

# Media Release

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// Phone (07) 3218 4157 // Website [esriaustralia.com.au](http://esriaustralia.com.au)  
// E-mail [astumm@esriaustralia.com.au](mailto:astumm@esriaustralia.com.au) //

## Utilities Must Act Now to Retain Knowledge

**Utilities will need Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to ‘institutionalise’ the knowledge of their aging workforce and avoid an information vacuum.**

**23 June 2011:** The Australian utilities sector faces an information black hole within a decade unless it works to retain the knowledge of its ageing workforce, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist Bill Meehan told the Smart Electricity World conference in Melbourne today.

Mr Meehan, Global Director for Utilities at GIS market leader Esri, said the industry needed to invest in systems that would preserve the experience and knowledge of the thousands of staff expected to retire in the near future.

“For utilities, having a stable knowledge infrastructure is as much an asset as the actual pipes, wires, and hardware of the electrical system,” Mr Meehan said.

“With so many workers leaving the industry at once, imagine all the wisdom and analytic power that could be lost.”

The warning reflected an Australian ElectroComms and Energy Utilities Industry Skills Council report, released in April, which cited demand for technical knowledge and skills among the sector’s top five workforce development challenges for this year.

Mr Meehan said an Enterprise Geographic Information System (GIS) was the most effective way to capture and redistribute existing knowledge and address the looming shortage.

“Energy utilities have traditionally used GIS to store asset records and produce clearer maps of their electrical system – now the technology is being applied as an enterprise-wide framework for knowledge retention and capture,” Mr Meehan said.

“Enterprise GIS can capture observations and predictive information, collect data from various sources, and help utility staff make better risk predictions and decisions – the same way staff with 50 years of experience might make decisions.

“GIS can document data sources and run, analyse and produce results in the easily understandable form of a map.

"It also makes knowledge traceable so you can see how and why decisions were made.

"The key is to have these models developed, validated and supplemented by experienced workers before they leave, so utilities can truly build a knowledge infrastructure."

Mr Meehan said GIS-based knowledge infrastructure would also play a key role in Smart Grid, a strategy to transform Australia's electric power grid with advanced communications, automated controls and other forms of information technology.

"I ran the electric operations for a power company several years ago," Mr Meehan said.

"Things regularly went wrong and I spent much of my time going from one crisis to another.

"To be successful in adopting strategies such as Smart Grid, utilities must institutionalise their workforce's knowledge."

Prior to joining Esri 10 years ago, Mr Meehan held a senior management position at one of the United States' leading electric utilities, NSTAR, Electric Operations and Supply Chain, and is internationally regarded in the industry for his GIS expertise.

Esri Australia's Regional Energy Manager Harry Kestin worked closely with Mr Meehan to develop solutions for the Australian market.

"Bill has worked on some of the most cutting-edge GIS projects ever implemented in utilities and comes to Australia armed with a wealth of experience," Mr Kestin said.

"His visit to Australia is a great opportunity to hear how some of the world's leading utilities are innovatively using Esri's technology.

"This kind of information sharing is enormously valuable, particularly in this time of rapid change in the energy sector."

Esri Australia is one of the region's largest GIS solution providers, with clients including Western Power, Energex and ActewAGL.

Gartner, the world's leading information technology industry research and analysis provider, recently rated Esri Australia's utility solutions a Strong Positive – the analyst's highest rating and the only Strong Positive to be awarded.

"Utilities around the world rely on Esri technology and Esri partner solutions for crucial business functions, including infrastructure management, emergency response, sustainable development, and risk analysis," Mr Meehan said.

"We believe Gartner's Strong Positive rating affirms our commitment to continue to meet the dynamic and evolving needs of the utility industry."

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**About Esri Australia**

Esri Australia has a 33 year history of providing location intelligence and data mapping solutions that help organisations make smart business decisions. The combination of local expertise and world-leading Esri GIS technology has helped thousands of government departments and commercial organisations to turn their data, information and knowledge into collective insight to reveal opportunity.

**About GIS**

Geographic Information Systems are a key piece of technology used in thousands of organisations Australia-wide from the military and government, to the insurance and mining sector. Australia's GIS industry currently stands at over \$2.1 billion and more than 300,000 organisations across the world use Esri GIS.

**Media enquiries:**

Alicia Stumm, Media Liaison

Esri Australia

P: 07 3218 4157

M: 0408 989 925

E: [astumm@esriaustralia.com.au](mailto:astumm@esriaustralia.com.au)