Technology Projects Review – Stocktake IQA Report

Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment

20 July 2026

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Summary

This report is the output of independent advice and support provided by Maven Consulting to MBIE's Internal Assurance branch for its Technology Project Stocktake, following the April 2026 report into the Biometrics Capability Update (BCU) project. The review has two parts – a "stocktake" of current technology projects, and an examination of systems and processes used to manage technology projects. This report covers the stocktake.

The independent reviewer met with members of the Internal Assurance branch that carried out the stocktake and reviewed their assessments and reports, and has concluded that:

- The stocktake was comprehensive and reasonably detailed, given the limitations of the scope and time available. The review teams found that while there is much that is being done well and that the projects examined are for the most part in good health, some of the same issues that were present in the BCU programme exist in the projects examined.
- The stocktake revealed that while in many cases the rules and guidance are being followed, in practice important detail is missing from key documents such as benefits maps and risk registers that would provide a more integrated view of project performance and impacts on project outcomes, and better enable early interventions to manage exceptions.
- The common issues that have come through in the stocktake indicate that it was a valuable exercise and was sufficiently thorough to provide confidence in the conclusions about the overall health of MBIE's projects. It identified areas for improvement, and these have fed into the second part of the review.

Background and Scope

MBIE engaged Maven to provide independent advice and support to its Internal Assurance branch for the Technology Project Stocktake and Processes Quality Assurance conducted in response to issues raised in the April 2026 report into the BCU project.

The scope of the engagement comprised two parts that reflected the two workstreams being examined, as follows:

A. Internal Assurance approach to a stocktake of current technology projects:

   Provide independent review and advice to confirm that Internal Assurance's methodology for reviewing technology projects is:

   - Robust, consistent, and scalable
   - Aligned with recognised best practice in project governance and assurance.

B. System and process improvements:

   Provide independent assurance that proposed enhancements to MBIE's technology project systems and processes (arising from the stocktake) are:

   - Fit for purpose
   - Practicable within MBIE's operating environment
   - Aligned with relevant best practice frameworks.

This report covers Part A.

Assessment of Projects Stocktake

The projects stocktake part of the review was a desktop research exercise that examined documentation about the health of projects and compliance with Government requirements. It asked a series of questions and looked for evidence of good practice, using New Zealand and international frameworks (such as Treasury's Better Business Cases for development of investment cases, and Prince2 and MSP for project management) as benchmarks. The questions covered all aspects of project establishment, governance, management and delivery including:

- Business and investment case
- Project risk profile assessment
- Scope and business requirements
- Benefits definition, ownership, realisation and reporting
- Changes during the project and impacts on scope, time, cost and quality
- Governance group oversight and decisions
- Provision of information to the governance group
- Project roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
- Performance management and measurement
- Management of critical dependencies
- Quality assurance and reviews
- Financial reporting
- Vendor engagement and management
- Executive and ministerial reporting.

The review team covered 69 projects with individual reviewers each examining a group of projects. A daily register of issues was maintained to ensure a complete view of the exercise was available. The reviewers had access to project folders on MBIE's document management system, the Projects Online (POL) project management system and the financial management information system (FMIS). While the stocktake was largely documentation based, interviews with project personnel were undertaken where additional information was required.

The independent reviewer met with each of the team during their work and examined a sample of project assessments for consistency and quality. They discussed issues arising, with a focus on issues observed in multiple projects and trying to derive the root causes rather than the subsequent effects. It should be noted that the stocktake was still underway at the time of writing, the issues observed were present in only some of the projects and there were examples of good practice observed in most of the areas examined.

The key issues that were reported to the independent reviewer included:

- Business cases/investment planning - inadequate investment logic and economic options analysis, lack of clarity on scope and business requirements, lack of assessment of whole-of-life costs, inadequate risk and delivery management strategies.
- Benefits realisation - simplistic benefits maps with no detail about how the solutions deliver the benefits and what are the dependencies, clear ownership of benefits, lack of quantifiable benefits, and an inability to track impacts of changes to scope, time, quality or costs.
- Governance and reporting - lack of consistency between what is presented to PSG and DGB; too much detail provided without showing the impacts of risks and issues, delays, change requests, etc.; discussions and decisions not always minuted; and slow/inadequate response to status changes.
- Capability – knowledge, skills and experience in establishing and managing effective projects, commercial engagement, benefits realisation and change management
- Financial management – lack of integrated views of financial performance with discrepancies observed between project workbooks and FMIS, and evidence of project costs being absorbed in BAU to keep costs within project budgets.

The report on the stocktake identifies eight findings that include these issues. The report includes a table that assesses each project examined against the assessment questions listed above and rates the project's performance in each area as "Effective", "Partially Effective" or "Not Effective" (or "n/a" if the assessment was considered not applicable), with issues specific to each project noted. Almost all projects were assessed as Effective or Partially Effective overall.

The findings will inform the process and systems improvements part of the Technology Project Stocktake and Processes Quality Assurance and its recommendations. The latter should build on the work of the stocktake and include:

- What is good practice in each area?
- What is MBIE already doing to address the issues?
- What gaps remain and how these will be addressed?
- What are the priorities and timings to address the outstanding issues?

Conclusions

The stocktake appears to have been comprehensive and reasonably detailed, given the limitations of a desktop research exercise and the time available. The reviewers concluded that there is much that is being done well and that the projects examined are for the most part in good health; however, some of the same issues that were present in the BCU programme exist in the projects examined in the stocktake, although not to the same extent. A few larger projects have significant issues, although these are known and currently being managed. A deeper quality assurance over those projects is needed (and in at least one case is currently underway) to ensure all risks and issues have been identified, responses are adequate, and lessons can be incorporated into guidance and practices.

The stocktake was sufficiently detailed to show that while the rules and guidance are usually being followed, in practice much important detail that is needed to support better decision-making is missing. Business sponsors, governance groups and even project teams struggle to assemble an integrated view of important project performance such as the impacts of variances in scope, time, cost and quality on project outcomes and benefits. This makes it very difficult to manage exceptions and to focus attention and resources on early interventions.

Overall, the common issues that have come through in the stocktake indicate that it was a valuable exercise and was sufficiently thorough to provide confidence in the conclusions about the overall health of MBIE's projects. It identified areas for improvement, and these have fed into the second part of the review.

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