

Joint Committee on Publications

Submission from the Department of Finance and Administration

The Hon Lou Lieberman MP
Chairman
Joint Committee on Publications
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION SUBMISSION TO THE
JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS
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Thank you for providing Finance with the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Committee on Publications on non-print material.

The Department of Finance and Administration, under Budget Output 2.4.1 (formerly Output 2.3.1) facilitates access to Commonwealth government information.

This Budget Outcome was created in late 1997 to perform an information dissemination service on behalf of the Commonwealth. Over the last few years, there has been a major shift in information dissemination, from paper-based systems to other types of non-print resources such as electronic and online delivery of information. Finance today has evolved in line with these changes and our current operations reflect the significance of the electronic environment. In addition, through policy development and best practice principles, Finance supports information delivery in a decentralised and devolved Commonwealth operating environment.

In undertaking this role, Finance has identified a broad definition of non-print material that encompasses all forms of information including, CDs, videotapes, DVDs, and information on the Internet. With the aim being medium independent, we recognise that public access to information might also include channels such as shop fronts and call centres. Often these channels of access will also utilise the Internet as an underpinning information architecture.

Consistent with this approach, Finance currently provides a number of information entry point facilities that are aimed at providing choice and equity to the vast array of stakeholder needs. These include, the Commonwealth Government Entry Point (www.fed.gov.au), the Australian whole-of-government single point of access (www.gov.au), and FedInfo www.fedinfo.gov, the single information reference point for public servants.

Each entry point provides a variety of access approaches, allowing users to choose the method of finding information that best suits them. This suite of sites has been developed with useability and accessibility principles as the main drivers for design, whilst supporting the devolved nature of the environment by ensuring responsibility for content remains with the author agency.

In addition, the Internet allows for a high degree of equity in that the same information and services are available locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Information in the

online environment can be more easily tailored or formatted to suit individual needs than was previously possible, thus allowing a greater degree of disabled and remote access.

While the focus has been on accessibility a number of aspects need careful consideration in this environment, such as;

- the continued need for the provision of high level guidance;
- the need to integrate information policy responsibilities with service delivery;
- the recognition that information content lifecycles assume a far greater significance in this environment; and
- that tools such as AGLS metadata as fostered by the National Archives of Australia (NAA) encourage more responsible information management and the potential for future data interchange.

In our role of facilitating access to Commonwealth government information, Finance supports and encourages the adherence of government standards as outlined by such organisations as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HEROC), NAA, the National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE) and the Privacy Commission.

In summary, Finance works across all delivery channels to ensure that Australians and international users have improved access to quality government information, regardless of their geographical or technical circumstances, and in forms suitable for individual customer preferences.

Yours sincerely

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