



Richard Pawlyn is chair of the Locus Association ([www.locusassociation.co.uk](http://www.locusassociation.co.uk)) whose secretary, Harriet Crosthwaite, and can be contacted by telephone on 020 7930 9788

**‘the current policy and guidance regime in the PSI Holder marketplace does not allow the private sector to deliver potential benefits to the full and creates dilemmas for public and private sector alike’**



Peter FitzGibbon

Greater consistency and clarity is needed between EU regulations and the guidelines issued by HM Treasury (pictured above), particularly those concerning Trading Fund status

## PSI: widening the debate

Richard Pawlyn believes that the debate shouldn't be about free maps, but about free trade!

In the last edition of this magazine, Simon Doyle, Chair of the Association for Geographic Information, authored an interesting column on the current state of the debate surrounding the Public Sector Information (PSI) marketplace.

The Locus Association, a trade association of private organisations, which exists to raise awareness and promote the development of, a healthy and competitive private sector in PSI, is at the heart of this debate and we welcome the increasing coverage it is receiving both in the trade and national press.

As readers will be aware, the PSI marketplace is a huge arena, with the European Commission estimating the value of the data to be around EUR 68 billion (£48 billion).

Analysis of the figures shows the considerable benefits to be gained from an active private sector utilising and adding to PSI and Locus believes it is a commonly-held misperception that the public and private sectors are locked in a win-lose battle.

As Simon would surely agree, the current policy and guidance regime in the PSI Holder marketplace does not allow the private sector to deliver potential benefits to the full and creates dilemmas for public and private sector alike.

The effect is that neither government nor citizen enjoy the benefits of innovation, choice and cost-efficiency that a fair, open marketplace for Geographic Information (GI) could bring.

In order to encourage a more level playing-field, the Locus Association would welcome a new regime that promotes the widespread availability of unrefined PSI data at the lowest possible cost and which is properly and transparently accounted for according to each activity.

One step towards this would be the revision of the Re-Use of Information Directive and Regulations. It is vital that there is greater consistency and clarity between this and other existing guidelines, such as the Freedom of Information Act, but especially Treasury guidelines and

Framework Documents concerning Trading Fund status.

As Simon pointed out in his column, many key PSI Holders are Trading Funds. The Trading Fund model allows monopoly holders of PSI to compete directly with private sector organisations both as their primary data supplier and as a retailer. As private sector businesses selling their own information products rely upon access to PSI held by Trading Funds, which at another level are their competitors, this inevitably creates conflicts and tensions between supplier and user. On behalf of companies in the GI sector Locus is running a campaign to change this.

New regimes aside, there is however much that can be done within the current structure. Locus would for example welcome a clarification of the role of PSI Holders. The bodies have a statutory obligation to collect information but also to make it available. Locus members believe that PSI Holders' should clearly define what are the boundaries of their "Public Task" and what elements are "value-added" services.

Accounts for the two activities should be separated and licensing terms should be clear, straightforward and commercially realistic for both parties. PSI Holders' value-added retail activities should be subject to the same basic terms and conditions for their data in an unrefined state as they require from third parties who acquire their data to add-value.

These points only touch on the tip of the iceberg of the PSI debate. It is only through the creation of a predictable and level playing field that the public sector will stimulate private sector innovation, investment and enterprise.

Locus recognises the significant potential that exists for the public and private sectors to work together in harnessing information and driving the UK's knowledge economy and the Association will continue to work with parts of Government, executive agencies, other PSI holders and regulatory bodies towards this goal.