



22 August, 2008

The Executive Officer  
Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee  
Parliament of Victoria  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

### **INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING ACCESS TO VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PUBLIC SECTOR INFORMATION AND DATA**

Thank you for inviting the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) to make a submission to this inquiry.

CAUL supports your proposals to maximise access to public sector information. This information supports research, learning and teaching activities in CAUL's member organisations. CAUL supports the removal of any administrative or cost barriers to accessing public sector information. There are clearly benefits for the community in maximising access.

CAUL members have been active in expanding access to information and data generated by universities. In the last ten years, CAUL members have exploited information and communication technologies to support the discovery, access and use of information produced by universities. Large numbers of theses, conference papers, journal articles and special collections have been available online in open access regimes. CAUL libraries have successfully implemented repositories that contain a wide range of textual and non-textual information. The next stage of repository development will focus on storage of primary research data generated at universities. CAUL supports the use of Creative Commons licences, which have been implemented in many research repositories and databases.

CAUL is not in a position to make informed comments about the economic benefits of open access public sector information and data. Its motivations in supporting this lie in a strong belief in the 'public good' of such initiatives and that this information is created by and for the public. However, there are two comments we would like to make regarding the economic aspects of this issue.

First, commercial re-use of public sector information should not come at the cost of any changes in access to the original data. This could occur through efforts to assign exclusive copyright or restrictive licence conditions to a commercial entity.

Second, cost recovery schemes come at a cost to both buyers and sellers of the information. Open access to information can be achieved through a reallocation of costs.

The discussion paper addresses issues regarding sensitivity of public sector information. It is understandable that agencies will be concerned about access to data which could compromise security or privacy, for example. There are ways to maximise access to this data for legitimate purposes. In the Commonwealth sector, access to confidential data is managed through licence agreements between a government agency and the university. Access to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Confidentialised Unit Record Files is managed this way.

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We wish to make a comment about section 3.2.1 which states that “the greatest value to be obtained by the public from increased access to PSI may indeed be from databases and statistical information, rather than research reports and images, for examples.” In our view, it is not a case of either/or. There should be access to primary and secondary data. They are both related and should be available for research, inquiry and validation.

Finally, CAUL recommends that considerations of open source developments, the technology, should be kept separate from discussions about open access to information and data, the content.

Yours sincerely,

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