EXECUTIVE MINUTE

on

JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT
REPORT *No.* 447
EPBC Act, Cyber Security, Mail Screening, ABR and Helicopter Program: Review of Auditor-General Reports Nos 32-54 (2013-14)

General comments

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) achieved compliance with the Australian Signals Directorate's top four mitigation strategies in June 2015, as per Recommendation 8 of the JCPAA Audit Report No. 447.

Since the ANAO audit was conducted, an updated version of the Australian Government Information Security Manual (ISM) was released in April 2015 which tightened a number of controls, including those relating to application whitelisting. The ABS is not able to immediately meet one of the new compliance requirements for application whitelisting, and is therefore once again non-compliant.

Under its ongoing security work program the ABS continues to address increasing ISM compliance requirements, and as a result manages continually escalating cyber security risks.

Response to the recommendation(s)

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the seven agencies audited by the ANAO achieve full compliance with the top four mitigation strategies and related controls in the Information Security Manual as soon as possible. Further:
• each agency should produce a clear and detailed plan of necessary activities, including a definitive date of compliance
• agencies that do not expect to achieve full compliance before August 2015 should notify the Committee – the Committee may then seek an explanation of why full compliance is not expected to be achieved, as well as the mitigation strategies the agency has put in place

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Australian Bureau of Statistics

The ABS supports the recommendation.

Since the ANAO reported its audit findings in January 2014, the ABS achieved full compliance with the top four mitigation strategies and related controls in the ISM of:
- application whitelisting;
- patching applications;
- patching operating systems; and
- minimising administrative privileges.

The implementation of the required changes to meet the top four mitigation strategies as they existed at the time of the audit (Jan 2014) were completed in June 2015.

Since the audit, an updated version of the ISM was released in April 2015 which now requires agencies to whitelist Dynamic Link Libraries (DLLs). While this new requirement will provide more effective security, it will be difficult and costly to implement.

The ABS will progressively achieve compliance with this new requirement by:
- prioritising the whitelisting of DLLs for high risk systems;
- updating whitelists for existing applications as they are upgraded under business as usual processes; and
- implementing new whitelists as applications are replaced under the ABS statistical business transformation program that has been funded by the Government over the next five years.

It is expected the implementation of this new requirement will be completed by June 2017. In the interim, the ABS will utilise additional measures (e.g. whitelisted web browsing, restricted use of portable media, strong security policy, endpoint security software, and a security operations centre monitoring events) to mitigate risks.

Signed by

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