John R Smyrk
BEc(Hons), MEc(OR), (Monash); MACS Certified Management Consultant

Customs CCF Issues paper

1 Purpose of paper:

To summarise the main issues to arise in John Smyrk's review of CCF. After discussion, this paper will provide the foundation of a formal report on the review.

2 Central findings.

Because of critical gaps in baseline documentation, it is not possible for key stakeholders in CCF to:

- Establish a meaningful picture of its status.
- Make optimal trade-offs between the scope of the remaining project, project cost and achievement of target milestones.
- Form reliable views about the conduct of the project.
- Make effective decisions on key issues.

2.1 Observation:

There are critical gaps in the framework for CCF which are constraining the ability of Customs to manage the exercise. These most significant of these gaps arise in the following (partly interlinked) areas:

- The project plan: the scoping statement, the workplan, the schedule of milestones, the budget, the resource plan, the issues register and the risk register.
- Tracking and reporting tools: progress assessment, budget assessment, issues management and risk management.
- Governance: the forum in which above-the-line oversighting of CCF takes place.
- Make effective decisions on key issues.

2.2 Conclusions:

Because of gaps in the CCF project framework, it is not possible for key stakeholders in CCF to:

- Establish a complete picture of its status.
- Make optimal trade-offs between the scope of the remaining project, project cost and achievement of target milestones.
- Form reliable views about the conduct of the project.

This is having a significant impact on the overall effectiveness of management decision-making.

There are a number of possible consequences of this situation—of which the most serious concern CCF outputs. These could be delayed or so reduced in quality that they may not be able to support the overall objectives of CMR. CCF costs are also likely to be higher than necessary—although it is difficult to say by how much.

2.3 Recommendations.

2.3.1 Scope:

It is recommended that action be taken on three fronts:

1.   A revised project business plan be assembled by mid-June.

2.   A tracking/reporting mechanism be established by the end of June.

3.   Refinements be made to the project governance model by the end of June.

These are all discussed in more detail below.   In each case it is recommended that a "minimalist" framework be put in place—even if that means ignoring PRINCE-2 guidelines. A decision can be taken later about progressing to a more detailed framework.

2.3.2 Rationale:

The recommendations are intended to achieve a number of objectives:

- To provide key stakeholders with a reliable decision-making model of the project.
- To assemble an on-going clear picture of the status of the exercise—especially concerning the time and cost involved in effecting delivery of all its outputs.
- To enable key stakeholders to make judgements about the management of CCF.

2.3.3 Implementation:

The recommendations should be implemented by a small team involving both Evonne Slingsby's group and senior management—all working to a simple plan outlined below.

2.3.4 Impact:

Implementation of these recommendations will require a significant re-allocation of resources over the next six weeks, and then additional above-the-line resources over the life of the project.

In addition to staff from Evonne Slingsby's area, the short-term work will require appreciable below-the-line resources.

It may be necessary to reschedule existing committed below-the-line work so that this can be done.

3 The current situation.

3.1 Project scope:

A project's scope is determined by its outputs. While some of the outputs that the CCF team is to deliver are well-known and clearly identified, others are uncertain. The walk-in centres are a case in point. The status of these is not known to the team, and yet they no longer form part of the current scope of CMR.

CCF does not appear to have a formal Scoping Statement that has been signed-off by the team. For purposes of this discussion, a Scoping Statement takes the form of a *schedule of deliverables.* This list of outputs with delivery dates—broken out by stage. (As currently structured, CCF recognised three stages—in the form of Releases—but it may be desirable later to adopt others).

Inasmuch as CCF is a sub-project of CMR, then the scope of CCF must recognise the scope of CMR.

Without a scoping statement it is impossible to plan with any confidence.

There will always be additional outputs that can't be decided until further work is done, but there are accepted ways of dealing with that type of uncertainty in projects including:

- Acknowledging decisions on scope in the WBS.

- Classifying outputs as in-scope, out-of-scope or to-be-decided in the Scoping Statement.

3.2 WBS and milestones:

CCF does not appear to have a comprehensive Work Breakdown Structure, even though WBSs appear to exist for various sub-projects (such as those being undertaken by vendors). This is partly attributable to the absence of a Scoping Statement. As a consequence, the schedule of milestones is incomplete and that an overall budget can't be set. There is some confusion within the team between "milestones" and "deadlines". CCF recognises a set of imposed *deadlines,* but has no WBS-based schedule of milestones.

Without a reliable schedule of milestones it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to manage a project.

3.3 Project governance:

CCF falls under a framework of IT governance that deals with both projects and operational matters (such as the application of standards).

There are various forums where the status of the project is reviewed—but the agendas of these meetings appear to include both above-the-line and below-the-line items. A highly desirable principle of project management is that there be a single forum of review that is confined to above-the-line matters.

The above-the-line roles of a number of existing forums could be consolidated into one. This could be handled either in a new CCF-specific forum, or (more desirably) in any existing CMR Project Board. The existing Steering Committee involves vendors and so is unsuited to filling this role.

The person held accountable by Customs for the eventual realisation of target outcomes is the Project Owner. Because the focus of CCF is CMR, CCF appears not to have its own target outcomes. This implies that the owner of CMR is the owner of CCF.

4 Recommendations.

4.1 A project business plan:

A (retrospective) project business plan should be assembled covering all CCF outputs. This should include the following components:

- Stakeholder analysis (based on the current model for CMR).

- Schedule of CCF deliverables—both delivered and committed—with the customers for each identified.

- A WBS.

- A schedule of milestones (recognising about 60 events for later tracking).

- Interdependencies with related projects (especially with CMR and the work of the "implementation" teams) by milestone and output.

- An output-based budget by milestone.

- A resource plan by team-member.
- Issues Register.
- Risk Register.
- A quality management plan.

The Project Business Plan will have to be "cascaded" down to the vendors—who will then need to confirm/revise their own briefs.

4.2 A tracking/reporting mechanism:

A tracking/reporting mechanism should be assembled involving two forums discussed in the next Section. This mechanism should involve just four components:

- Progress status against scheduled milestones.
- Budget status against scheduled milestones.
- Key issues.
- Critical risks.

4.3 Refinements to the project governance model:

Three substantive changes to the existing project governance model are recommended:

- A "Project Board" should be assembled—taking into its charter all tracking/monitoring roles currently assigned to other forums. It will also be necessary to supplement those roles with some additional accountabilities—related to the reporting "package" defined in the previous section. The Board should be made up of a small group of senior managers who have direct accountability for CCF. If the assumptions about project ownership made in the Section entitled "The current situation" are right, then the owner of CMR will be the Chair of the CCF Project Board.
- The CCF Project Manager should be made accountable for all above-the-line management and reporting, but all project administration should be handled on his behalf by Evonne Slingsby. This means separating out the functions of project management and project administration.
- The project team should conduct a weekly above-the-line meeting to review a weekly version of the reporting "package" defined in the previous section.

4.4 An implementation plan:

To implement these recommendations, the following approach is suggested:

1. Assemble the project business plan and templates for the regular reporting package. This is probably best done in a series of workshops involving all key players. The plan is owned by the CCF Project Owner. The Plan is to be signed-off by the CCF Project Manager—as his working brief. The work involved in preparation of the plan will be facilitated by Evonne Slingsby's area—who will also prepare the baseline documentation. This should be completed by Fri-2—Jun.
2. Institute the recommended changes to the Project Governance Model and institute the two Forums. The new arrangements should be in place by Fri-27-Jun.