signals a broader policy change that acknowledges that information held by the Government is a national resource to be managed for public purposes, leading to a stronger pro-disclosure approach and a push to make government information more accessible.

**APS200 Location Project** – The APS200 is a new senior leadership forum for the Australian Government that undertakes specific policy or change management projects. In December 2010 the Secretaries Board established an APS200 Location Project. This project proposed a whole-of-government review in the creation, management, sharing, and utilisation of location information across departments and agencies of the Australian Government. The project addressed the future geographic and location information needs of Government in three critical areas: location information policy, governance, and investment. To underpin these options the project identified key stakeholders and their requirements; undertook an existing government data and program inventory; and developed a business case demonstrating the value of linking information to location. The project also used the existing government commitment to develop the myRegion website concept as the immediate business driver to develop these options.

### **The current state**

The Australian Government's recent changes in information management policy will require agencies to make information more accessible and reusable, with the aim of improving the quality and responsiveness of government policy-making and service delivery. It has been recognised that information collected by or for the public sector is a national resource which should be managed for the public good and should endure. However, a critical enabler for effective whole-of-government collaboration and coordination – the ability to seamlessly share and integrate our own information across government – remains an aspiration.

The establishment of an enabling framework (policy, governance and principles) will however, help the Australian Government to keep pace with changes in technology and meet the increasing demands for open access to public information.

Following the endorsement, in July 2011, by Government of the APS200 Report, and its recommendations, a number of progressive actions have taken place. The Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism (DRET) was assigned the lead agency for a whole-of-government spatial information policy, and has established the Office of Spatial Policy, absorbing the previous functions of OSDM.

As an acknowledged and committed policy lead, OSP will progressively establish and operationalise the governance, principles, responsibilities, and requirements for collecting, managing, integrating and delivering location information used by Australian Government agencies. A detailed implementation plan will be presented to Government in early 2012 for endorsement. ANZLIC, ICSM, PSMA and the CRCSI are in the process of, where appropriate, realigning their priorities and activities to support these new directions. Early considerations include a national, integrated approach to SDI development, and determining and defining the national fundamental datasets and/or themes that constitute the core location building blocks to support Australia's SDI.

## Links

ANZLIC - The Spatial Information Council *Economic Assessment of Spatial Data Pricing and Access Stage 1 Report: Principles, Issues and Alternative Models* (November 2010) <http://www.crcsi.com.au/Documents/ANZLIC-Economic-Study---Stage-1-Report.aspx>

Australian Government, *Government Response to the Report of the Government 2.0 Taskforce – Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, <http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/govresponse20report/index.html>

Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), *National Government Information Sharing Strategy*, 2009. <http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/national-government-information-sharing-strategy/>

Gershon P., *Review of the Australian Government’s Use of Information and Communication Technology*, Prepared for the Department of Finance and Deregulation, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, <http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/ICT-Review/index.html>

Government 2.0 Taskforce, *Engage – Getting on with Government 2.0*, Canberra, 2009, <http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/gov20taskforcereport/index.html>

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC), *Announcement of a review of Freedom of Information charges* (October 2011) [http://www.oaic.gov.au/news/statements/statement\\_charges\\_review.html](http://www.oaic.gov.au/news/statements/statement_charges_review.html)

Office of Spatial Data Management, *Paper for the Government 2.0 Task Force: Improving Access to Public Sector Information – A Framework*, 2009 [http://www.osdm.gov.au/Publications/Access+to+Public+Sector+Information/BarriersToAccessOf\\_PSI%E2%80%93A\\_Framework.pdf?id=960](http://www.osdm.gov.au/Publications/Access+to+Public+Sector+Information/BarriersToAccessOf_PSI%E2%80%93A_Framework.pdf?id=960)

Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism, *Positioning Australia with Geography and Place*, speech by The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, Minister for Resources and Energy, Minister for Tourism, 7 March 2011. <http://minister.ret.gov.au/MediaCentre/Speeches/Pages/PositioningAust.aspx>