

ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE

**INQUIRY INTO THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE
IN DEVELOPING AND PROMOTING
INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2007**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Ms J.A. Radisich (Chair)
Mr G.A. Woodhams (Deputy Chair)
Dr J.M. Edwards
Mr M.P. Murray
Mr A.J. Simpson**

Hearing commenced at 11.24 am

BRYSON, MS VERITAS JOSEPHINE
Executive Director, Office of e-Government,
Department of the Premier and Cabinet, examined:

BLUEMMEL, MR SVEN
Director, Strategy and Policy, Office of e-Government,
Department of the Premier and Cabinet, examined:

CHAIR: The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you understand the notes attached to it?

The Witnesses: Yes.

CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you have any questions relating to your appearance before the committee today?

The Witnesses: No.

CHAIR: We have received your submission, for which we thank you. Are there any amendments you wish to propose to us at the outset?

The Witnesses: No.

CHAIR: Before we ask any questions, is there any statement you would like to make in addition to your submission?

The Witnesses: No.

CHAIR: Just to get the ball rolling, we would like you to summarise for us some of the key points that are relevant to your agency in the terms of reference for this inquiry, with which I believe you have been provided. Could you give us the background on where you are coming from, for us to relate some further questions during the course of our discussions?

Ms Bryson: I will begin with some history of the Office of e-Government. It was created under the functional review with the demise of what was then the Department of Industry and Technology. The e-government component was established in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

CHAIR: Just for my own benefit, was DOIT within DOIR?

Ms Bryson: DOIT was the origin agency of DOIR. When DOIT was broken up, the public sector management side of information and communications technology was included in the newly created Office of e-Government, within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Responsibility for procurement issues and asset management in ICT was given to the Department of Treasury and

Finance, and responsibility for industry development and the broader economic development issues associated with ICT were put into the newly developed Department of Industry and Resources.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: In which year was your office created?

Ms Bryson: I think it was created four years ago, in 2003.

Mr Bluemmel: That is right; it was 2003.

Ms Bryson: My hesitation there was due to the fact that I was not employed by the Western Australian government at that time. However, the office has just had its fourth birthday. The office has looked at public sector management issues of ICT, rather than the portfolio of the economic development of the industry. However, we do obviously take note of some industry issues in some of our policy development. To give you an example, we refrained from mandating a single government solution in an area for government because we have been mindful that that will potentially impact on the industry. So you see that most of the common use arrangements have selected three solutions rather than a single one. However, we have close links to industry because we see it as an important stakeholder.

[11.30 am]

For example, we are about to launch a strategy for electronic service delivery. That strategy is called citizen-centric government. Today we are partnering with the Australian Information Industry Association in a lunchtime session to brief industry on the impacts of that strategy and what it might mean for the sector. About three weeks ago we also partnered with the Australian Information Industry Association in a breakfast session at which we outlined the thinking in our office and our work program for the year so that industry will be aware of where we are going and what we are doing. We try to keep industry informed. Probably on a weekly basis I would have someone from industry come in and have a catch up.

CHAIR: Do you by any chance have a copy of your plan for the coming year that we might be able to peruse?

Ms Bryson: I can provide that to you.

CHAIR: Thank you. That would be great.

Ms Bryson: Sven sits on an information industry round table that involves the State Supply Commission, Treasury, ourselves, DOIR, ACS and AIIA, so we keep them informed through those mechanisms as well.

CHAIR: Is that the industry development forum?

Mr Bluemmel: No. That is the information industry forum.

CHAIR: ICTIIC?

Mr Bluemmel: No. It works closely with ICTIIC. It may be one that has not come up previously in your deliberations.

CHAIR: Does it have an acronym that I should be aware of?

Mr Bluemmel: Its current acronym is IIF. Previously, just to confuse things, it was called the Information Industry Forum Working Group - IIFWG. It is now just IIF. A few of the people from whom you have heard previously may represent on that but may not have mentioned it.

Ms Bryson: I also sit on TIAC - the Technology Industry Advisory Committee. That is on ministerial invitation.

CHAIR: Before I ask you to comment on our terms of reference I would like to understand a bit more about the Office of e-Government, because I am not as familiar with that as I would like to be. How many staff do you have, and what is your broad structure?

