

Sent: 31 January 2006 10:38
To: Watmore Ian - PMDU -
Subject: Feedback on 'Transformational Government, Enabled by
Technology'

Dear Ian Watmore (and Team),

This is a very brief response to the request for feedback on the use of IT in UK govt.

Personally I have no problem in principle with the state making good and even extensive use of IT and other technology as long as 'extensive' does not conflict with 'good'; and 'good' is what genuinely serves the needs of the people (rather than what simply serves the interests of state bureaucracy, 'big business', or politicians).

As I have not had time to thoroughly read 'Transformational Government Enabled by Technology', and will not have time before this Friday, I am going to use the issue of 'ID Cards and the 'National Information Register' as a case study.

As I have mentioned generally above I have, in principle, no particular objection to 'ID Cards', or even to some form of 'NIR', but I object very strongly to the proposals currently being put through the legislative process under these two headings.

As far as I am concerned no Govt. has any business (though perhaps 'business' is the main driving force in this) in acquiring the ownership of personal identity for anything other than perhaps a very grave and acute threat to national safety. Otherwise this is a completely immoral and undemocratic thing to do. However it is dressed up a wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf with the habits and teeth of a wolf.

I'm sure there's no need to say much about how power corrupts; history tells us all we need to know. The machinery of state needs to be kept firmly in check so that it continues, as openly and simply as possible, to fulfil its primary function, which is not to rule but to serve.

IT, and technology in general, is simply a tool, not a panacea. Like all tools it is imperfect and dependent largely on the quality of use given to it by people. Just because something can be done, or might be possible, does not imply that it is either needed, better than what already exists, or that it is good.

I hope our system of government, and the nation as a whole, will keep a very firm grasp and clear understanding of the fundamental principles that underpin a 'democratic' and 'free' society in allowing justice and compassion to inform its working. There are signs at present that hard fought for and very costly 'freedoms' and 'rights', which have been slowly built up over hundreds of years of this country's history, are being foolishly and cynically abused and discarded. Unfortunately the power of IT can make inflicting casual or systematic wickedness a lot easier, just as much as it can help government serve the needs of society and individuals.

Below is the notice attached to all emails that I send.

Regards, Alisdair Laird

**** 'signature' NOTICE

Dear reader,

DON'T BE FOOLED! - reject Government ownership of personal identity.

The present UK Government are busy extolling the virtues of each of us possessing and carrying an 'ID Card' which will be validated by a centrally controlled database.

You will have to pay a subsidised fee up front, but the total very large and ongoing cost will still have to be paid-through your taxes. An extensive range of data about you and your life will be compulsorily held:

- ALL your identity 'eggs' will be placed in a single basket over which you will have almost no control;
- the Government, not you, will decide what data will be held and who will have access to it;
- this data will define 'you'. Your place and freedom to live in this society will depend on the integrity of that data;
- the Government, not you, will decide whether that data is valid or not;
- you, NOT the Government, will be held responsible for the accuracy of the data held about you;
- failure to comply with your 'responsibilities' will be punishable by heavy fines and/or jail sentences;
- failure by the Government to use and secure your 'identity' in a responsible, ethical, or efficient manner will be punishable by... nothing actually, but could cost you everything.

Please do not be taken in by Government spin on this matter. The proposed scheme is an enormously expensive undertaking that will do very little to help you and I live our lives securely. It will increase the power of the state to monitor and intrude in our lives to a degree unprecedented in the history of this country. It will also be a magnet for organised crime because of the high 'value' of the card. It is almost certain that the scheme will be technologically inefficient and may well simply not work at all (the Govt's record in implementing large scale IT schemes is woeful).

There is huge commercial pressure on the Government to deploy the technology surrounding the ID scheme-it will make some people very wealthy indeed. There is also significant bureaucratic pressure to implement such a scheme-it's much more exciting than actually tackling the underlying problems that hinder this nation working in a just and humane way!

In practise the alleged benefits of a centralised 'ID' database constantly monitoring our lives and validating our right to exist in this country will be far outweighed by: the inevitable failures and abuses of such a huge and complex system; the undermining of personal liberty and responsibility, and of the relationship between individuals and their government.

Saying 'I've got nothing to hide' is really nothing more than a naive and complacent cop-out. No government has the right, or the need, to 'own' an individual's identity (and to have the brass nerve to then

compel each of us to pay rent for the privilege of using what is rightly ours anyway!).

Regards, Alisdair.