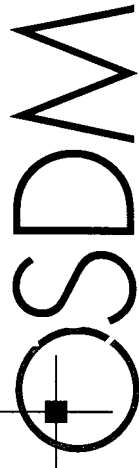


The Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on
Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Suite R1, 116
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into Wireless Broadband



Thank you for the opportunity to forward an interim submission to the Wireless Broadband inquiry, to be supplemented after the 4 June 2002 meeting of the cross-portfolio Commonwealth Spatial Data Management Group (CSDMG).

I have been advised that at the heart of the inquiry into wireless broadband are questions such as "what are wireless broadband technologies?" and "how can they help delivery better communication services to Australian individuals, families, communities and businesses, including those in regional Australia?"

The purpose of this submission, therefore, is to ensure the Committee is aware that:

- wireless technologies applications are used by broadband hungry spatial information services;
- the Commonwealth has a spatial data access and pricing policy
- the CSDMG has been requested to consider matters of relevance to your inquiry when they meet on 4 June 2002, with the aim of forwarding further information related to your inquiry at that time.

Ready and timely access to spatial information – knowing where people and objects are – is essential to Australia’s continued development in the information age. It is a critical tool in informed decision making on key economic, environmental and social issues.

Spatial information can be referenced on a map or stored in a database. When presented its graphical form, it provides immediately understandable information. Applications of spatial information are extremely diverse, including for example mobile location-based services, customer relationship management, environmental monitoring and the management of natural resources, assets, land and emergencies.

The use of positioning systems, such as GPS, enables the tracking and location of objects and individuals in real time. In conjunction with wireless mobile communications, this is providing the catalyst for a market in location-based services that can provide information that could range from the location of the nearest restaurant to optimising emergency services management. The emergence of high bandwidth wireless mobile connections to the Internet is allowing for greater access and innovative sharing of spatial information, further enhancing the possibilities of industry growth.

A number of existing and emerging applications for spatial information are heavily dependent on the availability of competitively priced communications bandwidth. Distributing large spatial images and associated files over the Internet is a high intensity use of the Internet bandwidth. Similarly, the distribution of image data to mobile services in the provision of location based services is a very high intensity use of the mobile network.

Spatial information users are at the high-end of the broadband usage spectrum, so availability of affordable bandwidth is of particularly concern to spatial data users. For example, the Australian Spatial Information Industry Business Association has advised my office that they consider that while for the average consumer of broadband services, Australian prices and availability compare favourable with leading countries, the cost for high-end Australian

bandwidth users, including spatial information industry, is too high. They feel that changes to the broadband-charging regime would improve the competitiveness of the spatial information industries.

Within the Commonwealth some government agencies produce and distribute spatial data as part of their core business, while others utilise spatial data and associated technologies as part of their policy development and program delivery. In September 2001, the Commonwealth announced a Spatial Data Access and Pricing Policy. The policy seeks to maximise the net benefits of the Commonwealth's spatial data investment to the Australian community, by:

1. maximising the benefits to the Commonwealth from the application of spatial data
2. supporting the growth of a private sector spatial information industry in Australia
3. facilitating community access to public sector spatial data

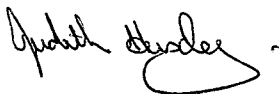
Further details about the Commonwealth's spatial data policy, including the policy coordination arrangements, are attached, with additional information available on the internet at www.osdm.gov.au.

Issues of relevance to both the Commonwealth's spatial data access policy implementation bodies (which include the CSDMG and my office) and your inquiry include:

- the potential for wireless broadband technologies to provide a 'last mile' broadband solution, particularly in rural and regional areas, and to encourage the development and use of broadband content applications;
- likely future national and international trends in the development and use of wireless broadband technologies;
- the benefits and limitations on the use of wireless broadband technologies compared with cable and copper based broadband delivery platforms;
- whether Government should make any changes to the telecommunications;
- regulatory regime to ensure that Australia extracts the maximum economic; and
- social benefits from the use of wireless broadband technologies.

As per my discussion with an inquiry contact officer, I have arranged for the CSDMG to consider spatial data issues of relevance to the inquiry at their 4 June 2002 meeting and will forward any further information to you as soon as possible thereafter.

Yours sincerely



Judy Huxley
General Manager
Commonwealth Office of Spatial Data Management

21 May, 2002



Attachment 1

Summary of the Commonwealth's spatial data policy

Pricing policy

The basic elements of the Commonwealth's spatial data pricing policy are that:

- custodians of fundamental spatial data will make that data freely available through the Internet at no cost, as soon as appropriate technology becomes available within the custodian agency;
- fundamental spatial data distributed as packaged products will be made available at a price not exceeding the marginal cost of transfer;
- fundamental spatial data distributed as customised products will be made available at a price not exceeding the full cost of transfer;
- there will be no restrictions on commercial use or value-added activities related to fundamental spatial data, as defined in the Schedule to the Policy, although copyright may be reserved by the Commonwealth.

