



Use of Open Source in Government - Australia and Around the World

Summary of Findings

Brendan Scott
Open Source Law
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1. Background

In the first quarter of 2005 Open Source Law (<http://www.opensourcelaw.biz>) conducted a review of use of open source software within Government in Australia and around the world, excluding South America, Africa and China. The review was based largely on publicly accessible documents supplemented in some instances by telephone interviews. The results of the review were presented at the Open Computing in Government Conference hosted by the Australian Unix Users Group in Canberra on 18 April 2005.

2. Key Findings

2.1 The key findings of the report were:

- (a) There is pervasive use of open source within government around the world;
- (b) Many governments have expressed a desire to move to open document formats, with many Technical Reference or Interoperability Frameworks requiring this use;
- (c) A number of States require consideration to be given to open source in procurement;
- (d) Many States publicly acknowledge the value of open source in supporting domestic SMEs and fostering local IT industries;
- (e) Typical open source solutions reported on include email/browser applications such as Mozilla office suites such as OpenOffice.org (or the related StarOffice product[†]), server products (such as Apache) and operating systems (such as Linux);
- (f) Some agencies reported substantially increased attentiveness from their closed source vendors as a result of their open source investment. None have reported adverse treatment as a consequence of open source investments;
- (g) There is at least one known open source panel contract which has been awarded within Australia (awarded by the NSW Department of Commerce, April 2005);
- (h) Some agencies reported use of open source had substantially reduced virus load (and response costs), and overall IT costs in the target implementation area;

[†] Technically StarOffice is not made available under an open source licence.



- (i) Some governments have participated in code development through financing aspects of open source projects. There are few instances of government release of government code as open source;
 - (j) There exist a handful of intergovernment code sharing repositories although they are not well populated by code. Such repositories have barriers to participation which may be related to low code population;
 - (k) Some States (such as France, and some South East Asian countries) have taken a strategic view of open source, adopting it as an industry development tool or, and some cases, a supplement to diplomatic initiatives.
- 2.2 France is the quiet achiever of the world of open source in government. In October 2004 French officials reported over 60,000 desktops in the public administration having already implemented open source office productivity software (OpenOffice.org), with that number set to at least double by end 2005. From January 2005 France also has a requirement for documents produced by the Directorate of Customs to be stored in the OpenOffice.org open data format.
3. **Key Threats**
- 3.1 Leading edge use of open source mandates emphasis of its potential as a strategic tool. Some governments are still fumbling over basic procurement and go/no-go decisions. These issues should be resolved quickly to maximise advantages.
- 3.2 Open source has an important role as the missing link in conditioning markets for data interoperability. Failure to adopt well targeted open source requirements in procurement (aimed at ensuring forward looking data interoperability) is likely to result in unsatisfactory data interoperability and standards outcomes.
4. **Political Support within Australia**
- 4.1 An earlier study by Open Source Law on behalf of Open Source Industry Australia Limited of major Australian Federal Parliamentary parties in September 2004 showed that there was strong political support for open source and open standards across the political spectrum.

About Open Source Law

Open Source Law is a boutique legal practice based in Sydney. The practice specialises in ICT and IP law with a special focus on open source related legal issues. Open Source Law engages in market research relating to open source.

Contact:

Brendan Scott
(+61) 414 339 227
inquiries@opensourcelaw.biz
<http://www.opensourcelaw.biz>

Disclosure: Open Source Law acts, or has acted for, some of the agencies reviewed in the survey, including the NSW Department of Commerce and the Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW.