Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, submission to the JCPAA inquiry into the use and governance of artificial intelligence systems by public sector entities

October 2024

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Introduction

This submission has been prepared by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) in relation to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) inquiry into the use and governance of artificial intelligence systems by public sector entities. This paper supplements DAFF's responses to previous questions from the JCPAA in relation to this inquiry.

Agency context

DAFF is committed to a more sustainable and prosperous Australia through biosecurity, production and trade.

DAFF will work together to safeguard and grow sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry for all Australians.

DAFF's strategic objectives are:

- **Sector growth** – Support Australia's agricultural sector, including the food and fibre industries, to be increasingly prosperous and internationally competitive in an ever-changing world.

- **Sector resilience and sustainability** – Increase the contribution agriculture, fisheries and forestry make to a healthy, sustainable and low-emissions environment.

- **National biosecurity** – Strengthen our national biosecurity system to provide a risk-based approach and an appropriate level of protection for Australia's people, our environment and economy.

This is outlined in DAFF's Statement of Strategic Intent.

Agency response to specific questions

Q1 Whether the public sector has the internal capability to effectively adopt and utilise AI into the future

DAFF is implementing policies and frameworks emerging from the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA), including the recently published ***Policy for the responsible use of AI in government***. This policy provides a coordinated approach and positions the government to embrace the opportunities of AI, while building public trust. DAFF will continue to build its capability and internal processes to assess risk to ensure ethical and safe use of AI.

Designed to evolve with technology and community expectations, these whole of government policies and frameworks set how DAFF and other agencies will:

- **embrace the benefits** of AI by engaging with it confidently, safely and responsibly.

- **strengthen public trust** through enhanced transparency, governance and risk assurance.

- **adapt over time** by implementing changes in tested and accepted technologies in lockstep with government policy.

Q2(a) Whether there are sovereign capability issues to consider given that most AI tools currently used in Australia are sourced from overseas

While there are sovereign capability risks for the Australian government in relying on overseas AI tools, these can be managed through the following risk mitigation strategies:

a. Reducing dependencies on foreign technology providers by investing in, where it is appropriate to do so, DAFF's own AI and machine learning models for authorised use cases.

b. If using overseas AI software supply chains, ensuring comprehensive testing frameworks are followed, results from similar vendors are compared to test for bias, and ensuring government IT security frameworks are followed.

Q2(b) Any other related matters

Nil

Q3 Further supplementary information

The whole-of-government policy for the *Responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Government* came into effect on 1 September 2024, with **mandatory** actions required over the following six months.

As the designated accountable official, the Chief Data Officer (CDO) has:

a. Responsibility and accountability for DAFF's direction for AI by setting standards and frameworks for data management, quality, and managing enterprise level risks and issues associated with AI models.

    b.   Responsibility to meet requirements of the government's AI policy through a public facing transparency statement, designating accountable official/s for policy implementation, and notification of any high-risk AI use cases.

DAFF is building an AI implementation team to address these and future activities.

DAFF is participating in the *Commonwealth AI Assurance Framework* pilot, a whole-of-government AI initiative led by the DTA. A proof-of-concept built by DAFF will be included in this pilot, to assist the DTA formulate its policy based upon government use cases.

Q3(a) ChatGPT and Co-Pilot

DAFF's Acceptable use of ICT policy outlines the responsibility of staff regarding their use of ICT. DAFF has provided additional policy guidance to staff in relation to the use of generative artificial intelligence tools.

DAFF regularly runs internal communication campaigns to support staff in their awareness of ICT security obligations and potential risks including the use of AI.

Staff at DAFF have access to a range of publicly available generative artificial intelligence tools. Regarding ChatGPT, DAFF has a requirement for staff to agree and accept their ICT policy obligations each time they access the site. This includes (but is not limited to) declaring use of the platform is consistent with:

    a.   Any directions given by their manager.

    b.   DAFF's Information Communications Technology (ICT) Acceptable Use Policy.

    c.   DAFF's interim guidelines on Artificial Intelligence.

    d.   The Australian Public Service (APS) Code of Conduct.

In addition, a limited number of staff have been granted access to the Microsoft M365 Co-Pilot, as part of the DTA's whole-of-government trial. Mandatory training is required for those who participating in this trial.

Q3(b) Types of AI in the department

The types of AI in use in the department include:

    a.   Natural Language Processing (NLP) to detect specific biosecurity risks from a limited set of imported cargo goods descriptions; and to analyse free text comments as part of a business quality assurance process. Outputs are not directly executed by software but are provided to inform regulatory officers of any potential biosecurity risk.

    b.   Land use maps production, undertake pattern recognition, perform predictive modelling to characterise farm performance and identify biosecurity risk. Predictive modelling techniques are expected to support commodity forecasting to manage biosecurity risk and understand changes to inform export market access.

    c.   Microsoft 365 Copilot has been trialled as a productivity tool for a limited number of staff; it acts as a digital assistant by drafting content, finding information on the department's intranet, editing materials for style and clarity, and summarising Microsoft Teams meetings.

A comprehensive stocktake of current AI uses and projects has commenced. This will also include a register that will maintain a list of AI projects and use cases for consideration, along with assurance considerations and outcomes and includes:

a. Classification of AI use cases

b. An assessment of risk and the associated mitigation strategies

c. Measures in place to monitor effectiveness; and

d. Information on how each project meets compliance with the AI policy.

Q3(c) AI transparency statements

Under the *Responsible use of AI in government policy*, agencies must make publicly available a statement outlining their approach to AI adoption as directed by the DTA. The statements are aimed to provide a clear and consistent message, build public trust and make it easier for the public to understand and compare how government agencies adopt AI.

The transparency statement is not required to list individual use cases nor provide use case level detail. However, DAFF may provide detail beyond the requirements to publicly explain their approach to AI.

DAFF must and will provide information to the DTA regarding the use of AI in its transparency statement. The agency's CDO will provide the DTA with a link to the transparency statement when it is published.