



Australian Government

**Department of Innovation
Industry, Science and Research**

Evaluation of business.gov.au

Report Summary

Negotiating government regulation, compliance and information are critical tasks for business in Australia. This is particularly the case with small and micro businesses, which lack the means to devote specific resources to these activities.

The mandate for the establishment of business.gov.au (previously known as the Business Entry Point) originated from the 1996 Small Business Deregulation Taskforce report *Time for Business*, known as the Bell Report. This report recognised the potential for all levels of government to work together to ease the compliance burden for small business.

business.gov.au (formerly Business Entry Point) was established in 1997 as part of the *More Time for Business* initiative, which launched a package of measures that included funding for the establishment of the Business Entry Point (BEP) and the National Business Information Service (NBIS).

business.gov.au is a web based solution developed and delivered by the Australian Government which provides a single source of information from all Commonwealth, State and Territory and local governments as well as online forms and tools aimed at assisting business. Its role is to aggregate information and transactions from all three levels of government and to provide business with an online discovery mechanism as well as providing up to date information for all three levels of government.

A recommendation in the 2004 evaluation of the Business Entry Point Initiative states that the performance of business.gov.au and its initiatives are to be evaluated on a regular basis. The 2007-08 evaluation was conducted by a specialist independent team within the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. The team was assisted by the policy and initiative operators as well as by experts who undertook specific economic modeling to contextualize and inform the evaluation's findings.

The evaluation examined the appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, integration, performance assessment and strategic policy alignment of the business.gov.au initiative since 2004. The evaluation gave particular attention to the following issues:

- The ability of business.gov.au to reach stakeholders with limited access to ICT infrastructure;
- What future initiatives should be considered in order to meet the needs of its target communities; and
- International comparative analysis.

The evaluation methodology encompassed a comprehensive desktop review, extensive consultations with key stakeholders and detailed analysis of reports, statistics, market research and other data. In addition the evaluation considered reporting data provided by the

initiative operator's comprising of monthly, quarterly and annual performance reports. The evaluation was advised by a Reference Group comprising Departmental experts.

Overall the evaluation found that business.gov.au is delivering a valuable service to the business community. The initiative is very well regarded by key stakeholders and end users and is used as an important resource by business professionals such as accountants and financial advisers. The initiative is being efficiently delivered, with the responsible staff attracting significant praise during the consultations. Analysis also revealed that for every dollar invested by the Australian Government the benefits to the business community in time and efficiency gains is ten fold.

When the evaluation examined business.gov.au in an international context it found that at present it is competitive in terms of its scope and its reach. Comparable initiatives are also attempting to improve information flows and reduce the regulatory burdens that business faces, indicating that other international governments are working to remedy these issues.

The evaluation considered whether business.gov.au was providing a service that in its absence would be offered by the private sector. Analysis indicated that while it is possible that such a service would be offered, it would probably be on a paid subscription basis, and that many current users would not have the funds to access it. Further, the evaluation also found that no individual alternative government jurisdiction would be capable of providing a service that would be comparable either in terms of its reach or content. This was confirmed through consultations with public and private organisations.

The evaluation found that while the policy objectives of the initiative are well understood it would be appropriate at this time, given the change of Government to reaffirm its mandate. At present it is conceivable that business.gov.au could identify areas where regulation is duplicative or overlapping but it is not an instrument that can achieve a reduction in the volume of business regulation. Even so the evaluation found that the initiative is an important tool in reducing the burden associated with both discovering and complying with the administrative aspects of regulation. While the key performance indicators are largely being met, the evaluation found that they could be improved in order to more effectively measure whether the initiative is reducing the regulatory and compliance burdens faced by business.

The evaluation also found that business.gov.au is broadly socially inclusive, providing services that are important in promoting social justice. This is emphasised by the initiative's universal accessibility, the ubiquity of information provided and the assistance that it offers to those who are not necessarily strongly placed within the Australian economy.

It is clear that business.gov.au is delivering a service that is valued and useful to the Australian business community. It is addressing a significant market gap, and doing so in a way that is both successful and cost effective. The evaluation considers that there is a substantial case for its continued operation, and that the initiative is playing a vital role in the contemporary Australian business environment.