

MEDIA STATEMENT



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AUDITOR GENERAL HIGHLIGHTS SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS WITH AGENCY INFORMATION SYSTEMS

In his three part Information Systems report tabled in Parliament today, Auditor General Colin Murphy has highlighted significant concerns with some agency information systems, most notably with the WA Police Firearms Management System.

The application controls section of Mr Murphy's report looks at five business applications at four agencies and while most of the applications were working effectively, numerous weaknesses were identified with the WA Police (WAP) Firearms Register and supporting systems.

"As a result of our findings, we have no confidence in the accuracy of basic information on the number of people licensed to possess firearms or the number of licensed or unlicensed firearms in Western Australia," Mr Murphy said.

"In the absence of reliable information, WAP is unable to effectively manage firearms licensing and regulation in WA."

Mr Murphy said a number of concerning issues had been identified that result directly or indirectly from the lack of reliable data and difficulties in accessing basic management information from the Firearms Register, including firearms not recovered from deceased estates, use of template 'property' letters to obtain firearms and people assessed as unfit to have a firearm still listed as possessing them.

Specifically, the report identified: 988 firearms that had not been recovered by WAP from deceased estates dating back to 1983; inaccurate recording showed over 300 firearm licence holders still had firearms listed against their licence despite being classified by WAP as unfit to possess them, and; over 25 000 instances where WA data could not be reconciled with the national CRIMTRAC database.

Recreational firearm licence applications require an accompanying letter of approval from a property owner to use the licensed firearm on their property.

"During the course of the audit we became aware of at least one case where a person was sold a property letter by a firearms dealer so they could apply for a firearms licence, which prompted us to look at a sample of property letters," Mr Murphy said.

"While there is no limit to the number of property letters that can be issued by an individual property owner, it was concerning to find one property owner had provided property letters to over 270 applicants through a small number of firearms dealers over the past 17 months, and another had provided over 80 property letters through the one dealer.

“WAP advised this practice was not illegal but acknowledge it is not in accordance with the intention of the legislation and expect this issue will be addressed through a proposed review of the relevant Act.

“Disappointingly, the Firearms Registry System cannot search or report on the number of property letters associated with each property making it difficult for WAP to identify any trends or areas of concern.

“We conducted performance audits on the management and regulation of firearms in 2000, 2004 and 2009, and in each report we identified various problems with the systems and processes for the licensing and management of firearms in Western Australia.

“What this latest audit shows is that WAP still has a long way to go to ensure the Firearms Register and supporting systems are operating effectively.

“WAP must act on the recommendations of this report to ensure the integrity and functionality of the firearms management system and to provide the community with some assurance that firearms can be suitably managed in this State.”

The Auditor General’s Information Systems Audit Report also contained the results of a security gap analysis against international standards and the outcomes of the annual general computer controls and capability assessments.

Mr Murphy said ninety per cent of the 21 agencies reviewed had serious gaps in their management of information security when assessed against better practice international standards.

“The standard sets out controls for ensuring computer systems are designed, configured and managed to preserve the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information.

“Most of these controls are recognised as good practice and require minimal effort to implement.”

The general computer control audits and capability maturity model assessments involved an assessment of 44 and 36 agencies respectively against six general computer control categories: IT operations, management of IT risks, information security, business continuity, change control and physical security.

Mr Murphy found that more than half of the agencies assessed had not established adequate controls to manage IT risks, information security and business continuity.

“I was pleased to note that eight agencies had made improvements in at least one of the categories without regressing in another,” he said.

“However, only three of the 36 agencies we assessed were rated as having mature general computer controls.

“I urge agencies to take note of the findings and act on the recommendations of this report to help ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information.”

The Auditor General’s report “Information Systems Audit Report” (Report 11 – June 2013) can be downloaded from the Office of the Auditor General website at www.audit.wa.gov.au

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