



Australian Government  
Digital Transformation Agency



Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

# Inquiry into the Procurement of the Permissions Capability

Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) Submission

The Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) thanks the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit for the invitation to make a submission to its Inquiry into the Procurement of the Permissions Capability (the Inquiry).

## Role of the DTA in the Permissions Capability

The DTA's role in the Permissions Capability was to identify and advise on potential reuse cases. DTA's participation was in line with its 2020-21 strategic priority to lead whole-of-government digital and ICT strategies, policies and advice that enables modern, efficient and joined-up government services.<sup>1</sup>

The DTA expected numerous reuse cases to arise, including opportunities that could support visa transformation or to simplify trade for importers and exporters. With the program ceasing prior to the completion of the first use case, opportunities to validate the Permissions Capability for broader reuse could not be undertaken.

The DTA provided support to Home Affairs as a member of several of the procurement governance committees.

## The Australian Government Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework (IOF)

The DTA notes no recommendations relating to the DTA were made in the Auditor-General's report but it would like to take this opportunity to inform the Inquiry on the DTA's revised functions and how, following the implementation of the *Australian Government's Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework* (IOF)<sup>2</sup> on 1 July 2021, the DTA continues to reduce associated risks and enhance the benefits realisation of transformational digital investments.

The IOF is a 6-state end-to-end framework through which the DTA supports the Australian government to manage its digital and ICT investments and delivery risks by providing governance, contestability, delivery, and assurance activities across the entire investment lifecycle.

Commencing with the 2022–23 Budget process, Commonwealth entities bringing forward, or implementing digital and ICT-enabled investments, are subject to the requirements of the IOF. The DTA provides advice to entities and the Australian Government to ensure proposed

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<sup>1</sup> Digital Transformation Agency [Corporate Plan 2020–21](#)

<sup>2</sup> Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework. [Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework \(IOF\)](#)

investments are well-designed, robust and meet whole-of-government digital and ICT policies, priorities and standards.

Through the first state, *Strategic Planning*, the *Data and Digital Government Strategy*<sup>3</sup> (the Strategy) defines the direction for the Australian Government's digital and ICT-enabled investment portfolio, its future objectives and identifies capability gaps. The Strategy and accompanying Implementation Plan (the Plan) were released in December 2023, and set out the Australian Government's 2030 vision: To deliver simple, secure and connected public services, for all people and business, through world class data and digital capabilities. Implementation of the Strategy (as outlined in the Plan) will be a joint commitment from the Department of Finance and the DTA.

The *Australian Government Architecture* (AGA) supports every stage of the IOF and provides key inputs and outputs with primary audiences being architectural and policy teams, decision-makers, and senior executives. The AGA is a collection of digital artefacts and guidance that are organised in such a way as to guide and inform users on how to align to the digital directions of government and map their investment to previous work.<sup>4</sup>

The AGA supports the outcomes of the Strategy, enabling efficient reuse and encouraging consistency and reliability of services to the benefit of users by showcasing and mapping existing designs. By presenting evidence-based Standards and Positions, the AGA seeks to de-risk, standardise, and enhance new digital and ICT investments.

The second state, *Prioritisation*, occurs in the lead up to each Budget and Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) process. The DTA works across the Australian Public Services to understand each portfolio's immediate digital needs and then prioritises, plans and advises Ministers on the likely range of digital and ICT proposals being brought forward for consideration. The DTA supports the government by producing the *Digital Investment Overview* (DIO) on the optimal package of major digital and ICT investments as part of the Budget and MYEFO processes. This includes initial assessment and advice by the DTA to Ministers and their entities on their planning, including any potential major procurements, reuse opportunities, and their readiness for consideration by government.

The DTA also produces the *Integrated Digital Investment Plan (IDIP) Insights Report* which provides early visibility to Secretaries of the pipeline of digital and ICT investment proposals and existing systems. The IDIP supports whole-of-government prioritisation of digital and ICT investments by forecasting future demand based on the current landscape of systems and

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<sup>3</sup> Data and Digital Government Strategy. [Data and Digital Government Strategy](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Australian Government Architecture](#)

in-flight projects. The long-term outlook of the IDIP provides agencies with early opportunities to work together to build and reuse digital and ICT systems that address similar policy challenges.

