

# Data sharing can be a win-win for everyone

**J**ohn Mannering is the Chief Information Officer for organisation X which holds a number of spatial information datasets that is uses for its own purposes and also makes available to other parties, usually for a fee.

An audit of the organisation's datasets has discovered an embarrassing gaffe.

One of its primary datasets was licensed for use by an outside company only to have another section of organisation X – unaware that the original dataset existed – buying it back.

It's a true story – only the names have been changed to save the CIO (and his organisation) further embarrassment.

While the case cited might be unusual, data audits frequently find several versions of the same data being collected and maintained by different sections of the one organisation.

"We can no longer afford the inefficiencies and cost of incompatible, conflicting and duplicated spatial data," says Elizabeth Thomas, Manager of the Victorian Spatial Council Secretariat.

Ms Thomas, who is coordinating the Council's drive to promote long-term sharing of datasets and new standards of data custodianship, said that there had been many attempts to promote data sharing between organisations.

"Most of these have been on a case-by-case or project basis, which meant that administrative, technical, pricing and legal hurdles had to be overcome for every dataset.

"Usually, this meant a lot of duplicated effort and sometimes it just got 'too hard'.

"When the data sharing was project specific (eg. the Commonwealth Games), once the project was over, the benefits ceased.

"We plan to change that dramatically.

"What we are trying to create is a win-win situation for everyone by ensuring appropriate care in the collection, storage, documentation and maintenance of spatial information," Ms Thomas said.

"VSC policy is to have a distributed network of custodians throughout Victoria who will retain full control of their respective datasets and who commit to managing

them according to an agreed set of management principles and to making them available.

"Five Victorian Government departments are already participating in the program and now we are expanding it to the private sector and non-government organisations.

"Many of these bodies, particularly utility companies and environmental organisations, hold and maintain datasets that could be very useful to others.

"The VSC sees the unlocking of spatial information, its effective sharing and broad use as fundamental to achieving the social, economic and environmental goals of the state."

Ms Thomas said that the benefits of participation in the data custodian program included:

**Your data assets are protected:** Custodianship gives your business the framework and processes to evaluate your datasets and to justify the resources to manage and maintain them efficiently.

**No duplication:** Each dataset is managed and maintained only once, saving time, effort and money.

**Improved Business Intelligence:** As you share your datasets, in turn you can access datasets collected and managed by others.

Your decision-making can be improved by tapping into additional datasets that you would never have the time or resources to collect from scratch.

**Better feedback:** Custodianship not only makes it easier for you to license your dataset, it keeps you informed of who is using it, gives users a feedback mechanism for future requirements and gives you a business justification for allocating budget or resources for maintenance or enhancement.

Users can be notified of updates so they keep their data current.

**Control:** You remain in control of who is allowed to share your data. Sensitive layers can be excluded and special agreements put in place for restricted data.

**Limited risk:** Data is rarely perfect. Limitations to its currency or accuracy should not exclude it, but decision makers need to take them into account.

All custodianship datasets must be clearly documented and maintained to the schedule that the custodian has committed to. Your obligations are clear, and so are the limits to your liability.

**Streamlined processes:** A lot of the groundwork has already been laid and the processes have been tried and tested.

As a custodian, you will have templates for role descriptions, licensing agreements, checklists and tools to help you document the dataset.

**Additional revenues:** By licensing your data you can generate additional revenues to fund maintenance and further enhancements.

**User awareness:** Users, who would otherwise have no idea that your data exists, can find you through the online search and discovery database containing descriptions of all the custodianship datasets in Victoria.

**Smooth distribution:** For unrestricted datasets you can allow users to sign an agreement online and download the data over the Internet. Alternatively, you can choose to distribute your dataset through a third-party distributor.

Fact sheets explaining the custodianship program are available at <[www.land.vic.gov.au/custodian](http://www.land.vic.gov.au/custodian)>.



Right: VSC Secretariat Manager Elizabeth Thomas is coordinating the drive to promote data sharing and higher standards of data custodianship.