



VICTORIAN SPATIAL COUNCIL

c/- Spatial Information Infrastructure
Department of Sustainability and Environment
PO Box 500
EAST MELBOURNE Vic 3002
Ph: (03) 8636 2529

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Dr Nicholas Gruen
Chair
Government 2.0 Taskforce

submissions@gov2.net.au

Dear Dr Gruen

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT 2.0 TASKFORCE ISSUES PAPER

The Victorian Spatial Council is pleased to make the following submission to the Government 2.0 Taskforce Issues Paper.

We would like to take the opportunity to respond because we believe that our experience in Victoria provides some indicators about what can and should be done at the national level to make government information, in this case spatial information, more accessible.

The Victorian Spatial Council is a collaborative venture of the whole spatial information community (public, private and academic sectors) in Victoria to provide a coordinated approach to spatial information policy and management, and facilitate opportunities for a strategic focus on its development through greater partnership building, collaboration, cooperation and education.

Its aim is to provide an environment in which spatial information is available and able to be used.

Through the Council, all sectors have a role in setting Victoria's strategic direction for spatial information and implementing policies and standards for the whole spatial information community, including Government.

The Council recognises that Government is engaged in a balancing act – how to develop and maintain quality spatial information to support its own activities, while also encouraging its release for wider use and re-use.

It is working with all its stakeholders to establish an appropriate framework that will provide the rigour to support appropriate information management, while also giving custodians the flexibility and confidence to release data.

The Issues Paper focuses on the OECD's principles for enhanced access to and more effective use of public sector information and how to realise them.

The Council has developed a Spatial Information Management Framework which has given Victorian government agencies a mechanism to address directly these principles. The following remarks set out the major features of this Framework and are intended to provide an illustration of a comprehensive management approach that can support the release of spatial data for wider use.

The Victorian Spatial Council's position is that the overriding objective for spatial information in Victoria must be that it be accessible and able to be used. This will be achieved by meeting the following conditions:

- Knowing data exists
- Being able to find ('discover') it
- Appropriate management of the information
- Fitness for purpose
- Ability to share it
- Multiple ways of accessing and distributing it

Victoria has a mature policy and management framework that provides the basis for meeting these conditions. (While it has been created for spatial information, the framework can be equally applied to non-spatial information.) It incorporates policies and principles for:

- the types of information that are managed under the framework
- custodianship of that information
- describing that information and publishing associated metadata
- establishing and documenting quality requirements and levels
- pricing and licensing
- access and distribution

For a summary of the components of the Framework, refer to the Attachment (under 2 – *Spatial Information Management Framework*).

In the most recent spatial information strategy for Victoria, the Council has identified a number of challenges that make spatial information less accessible than it could be, and that Government should address. They include:

- government agencies operating as separate, sometimes competing entities
- lack of or limited culture of sharing of information
- lack of coordination in technical developments
- lack of a standard licensing approach to accessing government information

In response to these challenges, the Victorian Spatial Information Strategy 2008-10 sets out the things government should do to make information more accessible. A summary of the key actions is provided in the Attachment (under 1 – *Victorian Spatial Information Strategy*).

The Council has read with interest the contributions to the Taskforce's consultation forums.

It is of the view that to create a culture of openness and sharing of information, a strong underpinning framework is needed to give custodians confidence in releasing their data. As outlined above, the starting point is an effective and sustainable information management infrastructure, incorporating custodianship of the data resources (including resourcing this responsibility), access and distribution, quality, governance, and pricing and licensing.

In addition to the development of the Spatial Information Management Framework, a significant and growing range of services and applications have been and are being developed in Victoria that take advantage of recent

trends in technology such as Web 2.0. Government, academia and the private sector have all been active in this area.

These developments illustrate how government agencies can contribute to the achievement of the goals outlined in the Issues Paper.

