AUSTRALIAN SPATIAL CONSORTIUM
DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

PURPOSE

The Australian Spatial Consortium has been formed to help Australia address those issues that can (best and only) be tackled through partnerships across the sectors, existing institutional frameworks and that are demonstrably needed in the national interest.

The Australian Spatial Consortium is designed to ‘value add’ to the existing spatial organisations and their individual outcomes. To be successful, it will be additive and not duplicative or detract from the current success of the present organisations and structures involved in spatial information.

The purpose of this document is to provide a progress report to the stakeholders of the Australian spatial information community on the identification of significant issues that will help the Steering Committee of the Australian Spatial Consortium develop its strategic plan.

The Steering Committee of the Australian Spatial Consortium has been progressively seeking the advice of eminent Australians and lead thinkers with a range of backgrounds, including health, energy, transport, finance, economics, politics, social science and ICT.

This paper provides a summary of the issues so far raised as a result of these consultations. The ASC Steering Committee will continue to develop its thoughts on its strategic directions through further consultation over the coming months.

Should you wish to comment on this paper, you are encouraged to do so. Please contact any one of the ASC Steering Committee members (listed at the back of this document). For more information about the ASC, please go to: www.spatialconsortium.org.au

MOST SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS SO FAR

1. The importance of seeing Information as a critical component of Australia’s Infrastructure

The Australian Government has recently created a $20 billion Infrastructure Fund. It has done this because there is widespread recognition that much of Australia’s infrastructure is in decline or is inadequate for the needs of the nation.
The ASC is of the view that plans to allocate this infrastructure funding should be based on sound planning information, including spatial information, and that the cost of assembling this information needs to be factored into these investments. There is real merit in the Infrastructure Fund recognising the need to treat information as a legitimate component of the fund, particularly where that information was critically required to support the decisions of the Fund.

2. **The need for a public benefit test to ensure the optimum allocation of public monies to promote improved social inclusion and equity**

Australia needs a mechanism to determine what government-funded information (including intellectual property and knowledge) is to be made publically available and under what conditions. A genuine public interest test is required. Such a test would seek to determine the best means of use of the information to maximise public benefit. The options for the use of publically funded information include access made freely available in the public domain, restricted access subject to licences and pricing, and use within government agencies only.

Australia needs to draw more effectively on the existing social research on this issue and to commission further research in order to develop the public interest and public benefit test. It is especially important to resolve the question of what’s best for Australia; free information or free access (with a fee upon use). Social inclusion will be better addressed when the nation creates a better understanding of the nature of the problem and the consequences of alternative solutions.

Australia needs to create new partnerships between government, companies and with individuals and local communities to significantly improve social inclusion. These partnerships would create a rich information flow that would substantially improve our knowledge levels and the wisdom of our decision making. Australia needs better mechanisms to share the information and to create new information.

3. **The need to develop information frameworks and information markets so that new ways can be found to create pathways for the exchange of knowledge**

There was a general consensus that Australia needs to build a framework with new models for stimulating the creation, provisioning and use of information. The framework should ensure that there are incentives to for companies to create value-added products on the back of these government data. It should be noted that free data can lead to poor quality data with inconsistencies and gaps that end up imposing unwanted costs on the users. So this issue needs careful consideration.

The Forum noted that Australia needed to get a better understanding of the role of ‘crowd sourcing’ and the role of standards in developing information markets.
4. **The need to value intangibles, and in particular intellectual property, on the balance sheets of Australian organisations**

Since 2006 the International Accounting Standards have applied to Australia and they state that intangible assets generated by the company cannot be recognised as assets in the balance sheet. Given that Australia will become an increasingly knowledge-driven country these accounting standards do not necessarily serve to provide the best drivers for the generation of new knowledge within business.

The national accounts are deficient because they do not include an assessment of the value of intangibles, intellectual property and human capital.

The implications for Australia in not clearly valuing intangibles, and in particular knowledge capital, warrants further examination.

5. **Evaluator-General**

Australia could consider creating an ‘Evaluator-General’ position for the purpose of ensuring that due consideration be given to the method by which Australia would evaluate the effectiveness of proposed policies or programs prior to their implementation. The position would also be responsible for undertaking an evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy or program following its implementation, and would do so in an intellectually rigorous and thoughtful way. The position of Evaluator-General could be aligned with that of the Auditor-Generals.

6. **The Importance of ‘Place Management’**

Policy and strategy formulation in Australia too often ignores the importance of local place management. Unless there is a clear connection between both ends of the spectrum we risk the continued development of policies and strategies that fail to produce the desired outcomes in the specific communities that they are intended to help.

7. **Good information in the market place**

Australian markets still do not have access to good information in many instances. A greater investment in assembling this information would aid the more rapid and effective development of these markets.

8. **Social inclusion and social exclusion**

The availability of information to the socially disadvantaged is a crucial determinant of the size of the pool of the socially disadvantaged. Moreover it should not be assumed that
modern internet-based technologies permit the socially excluded to become included. More simple mechanisms for the provisioning of information may be needed.

9. **Good public policy needs to address three key issues**

These are; firstly the vision, secondly the strategy settings and priorities, and thirdly the market incentives. Moreover the investment plans need to operate in relatively small, discrete chunks to ensure success.

10. **‘Second tracking’ business processes**

This is the development of alternative mechanisms for bringing together the private sector, the government and academia to work together. Getting the key players in the same room makes a huge difference. The ASC is an example of a ‘Second track’ business forum.

11. **Australia is particularly good at:**

Elections, land titling (through the Torrens system), democracy, distance learning and national statistics. There is merit in concentrating on the issues, and others in the same class, to help us become a world leader, and in doing so the generate export revenue.

**CONCLUSION**

The Australian Spatial Consortium will continue to develop its thoughts on the issues of national significance where spatial information can play a crucial role. This will help it determine strategies to better influence government policy making, formulation of market drivers, investment in infrastructure and other ways to help Australia develop ever more effectively.
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