Committee Name:	Community Development and Justice Committee (Legislative Assembly Committee)
Inquiry Name:	Collaborative Approaches in Government
Submission Author:	Mrs Siaan Matthews
Author's Title:	PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University
	(PhD Topic: Comparative analysis of approaches to government in Australia and Malaysia)
Committee Hearing:	I am willing to appear before the committee to present my case

1 Introduction and terms of reference

1.1   This submission will use a comparative study of Malaysian government approaches to identify how the Western Australian Government can improve its approach to collaborative government. It will specifically address the criteria listed in the Inquiry's terms of reference (see Appendix A).

1.2   The submission argues that effective collaborative approaches to government are most successful when supported by a coordinated e-government strategy (general point). Likewise, in a modern society, citizen centred services are most effective and efficient when delivered by new e-government initiatives (response to terms of reference, point 3). The submission also argues that successful delivery government services should be supported by relevant legislation and direct intervention from a complaint handling/service reform body (response to terms of reference, point 2). Case studies of Malaysian public policy will be used to factually support the submission.

2 Learning from Malaysia

2.1   Malaysia is a particularly interesting case for Australian policy-makers to compare with. Both Malaysia and Australia share a similar system of government; that is a system of government grounded in the British Westminster System. Likewise, both Malaysia and Australia are federal states and hence each country also faces issues associated with Federal-State relations. Finally, Malaysia and Australia are part of the same region, therefore facing the same regional issues. These reasons provide a logical framework for Malaysia and Australia to consider, and learn from, the government practices of both countries.

2.2   From a diplomacy perspective, there is also reason for Malaysia and Australia to share government experiences. Malaysia and Australia have a very strong bilateral relationship. Extensive cooperation occurs in areas such as trade and investment, tourism and aviation, education and defence. More recently, the two governments have also been working together on a wider range of issues including counter-terrorism, law enforcement and broader economic issues. In 2005 Malaysia and Australia agreed to launch negotiations on a bilateral Free Trade Agreement. This will obviously lead to even further cooperation. In summary, Malaysia and Australia work cooperatively in many policy areas and it appears this level of cooperation is set to deepen. Consideration of duel practice is therefore appropriate for both countries.

2.3   Recommendation 1: The Australian Government analyse and learn from Malaysian government experiences.

3 Using e-government to drive collaborative government

3.1　Collaborative government has been recognised by many Western governments as the most suitable method of supporting government policy and delivering effective and efficient government services. In Australia, 'joined up' government is known as whole-of-government.

Whole of government denotes public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal and informal. They can focus on policy development, program management and service delivery.[1]

3.2　In implementing the whole-of-government approach, the Australian Government has recognised the many imperatives which make being successful at whole-of-government work increasingly important. These imperatives include pressure on the public service to offer sophisticated whole-of-government policy advice which comprehends a range of stakeholders' views, and to respond to complex policy challenges such as security or rural issues. There are also pressures to join up program management (including security threats and intractable social issues such as drug dependence) as well as rising community expectations for easier access to government by integrating and improving service delivery. Moving to collaborative or whole-of-government is an appropriate response to these imperatives.

3.3　E-government represents the vital component in coordinating government policy and in offering the most efficient and effective services for clients and stakeholders. 'E-government' refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government.[2] In the academic theory surrounding e-government, focus has been given to the government coordination benefits and the client (citizen) advantages of such a system. .

3.4　E-government presents an excellent opportunity to drive cooperative government. 'E-government is about more than just applying ICT to government processes. It is about applying ICT to reform and improve government processes. Merely applying ICT to something does not make it better. But applying ICT, and reforming the accompanying business processes, does.'[3] In short, e-government currently presents policy-makers with an expedient tool to manage and support effective and efficient collaborative government. In the future, as governments become even more electronically dependent, e-government will become a necessary prerequisite for collaborative government.

3.5　**Recommendation 2: E-government be recognised as the necessary prerequisite for ongoing collaborative government approaches.**

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[1] MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (2004) *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Reponses to Australia's Priority Challenges*, Canberra: The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
[2] THE WORLD BANK, *Definition of E-Government*, Accessed 30 December 2007, http://go.worldbank.org/M1JHE0Z280
[3] AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION MANAGEMENT OFFICE (2006) *Responsive Government, A New Service Agenda: 2006 e-Government Strategy*, Canberra: Department of Finance and Administration

4 Delivering efficient and effective government services through e-government

4.1   The relationship between efficient and effective government cannot be over emphasised. In 2005 the Western Australian Office of e-Government undertook a Review of Western Australian Government websites for the Western Australian Public Sector. The objective of the review was to gain a comprehensive understanding of websites existing in the Western Australian public sector, to assist the Western Australian Government in improving the delivery and management of information and services on its websites, and to develop a more customer-centric web environment. A key recommendation of this review was the establishment of a single entry point website for the Western Australian Government. This meant merging the two existing Western Australian Government entry point websites (Online WA and www.wa.gov.au) under the wa.gov.au website address. This merge was successfully completed in 2006.[4]

4.2   The development and implementation of these e-government initiatives were significantly behind the development and implementation of similar Malaysian e-government initiatives. Indeed, Malaysia's overall e-government strategy began some five years prior to the launch of e-government in the wider Australian Public Service (Malaysia: 1997, Australia: 2002). At the time of launch, the Malaysia's e-government goals included electronic delivery of driver and vehicle registration and/or licensing and summons services, utility bill payments, online health information, electronic procurement, human resource management information systems and project monitoring systems.[5] To effectively provide these electronic citizen centred services, the Malaysian Government's developed a single entry point website, known as the MyGovernment portal (www.gov.my). The MyGovernment portal provides a single point of access/gateway to multiple government services and will ultimately link 900 websites across Federal, State and Local Authorities. These initiatives were all announced five years prior to the launch of e-government in Australia.

