



Public Sector Performance Report

Executive Summary

Report No 4, June 2003

This first Public Sector Performance Report for 2003 brings to the notice of Parliament the results of three Control, Compliance and Accountability Audits that, in the opinion of the Auditor General, are significant and warrant attention.

Management of Marine Safety and Sea Search and Rescue

Over the last five years, boating accidents have caused more deaths and serious injuries in Australia than rail accidents and air crashes combined. In Western Australia (WA) over the last 40 years, an average of nine people have died each year from boating accidents¹, though WA has a better marine safety record than the majority of other Australian States.

WA has approximately 68 000 registered recreational boats and around 2 000 commercial boats operating along its 12 500 kilometres of coastline whilst an estimated 250 000 people are involved in boating activities each year. In 2001-02, approximately 1 400 marine search and rescues (SARs) were carried out, 90 per cent of which were conducted by WA's 36 Volunteer Marine Rescue Groups (VMRGs).

Management of marine safety in WA is largely the responsibility of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI). Management of marine search and rescue (SAR) operations in WA is the responsibility of the Western Australian Police Service whilst Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) is responsible for the funding and administrative coordination of VMRGs.

The audit found that significant steps have been taken over the past decade to enhance marine safety in WA including more focused administration, enhanced vessel safety requirements and greater valuing of the essential role played by volunteers. Nevertheless, further improvements are still necessary:

- ❑ Parts of WA's marine safety regulations are outdated including standards for modern vessel construction and qualifications of pilots and marine surveyors. A parliamentary Bill to modernise the legislation lapsed in 2000.

- ❑ A 21 per cent reduction in on-water safety inspections of commercial vessels has been attributed to resource constraints. DPI has advised that this will change. An April 2003 decision to implement a June 2001 Machinery of Government recommendation will see the integration of the at sea operations of DPI and the Department of Fisheries.
- ❑ DPI lacks comprehensive information about marine safety incidents. This affects its ability to assess risk factors, develop prevention measures and make resource allocation decisions.
- ❑ DPI can improve its undertaking of marine incident investigations, issuing of cautions and infringements and monitoring and enforcement of competency standards for commercial vessel operators.
- ❑ A lack of marine safety plans in five of the eight ports for which DPI has responsibility is a result of a lack of legislative or contractual authority over the private port operators.
- ❑ Search and rescue reports from Volunteer Marine Rescue Groups do not contain all key information and are not being used to assist in identifying or addressing potential problems. Information not reported includes the time taken to launch a rescue vessel and to get to the vessel in distress.
- ❑ Forty thousand hours was estimated in 2001 as necessary to train sea search and rescue volunteers to meet desired skill levels. FESA has advised that it aims to commence the training in late 2004.

Regulation of the Taxi Industry and Small Charter Vehicles

The State's 6 660 taxi drivers and 1 520 taxi vehicles are regulated by the Taxi Act 1994 and the Transport Coordination Act 1966. Regulation is aimed at setting service standards required of drivers and vehicles and maintaining a viable industry through licensing and the setting of fares. In 2001-02, the total value of metropolitan taxi fares was estimated at \$88 million.

¹ Four deaths occurred in 2000-01 and six in 2001-02.



Auditor General for Western Australia

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) through its Taxi Unit undertakes the administration of the taxi industry. The Taxi Unit also administers the State Government 'Taxi User Subsidy Scheme' (TUSS) which subsidises taxi travel for people who have a severe disability. In 2001-02, over 23 000 TUSS members received subsidised travel valued at \$6.4 million.

Competition to taxi services is provided by small charter vehicles (SCVs), which like taxis offer on demand, chauffeured travel. At December 2002, 509 SCVs were licensed in Western Australia. SCVs are regulated by DPI under the Transport Coordination Act 1966, though the level of regulation is much less than for taxis.

In January 2003 a Ministerial review commenced into the regulatory structure of the taxi industry. The Ministerial review has generated considerable speculation including about whether the taxi industry will be deregulated and whether the State Government will initiate a buy-back of vehicle plates. These issues were not addressed by this audit.

The audit found that:

- Most aspects of the taxi industry are being adequately administered, though some issues were identified. DPI has committed to addressing these matters:
 - planning and assessment of compliance activities needs improvement, particularly for the country taxi industry where little monitoring is done; and
 - minimum hours of operation are a condition of license aimed at ensuring an adequate supply of taxis during peak times. DPI does not enforce the requirement but rather manages it through the issue of additional taxi plates if passenger demand is not being met. Audit testing indicates that drivers are often not working the minimum hours and some information indicates excess passenger demand.

- Monitoring of the Small Charter Vehicle industry is minimal compared to the taxi industry because of fewer regulatory requirements. DPI has advised that the regulatory differences and its monitoring program will be reviewed in 2003-04.

Security of the Government Internet Gateway

The Department of Treasury and Finance offers Internet related services to State Government agencies² under the 'ServiceNet' banner. Internet services offered include:

- connection to the Internet;
- hosting of web pages; and
- intruder detection and virus protection.

A major national technology service provider operates and maintains ServiceNet's computer and network infrastructure under a contract established in 1999.

Currently 46 State Government agencies connect to the Internet using ServiceNet including those responsible for key online government services such as vehicle licensing, payroll and land tax payments and births, deaths and marriages.

In this context, the security and reliability of ServiceNet's infrastructure is essential to providing a stable environment for much of the Western Australian Public Sector's Internet activities. Without a secure infrastructure, agencies are susceptible to the increasing world trend of Internet based attacks with consequential potential damages to service delivery and data integrity.

Audit of the security infrastructure of ServiceNet found:

- The security infrastructure is generally sound though opportunities exist to improve ongoing security including some management aspects of the firewall and related infrastructure.
- Internet related risks can be reduced in at least one third of the 46 agencies connected to the Internet through ServiceNet by them more fully utilising ServiceNet's security features.

² Services are also provided to two Local Government agencies.