

How safe are the Australian Electoral Commission's Systems?

News of Information Technology

CSI director, Mr. Patrice Rapalus, said neither technologies nor policies alone were an effective defence. Intrusions and theft of trade secrets took place despite the presence of firewalls and encryption. UNIX and WINDOWS NT were vulnerable. (A. Fin. Review 27.3.2001)

A University of Queensland team reported a fourfold increase in computer-based crime - the Internet the most frequent point of attack over four years. (ibid)

The first comprehensive study of E-crime in Australia by the Charles Sturt University for the ICAC covered 1,000 senior managers in state government agencies and local councils. It found that only half were confident their IT systems were safe from electronic crime. Only 11% had a formal strategy to combat E-crime and E-corruption. Only 25% were confident none of their staff would be involved. Only 31% would report it. (Daily Telegraph 21-May-2001)

Outsourcing electronic Processes of the AEC

Note - the electoral roll is outsourced to Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC)

The basic principles of the model adopted by the Department of Finance, for outsourcing functions of a number of Commonwealth departments and agencies, were to organise them in clusters, and to centralise control in an Office of Asset Sales and IT Outsourcing (OASITO). The plan was strongly opposed by heads of agencies involved, believing the programs did not:

- a) provide sufficient protection for sensitive government data
- b) take privacy issues fully into account

The Head of the Australian Stock Exchange, Mr Richard Humphrey, declared the program had been 'bungled'. Agencies had been 'bundled together.' This proved 'inflexible, centrally driven and controlled approach to outsourcing that ignored or overrode the requirements and special needs of individual departments and agencies.' This paid 'inadequate regard to the highly sensitive risks and complex processes of the transition to the process.' (Courier Mail 17-Jan-2001)

Mr Humphrey said further that keeping IT business on shore would help to maintain security for information. This comment is relevant to the fact the AEC's electoral roll is managed by CSC, a subsidiary of a large Californian firm.

Computer Services Corporation

IBM stalwart, Roger Allen, joined the outsourcer and systems integrator, Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) as its sales and integrated business systems vice-president. A 25 year veteran, Allen was most recently Virgin Blue's manager for global aviation and transport projects. At CSC he is responsible for the strategic direction and profit performance of the company in Australia with a strong focus on winning large deals within both the public and private sector.

JUST HOW SECURE AND HOW TRANSPARENT ARE THESE OUTSOURCED ELECTRONIC PROCESSES IN OUR ELECTORAL SYSTEM?