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Draft ICT procurement framework a mixed bag for FOSS sector
Progress made on open standards & cybersecurity but bias against FOSS remains damaging

Open Source Industry Australia Ltd
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In a submission lodged this week[1], OSIA have set out in no uncertain terms the Australian free & open source software (FOSS) industry's views on the draft ICT procurement framework[2] released recently by the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA). The paper's authors—five stalwarts of the Australian FOSS industry—did not mince their words.

OSIA lauded some principles & policies in the framework such as the new focus on open standards & the importance of cybersecurity, while in each case recommending amendments to the draft. "An emphasis on open standards will address some of the known procurement issues," said OSIA Chairman Mark Phillips, "but this should be supplemented by a strong presumption in favour of FOSS."

"New measures are also needed to address transparency & accountability in Commonwealth ICT procurement processes," continued Phillips, "For example a system providing for public scrutiny of tender responses and selection decision-making processes after the fact could yield far greater industry confidence & trust in those processes. That lack of confidence & trust is a major factor discouraging many SMEs from participating in government ICT procurements."

On the other hand OSIA took issue with the framework's explicit preference for COTS ("commercial off-the-shelf software") and failure to seek innovation through FOSS. "This preference is a clear move in the wrong direction", said OSIA Director (public policy) Josh Stewart, "In a framework espousing fairer decision making processes in procurement, a stated bias towards COTS undermines many of the principles that the framework otherwise considers crucial."

"FOSS has a proven history of leading in innovation, a fact that is embraced by governments such as the US, the UK and the EU who have instituted policies of strong preference or mandate for FOSS."

"Preferences such as those in the framework demonstrate a rigid mindset that can stifle innovation," continued Stewart, "retaining a preference for COTS and against FOSS will ensure that Australia is left behind its global peers in terms of innovation in public sector ICT. We do not want to see that happen."

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[1]Stewart, J., Burton, J., Moore, P., Phillips, M. & Pendashteh, A., *Submission to the Commonwealth Digital Transformation Agency on its draft ICT procurement framework*, Open Source Industry Australia, 25 Apr 2016. Available at http://osia.com.au/f/osia_sub_201804_dta_rc4.pdf
[2]https://www.dta.gov.au/ict-procurement-framework-open-for-feedback/

But OSIA's greatest indignation was reserved for the framework's support for the continued use of single-vendor panels for software procurement. "Single vendor panels are blatantly anti-competitive. Multiple resellers offering the exact same product from the exact same vendor is not competition—at best it is merely an illusion of competition," said OSIA Company Secretary Jack Burton, "The Commonwealth has put in place single-vendor panels for its two most entrenched closed source software vendors. This makes a mockery of the project's previously stated aim to foster innovation by enabling new entrants to the public sector ICT marketplace."

"The single-vendor panels send the clear message that the entire Australian FOSS industry remains locked out of Commonwealth Government business in several very broad classes of software: ERP, enterprise mail, desktop OSes and office productivity," continued Burton, "That institutional bias is damaging to government too, not just to the excluded industry sectors. If the Commonwealth is ever to achieve meaningful innovation or substantial cost savings in areas that account for the lion's share of its ICT spend, it must first abolish these single-vendor software panels."

About Open Source Industry Australia Ltd

Open Source Industry Australia Ltd (OSIA) represents & promotes the Australian open source software industry by:

- Ensuring that the Australian business, government and education sectors derive sustainable financial and competitive advantage through the adoption of open source and open standards;

- Helping Australian Governments to achieve world leadership in providing a policy framework supportive of open standards and of the growth and success of the Australian open source industry; and

- Ensuring Australia's global standing as the preferred location from which to procure open source services & products.

OSIA's members are organisations in Australia who invest in or build their future on the unique advantages of open source software.

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