Ms Bryson: We have 28 staff. We have three streams within the office: a strategy and policy stream, a strategic projects coordination stream, and a telecommunications stream. The function of the office is to transform the way in which government does business through leadership and collaboration, and by using ICT as an enabler. The main areas that we are dealing with this year are governance and ICT issues. All the major agency budget bids come through our office, and we look at how those bids are delivering on the government's outcomes and on the e-government strategy, and at good best practice management. We sit on the number of agency committees at a high level, such as TRELIS and the police metropolitan radio network.

CHAIR: How is TRELIS going?

Mr Bluemmel: It is working well now.

Ms Bryson: There are also big ticket items such as health. I have just been asked to sit on that committee to look at good governance in that area. There is also the Shared Land Information Platform. Three other streams within our office also form part of our work program for this year. One is identity security and trust in government. That picks up security. For instance, for all the security alerts for viruses etc, we act as the centre point to distribute information to agencies. A lot of work is associated with the commonwealth identity and access regime and the proposed access card. We are working through a smart card framework. We are also rolling out an employee identity number across the whole public sector. That is associated with shared corporate services, and that is a major project for us as well. In the citizen-centric electronic service delivery stream we were the agency that brought together the two entry points - WA Online and wa.gov.au - to form a single entry point. We are doing a lot of work in rationalising web sites across agencies. There were up to 1 600 web sites. We are now down to about 800. We are looking at governance mechanisms for web sites. One of our major strategies is to change the culture and thinking in agencies so that government is seen not as a set of siloed institutions but as a set of decision making processes and service delivery that runs across agencies. That means that we need to think differently. One example is the electronic land development process. That process started out in the WA Planning Commission, but it goes out to Synergy, Western Power, AlintaGas, local government and a range of agencies. That decision making goes across all levels of government. Therefore, to try to get people to think in that way is a major task. In fact, to some extent I would prefer that our office was called the office of transformational government, because that would make more sense in terms of what we are actually doing. We are trying to change the way in which government works by using ICT as the enabler. The fourth stream is telecommunications. We are currently finalising an emergency services strategy to bring all the emergency services agencies together so that they can talk to us and have common governance in that area. We are also looking at the implications of mobile telecommunications, because for a large proportion of the community, particularly for generations X and Y, and earlier, their primary way of communication is the mobile phone. If government does not have a presence in that mobile environment, government will not exist for those people. Therefore, we are looking at the organisational implications of service delivery for agencies and for a mobile population that is working from home, as technology makes that possible. We are also working with DOIR and Treasury on the statewide broadband network. Every second year we do an audit of telecommunications across the public sector. We are also doing an inventory of electronic services across the public sector so that we know what we are dealing with and where there are duplications or gaps. There is a wide variety of opportunities and challenges for the Office of e-Government.

CHAIR: Thank you for that summary. You are probably doing more work than we realise. I come now to our terms of reference. From your experience in the Office of e-Government, what information could you offer to this committee for consideration in this inquiry?

Mr Bluemmel: I would like to add my thoughts on that matter. One thing that we made very clear in our written submission is that our main aim and direction is not specifically industry

development. That is fairly clear. That is obviously not just our choice; it was given to us as our direction. Your terms of reference are very much focused on that, and rightly so, of course. Probably the main message from us is that although we are about transforming the operations of government to provide better service delivery and to ensure that we provide the community with the services it wants and needs, rather than the structures that we have always had, we are also working closely with our colleagues in DOIR and Treasury and Finance, and to a lesser extent in the State Supply Commission, to ensure that our outcomes and our work are consistent with policy objectives such as industry development. Jo has mentioned the idea that we have strongly resisted or steered away from mandating single solutions. That is because when we start to mandate single solutions in this area, apart from some other commercial objectives in terms of losing our bargaining position, it tends to hamstring local industry, because it generally cannot compete with that sort of thing. Therefore, we are very conscious of the need to ensure that that is taken into account in determining our focus.

With regard to your terms of reference and the assistance that may be available from our office, probably the most valuable way in which we provide assistance is that we make ourselves available to local industry and share with industry where we are going and what solutions industry can provide to ensure that it is in the best position to compete. One example, apart from the things that Jo has already mentioned, is that we often give addresses to industry forums. I spoke at the launch of the ICT industry collaboration centre and outlined what our role was and what kinds of solutions we will be looking for from the market and what government will be looking for from the market. The idea behind that was that those local industry members will then be in a much more competitive position, because they will have that knowledge, and those industry members who are not local or do not have a local presence may be at a slight disadvantage because they will not have the same level of insight. We are not discriminating in that regard. We will talk to anyone who has a good reason to talk to us. However, we make an effort to ensure that local industry has access to our strategic thinking and what that means for the sector, so that when it is providing solutions in response to tenders and so forth in six, 12, 18 or 24 months it will know what the government is looking for strategically. That is probably the key nature of the direct assistance that we provide.

