

The Development of a Modern Government Land Information Agency

Russ Ballard
Land Information New Zealand
PO Box 5501
Wellington
New Zealand

Summary

State Sector Reforms in New Zealand and new technology have had a profound impact on the organisation of government land information activities and associated agency structures and business approaches.

This paper examines the impact of reform principles, government policies and evolving technologies on, the development of New Zealand's land information agency – Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), and its outcomes/goals, structures, management processes and staff resources.

The move from an integrated operational agency to a single policy, standard setting, auditing, contract management agency is tracked with a forecast of evolution into a virtual, on-line agency.

The effects of outsourcing operational activities on accountabilities, regulatory activities, use of technology, agency competencies and staff skills is significant.

Introduction

This paper outlines the changes which have occurred in government land information administration in New Zealand over the last three years. It identifies the principles and policies underlying the changes and the administrative structures and processes used to give effect to them.

State Sector Reform

General principles

The role of central government in New Zealand society today is the product of a substantial reform process that has been taking place since 1984.

The overall purpose of this reform has been to:

- reduce unnecessary government intervention in the economy by identifying and focusing on the provision of core public good functions¹; and
- increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the state sector through an emphasis on transparency, accountability and outsourcing.

¹ 'Core public good' functions in this instance are defined as those which are critical to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the country and would not be provided without central government intervention.

The introduction in the late 1980s of both the State Sector Act and the Public Finance Act brought about changes in the way departments are managed, funded, and how operational accountability is assigned. In general terms, there has been a move away from centralised and prescriptive control of departments to a more devolved and facilitative model. Chief Executives have been made the legal employers of staff and been given direct responsibility for both carrying out of the functions and duties of their departments, and ensuring that they are operated in an efficient, effective, and economical manner. This includes the management and funding of risk. (1) In return for the managerial autonomy, Chief Executives are held accountable via fixed term contracts and performance agreements for the performance of their departments and the delivery of government determined outcomes.

The Government purchases outputs from Departments, as opposed to funding inputs, via purchase agreements which are supported by appropriations. Budgets and financial statements are on an accrual basis with provision for depreciation costs and a charge for net capital deployed. This provides Departments with the facility to manage their own capital assets. Where large capital projects exceed the internal capital funding capacity, capital injections may be sought. (2)

Land information restructuring

In line with the state sector reforms, there has been a move to focus on the provision of those land information related functions and services that have been identified by government as being it's core business. These core land information and regulatory functions have, over the last ten years and via a number of reorganisations, become consolidated in the department that is Land Information New Zealand (LINZ). LINZ has the role as provider and/or purchaser of these core functions. A chronology of the reorganisations that have occurred since 1987 is provided in table 1 below.

Table 1: Chronology of events in the formation of Land Information New Zealand

1987	Department of Lands and Survey was restructured. Land development and conservation management roles were removed and placed with new departments and a State Owned Enterprise (SOE). Department of Survey and Land Information (DOSLI) was set up to provide government, civil and military survey mapping and land information services.
1995	Land Titles Office of the Justice Department amalgamated with DOSLI.
1996	DOSLI restructured. LINZ and Terralink NZ Ltd set up to take over roles of DOSLI. LINZ vested with core government land related regulatory and purchase functions. Terralink NZ Ltd (a SOE) vested with the commercial activities. Responsibility for purchase of hydrographic services vested with LINZ from the Royal New Zealand Navy).
1997	LINZ assumes responsibility for management of technical aspects of New Zealand's continental shelf claim.
1998	Valuation Department restructured into Quotable Value NZ Ltd (an SOE). Regulatory functions of the Valuer General amalgamated with LINZ.

Government decisions

In addition to making decisions to restructure its agencies to reflect a 'core', 'non core' separation, the Government has made two other key decisions, which together with the State Sector Reform general principles have provided the framework within which the LINZ management team have built their organisation.

