

Government 2.0 Taskforce Recommendations and the Spatial Industry

In the vein of open government, the operation, funding and findings of the taskforce are transparent and well documented on <http://gov2.net.au>. This is the first time I have seen such wide and high quality discussion of data sharing including the cultural change needed to support it. The report is now with the Federal Government. No specific date has been set by which the Government will respond. Start with the recommendations but you will soon be sucked in.

What the report said (in a nutshell)

- Make data free as in available (*libre*) and free as in beer (*gratis*)
- Use creative commons so use is pre-approved and unburdened by restrictions
- Technology supports sharing like never before and the public is increasingly getting used to engaging online including crowdsourcing to improve or collect new data.
- Assign a lead agency to put this engagement in place
- The risk averse culture in public service needs to change, right from the top.
- The default position should be to publish – with any agency needing a very good reason if it does not
- You have to have a user friendly infrastructure to make the data usable
- Public servants should be rewarded and applauded for sharing
- Successes must be publicized and celebrated

“There are deep cultural, organizational traits that have to change” explains Alan Noble, adding that this is a journey that will take years. Psychologically relinquishing control is never easy. “Public servants have been trained to be cautious and risk averse. They are keen on due process but we would be disappointed if agencies used data quality as a reason not to publish because there is huge value in timely publication” says Noble. “GIS managers should think of themselves as custodians, not as owners”. Rather than being afraid of the spotlight shining on your data think of how crowdsourcing could improve it.

Discussing quality of the information, its reliability and currency at considerable length, the Taskforce agrees these matters such be carefully considered in agencies’ management of Government 2.0. They should never be seen as reasons for preventing PSI from being open.

The Report warns that charging for access to information is a major inhibitor of serendipity. “Many serendipitous discoveries arise when a prepared mind makes a previously unnoticed connection between seemingly disparate pieces of information”. The more people have access to more data, the more likely you are to get something really good. There may also be some ‘unexpected or inconvenient truths’.

The Taskforce calls for structural reforms to provide a platform for system wide information policy development across government and supports the Government proposal for an Office of the Information Commissioner.

This is exactly what the spatial industry has been lobbying for – a coordinated, cross government approach that does not require individual departments to battle for budgets or work in isolation. Obviously resources and budgets have to be established but the point is, the acknowledgement is there that this has to be done across government. It is big and it is important. Once there is understanding of value among politicians and their voters (as demonstrated by the Mashups) and public servants realise the sky has not fallen because they published their data (indeed they or their colleagues are being congratulated for doing it) – the money will come – maybe not as much as we’d like or as quickly, but it will come. The ball is rolling.



This work is licensed under an Australian Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Jose Diacono 17th January 2010