

# **THE VICTORIAN SPATIAL COUNCIL'S VISION AND PLANS FOR SPATIAL INFORMATION IN VICTORIA**

## **Presentation to the Spatial Sciences in Victoria 2006 one day conference**

7 September 2006

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### **The Victorian Spatial Council**

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to address the *Spatial Sciences in Victoria 2006 One Day Conference* on the Victorian Spatial Council's vision and plans for spatial information in Victoria.

This is an auspicious time to be addressing the Institute, as September 2006 marks the second anniversary of the Council's establishment.

To start, I'd like to recap briefly the history and role of the VSC for those who may not know the full story.

The Victorian Spatial Council was set up in September 2004 to be the peak body for spatial information in Victoria and to lead the development and implementation of the State's strategic direction for spatial information.

In that spirit, the role of the Council is to provide a coordinated approach to spatial information policy and management, and facilitate opportunities for a greater strategic focus on spatial information development, including greater partnership building, collaboration, cooperation and education.

I have the pleasure to be the independent Chair, and my fellow members are drawn from all sectors of the spatial industry, that is, the Spatial Sciences Institute, ASIBA, the Association of Consulting Surveyors Victoria, academia, Local Government, the Victorian Government Spatial Committee, and the Australian Government through Geoscience Australia.

The key words and phrases that I think describe the Council's approach are

- 'cooperation'
- 'communication'
- 'promoting spatial initiatives'
- 'forum for examining issues'
- 'building networks'
- 'promoting best practice in spatial information management'

In this vein, the VSC has adopted facilitation, advocacy, and communication as its mode of operation, encompassing

- sponsoring and/or championing major spatial information initiatives;
- publishing policy statements, guidelines, and discussion papers; and
- running forums and briefing key decision makers in business and government.

Under its collaborative approach, each sector also has a particular role to play. The Council has published a set of business principles that are intended to define these roles and provide a sound basis for coordination and collaboration of the government, private and academic sectors. They cover policy and standard setting, data provision, development of new

products, developing markets, and research and development. These roles may be performed individually or through cooperative approaches, but together they are intended to contribute to the growth and development of the spatial information industry.

2005 was a year of consolidation for the Council, beginning with the development of a three year strategic plan that is allowing members to focus on a series of key outcomes that together:

- support the growth of the spatial information industry,
- bring together resources and capabilities from across the spatial information community, and
- improve the quality of spatial information and increase its use.

I will refer to two major activities in the context of the spatial information management framework being implemented as part of the Victorian Spatial Information Strategy, but for now, I would like to highlight the Council's efforts to involve the spatial industry in addressing major issues and to showcase key spatial information related initiatives.

The VSC is continuing to provide a means for the industry to share ideas and discuss issues through its annual series of Public Forums, and in January this year became the publisher of the successful Landmark magazine.

To further develop Landmark as the official spatial information industry publication in Victoria, an Editorial Committee comprising representatives from the sectors oversees the production of the magazine, and I hope that the SSI will soon consider joining the Committee to

provide a professional perspective. I am also pleased that from November this year, Landmark will once again be available in printed form to accompany the on-line version currently published on the Land Channel.

In pursuing its mandate to facilitate collaborative approaches to spatial information development, the Council has this year set up two major Committees that bring key stakeholders together to pursue vital initiatives that further enable the use of spatial information.

### **Imagery Assurance Group**

The first of these is the Imagery Assurance Group, which is providing a formal consultative arrangement between government, industry and users for continuous improvement in the specification, acquisition and provision of imagery under the Coordinated Imagery Program.

### **PIP Migration Stakeholder Management Committee**

The second is the formation of a PIP Migration Stakeholder Management Committee, which was a major recommendation of the recent Property Information Program Evaluation.

As many of you will be aware, the Property Information Program, or PIP, began in 1998 as a collaborative initiative between State and Local Government to improve the quality of the land parcel and property related data that is critical to Victoria.

The Evaluation concluded that while PIP is an achievement not matched anywhere else either in Australia or internationally, it has reached a

critical threshold in continuing to provide a fundamental infrastructure for Victoria.

The purpose of the Evaluation was to assess Council performance against ‘best practice’ and to recommend a Migration Plan that will assist each Council to move closer towards that best practice.