Core land information outcomes

The New Zealand Government has set the department four core outcomes:

- The on-going delivery of an efficient regulatory framework that establishes:
 - parameters for definition and dealing in land property rights; and
 - standards and specifications for provision of core land and seabed information.
- The establishment of clearly defined, marketable and secure land property rights, and maintenance of the resulting records, to underpin economic activity in New Zealand.
- The efficient management of Crown land-related liabilities and responsibilities through either:
 - Efficient management and disposal of surplus Crown land assets and land-related liabilities; or
 - Efficient oversight and/or management of Crown land purchase and disposal regulatory instruments.
- The on-going maintenance of publicly available core geographic information that supports the constitutional framework, national security and emergency services' responses. (3)

Information management policies

In 1997 the New Zealand Government approved a policy framework for government held information. The principles of this framework provide the common ground under which all central government agencies are expected to manage their responsibilities as stewards of information. The principles govern what information agencies may hold and how they must manage it and cover such aspects as collection, quality and integrity, copyright, availability, pricing, preservation and disposal. In the main these principles clearly consolidate requirements under existing legislation such as the Official Information Act and the Privacy Act.

LINZ has developed an overarching information management policy based on customising the above policy framework in the context of its land and seabed information and service responsibilities. An initial focus has been on implementing the pricing principles which state that where information is collected in the public interest that it be made readily available at a price based on the marginal cost of dissemination. This is other than where access must be restricted due to confidentiality or privacy requirements.

LINZ has examined overseas initiatives aimed at the development of national spatial data infrastructures (NSDIs). LINZ has in the interim determined that the central government information management issues associated with an NSDI are more effectively addressed comprehensively for both spatial and non-spatial data through the implementation of the New Zealand Government approved principles for the management of government held information. The more coercive and interventionist nature of some of the overseas NSDI initiatives are contrary to the general principles of the governance of New Zealand where central government aims to facilitate the role of the private sector in integrating databases and providing value added services. LINZ will, however, adopt international standards, in so far as they are available and appropriate in the development of the national spatial referencing system and core land and seabed information databases, and in doing so provide the fundamental building blocks of the New Zealand NSDI.

Agency establishment – management decisions

The newly appointed management team of LINZ set themselves the challenge of using the managerial discretion provided by the NZ State Sector Reforms, within the framework set by government, to create a world class land information agency. The key attributes of such an agency were seen as:

- 1 A well defined policy framework and set of outcomes established by the Government (the agency owner).
- 2 A clear sense of direction (vision and goals) on how to achieve the outcomes.
- 3 A structure consistent with the Government's reform principles and which supports the achievement of the outcomes and goals.
- 4 Management practices and processes and use of technology that are innovative, match 'best international practice' and consistent with Government reform principles and expectations.
- 5 Staff with the skills and behavioural attributes that support achievement of the goals and outcomes within the operational framework set by Government and the Department.

Vision and goals

LINZ's Vision Statement, produced in consultation with staff, is presented in table 2. The statement reflects our over-arching goal of being a world class agency, the broad outcomes we are hoping to achieve and some rules of operation reflecting how we will conduct our business.

Table 2: Vision Statement – Land Information New Zealand

<p>We will provide world-class land and seabed information services that will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure the security of New Zealand land rights and interests;• enable the people of New Zealand to fully enjoy the benefits of our land and seabed resources; and• meet (and often exceed) the expectations of the Government and customers. <p>To achieve this we will (rules of operation):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide a challenging and satisfying workplace for our people;• develop an action-oriented and responsive customer perspective;• act with integrity and honesty - 'walk the talk';• empower people and instill a strong emphasis on personal responsibility;• encourage 'team' thinking over factional interests; and• encourage creativity and excellence by supporting initiative and valuing differences. <p>Our systems of performance, training and development, and open communication will reinforce these.</p> <p>We will deliver our services and products with integrity and pride.</p>

At its establishment the Department developed a set of mid to long-term strategic goals that reflect its aim to deliver services and outcomes that meet the needs of the Government and it's customers. The Department has seven operational goals and two organisational goals (table 3).

