IMT Impacts of ES Reform Report.

Commonwealth Scientific and
Industrial Research Organisation

CSIRO Staff Association

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Executive Summary

This report provides a thematic analysis of staff contributions in response to the proposed changes to Information Management and Technology (IMT) services under Wave 3 of the Enterprise Services (ES) Reform at CSIRO. The feedback reveals widespread concern about the potential impact of these changes on research capability, productivity, operational efficiency, and organisational morale.

A recurring theme across responses is that the reforms shift costs rather than generate savings—transferring financial and administrative burdens from central IMT services to individual research units and projects. Staff expressed alarm over the erosion of critical research infrastructure, including access to scientific journals, Australian Standards, and High-Performance Computing (HPC), all of which are considered essential to CSIRO's research excellence.

The removal of specialised, on-site IMT support was also viewed as a significant loss, with many citing its importance for maintaining seamless operations. Additionally, numerous respondents voiced dissatisfaction with the consultation process, describing it as unclear, rushed, and lacking genuine engagement.

Sentiments ranged from pragmatic concerns about disrupted workflows to deeper anxiety around job security and the organisation's strategic direction. Overall, the feedback reflects a strong view that while cost-efficiency is a valid objective, the proposed IMT reforms may ultimately undermine CSIRO's core scientific mission.

> **In summary, while financial sustainability remains an understandable objective, the feedback strongly suggests that the current direction of IMT reform may compromise the very science it seeks to support.**

Introduction

This report summarises staff feedback on proposed changes to Information Management and Technology (IMT) services under Wave 3 of CSIRO's Enterprise Services (ES) Reform. The proposed changes include reductions in support staff, the removal of service subsidies, and shifts in the delivery of IMT services—framed as initiatives to improve cost-efficiency and organisational effectiveness.

To understand the perceived impact of these proposals, staff were invited to submit written responses through a structured consultation process conducted between March and early April 2025.
This report presents a thematic analysis of those responses, highlighting common concerns and perceived risks.

This document is intended to inform internal stakeholders—including executive leadership, reform planners, and affected teams—of the practical, professional, and cultural implications that may result from the proposed changes. By surfacing the voices of staff, this report contributes to a more transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

Thematic Analysis of Comments and Feedback

1. Cost-Shifting and Financial Impact

A dominant theme across responses was the perception that the proposed IMT reforms represent a **redistribution of costs rather than actual savings.** Respondents repeatedly criticised the notion that shifting expenses—such as device procurement, software licences, and access fees—from centralised budgets to individual Research Units (RUs) or projects constitutes meaningful efficiency.

Many staff highlighted that research teams are now expected to cover costs that were previously centrally managed, including journal subscriptions, computing devices, and specialised software. This has led to concerns about budgeting strain, project delays, and **increased administrative overhead** for researchers who now must navigate procurement and budgeting themselves.

Key concerns include:

- **Duplication of licensing costs** across teams and sites.
- Risk of **non-compliance** or **substandard equipment** due to individualised purchases.
- **Disincentivising best-practice procurement** by encouraging ad hoc, lowest-cost solutions.
- Erosion of standardised environments, which previously provided consistency, security, and ease of support.

"Removing the computing device subsidy... they're still going to cost the same. Saving to CSIRO? $0."

"This is patently not a saving – just cost-shifting."

"Now the business unit will be fully funding it. Will they go with the standard, or pick up a $100 special from a local store?"

In several cases, staff expressed a sense that the **reforms may hinder research** more than help it, especially in environments where budgets are already stretched. Without increases in RU budgets to offset the shifted costs, many fear that **core research functions could be deprioritised or delayed.**

Key points raised:

- **Loss of access to high-impact journals** limits research quality and competitiveness.
- **Increased project costs** through pay-per-article charges and open-access fees.
- **Negative impact on collaboration and external engagement**, particularly with industry.
- **Research delays** due to time spent sourcing content through alternative channels.
- **Reputational harm** for a leading research institution not providing basic tools.

"Seamless access to the relevant literature is non-negotiable for researchers."

"This will damage research productivity and likely increase costs."

