



Australian Government
Digital Transformation Agency



Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation
Committee

Inquiry into the Identity Verification Services Bill 2023 and Identity Verification Services (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2023 [Provisions].

Digital Transformation Agency Submission

Introduction

As the leader for Government's digital strategy and advice, the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) supports clear guardrails and standards for Government's delivery of digital services including, those supported by Identity Verification services. The community expects greater convenience and efficiency when accessing digital services with a high standard of privacy in order to maintain trust in Government.

Current identity verification services

Current identity matching compares the personal information on an identity document against existing government records, such as passports, driver licences and birth certificates. The service is provided through secure, online systems through a partnership between the Australian Government, state and territory governments, under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Identity Matching Services.

There are more than 11.3 million myGovID accounts that people use to authenticate their identity for government services. These were created using the Document Verification Service (DVS), and one-third were verified using the Face Verification Service (FVS), which provides access to Centrelink, the Australian Tax Office and other services, including disaster relief. The significance of identity verification services to our day-to-day lives will continue to grow as technology advances and the uptake of identity verification increases.

The need to legislate for the identity verification services is more important today than ever before. The identity verification services are a foundational capability to the Australian economy that is used every day by governments and industry. The services will become even more crucial to the provision of government and industry services as the voluntary accreditation scheme for Digital ID service providers (to be strengthened by the Digital ID Bill) expands across the economy.

Identity matching changes

The Bill proposes to expand the use of 1:1 matching with the consent of individuals, by public and private entities, 1:1 matching is for the purpose of substantiating a Digital ID. This would include the use of DVS and FVS to verify biographic information against government issued identification documents. The implementation of identity matching should initially focus on 1:1 matching with 1:many matching to be considered in the near future once 1:1 matching is bedded down. 1:many matching requires continued monitoring to balance privacy, confidence and quality of services. For example, the Bill enables the option to extend

matching services from 1:1 to 1:many in limited circumstances relating to law enforcement activities for FVS, the DTA recommends the sequencing of this occurs with an initial focus on 1:1 matching. The DTA notes the introduction of 1:many matching is a significant change and will have a detrimental impact on the uptake of matching services by the community if it is perceived as lowering confidence in the service.

The use and uptake of Digital ID by the community is increasing with Government promoting enrolment as a key metric to improve government services. The community increasingly expects easy access to government services with assurance that their personal information is protected. There is likely to be concern from the community about privacy and that the use of 1:many matching could create negative consequences.

Tighter safeguards are required to proactively address community expectation about privacy and how identity information is used by Government. Any negative impacts relating to the 1:many matching is likely to result in less enrolments in Digital ID and uptake of digital services. A slowing in the uptake of Digital ID would negatively impact on the work done by government to date, to streamline and improve inclusive access to digital services. Digital ID improves access by the community to digital services, failure to address concerns relating to 1:many matching will mean a disjointed and agency based approach to digital services will remain and services will continue to be fragmented.

The Bill provides allowances for the charging of fees for identity verification services. Any changes to costing arrangements require consideration and consultation, with a focus on vulnerable cohorts. A fee for services or associated costs could negatively impact those in the community who are most likely to benefit from improved digital services and enrolment in Digital ID.