Table 3: Strategic goals – Land Information New Zealand

Operational goals:

- a national spatial referencing system that meets New Zealand's core land and seabed information needs;
- a secure national land title and survey system available from remote locations with a turnaround time of 24 hours for 90% of survey and title transactions;
- current topographic, hydrographic and bathymetric information that covers New Zealand's area of jurisdiction and is required for public interest purposes;
- seabed information that will enable New Zealand to maximise its continental shelf claim (under United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 2006);
- transfer of all Crown lands to the private sector, Maori, local authorities or the Conservation Estate;
- information and advice to enable the Government to decide how future rights to the seabed will be defined and held; and
- a nationally consistent valuation system for rating purposes within a contestable environment.

Organisational goals:

- to ensure staff have the skills and commitment to achieve the department's vision of meeting (and often exceeding) customer's expectations; and
- to have information and management systems that are consistent with the department's vision, and support the achievement of its strategic goals.

Departmental structure

LINZ is structured around the following four basic functional areas to achieve the government-required outcomes:

- Policy;
- Regulatory;
- Service delivery; and
- Corporate services.

The separation of the policy/regulatory groups from the service delivery is designed to:

- limit conflicts of interest (enhancing the credibility of policy and technical advice);
- provide accountability transparency;
- improve management focus; and
- facilitate the outsourcing of service delivery.

The service delivery functions of survey, Crown property, topography and hydrography are largely undertaken by external suppliers, while service delivery of the Office of the Valuer General is totally outsourced. Land title services, including survey plan approvals, are currently carried out totally in-house.

With the separation of the Regulatory and Service Delivery areas the principle focus of the Regulatory Group (consisting of five statutory officers) is on:

- providing technical advice;
- setting and documenting technical standards and guidelines (ensuring that where appropriate these meet international standards);
- defining programmes of work (service delivery) to be purchased by Government (as appropriate);
- accrediting service providers (to facilitate competitive outsourcing);
- monitoring compliance with standards and service delivery specifications; and
- professional liaison (domestic and international) with peer, stakeholder and industry groups.

The specialised function of contract negotiation and managing/auditing contracts is carried out by an administrative group within the Regulatory Group. This provides for specialisation, economies, and risk mitigation.

The external suppliers and/or the internal operations groups contracted to provide services are required to ensure that core databases are maintained and services are delivered in accordance with the standards and guidelines set by the regulatory groups. (3)

Management practices

Key features of LINZ management practices are:

- Rigorous planning and reporting
Production of a Strategic Business Plan which links, via a purchase agreement with the Minister, to annual business plans for each organisational unit. Formal monthly reporting against milestones in the purchase agreement and business plans.
- Benchmarking
Systems, processes and practices are benchmarked against 'best practice' and for consistency with the 'rules of operation' (see table 2).
- Business case analysis
Decisions on capital investments, outsourcing and added activities are based on cost/benefit analysis. Projects are sponsored and run by business managers not technologists.
- Risk management
With the accountability for risk management residing with the Chief Executive and the level of liability exposure associated with the provision of land information, many LINZ management systems and practices focus on risk mitigation:
 - the clear separation of functions and accountabilities;
 - the documentation of standards and guidelines with formal monitoring of compliance with them;
 - relationships between organisational units within the department formally documented in Service Level Agreements;
 - use of automated information systems to achieve standardisation of business rules, procedures and standards across the organisation;

- accreditation of service providers for 'fitness and capability' to deliver contracted or agency services; and
- an administrative policy requiring organisational units to undertake comprehensive risk analysis and maintain associated risk management and contingency plans.
- Maintenance of contestability

A strong market driven economy is critical to achieving efficiency gains which the New Zealand Government has sought in its reform of the state sector. Effective marketplace contestability in the provision of services to government is critical to achieving efficiency gains in outsourcing. Similarly, where government is releasing information to the community via retailers effective contestability in both the on-selling of information and the provision of value added services is essential if the community is to have access to these at competitive prices.