4.3   E-government initiatives such as the MyGovernment portal and the wa.gov.au website have obvious citizen centred services advantages and these have been recognised in both Australia and Malaysia. The Australian Commonwealth Government's publication *Responsive Government: A New Service Agenda* highlighted that through improvements in e-government 'there is no doubt that Australians now have 'better services' and 'better government'.[6] For Western Australian residents to continue to receive the highest level of coordinated service, e-government must continue to move forward.

4.4   Recommendation 3: The Western Australian Government further utilise e-government to provide easily accessible, efficient and effective citizen centred services.

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[4] GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, *Electronic Service Delivery* (2005), Perth: Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Accessed 25 March 2008, http://www.egov.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=projectsElectronic

[5] MALAYSIAN ADMINISTRATIVE MODERNIZATION AND MANAGEMENT PLANNING UNIT (1997) *Electronic Government Information Technology Policy and Standards (EGIT)*. Kuala Lumpur: Department of the Prime Minister

[6] AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION MANAGEMENT OFFICE (2006) *Responsive Government, A New Service Agenda: 2006 e-Government Strategy*, Canberra: Department of Finance and Administration.

5 The role of a Services Ombudsman: Ensuring effective and efficient government services

5.1   Despite the advantages of e-government, it will never succeed in promoting government collaboration and improving services if it is not effectively implemented, monitored and reviewed. Again, an example can be drawn from the Malaysian government. Malaysia is considered a semi-developed country, yet many of its new e-government services are detracted from by sloppy implementation or lack of ongoing efficiency. Examining the time taken to actually deliver some services, it is seen that Malaysia falls far behind even some of the developing countries in the surrounding region. To set up a factory in Malaysia it takes 25 steps, 281 days. In Vietnam this same process takes 14 steps, 133 days, and in Thailand only 9 steps and 127 days. Similar results are found for setting up a business (Malaysia: 9 steps, 30 days; Australia: 2 steps, 2 days).[7] This problem can be traced back to the role of relevant legislation, information, and direct intervention in achieving effective and efficient government services.

5.2   In the current Malaysian government structures, there is no central body or regulatory framework to encourage/compel government agencies - those who fail to provide effective services to their clients - to adhere to better client service standards. This is a clear weakness in the current Malaysian government's approach and an area where the Western Australian Government can learn from Malaysia's oversight.

5.3   To overcome this problem a "Services" Ombudsman is suggested (the Services Ombudsman could fall under the current Western Australian Ombudsman portfolio). This special ombudsman should standardise Western Australian government service standards and have regulatory power to force other Western Australian government agencies to meet these service standards. The Services Ombudsman should also have responsibility for coordination and development of e-government in Western Australia, as e-government has already been proven to be the necessary prerequisite for ongoing collaborative government approaches and the most efficient and effective way to provide citizen centred services. The Services Ombudsman should conduct ongoing research into service standards to ensure the Western Australian Government continues to meet (and exceed) international service standards across all agencies, and to plan for new/future services issues (such as those linked to e-government initiatives). Moreover, the Services Ombudsman should be able to receive complaints and suggestions about government services from both government agencies and the general public, and these complaints/suggestions should be effectively investigated and dealt with. The Services Ombudsman should report directly to the Parliament of Western Australia.

5.4   **Recommendation 4: The Government of Western Australia establish a Services Ombudsman with regulatory power to:**
- **standardise Western Australian government service standards;**
- **develop and coordinate Western Australian e-government initiatives;**
- **conduct ongoing research into service standards; and**
- **manage complaints and suggestions from government agencies and the general public.**

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[7] KAUFMANN D, KRAAY, A, MASTRUZZI, M, (2007) *Governance Matters VI: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators 1996–2006,* The World Bank

6 Summary of recommendations

<u>Recommendation 1</u>: The Australian Government analyse and learn from Malaysian government experiences.

<u>Recommendation 2</u>: E-government be recognised as the necessary prerequisite for ongoing collaborative government approaches..

<u>Recommendation 3</u>: The Western Australian Government further utilise e-government to provide easily accessible efficient and effective citizen centred services.

<u>Recommendation 4</u>: The Government of Western Australia establish a Services Ombudsman with regulatory power to:
- standardise Western Australian government service standards;
- develop and coordinate Western Australian e-government initiatives;
- conduct ongoing research into service standards; and
- manage complaints and suggestions from government agencies and the general public.

Terms of Reference

Taken from: http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/web/newwebparl.nsf/iframewebpages/Legislative+Assembly+-+Current+Committees

The Committee resolves:

That this Committee examine, report and make recommendations on the way in which policy, and practice together with organisational structures, encourages sustainable and collaborative approaches and activities across government with particular reference to community services and to

(1) models of partnerships between public (including local government) and private sectors for the development of policy and the delivery of services, with particular emphasis on human service and community development;

(2) the role of relevant legislation, economic instruments (e.g. grants, targets), information, direct intervention, in achieving effective and efficient government services;

(3) the use of citizen centred services - how different jurisdictions are transforming and integrating government processes around the needs of the citizens to improve service delivery and improve well being; and

(4) any other relevant issue.

The Committee will report to the Assembly by 27 November 2008.