Access policy

The Commonwealth's spatial data access policy provides a long-term vision for access to fundamental spatial data, together with an outline strategy for its implementation, which builds upon the facilities currently in place, featuring:

- a choice of access methods for users
- a single Internet entry point for Commonwealth spatial data
- the provision of spatial content for Commonwealth portals
- development of an Australian spatial data directory search engine
- provision of links to all relevant portals
- support for e-commerce and other value-adding services; and

Agencies remain responsible for maintaining their own data access and management systems, but must comply with an agreed set of standards which support the Australian Spatial Data Directory - a key element of the Australian Spatial Data Infrastructure.

Spatial data policy coordination arrangements

The three tiers of the Commonwealth's Spatial Data policy coordination arrangements comprise:

A Commonwealth Spatial Data Policy Executive (CSDPE), with membership generally at the portfolio Deputy-Secretary/agency CEO level from across the Commonwealth.

A Commonwealth Spatial Data Management Group (CSDMG), with membership generally at the senior executive officer level from interested departments and agencies across the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM), a small project office which is the CSDPE and CSDMG operational body.

The role of the CSDPE is to report annually on implementation of the policy and to review and evaluate the efficacy of: the data schedule; the access and pricing arrangements; the arrangements for custodianship and sponsorship; the annual workplan; and the coordination arrangements.

The role of the CSD MG is to monitor the implementation of the policy; prepare and oversee the implementation of the annual workplan; provide advice on changes to the data schedule, access and pricing, custodians and sponsors; provide advice on spatial data user needs; maintain linkages with

major Commonwealth initiatives; and represent the Commonwealth in appropriate spatial data coordination forums.

The role of the OSDM is to provide administrative support to CSDPE and CSDMG; manage the workplan and working groups established by CSDMG; facilitate sharing of experience and expertise between Commonwealth agencies; provide technical advice to the CSDMG; promote efficient use of Commonwealth spatial data assets; represent the Commonwealth in the negotiation of whole-of-government spatial data access arrangements with the States and Territories; and foster the development of a private sector spatial information industry.

The Commonwealth's spatial data policy principles, listed in Attachment 2, underpin decision-making processes within the CSDPE, the CSDMG and the OSDM. Further details about the Commonwealth's spatial data policy are provided on the internet at www.osdm.gov.au.



Attachment 2

Commonwealth spatial data policy principles

Community Access

All sectors of the community have a right to easy, efficient and equitable access to government information under conditions that ensure that technology, data formats, institutional arrangements, location, costs and conditions do not inhibit their use.

Access and pricing arrangements must support the objectives of the Commonwealth in relation to online service delivery.

Exchange of Data

This Policy encourages the two-way exchange of spatial data between Commonwealth departments and agencies.

The Commonwealth must be able to enter into whole-of-government, multi-lateral arrangements with State and Territory governments, for the exchange of spatial data to maximise mutual benefit.

Net Benefits

Pricing decisions must be based on maximising net benefits to the community arising from better decision making and ready community access to quality spatial data.

Efficiency of Commonwealth Spatial Data programs

To maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commonwealth's investment in spatial data, it is necessary to adopt a whole-of-government approach to sharing data and avoidance of duplication of effort and expenditure.

Uniformity and Consistency

The efficiency and effectiveness of the Commonwealth's investment in spatial data is increased when data conforms to common standards and there is a consistent approach to access and pricing across all government agencies.

Copyright and Use

The Commonwealth Government will retain copyright in any spatial dataset that is made available to another party, even if no licence fees or royalties are sought, and even if the other party is extended very liberal rights in the use of the data. Commonwealth copyright should be explicitly noted in relation to the making available of datasets.

Data Licence

All provision of spatial data under this Policy shall be accompanied by a licence clearly setting out the conditions under which the data may be used, the rights and responsibilities of the data provider, and the rights and responsibilities of the data receiver. The licence will require the user to acknowledge that copyright over the fundamental data is vested in the Commonwealth and to absolve the Commonwealth from any liability arising out of the subsequent use of the data or a product developed from the data, and should seek to encourage accuracy in reproduction. The licence should also require licencees to report their value-adding activity to enable the Government to assess the effectiveness of this Policy.

Custodianship

Agencies must adopt best practices in managing data and must follow the principles of custodianship established by ANZLIC.

Standards

Fundamental spatial data must conform to international and national standards, as identified by the CSDMG.

Industry Development

Access and pricing arrangements must facilitate development of an innovative and competitive spatial information industry in Australia.

Rights and Obligations

The rights of the individual and the Commonwealth in relation to confidentiality, privacy, security and intellectual property must be preserved. Government legislation and Australia's international obligations must be complied with.

International Initiatives

Access and pricing arrangements shall facilitate participation in international activities that further Australia's national interest.