INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT AND INTEGRITY OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Government Response

1   In general, how have Government agencies responded to standards established by Standards Australia?

The Communications, IT and eCommerce (CITeC) area within Standards Australia has a long and extensive history of interaction with a wide spectrum of Commonwealth and State Government agencies. These activities include: the usage of standards by Government agencies; representation of agencies in Standards Australia committees; and the funding of specific standards development projects within Standards Australia. Government representation has provided large user and regulator representatives who have been an integral aspect of Standards Australia committees. This representation has allowed different branches of government to have a tangible and immediate impact on the standardization process. The Attorney-General's Department, Australia Post, Department of Defense, NSW Police, Reserve Bank of Australia, Australian Customs Service, Department of Finance and Administration, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and the National Office for the Information Economy are some of the agencies represented on CITeC committees. The committee involvement of many of these agencies has translated into implementing Australian standards within their work processes. There are a number of instances when Standards Australia has worked in collaboration with government agencies to produce standards relevant to their particular areas of interest. Recently, the following agencies have provided funding to support standardization activities:

- Australian Federal Police and the Attorney-General's Department – development of an electronic evidence and computer forensics handbook

- Foreign Affairs –support for Australian representation in the international standardization of biometrics technologies

- NOIE – development of an ebXML registry and toolkit to provide a national framework for business-to-business messaging interoperability

- National Archives – development of electronic records management and archives standards.

Microsoft

2   The submission from Microsoft Australia outlines its approach to standards. This involves outlining broad goals for information integrity and security, allowing the details of implementation to be determined on a case-by-case basis and using the best and most appropriate technology for the particular set of circumstances. The submission also states Microsoft's commitment to open extensible standards. Would you comment on this approach?

The nature of Information Technology is one of constant and rapid changes. Given this, standardization within the industry has to accommodate these dynamics while setting industry practices. While flexibility is required to incorporate rapid changes in technology and provide room for

innovative thinking, standards should not lose sight of setting guidelines that provide a common base of measurement or accountability. Implementing processes for information integrity and security does have to incorporate the inherent differences vested within different circumstances. But, these implementations have to work within clearly defined and understood guidelines. While open extensible standards have a place in industry, it is vital that in most instances standards set guidelines and good practice methodologies that are stable and accepted by industry. This would allow for customers and all industry players to access and gauge the veracity of the implementation of information integrity and security within an organization or a project.

Open Standards

3   The submission from AUUG Inc. recommends the use of standard security protocols to maximize availability and interoperability. It also states that using standards avoids problems with data stored in proprietary formats becoming inaccessible due to patents, trade secrets, or just lack of good documentation. Would you please comment?

Use of standard security protocols leads to the provision of interoperability and uniformity within industry. While in many instances proprietary formats are used within the information technology industry, use of standard protocols could mitigate the future inaccessibility of stored information. Standard protocols provide data formats and techniques that are in most cases independent of patented technologies and trade secrets. Open consensus based international standards produced through organizations such as the ISO and IEC are the most widely recognized and respected guides in the world for information technology developers and managers.

Victorian Electronic Records System (VERS)

4   The submission from the Victorian Government recommends that electronic records be converted into one or more long-term preservation formats to protect them from the obsolescence of the applications used to read and write them. The Victorian Electronic Record Strategy has recommended characteristics that distinguish long term preservation formats, and their Final Report recommends Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF) as a practical example. Has Standards Australia given consideration to a long-term preservation format?

The long term preservation of electronic records can be achieved in a number of ways: preservation of whole operating environments in original form, (including hardware and software); transfer of data to long life storage mediums; transfer of data to formats that can be read by a number of devices. At present, Adobe PDF is a good example of this final example, and provides a hardware independent format that is stable and relatively compact. Standards Australia has not examined the use of PDF as an Australian standard since it proprietary in nature. But, Standards Australia does use it for publishing Australian Standards and other documents electronically.

There is a likelihood of a Standards Australia Committee examining XML (extensible markup language) as a long-term preservation format.

Committee IT-21: Records Management Systems could be considering strategies and methodologies that would assist in the long-term preservation of records. ISO 15489 – Information and Documentation – Records Management, would be a starting point and reference, where specifications could be built upon the frameworks provided in the ISO document.