Three recent examples include:

- The development and progressive implementation of a ‘Notification and Edit Service’, a collaborative data maintenance platform designed to significantly improve the creation and exchange of spatial information at local and State government levels.
- The launch of a map-based search capability called ‘DataSearch Victoria’ that enables users to access a list of datasets, their history, the custodian and the contact details by clicking on the location of an area of interest displayed on a browser-based map.
- The development of a proof of concept facility called ‘Rapid Acquisition Engine’ that aims to significantly reduce the effort required by a custodian to make datasets (including their metadata) available for acquisition and use by others.

In conclusion, much development has been done, and is being done to provide access to spatial information in Victoria. As in other cases, our experience has shown that appropriate technical solutions can be found to support the goal of opening up access to information, however these technologies and the applications they support are not enough on their own. They should be supported by the commitment of data suppliers to make their data available and exchange it with others, and users must be able to find that data and access it.

Through its activities, the Victorian Spatial Council recognises that the successful development of technology and applications will only be made possible through establishment of appropriate institutional arrangements for developing spatial information; requirements for creating and maintaining it; and mechanisms for making it accessible and available. It believes that such an approach will provide the greatest opportunity to provide higher quality datasets and improve access to spatial data.

In Victoria, the foundations for these arrangements have been defined and are being communicated. However the Council acknowledges that more needs to be done, and it is committed to working with Government to give custodians the tools to properly manage their data and gain the confidence to release it. This will go a long way to providing the basis for creating a culture of openness that is also the aim of the Taskforce.

The Council would welcome discussing its submission with the Taskforce members should the opportunity arise as it continues its investigations. In the meantime, further information about the Council’s activities is available from its web site at www.victorianspatialcouncil.org.

Yours sincerely



Olaf Hedberg, AM
Independent Chair

Attachment

1 - Victorian Spatial Information Strategy

The Council has recently published the Victorian Spatial Information Strategy 2008-2010 that seeks to address a number of challenges around them, including:

- Maintaining a robust and consistent approach to the management of spatial information to support its use and exchange (*'continuing to get the foundations right'*)
- ensuring that information is fit for purpose (including quality and accuracy), accessible and available, and supporting awareness raising and discoverability of data (*'continuing to ensure accessible and maintained data'*)
- encouraging data managers to release their data to wider audiences, through for example overcoming barriers such as copyright and liability, and finding ways to encourage partnerships between all levels of government, business and academia to develop new products and services (*'building a culture of sharing'*)

In responding to these challenges, the Strategy sets out four strategic directions and recommendations for action by all members of the spatial information community.

'Creating a framework in which the use of spatial information can flourish'

Through this direction, the VSC is seeking to ensure that accessibility to spatial information is guaranteed through a framework that supports participation, promulgates appropriate standards and establishes mechanisms for delivering and sharing spatial data.

Under the Strategy, the framework will incorporate:

- Standards – based on open sources; consistent with national and international standards; and developed in consultation with users.
- Clear articulation of the roles of all sectors.
- A whole of Government approach to data management, delivery, sharing and access – government agencies working together rather than operating as sometimes competing, often duplicating, players.
- Legislation that will stipulate requirements and establish best practice for delivering spatial data – here the Council seeking to consolidate the multiplicity of provisions relating to the management and delivery of information, to streamline and simplify them and modernise the information management environment to reflect the requirements and capabilities of digital technology.

'Adopting an inclusive approach to the management of spatial information'

Approaches to data management that bring opportunities for a wider range of contributions are becoming feasible as a result of a number of factors:

- Partnerships and relationships that underpin a range of spatial information developments.
- The development of 'Web 2.0' that is enabling contributions to the updating and maintenance of data from any interested party.
- The demands on content providers growing, as a result of wider use, to the extent that they are not always in a position to keep up with users' expectations or have the up to date 'on the ground knowledge' of changes occurring at the local level.

Opening the data maintenance cycle could provide a means for bridging the gap between user demands for quality and the cost of maintaining and delivering information.

