

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into Commonwealth Financial Statements 2022–23

Department of Finance

Response to Question on Notice

Hearing of 19 April 2024

Question on Notice 1 (Mr Hill) Proof Hansard page 23

CHAIR: Okay, great. One of the issues—I won't articulate this properly, but you'll get the sentiment—is the question about making sure that the public sector is getting value for the data that we hold, which may involve monetising data. There's a bit of a tension—maybe I'm not thinking about this right—between our default that we should let it all hang out, be transparent and put our big datasets out there so the world can make use of them, and reflecting on whether there are datasets that the taxpayer should be getting some value out of? I'd just be curious about a preliminary comment on that, which might shape our thinking—or maybe it's not an issue.

Mr Fechner: The Department of Finance does data policy within there, but the aspects of the Data Availability and Transparency Act that was passed are about making sure that Australia's data assets are shared for the benefit of Australia and for improvements in research. There is also a large investment from the Commonwealth historically in open data that's managed through the Bureau of Statistics. But there is, obviously, a lot more that Australia feels it can do in terms of uplifting the value that Commonwealth-created data can apply not just in the delivery of our own services but broadly in the economy.

CHAIR: Maybe we will ask Finance to take it on notice from the relevant area and give us a precis on that topic.

Response

The Australian Government's Data and Digital Government Strategy (Strategy) outlines its 2030 vision to deliver simple, secure and connected public services for all people and business through world class data and digital capabilities. This includes maximising the use and value of government-held data to generate benefits for the public through developing evidence-based policy, designing and administering policies and programs, and strengthening research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the Government's programs and policies.

To achieve this, the Government has committed under the Strategy to:

- requiring all government entities to make non-sensitive data open by default in compliance with relevant laws and appropriate privacy, security, and ethical controls for sharing data.
- continuing to invest in new enabling technologies and streamlining governance and data sharing processes to allow greater access to timely and accurate data, and
- encouraging all government entities to build partnerships and share data across the APS and with state and territory governments, the private sector and non-government organisations.

Government entities already make data publicly available through platforms such as data.gov.au and the Digital Atlas of Australia.

The Government is removing barriers to data sharing through the DATA Scheme, established by the *Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022*. The DATA Scheme delivers clear arrangements to build trust and transparency when sharing data and is underpinned by strong safeguards and consistent processes.

Frameworks are being developed to guide government entities' use of data, including a Data Ethics Framework that will guide and support best practice ethical considerations relating to public data use, and a Data Governance Framework to define common rules, processes, and accountabilities including to ensure privacy and compliance of government data is maintained. These frameworks will underpin the responsible use and management of data, including its use in current and future advances in emerging technology such as AI.