



Submission No. 76

Australian Government
**Department of Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts**

our reference

Secretary

Helen Williams AO

Mr Bob Charles, MP
Chairman
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Charles

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON COMPUTER RELATED SECURITY
BREACHES**

I refer to your letter of 16 September 2003 requesting details of any breaches of computer security that have occurred in the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and its associated agencies, since July 1998.

As requested, attached is the information on losses of software and/or hardware, unauthorised access to computer systems, and details of other significant events involving information technology security for the Department. The information does not cover details relating to the National Science and Technology Centre (Questacon) and ScreenSound Australia as these two units were transferred to the Department of Education, Science and training and the Australian Film Commission respectively from 2003.

Should any clarification on the attached information be required the Departmental contact is Mr Frank Nicholas, General Manager, Information, Technology and Facilities Branch on 6271 1412.

Yours Sincerely

Helen Williams

15 October 2003

Losses of software and/or hardware

Since July 1998 seven Departmental laptops have been lost. Five of the laptops were lost as a result of home break-ins, one was lost during official travel and one was also lost from Departmental premises. All laptops were loaded with standard Departmental software, Windows NT/XP and Microsoft Office. Each incident, with the exception of the loss from the Department's premises, was reported to the police at the time of the break-in or loss.

Since July 1998 five Departmental desktop machines have been lost. All five machines were taken from a storeroom during a break in at one of the Department's former premises on 7 July 2002. All desktops were loaded with the standard Departmental software, Windows NT and network access software. The loss was reported to the police at the time of the break-in.

A Palm Pilot was also lost from Departmental premises in December 2002. The loss was not reported to the police.

None of the equipment has been recovered.

Unauthorised access to computer systems

There has been no unauthorised access to core Departmental computer systems. However, the Cultural and Recreational Portal (CARP) was recently compromised and had the front page replaced with a 'defacement' page. This website is not hosted by the Department, but under contract with an external hosting provider.

Other significant events involving information technology security

A serious breach of IT security, involving the loss of a quantity of backup tapes by Telstra Enterprise Services (TES) Pty Ltd, occurred in March 2003. TES is the outsourced Information Technology and Telecommunications (IT&T) service provider for Group 5 agencies of which this department is a member.

The loss of the backup tapes was due to a major breakdown in TES's tape handling procedures. The backup tapes have not been recovered.

Dr Shergold wrote to Dr Ziggy Switkowski, CEO Telstra, to express the Group's extreme concern with the extent of this security breach and the negligence of TES staff in the protection of Commonwealth information. Dr Switkowski assured Group 5 that Telstra and TES were very concerned with the seriousness of the breach and had revised the procedures and processes for backup to ensure that all agency information would be handled appropriately, as is required under the contract. Group 5 is undertaking random inspections of the backup facility.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP), Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) and ASIO were informed immediately of the security incident once TES became aware of it. The

AFP made an initial assessment of the incident and determined that there was no evidence to suggest criminal conduct. DSD will alert the AFP at once if there is any evidence of the tapes being found and used.

Group 5 agencies have also conducted an independent audit to review the circumstances surrounding the event. This confirmed TES's account of the circumstances. We are agreed that the most likely explanation is that the tapes were accidentally disposed of as rubbish.