Such data delivery methods are already being investigated. The Council is aware that during the last two years, the Government, in partnership with the private sector, has piloted an online notification environment to test the potential for managing changes to Vicmap data in a real time environment, and to trial enabling technologies and custodian roles and responsibilities.

The Strategy recommends that standard editing environments, on-line tools for metadata creation and management, and tools for notifying changes or modifications to attributes be developed. At the same time, it acknowledges that a number of preconditions will need to be met to make such a model viable, such as

- Mechanisms for managing and verifying contributions.
- Standards against which contributions can be measured.
- Clear definition of roles, including what will be expected of data custodians

'Maintaining the foundations for Spatial Information Management'

Spatial information needs to be available, accessible and clearly understood by users. This will require:

- Ensuring it is fit for purpose
- Licensing models that facilitate access
- Development of technical solutions that encourage accessibility
- Awareness raising
- Enabling it to be 'discovered' by users or potential users
- Availability of the data

The Strategy outlines the principles that are to govern the management of data:

- all spatial information being managed by an identifiable 'custodian'
- a consistent approach to managing spatial information
- networks that support custodians performing their roles.
- a Whole of Victorian Government approach for access to and sharing of data

2 - Spatial Information Management Framework

Information Management Components		Requirements
Institutional arrangements for delivering spatial information	Governance	The Victorian Spatial Council is responsible for policies and standards for spatial information across the spatial industry. The Victorian Spatial Council develops and implements whole-of-industry spatial information policy and standards.
	Custodianship	Datasets managed by participants in the Framework will have designated custodians who will manage them according to the information management principles established by the Framework. Custodians will make their data available via the Victorian Spatial Data Directory (see Metadata).
Creating and Maintaining Spatial Information	Framework Information	Framework Information will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The authoritative base datasets of Victoria’s Spatial Data Infrastructure and underpin the use of all Business Information. ▪ Maintained by custodians according to the Spatial Information Custodianship Guidelines and information management principles, including data quality, metadata, awareness, access, pricing and licensing, and privacy. ▪ Subject to periodic auditing to ensure that the component datasets continue to meet their published specifications.
	Business Information	Business Information will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintained by custodians according to the Spatial Information Custodianship Guidelines and information management principles, including data quality, metadata, awareness, access, pricing and licensing, and privacy. ▪ Subject to periodic auditing to ensure that the datasets continue to meet their published specifications.
	Data Quality	Custodians will develop data quality statements in consultation with users, and publish them in the product specifications and metadata for the respective datasets.
Making Spatial Information Accessible and Useable	Metadata	Each custodian will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure metadata is created as an integral part of datasets and associated products. ▪ Collect, as a minimum, core metadata elements, as defined by ANZLIC. ▪ Include metadata with data distributed to users. ▪ Publish metadata for their dataset(s) in the Victorian Spatial Data Directory repository.
	Awareness	Custodians will publish metadata and product specifications, and make their spatial information available through the Victorian Spatial Data Directory.
	Access	The Victorian Spatial Data Directory will be the central access point for spatial information. Custodians of spatial information will publish metadata for their datasets in the Victorian Spatial Data Directory. Multiple access and distribution mechanisms will be developed to make spatial information available to all types of users. A consistent approach to data licences and other agreements will be adopted.
	Pricing and Licensing	A whole of government pricing policy will be developed and adopted by all Departments. Pricing of spatial information developed and made available by Departments will be based on cost recovery, except where specifically exempted by the Department of Treasury and Finance or where a price is set down in statutes or regulations. Standard licence conditions will be adopted for all spatial information made available by Departments.
	Privacy	Custodians will recognise privacy requirements in the management of their spatial information.
Strategic Development of Technology and Application		Multiple access and distribution mechanisms will be developed for the delivery of spatial information. Distributed mapping resources based on OGC compliant web services will be the preferred approach to deliver spatial information, but where participants do not have the capability to implement this approach, multiple, redundant data stores will be developed.