



Australian Library and
Information Association

Submission in response to the Productivity Commission Data Availability and Use Issues Paper

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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

Our Members include school libraries, public libraries, special libraries (including government, law, health, corporate), academic and research libraries, TAFE libraries, major collecting institutions and the information professionals who work in them.

2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission Data Availability and Use Issues Paper. Library and information professionals work with data every day:

We capture data through our library management systems. This gives us raw information about usage, behaviours, borrowing patterns for print and eresources. We use this data to help us shape service delivery, collection policies, programs and services. It is also of interest to publishers, content producers and aggregators, but sharing information is subject to issues of data ownership, permissions and privacy concerns.

We help store data and make it accessible, for example through our work building and managing research repositories in universities, and through the production of industry statistics.

We help make data discoverable by aggregating information; using existing, and creating new platforms; adding and harvesting metadata.

We help others find the data they need. We use our skills to find information for clients and we train individuals to carry out their own searches more effectively.

We contribute to data policy discussions. Library and information professionals have long been advocates for open access, making research funded by government freely available to the taxpayers who paid for it. While the Australian Government Public Data Policy Statement¹ of December 2015 is a welcome move towards open access principles, we would like to see experiments with open access models in Australia to identify ways of sharing important findings with the broader research community. Successful models would provide recompense for the contribution of publishers and aggregators while mitigating the often prohibitive expense of publishing fees, especially for early career researchers.

Our clients include governments, businesses and individuals from a broad cross-section of society. For example, health information professionals serve policy makers, health workers and the public; public library staff are often asked to advise families and individuals about privacy issues, for example in the area of cybersafety; school libraries support information literacy and digital literacy for students and teachers in schools; government libraries provide data services for politicians and their advisers, and university libraries help manage their institutions' research output.

We have identified privacy as an important issue for clients of all kinds of libraries worldwide. The 2013 *IFLA Trend Report*², published by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, highlighted privacy and data protection as one of the five key themes for the profession moving forward.

“The boundaries of privacy and data protection will be redefined

Expanding data sets held by governments and companies will support the advanced profiling of individuals, while sophisticated methods of monitoring and filtering communications data will make tracking those individuals cheaper and easier. Serious consequences for individual privacy and trust in the online world could be experienced.”

While we are aware of the potential risks to individuals' privacy, mitigation strategies exist and we are also aware of the benefits of releasing data into the world.

On a grand scale, the work of library and information professionals in making data more accessible and discoverable supports a stronger evidence-based approach to policy development in government and greater innovation through humanities and science research initiatives. At a less macro level, making data available through libraries can support small businesses and entrepreneurs with new product development and it can help individuals with their own projects. Family historians, for examples, are dedicated users of digitised newspapers and local history collections.

¹ https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/aust_govt_public_data_policy_statement_1.pdf

² <http://trends.ifla.org/node/309>

3. Questions on high value public sector data

What public sector datasets should be considered high-value data to the: business sector; research sector; academics; or the broader community?

What characteristics define high-value datasets?

What benefits would the community derive from increasing the availability and use of public sector data?

There are some obvious definitions for high value data, for example, original, unique datasets relating to priority areas such as health and library and information professionals have a long history of collection management and curation of print and digital resources.

However, in our experience the value is not always readily identified in advance and unanticipated outcomes can be derived from what might not be considered high priority data. These are two examples from cultural institutions:

Old designs finding new applications

National Library of Australia, Trove (http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-17/world-first-3d-printed-hand-prosthesis-inspired-by-1845-design/7032736?WT.ac=statenews_act)

There many stories about the positive impact digital access has had on the lives of individuals and there are a number of examples of how digital access has led to important scientific and policy outcomes. An excellent example of this is the development of the world's first 3D-printed prosthetic hand, based on an 1845 design. This breakthrough would not have happened without the original data provided by the Trove portal.

Rediscovering lost customs

Ara Irititja (<http://www.irititja.com/>) and National Film and Sound Archive

The Ara Irititja Project is a model for Indigenous archives in Australia and internationally. It shows how to deal respectfully with cultural heritage and it supports the maintenance of first languages. The National Film and Sound Archive identifies and digitises relevant holdings in consultation with the Indigenous communities and provides copies to those communities. The community is involved in both the provision of access to this material by third parties and the identification of highly sensitive cultural recordings which require specific community control. In some instances repatriated material provides the only known record of customs since lost to those communities. Copies of films made in the 1930s and '40s by mission staff on Mornington Island were returned to the community and found to contain records of lost customs including canoe making techniques, now reintroduced for younger generations to master.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the definition of high-value data be used with caution to avoid the loss of serendipitous discoveries for the benefit of business, research, academics and the broader community.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that library and information professionals' expertise in curation decision-making be considered and that their role be explicitly noted.

4. Questions on collection and release of public sector data

What are the main factors currently stopping government agencies from making their data available?

For the cultural agencies, the issue is primarily about funding. The skills and resources exist within the organisations, but the cumulative effect of budget cuts, especially the efficiency dividend for national cultural institutions, means that there is not the capacity within an already overstretched staff to increase the focus on data and digital access.

Government library and information services are also short on capacity, and there is the added difficulty of maintaining records and ensuring data is not lost during machinery of government changes.

