

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission of Audit provides an opportunity to unlock the economic value of Government registers – both the registers themselves, and the information they hold.

Veda, best known as Australia's leading provider of credit reporting information, is also an information economy company, transforming data into identity, fraud and risk solutions. We take seriously our role in protecting sensitive personal information we hold on most Australians, information stored in highly regulated databases that are subject to specific legislation with exacting standards for access, use, disclosure, accuracy, security and reliability.

In addition, we are a significant customer of Government-run registers, being the largest broker of data held on ASIC and PPSR registers. We have contractual relationships for Commonwealth data access with registers operated by the Australian Financial Authority (AFSA); the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC); the Department of Industry (for Australian Business Numbers); and most recently the Attorney-General's Department in relation to the Document Verification Service (DVS).

Our experience therefore reflects being a database operator; an innovator and transformer of data into commercial products; and a paying customer using information held on Government-run registers.

Based on this experience, we ask the following be considered as specific recommendations to be made by the Commission of Audit:

- i. Future Commonwealth government registries to be built and subsequently managed by the private sector.
- ii. Contract out responsibility for existing registry data products.
- iii. Contract out innovation of new registry data products, via licenced access.
- iv. Individuals should be able to use, with consent, data held about themselves on a government-register for a specific purpose eg. to enable individuals to identify themselves.
- v. The above recommendations to form an over-arching policy to give agencies a consistent approach to the operation of registers and access and use of information held.

- vi. Having resolved a Commonwealth policy for access and use of registers, COAG to pursue state jurisdictions adopt a similar framework.

These recommendations all keep the control and ownership of data with the relevant government agency. Aspects of most of these action items are already in practice, but not in a coherent or consistent fashion and progress has been slow and, on occasions, reversed. Conversely, the legal requirements around privacy, competition and consumer protections are clear, consistent and well understood. As the Productivity Commission stated in its' most recent annual report:

“Unlike many other countries, Australia makes relatively little use of its public data resources even though the initial costs of making data available would be low relative to the future flow of benefits...”

A rich vein of information is held by governments in the form of ‘administrative data’ collected for regulatory requirements (e.g. vehicle registrations and taxation declarations), program administration (e.g. Centrelink and Medicare payments, school, university and vocational enrolments and completions, and hospital admissions) or as a byproduct of transactions (e.g. fines and fees)”¹

We look forward to Commission of Audit consideration of our submission and are available to provide more detail as and when required.

¹ “Using administrative data” chapter one, Productivity Commission annual report 2012-2013