LINZ seeks to foster the development of a contestable provider market by:

- providing facilitative (non-prescriptive) contracts which encourage innovation in the adoption of new technologies and methodologies.
- ensuring that contracts are modularised to maximise the opportunities for existing and new providers.
- ensuring that there is widespread knowledge by the land information industry of pending contracts and longer term programmes.
- being prepared to accept overseas bids (although giving preference to those acting via a New Zealand agent so that transactions are in NZ dollars and managed under NZ law).

LINZ seeks to foster the development of a contestable retail market by:

- ensuring that there is widespread knowledge by the extended land information industry of retail opportunities by making information on core land information and supporting documentation readily available.
 - providing information to the land information industry in readily accessible formats and in accordance with policies that ensure a level playing field for the widest range of retailers.
 - being impartial and objective when providing information and contextual comment to the land information retail sector.
 - Stakeholder relationship management
- A factor critical to the success of LINZ is the management of its relationship with the Minister, other government departments, stakeholders and customers. The way such relationships are managed is crucial to how the department is perceived, and the credibility it carries. LINZ therefore places considerable emphasis on enhancing these relationships by:
- providing high quality policy advice to our Minister;
 - providing consistent, accurate and timely services to customers;
 - responding to customer surveys and complaints;
 - involving key stakeholders in development of future directions, strategies and policies, through participation in advisory groups, steering committees and consultative panels;
 - communicating with our customers, suppliers and stakeholders; and
 - ensuring that our customers and suppliers are aware of and prepared for change.

Human resources

LINZ has inherited and recruited many highly skilled people from a range of organisations.

The initial stumbling block to our operating as an effective organisation was not a lack of technical skills but the lack of a common culture and behavioural characteristics at odds with the way we and Government wished to do business. We are moving to this common culture by:

- defining our rules of operation (see table 2);
- identifying behavioural characteristics associated with our desired culture;
- integrating facilities and business processes with a focus on teamwork;
- requiring all staff to have performance agreements which set targets for both work outputs and behavioural characteristics and reinforcing these through the rewards and sanctions system;
- building appropriate non-technical competencies into job descriptions; and
- focusing on our communication networks.

Our longer term concern is in the skill development and retention area. Traditionally the parent agencies of LINZ provided extensive internal training to develop the specialist skills required. As we move more and more into outsourcing our ability to provide training positions diminishes. To compensate for this we are in the process of defining the competencies required for specialist land information positions (land titles and survey approving officers and property officers) with the intent of getting tertiary training institutions to develop appropriate diploma/degree courses to satisfy our recruitment requirements.

The other problem associated with outsourcing and downsizing, that of loss of corporate knowledge, we are tackling by documentation of standards and processes and building business rules into intelligent automated processing systems.

The demand for and the weight placed on traditional technical competencies in the Government land information/management area has declined with an increasing emphasis now on new skills such as standard setting, auditing, contract management, computer literacy, risk management, customer relations and interpersonal skills. Having people with both the right skills and right attitude is critical to our success.

Future development

Future developments which are either planned or likely based on trends include:

Planned:

- Automation of our land titles and survey plan approval process with a national, on-line land register and survey accurate cadastral data base (2002)
- Growth in the number of staff teleworking.
- Establishment of a Chief Information Officer position (combining IT and Information System responsibilities).
- Reduced regulation of land information related professions (survey, valuation, conveyancing).

Likely:

- Availability of all our databases via the internet with many products, including maps and charts, available interactively on-line.
- Outsourcing of all service delivery activities including the new automated land titles and survey processing.
- The consolidation of some of the Statutory Officer positions as regulation of professions decreases and business rules are built into information and processing systems.
- The disappearance of LINZ as an agency with a physical presence and its emergence as a virtual on-line agency or agencies in varying combinations with other Government information/regulatory activities.

References

(1) State Sector Act 1988. Reprinted 1 March 1995 (New Zealand).

(2) SCHICK, A., 1996. *The Spirit Of Reform: Managing the New Zealand State Sector in a Time of Change*. Wellington New Zealand: State Services Commission and The Treasury, 87 pages.

(3) Land Information New Zealand, 1998. *Strategic Business Plan*. Wellington: Land Information New Zealand, 33 pages.