The third state, *Contestability*, facilitates advice from the DTA to entities and the Australian Government on proposed investments and undertakes a thorough assessment of a proposal's compliance with relevant whole-of-government digital standards, including sourcing/procurement and further scrutiny of reuse opportunities.

Recently, the DTA has been working closely with the Department of Finance and entities bringing forward new policy proposals (NPP), to design those proposals to link funding with the delivery of milestones aligned to identified and measurable benefits. The intention is to reduce cost risk and improve transparency of the proposal's implementation status to the Australian Government.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> Where the DTA considers NPPs are falling short of the government's expectations, the DTA provides independent advice to government on opportunities to de-risk proposals and, in extreme cases, a deferment of consideration of the digital elements of an NPP. For example, the DTA would seek to substantiate reuse cases prior to funding being considered or might provide advice to Ministers on alternate governance arrangements to ensure key decisions undertaken throughout program delivery are made in partnership with affected entities.

Through the fourth state, *Assurance*, the DTA undertakes assurance activities that monitor in-flight digital and ICT investments and advises government on their delivery status including whether they are on-track to deliver expected benefits. The timing of the Permissions Capability program meant that the program was not under the DTA's System of Assurance. The change in the DTA's remit in July 2021 has resulted in the DTA providing regular and reliable information on the condition of all major digital investments to the

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<sup>5</sup> *Digital Transformation Agency Annual Report 2022-23*, page 33, DTA supported the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) through the IOF to secure government funding for Budget measure *Big Data, Timely Insights, Phase 2 – securing Australia's critical economic data and supporting better informed macroeconomic policy*. A key feature in the design of Phase 2 is the link between funding and the achievement of delivery milestones. [Digital Transformation Agency Annual Report 2022-23 \(dta.gov.au\)](https://www.dta.gov.au/annual-report-2022-23)

<sup>6</sup> *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2023-24*, new Aged Care Act, page 256. The DTA supported the Department of Health and Aged Care through the IOF to secure government funding to continue to support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and improve care outcomes, including to support and deliver the ICT changes required for the implementation of the new Aged Care Act. [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2023-24 \(budget.gov.au\)](https://www.treasury.gov.au/mefo/2023-24)

<sup>7</sup> *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2023-24*, Administrative Review Tribunal, page 217. The DTA supported the Attorney-General's Department through the IOF to secure funding to support the delivery of government priorities, including for the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to support transition to the new Administrative Review Tribunal. [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2023-24 \(budget.gov.au\)](https://www.treasury.gov.au/mefo/2023-24)

<sup>8</sup> *Budget 2023-24 Budget Measures Budget Paper No. 2, Water Market Reform – strengthening integrity and transparency*, page 82. The DTA supported the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) through the IOF to secure government funding to restore transparency, integrity and confidence to water markets, including a single digital platform for national water data management. [Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures](https://www.treasury.gov.au/budget/2023-24/budget-measures)

Minister for Finance. Where necessary, the DTA escalates instances where the delivery of a digital investment is at risk and will advise the Minister for Finance, and the relevant lead Minister, so early, decisive action to recover the investment can commence.

Through the fifth state, *Digital Sourcing*, the DTA currently maintains 6 marketplaces and 7 single-seller arrangements. Its online procurement platform, BuyICT.gov.au, simplifies the process of buying and selling digital products and services to government.<sup>9,10</sup>

The DTA's marketplaces allow for expansion of categories to support greater access to innovative and emerging technologies. Regular refreshes of marketplaces enable new market entrants and updated pricing, which provides for greater competition among sellers and better value-for-money for the Australian Government. Currently, the DTA is improving its marketplaces to support government buyers to acquire external expertise, and to provide guidance to ensure purchases align with good procurement practices.

The DTA's single-seller arrangements consolidate the buying power of the Australian Government to negotiate the best possible pricing and terms for government buyers, as well as pre-negotiated templates that reduce the time and effort required by entities to enter into contract. Most arrangements also include additional benefits, such as access to specialised support and complimentary training.

Under the sixth state, *Operations (Real World Use)*, the DTA regularly collects data on in-flight government digital and ICT investments as well as existing digital and ICT infrastructure. The data collected provides an important evidence base for advice regarding the government's digital and ICT investment landscape.

All 6 states work together to support the Australian Government and entities to consider the planning, opportunities, risks, governance, and assurance activities required to optimise the chance of success in the design and implementation of transformational digital and ICT-enabled investments.

## Conclusion

Though the IOF was not in place when the Permissions Capability commenced, its implementation in July 2021 has resulted in a framework underpinned by strategies, policies and tools that are supporting the Australian Government to manage the successful delivery of digital and ICT investments. This contributes to better outcomes for people and

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<sup>9</sup> Cloud, Data Centre, Digital, Hardware, Software and Telecommunications Marketplace Panels

<sup>10</sup> SAP, IBM, Concur, AWS, Oracle, Microsoft and Rimini Street

businesses, assists in formulating advice to government on new and existing digital and ICT investments and mitigates the risks associated with large, transformational digital projects. The DTA invests considerable effort into engaging with entities to improve their visibility of the DTA's revised functions and it supports entities through the lifecycle of their digital and ICT investments.

Through the IOF, the DTA continues to strengthen its oversight of the Australian Government's digital landscape and is called upon by government to provide strategic advice in relation to all digital and ICT matters.

## Background

A procurement process for a Global Digital Platform (GDP)—a new IT workflow system to modernise the processing of Australian visa applications—was cancelled on 18 March 2020. A new policy direction that would integrate an enterprise-scale workflow processing capability in the Home Affairs portfolio, and could also be utilised across the Commonwealth, was announced on 20 March 2020.<sup>11</sup>

In October 2020, Home Affairs commenced the procurement process for the Permissions Capability system (Permissions Capability).<sup>12</sup> The Permissions Capability system was to be a whole-of-government platform with the capability to be designed and developed for reuse across government for other similar permissions-based services, such as permits, accreditations, licences, and registrations.

On 3 July 2022, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Clare O’Neil MP, announced that travellers to Australia were no longer required to complete the Digital Passenger Declaration (DPD).<sup>13</sup> The DPD was the first use-case of the Permissions Capability. The DPD was intended to support the re-opening of Australia’s international border through the collection of COVID-related health and quarantine information. At the May 2023–24 Budget, the government announced that it had ceased further work on the Digital Passenger Declaration, as it was no longer a priority since the easing of COVID-19 border restrictions.<sup>14</sup>

On 7 June 2023, the Auditor-General presented its report titled Procurement of the Permissions Capability to the Parliament.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Former acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, ‘New approach to technology capability acquisition and delivery’, media release, 20 March 2020: [New approach to technology capability acquisition and delivery \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/new-approach-to-technology-capability-acquisition-and-delivery)

<sup>12</sup> AusTender, HomeAffairs/2054/RFT. [Closed ATM View - HOMEAFFAIRS/2054/RFT: AusTender \(tenders.gov.au\)](https://www.austender.gov.au/procurement/procurement-details/2054/RFT)

<sup>13</sup> The Hon Clare O’Neil MP, Minister for Home Affairs, ‘All COVID-19 border restrictions to be lifted’, media release, 3 July 2022. [All COVID-19 border restrictions to be lifted \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/all-covid-19-border-restrictions-to-be-lifted)

<sup>14</sup> Budget 2023-24, Budget Measures, Budget Paper No. 2, page 161. [Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures](https://www.budget.gov.au/2023/p2/p2_161.htm)

<sup>15</sup> Auditor-General Report No. 23 of 2022-23, ‘Procurement of the Permissions Capability’, 7 July 2023: [Procurement of the Permissions Capability \(anao.gov.au\)](https://www.anao.gov.au/publications/procurement-of-the-permissions-capability)