Ms Bryson: Following on from that, when I am having meetings with the local industry, we often give it advice, because we know what the agencies are doing. We have fairly good networks into agencies, so we can say that DLI is working in this area, and they should talk to such and such. We do not ring up the agency and say it must talk to a particular industry group, but we point industry in the right direction.

Following on from what Sven has said about capital work programs, when we look at agency budget bids, we talk to people in the consultancy industry about what we are looking for, so that when they are employed by agencies to help them prepare their bids they will be aware of what we are looking for and will be on our wavelength. That means that we in turn are helping them to be more effective in delivering services to the agencies.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Are you looking at new products and developments and predicting how we are likely to communicate into the future, for example? Given the number of products that are emerging daily and the huge progress that is being made with new technologies, how are you able to keep up with that?

Ms Bryson: We are able to do that through very good networks. We have people who as part of their job within the office look at emerging technologies. Within the office collectively we have some very bright people who have a lot of networks elsewhere, from which we are able to pick up emerging trends. We have contacts all over the world that we can talk to. We also monitor all over the world. We also use companies such as Gartner to give us some information but we do not rely just on them. We spend a lot of money on professional development, sending our people to conferences to pick up the latest trends.

[11.45 am]

Mr Bluemmel: Just on that question about the latest gadgets, one of our roles is to act as a reality check so that we do not have technological boffins in agencies who see the latest shiny thing at an expo and say, "We must have that; all our people will have those." We have to say, "What business objective does that serve for your agency?" It might serve them effectively and efficiently but it might not. We do that very much in terms of trying to engender agencies with that rigour to make sure that they do things for a good business purpose and an outcome, not the latest shiny toy. In doing so, we have to be across the latest developments. One of the things we have been doing quite a lot recently is looking at the future of work - what will the workplace look like in the future and how will people work? It is quite often said that it is a thing you do rather than a place you go. What will that mean for technology in government services? If that means that people have to line up at government offices in a capital city, we have not done very well. We look forward in that regard in terms of changing demographics, ways of working and so forth but try to apply that reality check to make sure we do not get carried away with getting the latest just because it is the latest.

Mr G. WOODHAMS: You are a relatively new government agency. If you look at an agency such as the Department of Agriculture and Food, there is a phenomenal tradition that sits in there. You talk about best practice management. Is there a model that you base yourself on? Is there an agency somewhere else that you look at and say, "That is really the way we need to make some of our operations work" or are you really at the head of the wave and there's nothing else in front of you?

Ms Bryson: More the latter. I will give you an observation by Steve Bittinger, the head government consultant for Gartner. He said that he sees the Office of e-Government looking around the world for best practice and incorporating that and then taking it one stage further. Our citizen-centric government, which is a strategy that will be launched next month, will break new ground in new thinking - certainly in Australia - across our equivalents.

Mr Bluemmel: As one of the underlying points that you were addressing, we do not have that approach where we say to agencies, "Forget everything you've been doing, we've got a better way." We know that agencies have a lot of experience and knowledge about their customers. None of us in the office would ever pretend to know the core business of the Department of Agriculture and Food better than the key people in the department. We have the luxury of being able to take a step back and not just look at one agency. We are able to say, "For the citizens out there who do not know the structure of government and usually do not want to know the structure of government, what do they need?" The people dealing with the Department of Agriculture and Food might also be dealing with the Department of Land Information and so on. We try to bridge that gap, and I think we try to do it quite effectively. We have very goodwill between us and most, if not all, agencies and we try to bridge that. In doing so, we are always very aware that we are not saying, "Agriculture, we know your business much better than you do." We are allowed to step back and say, "We can look at you and DLI and some others and see how they fit together."

CHAIR: Today was short and sweet. Thank you very much. We need to wrap up today. We appreciate you taking the time to come in. Some questions might arise from us when we are reflecting on the information that you have provided in the context of other comments. We may get in touch again. The transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Could you please make these corrections and return the transcript within 10 days of receiving it. If it is not returned, we will deem it to be correct. Thank you very much for your time. We appreciate your contribution.

Hearing concluded at 11.49 am