"It's absurd to remove access to Australian Standards when CSIRO is on many standards boards."

The withdrawal of resources such as Springer eBooks and technical databases also drew strong reactions, with some highlighting the **direct impact on active research projects** and their ability to deliver outcomes to partners.

> This reduction in knowledge access is widely viewed not only as a **barrier to scientific excellence**, but also as a symbolic signal that research support is being deprioritised.

3. IMT Support and Productivity

The proposed reductions in IMT support staff—especially onsite assistance and service desk capacity—sparked significant concern among respondents. Many viewed this change as a **direct threat to daily productivity**, describing IMT as the "invisible backbone" that enables research and operations to run smoothly.

Respondents warned that fewer support staff would lead to:

- **Delays in resolving technical issues,** with cascading effects on project delivery timelines.
- **Greater administrative burden** on researchers, who would need to troubleshoot or procure support independently.
- **Lost productivity during downtime**, especially for field equipment, scientific computing systems, or specialised lab software.
- **Stress and morale issues** among remaining IMT staff, who are already stretched thin and often covering multiple sites.

"Delays due to being put in a long queue mean we have to stop working."

"IMT support is already at its extreme when end users need assistance—reducing it will only make it worse."

"The IMT team has already been cut. Leave it alone!"

In some cases, the existing high standard of IMT support was specifically praised—with staff emphasising that their **efficiency, helpfulness, and deep CSIRO knowledge** made a critical difference to their work. Losing this capability was seen not just as an inconvenience, but as a **strategic risk** to research continuity and reliability.

The sentiment was clear: **reducing support services will not improve efficiency**, and instead will lead to increased downtime, costlier workarounds, and reduced staff satisfaction.

4. Cybersecurity and Compliance Concerns

Cybersecurity was mentioned across several responses, often with a **dual tone of concern and irony.** While staff acknowledged the importance of secure systems, many questioned whether the proposed reforms truly support that goal.

The reduction in IMT staff—particularly those with **technical expertise in systems, networks, and infrastructure**—was seen as undermining CSIRO's ability to manage cybersecurity risks effectively. Respondents were skeptical that cutting staff and outsourcing would strengthen protections, especially in a complex research environment with diverse needs.

Key concerns raised:

- Fewer skilled IMT staff may lead to **slower incident response** and unresolved vulnerabilities.
- Reliance on third-party providers for cybersecurity was seen as **risky and impersonal,** with some fearing it would erode institutional knowledge.
- Changes to software platforms (e.g., forced migration to Microsoft solutions) raised **questions about data privacy, ownership, and exposure** to vendor-driven cost increases.
- Limited transparency around cybersecurity justifications for some decisions (e.g., removal of systems or tools) created **distrust** among staff.

"It feels very counterintuitive to reduce IMT services in a time of increasing cybersecurity threats."

"A system with no users tends to be quite secure. But that's not a strategy."

"How does CSIRO propose to manage cybersecurity with a reduced ongoing IMT staff base?"

While most respondents agreed that secure systems are essential, many felt that the reform proposals **over-emphasised corporate compliance at the expense of usability, practicality, and scientific openness.**

The underlying message: **Security and usability are not mutually exclusive,** and strong cybersecurity must be supported by sufficient resourcing, internal expertise, and consultation with the people it protects.

5. Library Services & Knowledge Management

The proposed reduction in library services, particularly journal subscriptions, access to eBooks, and staff support, drew some of the **strongest and most emotionally charged feedback** in the survey. Respondents described these cuts as **short-sighted, regressive, and harmful to research quality.**

The CSIRO Library was widely acknowledged as a **critical enabler of scientific productivity,** and its services—ranging from resource access to interlibrary loans and reference support—were seen as **irreplaceable by automated or self-service systems.**

Concerns included:

- **Severe impact on literature reviews, grant writing, and publication,** especially where fast access to sources is required.
- Loss of librarian expertise for c**omplex searches, repository management, and compliance** with publication policies.
- Risks of creating an **uneven playing field** where researchers in better-funded RUs can afford journal access, while others cannot.
- **Increased costs and inefficiencies** through piecemeal access or open-access fees, often passed onto individual projects.

