

Sky-high IT contractor costs at weather bureau

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Australia's national weather agency forked out more than \$400 million on external contractors for its long-running IT upgrade – the full cost of which has never publicly been revealed.

The Bureau of Meteorology made the disclosure in answers to questions on notice from recent Senate Estimates, where it faced questions over suspected cost blowouts in its ROBUST program.

ROBUST is a near-complete rebuild of the bureau's IT systems and observing networks initiated in response to a 2015 hack attributed to a foreign intelligence service by the Australian Cyber Security Centre.



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The overhaul was reported to be off track in August last year, with the agency purported to have tapped into a \$200 million-plus sustainability fund to pay for the blowouts and cover for consultant skill shortages.

BoM chief executive Andrew Johnson later denied the blowout, (<https://www.innovationaus.com/bom-it-overhaul-within-budget-despite-cost-blowouts-on-contracts/>) claiming the program was “well within” budget despite also confirming that it was running at least a year behind schedule.

He was again forced to defend ROBUST (<https://www.innovationaus.com/bom-technology-projects-hit-by-an-estimates-whirlwind/>) in May following a report that the program had cost almost a billion dollars, as well as address suggestions of a ‘land and expand’ by consultants.

The agency has never publicly disclosed the project’s budget, which has been topped up at least once in 2020, claiming commercial-in-confidence sensitives since it was first funded in 2017.

But in answers to questions on notice, the agency has put a baseline figure on the project for the first time, by revealing 881 ROBUST contractors were paid \$406.6 million over the last seven years.

BoM also addressed questions from Greens Senator Barbara Pocock on two of its largest ROBUST contracts with Accenture and Deloitte, which are providing a new channels platform and integration platform, respectively.

It came as the Accenture contract recorded its biggest one-off increase since it was signed in August 2019, climbing \$16.6 million to \$75.3 million late last month. The contract was initially valued at \$31.4 million over three years.

BoM said amendments to the Accenture and Deloitte contracts were due to a combination of factors, including “dependency delays due to ICT infrastructure and environment availability”.


It also said that “additional technology integration interface work” had been requested during the course of the contract, while extension options had also been taken up on both contracts.

Another ROBUST-related contract with Leidos for a data management platform also ballooned by \$7.8 million to \$67.8 million last month, according to AusTender. It was initially valued at \$16 million.

Answers to questions on notice confirm “financial remedies have not been applied to contracts under ROBUST because the performance of vendors has been consistent with their commitments under each respective contract”.

Do you know more? Contact James Riley via [Email \(mailto:james@innovationaus.com\)](mailto:james@innovationaus.com).
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