The Evaluation recommended that a high-level inter-government – industry committee of stakeholders should be formed to implement the Migration Plan.

Victoria has a first class information infrastructure in Vicmap, which is being used to underpin a wide range of applications across government and industry. However, while the quality of the data is increasing, it is also apparent that this is not keeping pace with the expectations being placed on it.

Most notably, the Council has been able to respond to concerns raised by the Emergency Services community associated with the use of Vicmap to support Victoria’s emergency response capabilities, by expanding the PIP Migration Stakeholder Management Committee’s brief to address the quality of this core spatial data beyond its use as a property and parcel base.

The Council’s very successful July Forum highlighted that there is still very strong support for PIP itself and the importance of Vicmap in providing critical infrastructure for Victoria.

The Committee will be a particularly important venture for the Council as it will provide a key mechanism for communicating to the highest levels of Government this vital role and seeking support for its continuing maintenance.

I have spent the last three months meeting as many of our major stakeholders as I can to explain the role of the Council and to raise awareness of spatial information, particularly to what we might consider non-traditional spatial information practitioners.

I have received encouraging responses from all of them, in particular Victoria's Chief Information Officer, who has acknowledged the leading role that the Council has played in pursuing the contribution that spatial information can make.

The OCIO's representation on the Council has been of great significance in ensuring that spatial information has taken its place in the overall strategic direction for Information and Communications Technology in Victoria.

I am pleased to be able to say that after two years, the Council is making its mark, and is playing its part to raise the profile of the spatial information industry in Victoria.

Furthermore, the success of our efforts has been acknowledged interstate, as both Tasmania and South Australia are looking to copy Victoria and establish similar multi-sectoral bodies to oversee their spatial information initiatives.

This is testimony to the efforts of my fellow members and all our stakeholders who have embraced the Council and have shown a willingness to engage it in a positive way.

### **Victorian Spatial Information Strategy**

I've previously indicated that the principal role of the Council is to lead the implementation of the Victorian Spatial Information Strategy. And, for the first time, Victoria has a truly collaborative approach to setting and implementing a strategic direction for spatial information in this State.

The current three-year strategy aims to establish a coherent spatial information management framework based on a key set of principles for describing spatial datasets, managing them, making them available and making people aware of them.

I would like to spend a moment to stress the importance of an information management framework.

We are already seeing a range of prominent initiatives being undertaken, such as the Victorian Mapping and Address Service and the Coordinated Imagery Program that are aiming to make spatial information more available as part of normal day to day business operations.

They are using standard software and web services technology to provide access to authoritative data without the need for any specialised hardware, software or training.

However, the successful application of spatial information in mainstream business activities should be supported by a sound underpinning management approach that guarantees that spatial information is available and able to be used.

Hence, the current focus of policy in Victoria is on providing the information management framework and institutional structures to enable that to occur.

The Victorian Spatial Information Strategy, which sets out the basis for this framework, is accompanied by a series of Guidelines that will support the implementation of its policies and principles. The Council has already published the first three of these documents – the *Governance, Custodianship, and Pricing and Licensing* Guidelines – and is planning to release the remaining seven over the next six months.

I would like to single out two further Council activities for particular mention as they go a long way to entrenching such an information management framework that will endure beyond the current strategic cycle, and to facilitating access to spatial information by users.

### **Custodianship**

The first of these is the custodianship program.

The focus for implementation of the Information Management Framework is the custodian of spatial information. It is intended that data managed according to this framework will have a designated and identifiable custodian.

The Council's custodianship program will play an educative role to enable custodians to understand custodianship, and their roles, rights and responsibilities as custodians, and will pilot the proposed approach in a number of key areas.

The aim is to put in place a distributed network of custodians who will retain full control of their respective datasets and commit to managing them according to the Framework and making them available. It is ultimately intended that the custodianship approach established under the Framework will be the method of choice for managing spatial information in Victoria.

During the last 12 months, the Program has been able to establish acceptance of custodianship as the basis for spatial data management across a wide range of government and private sector organisations, which last month resulted in the signing of the first custodianship agreement with a utility company.