"Cutting subscriptions to hundreds of critical journals is not a saving—it's a knowledge bottleneck."

"Library staff are invaluable. You can't just replace them with a search bar."

"I've never worked at a research institution where I had to pay for my own literature access."

A number of staff expressed **embarrassment** or **frustration** that CSIRO—Australia's premier research organisation—would degrade such a foundational service.

The cuts were seen not only as an **operational risk**, but also as a **symbolic retreat from research excellence.**

6. Scientific Computing and HPC Capacity

High-Performance Computing (HPC) and technical computing support are vital for a wide range of CSIRO research areas—from climate modelling and AI to physics simulations and data-intensive analytics. Many respondents voiced alarm at the proposed reduction in investment and support for these capabilities, warning it would **directly undermine the organisation's scientific outputs.**

Respondents emphasised that access to HPC is **not a luxury, but a necessity,** especially for research involving large datasets, simulations, or complex models. These tools are central not just to discovery but to **collaboration with national and international partners.**

Recurring concerns included:

- **Reduced availability and responsiveness** from scientific computing teams, leading to delays and technical bottlenecks.
- •**Risk of losing skilled personnel,** such as software engineers and computational scientists, who provide irreplaceable project support.
- Perceived **de-prioritisation of scientific needs** in favour of generic IT models and outsourced solutions.
- Potential **erosion of Australia's research leadership,** particularly in areas like climate science, AI, and quantum research.

"Climate science depends on HPC. It's a national-level asset. Why are we cutting it?"

"Without their services, none of our research can be conducted smoothly."

"Working on science involving AI was already stressful due to outdated hardware—now we may lose support altogether."

Some responses noted a worrying trend: as access becomes more difficult, scientists may **abandon internal resources in favour of external (often costly or insecure) alternatives,** weakening CSIRO's integrated research environment.

> The message is clear—cutting HPC support is not a back-office adjustment, it's a **front-line hit to scientific capability**, and one that **threatens CSIRO's ability to lead** in a data-driven research landscape.

7. Organisational Morale and Consultation Process

Perhaps no theme was more emotionally resonant in the feedback than that of **morale, trust, and the consultation experience.** Respondents repeatedly expressed frustration, fatigue, and cynicism around how the IMT reform process has been communicated and executed.

The reform was thus seen not just as a change in resourcing, but as a symbolic withdrawal of trust and investment in the very people delivering CSIRO's science.

The consultation was often described as:

- **Rushed or incomplete,** with staff feeling uninformed or excluded.
- **Opaque,** with major service changes proposed without sufficient detail or impact modelling.
- **Disingenuous,** where feedback felt unwelcome or ignored.
- **Top-down,** with little evidence of co-design or engagement with the people most affected.

"It's hard to provide feedback when there are no details. What are we even responding to?"

"Consultation feels performative—we're being asked for views after decisions are already made."

"I no longer care very much... I just want to know when I'll receive my redundancy letter."

Several responses reflected a deep sense of **burnout and disillusionment,** compounded by years of ongoing change and what many perceived as a **slow erosion of the organisational culture** that once made CSIRO a place of pride.

Morale was frequently tied to **job security, role clarity, and a perceived shift away from science-first values.** Many felt that repeated restructures and underinvestment in support services were making it harder to do meaningful work, and even harder to stay motivated.

> Some staff even questioned whether leadership understood—or valued—the research environment at all. The reform is seen not just as a change in resourcing, but as a **symbolic withdrawal of trust and investment** in the very people delivering CSIRO's science.

8. Operational Challenges & Research Efficiency

The reform proposals raised widespread concerns about **how day-to-day research operations would be impacted,** especially for teams already working under tight timelines, diverse technical needs, and complex project environments. Staff described a future where **everything becomes harder to do,** not just more expensive.

Specific operational concerns included:

- **Loss of integrated, centralised systems,** leading to fragmented procurement, duplicated effort, and inconsistent standards across the organisation.
- **Administrative burden shifting to researchers,** such as managing hardware purchases, sourcing journal articles, or troubleshooting unsupported tech.

