

Commonwealth Spatial Data Committee

CSDC Secretariat:
Scrivener Building,
Dunlop Court
Fern Hill Park
BRUCE ACT 2617

Postal address:
PO Box 2
BELCONNEN ACT 2616
Ph: (02) 6201 4321
Fax: (02) 6201 4366
Email: **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

URL: **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

31 March 1999

Dr N. Byron
Presiding Commissioner
ESD Inquiry
Productivity Commission
LB 2 Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Dear Dr Byron

Submission on the draft report on the Implementation of Ecologically Sustainable Development by Commonwealth Departments and Agencies

The Commonwealth Spatial Data Committee is the peak interdepartmental coordinating body addressing spatial data matters affecting the Commonwealth. (More information on the Committee's objectives, role, structure, membership and initiatives is available on the Internet at the URL address given above).

'Spatial data' is information that is geo-referenced. In other words it is linked to a specific location on Earth and it can be shown on a map. Most of the data required to assess or monitor ecologically sustainable development would be considered to be spatial data.

The Commonwealth Spatial Data Committee has noted with interest the Productivity Commission's draft report on the Implementation of Ecologically Sustainable Development by Commonwealth Departments and Agencies. It was particularly interested in Chapter 7 "Improving coordination, monitoring and feedback" and the comments on the need for better information collection. It also noted the concern for better data availability, data comparability and directories of data.

The main reason for the creation of the CSDC in 1992 was to address just such issues across the Commonwealth in respect to spatial data management.

One of the CSDC's stated objectives is to maximise the benefits of spatial information by:

- enabling the effective and efficient use and wide dissemination of spatial data through adoption of common procedures, standards and criteria; and
- avoiding duplication of effort and cost in the collection and management of spatial data.

We note that this objective is consistent with the data requirements identified in the Productivity Commission's report.

A major recent initiative of the CSDC in addressing this objective is the development of the Australian Spatial Data Infrastructure (ASDI). The CSDC and the Australia New Zealand Land Information Council (ANZLIC) have been working closely together, actively promoting the concept of the ASDI to provide fundamental spatial data needed to support sound decision-making by government specifically and the community in general.

The primary objective of the ASDI is to ensure that spatial data users will be able to acquire consistent datasets to meet their requirements, even though the data are collected and maintained within different administrative boundaries and by different agencies. This national infrastructure will help ensure that all custodian agencies concern themselves with the national interest, thereby maximising the benefits of government investment in spatial data.

The ASDI encourages lead agencies and sponsors to ensure consistency in standards for particular fundamental datasets. It is appropriate that the lead agencies are subject matter specialists that understand the issues.

The Commonwealth, as a major producer and user of government spatial data, has a key role in the implementation of the ASDI. Commonwealth spatial datasets and data requirements are important elements in the ASDI's development. The Commonwealth therefore has accepted leadership responsibility in coordinating the development of the ASDI and cooperating with states and territories (the source of many datasets required by the Commonwealth), and in providing access to seamless fundamental datasets spanning the continent.

Lead responsibility for ASDI implementation in the Commonwealth was assigned to the Australian Surveying and Land Information Group (AUSLIG) in the 1996 Budget statement. No additional funding was provided at that time however implementation is being undertaken within existing resources. Additional funding would accelerate the progress. Despite this, AUSLIG and other CSDC member agencies have initiated several projects to support the implementation of elements of the ASDI.

CSDC has now developed its work program around ASDI implementation. Several current initiatives are outlined below:

- A dataset compliance model and testing procedure has been developed to audit the quality of datasets so that they meet an accepted standard before being accepted into the ASDI framework. This process will improve the standard of fundamental data in the ASDI.
- The Australian Spatial Data Directory (ASDD), is an on-line 'yellow pages' that lists 'metadata' for datasets available from Commonwealth, state and territory agencies. The metadata (information about available data) is fully compliant with metadata guidelines developed by ANZLIC. CSDC is committed to populating the directory with Commonwealth spatial metadata. The Internet address for the ASDD is **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- On-line Web mapping will provide a component of the ASDI Spatial Data Clearinghouse. Several Commonwealth agencies have already developed some on-line mapping capabilities. Australia has been nominated as the *lead nation* on Web Mapping on behalf of the Global spatial data infrastructure technical community.
- The ASDI Partnerships Program is an initiative of AUSLIG to provide grants to enable selected organisations to develop key spatial datasets as part of the development of the ASDI.

The CSDC sees all these activities as helping to address some of the critical information issues identified under "*Coordinating and expanding information collection*" on page 119 of the Productivity Commission's draft report.

There is some concern in CSDC regarding Recommendation 7.4 in the Productivity Commission's report - "*Data collection relating to ESD issues should be rationalised to avoid*

duplication of effort and coverage. The ABS should be given the major responsibility for developing, in consultation with stakeholders, standard classifications and consistent measurement protocols for collection of state of the environment data and other sustainability factors. The current work of the ABS in this area should be given a high priority”.

We strongly agree with the sentiment of the first sentence. As previously stated the ASDI being developed through CSDC, will improve access to and usability of spatial data for managing the environment and other related purposes.

The second sentence is seen as a related but separate issue. The ABS, as Australia's central statistical authority, has an acknowledged role in the development of standard classifications for statistical reporting and for developing statistical measurement protocols. It must also be acknowledged however that other Commonwealth agencies (notably Environment Australia, the Bureau of Rural Sciences, the Australian Geological Survey Organisation, the National Land & Water Resources Audit and CSIRO) have expertise in practical scientific monitoring techniques. They are also responsible for supporting policy analysis of issues related to their portfolio interests. Environment Australia has existing responsibilities with regard to state-of-the-environment reporting. ABS, Environment Australia, BRS, AGSO, CSIRO and the NLWRA are all active members of the CSDC.

Recognising the interests of all Commonwealth agencies it is suggested that the ASDI initiative under CSDC coordination is a key component in the development of spatial standards and the coordination of data collection programs.

Yours sincerely

Peter Boersma
Secretary, CSDC

for

Drew Clarke
Chair, Commonwealth Spatial Data Committee

Encl.

Commonwealth Spatial Data Committee Annual Report 1997-98