InTACT, ACT Department of Treasury

Submission to
The Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January Bushfires

Introduction

InTACT is the insourced provider of Information Technology and Communications Infrastructure services to ACT Government. It provides most Government telecommunications and computing services, with key exceptions being the Emergency Services Bureau's Computer Aided Dispatch and Radio Communications systems, and file backup and recovery services for ACT Forests.

During the fires and subsequent State of Emergency, InTACT performed four main functions, namely

- Preservation and protection of ACT Government electronic information holdings;
- Maintenance of availability of computer systems to Government and, via the Internet, to the Public;
- Restoration of services to facilities damaged by fire, and re-establishment of services to groups whose facilities had been destroyed; and
- Provision of new or additional computing and communications facilities to a range of emergency-related activities, including ACT Government co-ordination elements located at the Police Operations Centre, and the ACT Recovery Centre.

Lessons Learned

1. **ACT Government IT&C infrastructure is critical to a successful ACT Government response to a disaster.**

During the bushfire crisis, InTACT played a crucial role in the provision of a variety of services including:

- Telephony and IT systems at the Canberra Connect Call Centre;
- Web services and Internet connectivity for the Canberra Connect and ESB web sites;
- Hospital administrative systems, such as the Patient Administration and Emergency Room systems; and
- A range of other key computer systems used by Agencies in delivering their response (e.g. Homenet, ESB administrative systems, electronic mail communications and many others).

There was some unavailability of systems on Saturday 18 January, including Canberra Connect and ESB websites, due to extended loss of power at the main Callam Offices

computer facility, and subsequent run-down of the battery backup system. A generator capability has since been installed to keep ACT Government IT systems running indefinitely.

Extended unavailability of these services would have impacted seriously on public safety and, perhaps less significantly, on key public information communication channels.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the ACT Government's IT&C systems be recognised as critical infrastructure, and designed and managed with all appropriate measures to maximise business continuity for key systems across Government.

2. Early engagement of Government Agencies with IT&C Provider significantly improves business continuity capability.

Those Agencies that engaged early (before the onset of the disaster) with InTACT to develop and test their disaster contingencies realised significant benefits in their ability to maintain Business Continuity, despite a massive increase in load. Examples of such Agencies were Canberra Connect and their telephony services, and The Canberra Hospital and its emergency room systems. These groups were able to maintain a very high level of service during the worst of the emergency, due to early activation of agreed arrangements with InTACT.

It is likely that some delays and misunderstandings in other areas could have been avoided if there had been prior discussion with InTACT about how it could assist, both in maintaining business continuity, and in providing additional services at short notice.

It is therefore recommended that all Agencies with systems identified as having a role to play in emergency or disaster response, liaise with InTACT to establish and test appropriate disaster contingency plans.

3. Formal communications outside of Emergency Management Council should be expanded.

Communication among member Agencies of the Emergency Management Council appears to be very good, but it appears to be less effective with other parts of Government. By way of example, InTACT was not part of a formal communication process during the entirety of the bushfire crisis. Fortunately, informal communication channels were established, and these went some way to redressing the problem, although communications failures did result in delays to provision of public services, for example when it was discovered that the main ACT Government computer centre was not on ActewAGL's priority list for restoration of power.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the existing Liaison Officer system be extended from the current membership of Emergency Management Council to all Government Agencies with a possible role in emergency response. It is further recommended that

these arrangements be flexible enough to allow non-member Agencies to be included as the need becomes apparent.

4. The Major Technology Systemic Failure sub-committee should be re-activated and the associated sub-plan revised.

The Major Technology Systemic Failure sub-committee of the Emergency Management Council was formed to develop a response to the Y2K issue. It has been inactive since, with the plan not being revised since that time. The bushfire emergency demonstrated the heavy reliance placed on IT&C systems.

It is recommended that, given the increase in threat to key systems from cyber-attack and the need to be prepared for other natural disasters in future, the Emergency Management Council sub-committee to co-ordinate a response to systemic loss of technology-based infrastructure be reactivated.