- **Delays in project delivery,** particularly for fieldwork or time-sensitive work, due to reduced access to IT support or research tools.
- **Increased risk to data quality and integrity,** especially where support for storage, transfer, or access is weakened.

"I spend more time now doing back-end support work than actual science."

"This will lead to more failed grant applications—we already struggle to compete with universities."

"We're being asked to do more with less, but no one is saying how that adds up."

A recurring worry was the breakdown of **"invisible efficiency"**—the background systems and people that have historically enabled scientists to focus on research without needing to understand IT infrastructure or institutional procurement processes.

Respondents were clear: the reform threatens to erode that foundation, pushing highly skilled people into support tasks, increasing downtime, and making CSIRO **less agile, less competitive, and less capable** of delivering innovative science.

Key Quotes from Respondents

"It's hard to understand how central services can be reduced with no clear plan for how the gaps will be filled. It feels like we're being left to figure it out ourselves."

"You can't cut support and expect performance to stay the same. We need the infrastructure to do excellent science, not just goodwill and caffeine."

"I am very concerned by the bigger implications of the proposed ES changes for Library services... The proposed changes are going to gut so many useful journal subscriptions that we have. What information were these cuts based on?"

"In this digital age... it feels very counterintuitive to reduce IMT staff and services. If anything those services will be needed more than ever."

"There's a difference between reform and retreat. This feels like the latter."

"I was completely unaware that there was an IMT consultation process currently underway – surely this affects all staff, since we all interact with IMT?"

"I simply couldn't do my job at all without [IMT]. Yet I don't have to contact IMT loads which is a testament to how well they keep things running behind the scenes."

"If the goal is to save money, this seems like a very expensive way to do it—projects will just eat the cost later and suffer for it."

"The proposed cuts feel disconnected from the actual work we do. This isn't about saving money – it's about shifting costs from one team to another, and ultimately, to the researchers and support staff who are just trying to get their work done."

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

The feedback gathered from staff in response to the proposed IMT changes under the ES Reform reveals a **deep and widespread** concern about the operational, cultural, and scientific impacts of the current direction.

While financial sustainability is acknowledged as a legitimate organisational goal, the overwhelming sentiment is that the current approach:

- Shifts costs rather than reduces them, straining research budgets and productivity
- Reduces access to essential tools, including journals, computing power, and software.
- Undermines staff morale, creating uncertainty, frustration, and disengagement.
- Jeopardises research excellence, through inefficiencies and increased administrative burdens.
- Signals a cultural shift away from valuing science and scientific staff, risking CSIRO's identity as a premier research institution.

There is a recurring theme that the reform lacks transparency and has been perceived as a top-down process with insufficient consultation, particularly with the scientists and technical staff who will bear the brunt of its effects.

Recommendations

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to better align the reform process with the needs of a world-leading research organisation:

1. **Reassess Cost-Shifting Measures**
    - Ensure centralised services that are demonstrably more cost-efficient remain intact.

2. **Preserve Access to Core Research Tools**
    - Maintain key journal subscriptions and access to Australian Standards.
    - Recognise digital libraries and HPC as foundational infrastructure, not optional extras.

3. **Retain and Support On-Site IMT Expertise**
    - Protect the availability of local support staff with domain knowledge.
    - Avoid excessive outsourcing that erodes institutional memory and responsiveness.

4. **Invest in Research-Enabling Technology**
    - Ensure continued investment in HPC, storage, and development support.
    - Support open-source and fit-for-purpose alternatives where possible.

5. **Improve Transparency and Staff Engagement**
    - Provide clear, accessible information about proposed changes.
    - Involve staff earlier and more meaningfully in design and decision-making.

6. **Prioritise Organisational Culture and Morale**
    - Acknowledge the impact of reforms on staff well-being.
    - Consider the long-term cultural costs of decisions that are seen as dismissive of staff expertise.

> **Taken together, these recommendations offer a way to realign the reform process with CSIRO's mission, ensuring that support structures enable, rather than hinder, the pursuit of science.**