And discussions are continuing with a number of other organisations to sign up further custodians and have them manage their data according to the Framework principles.

### **Accessibility of spatial information**

With a robust Framework and a network of custodians in place, potential users of spatial information still need to be able to find out and access what is available.

When I chaired the Review of the Regulatory and Administrative Framework for Survey and Spatial Information in Victoria in 2002-03, a

common refrain from participants was that it is too difficult to discover what spatial information is available. This is among the major barriers to increasing the use of spatial information.

As a result, our Review recommended that a spatial atlas be created, to maximise the use of whole-of-government-wide spatial information.

The Council's second major initiative therefore is to promote the idea of a 'single view' system, with the purpose of allowing users to click on the location of an area of interest to access a list of spatial datasets, their history, the custodian and the contact details.

In conjunction with the Spatial Information Infrastructure group, the VSC is supporting a range of developments that will enable users to

- access a list of spatial datasets available in relation to an area of interest by clicking on the location
- refer to the metadata associated with the datasets
- select datasets of particular interest
- produce a map view based on those datasets
- and purchase that data on-line.

By the end of 2006, we are aiming to have the datasets from the Departments of Sustainability and Environment, and Primary Industries, up to 400 in total, available through such a system.

### **Where to from here?**

VSIS outlines the characteristics of a coordinated spatial information management environment and strategies for putting one in place to the end of 2007.

2007 will also mark the beginning of the development of the next Spatial Information Strategy, covering the years 2008 to 2010.

The Council will look to translate the Strategy into an enduring Spatial Information Management Framework that retains a consistent approach to managing spatial information beyond its current term – and potentially one that can also support information management more generally.

The integral relationship between ‘spatial information’ and ‘information’ was recently highlighted when the Australian Government Information Management Office released the *Australian Government Information Interoperability Framework* to facilitate, and I quote, ‘sharing information across boundaries’.

Their vision is that, and again I quote, ‘information held by government is valued and managed as a national strategic asset for the individual, government, business and the community’.

While it relates to information more broadly, the Information Interoperability Framework has many parallels with VSIS and the objectives the latter has for management of spatial information.

To illustrate, here are a number of key phrases used by AGIMO to define the information interoperability framework:

- ‘Supporting a culture of reusing existing information’
- ‘Single authoritative sources’
- ‘Information that is shared needs to be managed’
- ‘Standardising information management practices’

- ‘Collecting quality information’
- ‘Access to information’
- ‘Custodianship of information’
- ‘Governance arrangements’

A reading of VSIS will see these very same principles expressed for spatial information. In fact, by removing the word ‘spatial’ from VSIS, it can already be said that the basis for a wider information management framework is effectively in place.

We are moving toward a time, if we haven’t already arrived yet, when spatial information will be seen as much a part of the information resources of not only government but also of all sectors, and will no longer be a ‘niche’ resource that is the preserve of the specialist user.

However, spatial information in its own right still has a key role to play in supporting the key issues that we, as members of government, the industry, academia and the professions, are attempting to address.

Already, key themes for the next Strategy are emerging. For example:

- Location is increasingly becoming embedded in objects (the Virtual Australia approach).
- A networked approach to information management and maintenance through using the capabilities of the internet to facilitate on-line notification of changes or errors and editing of the core data by the relevant custodians.

- A ‘place based’ approach to planning and managing the delivery of services and products, requiring an understanding of what is happening, where and when; and the profile of communities and the needs and concerns of their members.
- An increasing recognition of spatial information as an asset of a State.
- The need to guarantee the quality of the core spatial data to support an increasing range of activities.
- Further national approaches to tackling major issues and delivering consistent approaches to service delivery, such as National Electronic Conveyancing, emergency management and environmental management.

Such activities will continue to rely on the sound information management principles and standards that VSIS is putting in place.

And even more so as we seek to further our collaborative approaches and as more is being asked of spatial information in answering fundamental questions about the nature of the society that we wish to live in and pass on to our grandchildren.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the team at Spatial Information Infrastructure. I have always said that the Council should be the steerer – that is, setting the course and pointing the ‘ship’ in the right direction. However, we would not be able to reach our destination without a dedicated team of rowers, and in SII we have just such a group.

Thank you