The Australian Government Public Data Policy Statement supports the open access principles and we would like to see this extended to experiments with open access models to identify ways of sharing important data and findings with the broader research community, while recompensing content generators and publishers, where appropriate.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the national cultural institutions are made exempt from future efficiency dividends.

Recommendation 4: We recommend the ringfencing of Department budgets for data management and access.

Recommendation 5: We recommend initiating trials of open access models to support the Australian Government Public Data Policy Statement.

How could governments use their own data collections more efficiently and effectively?

There is an upfront investment cost but removing barriers to data access and reuse will lead to efficiencies in the longer term. However, while the responsibility for exploiting the benefits of data collections remains within individual Departments and agencies, current demands on staff time will usually take precedence over a more strategic approach to data access and the result will inevitably be piecemeal.

By creating the Digital Transformation Office, with the explicit support of the then Minister of Communications, now Prime Minister, the Coalition Government created the impetus for all Departments and agencies to examine their approach to e-government. A similarly high profile for the Public Data Policy Statement, as part of the National Innovation and Science

Agenda, can be achieved through the explicit support of, and endorsement by, Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Recommendation 6: We recommend making data management and access a priority at the highest level of government.

What specific government initiatives (whether Australian Government, state, territory or local government, or overseas jurisdictions) have been particularly effective in improving data access and use?

The data.gov.au site has been enormously beneficial as a resource for library and information professionals and their clients. The Australian National Data Service³ is another essential resource, which promotes data access and reuse, and provides programs with respect to research data management, which help upskill library and information professionals.

Two outstanding examples of cultural data initiatives at a national level are Trove⁴ and the Atlas of Living Australia⁵. Trove has an average of 55,000 unique users per day and more than 20 million unique users per annum, while the Atlas of Living Australia has had more than 12000 active users since it began in 2010.

5. Questions on data linkage

Which datasets, if linked or coordinated across public sector agencies, would be of high value to the community, and how would they be used?

The GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Historical Societies) peak bodies formed the Australian Digital Access to Collections Conversation in 2015. The primary purpose was to clarify a shared vision and approach to digital access to Australia's cultural collections through the development of a national framework. This has been supported by the Ministry for the Arts, with a Catalyst grant. The secondary purpose was to enable dialogue and nurture partnerships across all three tiers of government and with the private and not-for-profit sectors.

Through this initiative we are able to work on linked data, which will expose Australia's rich cultural heritage to national and international audiences, while reducing duplication of effort and increasing the impact of the results. Trove, the Atlas of Living Australia and Victorian Collections⁶ have been identified as three models that effectively support data linkage across all levels of government.

Which rules, regulations or policies create unnecessary or excessive barriers to linking datasets?

³ <http://www.ands.org.au/>

⁴ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

⁵ <http://www.ala.org.au/>

⁶ <https://victoriancollections.net.au/>

Copyright is an issue for the collecting institutions. The law as it stands means that there is perpetual copyright in unpublished works such as diaries, letters and manuscripts. This results in millions of items being locked away in collections.

The draft amendments to the *Copyright Act 1968*⁷ released in December 2015 include simplifying the Act by “aligning the terms of protection for unpublished works with published works to give libraries, archives and other cultural institutions greater opportunities to use, and provide public access to, unpublished works.”

In addition, the draft Productivity Commission report on Intellectual Property⁸ included the following recommendation:

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 4.1

The Australian Government should amend the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth) so the current terms of copyright protection apply to unpublished works.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that proposed amendments to the Copyright Act, aligning the terms of protection for unpublished works with published works, be presented to the Parliament.

How can Australia’s government agencies improve their sharing and linking of public sector data? What lessons or examples from overseas should be considered?

While it is tempting to look overseas for examples such as Europeana⁹ and the Digital Public Library of America¹⁰, in truth, the National Library of Australia's Trove platform for digital access to cultural collections has been a world leader and remains an exemplar for cultural institutions across the globe.

7. Questions on privacy protection

How can individuals’ and businesses’ confidence and trust in the way data is used be maintained and enhanced?

Libraries are trusted intermediaries and can be a useful communication channel. In the community, public library staff already handle in excess of 8.3 million requests for information every year, many of them relating to government form-filling. We expect the federal government’s commitment to Digital Transformation to increase the number of requests for one-on-one assistance still further.

In order to support their communities, libraries will need advance information about data collection; the opportunity to provide input into the collection methods, helping to identify

⁷ <https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/updating-australias-copyright-laws>

⁸ <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/intellectual-property/draft>

⁹ <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/en>

¹⁰ <https://dp.la/>

issues and solutions; print and online resources; staff training and a fair financial investment to cover the increased workload.

Recommendation 8: Governments recognise the potential for libraries as a trusted intermediary and communications channel, and invest in appropriate resourcing for the library network to fulfil this role.

6. Summary of recommendations

ALIA makes eight recommendations in response to the Productivity Commission Data Availability and Use issues paper:

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the definition of high-value data be used with caution to avoid the loss of serendipitous discoveries for the benefit of business, research, academics and the broader community.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that library and information professionals' expertise in curation decision-making be considered and that their role be explicitly noted.

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