



CONNECTING  
GOVERNMENT

Whole of Government Responses  
to Australia's Priority Challenges

MANAGEMENT  
ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE

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## >> PREFACE

I am pleased to present this important Management Advisory Committee Report on *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges*.

My strong perception is that the Australian Public Service (APS) performs well, compared to other public sectors around the world, in working across the organisational boundaries of bureaucracy. Every day, in many ways, we bridge successfully the demarcations of officialdom that can undermine successful policy development and delivery. But we cannot be lulled into a self-satisfied complacency. Challenges remain. More than ever before, agencies must continue to find new and better ways to work together to deliver results for the Australian Government and the community.

There are many reasons that we should work in a whole of government way. Not least is the fact that every major challenge of public administration—ensuring security, building a strong economy, coping with demographic change and crafting social policy—necessarily requires the active participation of a range of central and line agencies.

Australians rightly demand the delivery of government programs and services in a seamless way. They should also expect that, behind the scenes, all the resources of government will be brought to bear in the search for innovative solutions to the complex challenges of developing public policy.

It is important that commitment to a whole of government perspective is not misinterpreted as a call for 'group think'. Governance has been improved by the fact that public policy is an increasingly contested terrain. The challenge is to ensure that the collective decision-making of the Australian government is based upon the best informed articulation of the challenges faced and a strategic assessment of the relative merits of different approaches to how they might be addressed. For this, a comprehensive whole of government approach is required.

*Connecting Government* goes beneath the surface of the 'coordination' that the APS strives to achieve. It examines the many different and sometimes competing imperatives that contribute to successful whole of government work and seeks to learn from our successes and failures.

The report does not believe that effective solutions lie in moving around the deckchairs of bureaucratic endeavour. Rather it reinforces the need to continue to build an APS culture that supports, models, understands and aspires to whole of government solutions. Collegiality at the most senior levels of the service is a key part of this culture.

Portfolio secretaries and agency heads will be responsible for driving cooperative behaviours and monitoring the success of whole of government approaches. This has many elements. They will be required to ensure that their staff understand that their role on interdepartmental committees or task forces is not to defend territory but to seek

solutions in the national interest. They will be expected actively to champion whole of government projects and to model critical behaviours such as collegiality.

The report also highlights the need for agencies to recruit and develop people with the right skills. Relevant topics should be included in induction and training so that coordination, cooperation, negotiation and openness are truly valued. Agencies will be encouraged to give their high performing staff experience on whole of government projects and to support their participation with other agencies in such projects.

Commitment needs to be recognised. New service-wide awards will be offered to celebrate the best whole of government work. The success or failure of the APS in taking whole of government approaches will be reported through the State of the Service report.

Knowledge is a key to cultural change. A web presence will be established to encourage agencies to share information, expertise and ideas so that the increasing volume of research on the organisation of whole of government approaches can be collected once but used many times.

MAC will fail if its reports are quietly filed away under the heading 'Read on a Wet Sunday'. There are many more initiatives in this report which offer practical help to Australian government agencies in their efforts to continually improve the way they work across boundaries. The objective is to implement many more.

Whole of government is the public administration of the future. It offers links and connections to the global community of ideas, knowledge and understanding essential for the APS to face the governance challenges of the 21st century. It extols team-based approaches to solving the wicked problems that are endemic to public policy.

*Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenges* is a valuable guide to participating effectively in that future.

I hope it makes a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Shergold', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Peter Shergold AM

## COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT INDIGENOUS TRIALS

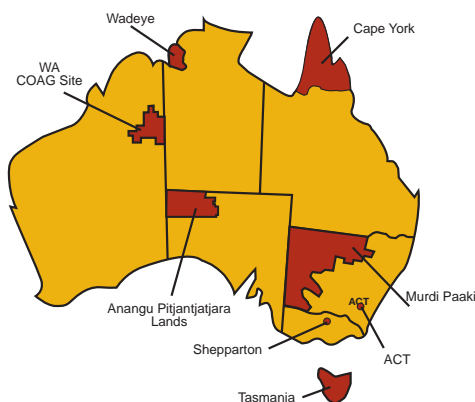
### Objective

This case study provides an overview of the work being undertaken to implement the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) decisions of November 2000 and April 2002, through which all Australian governments made a commitment to trial working together to improve the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people and communities. Governments agreed, in partnership with Indigenous communities in up to ten regions, to provide more flexible programs and services based on priorities agreed with communities. Evaluation of the trials would be premature at this stage, but this case study aims to describe the approaches and mechanisms which have been developed so far.

The key objectives in the COAG trial sites are to:

- tailor government action to identified community needs and aspirations
- coordinate government programs and services where this will improve service delivery outcomes
- encourage innovative approaches
- cut through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly
- negotiate agreed project outcomes, benchmarks and responsibilities with the relevant people in Indigenous communities
- work with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners with government
- build the capacity of government employees to work in new ways with Indigenous communities.

It is anticipated that models will emerge from these trials that will have broad application.



Since April 2002, seven trial sites have been announced across Australia. The sites are Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands (South Australia), Cape York (Queensland), Murdi Paaki (New South Wales), Shepparton (Victoria), the East Kimberley region in Western Australia, the northern region of Tasmania and Wadeye (pronounced Wod-air) in the Northern Territory. An announcement on the ACT is expected soon. In each of these sites an Australian government secretary and their agency have

taken the lead and carry primary responsibility for the Australian Government's response in that area, with other agencies operating as partners. The agency head in the lead agency has a particular role as 'champion'.

## **Introduction**

To even begin working in this new way, governments and Indigenous communities needed to develop a shared understanding of what the trials are about and what new roles stakeholders can and should play. Different relationships needed to be established. Much of the work to date has been about 'getting to the starting line'. Progress towards making the more visible improvements to the issues concerning Indigenous people, such as economic development, education and family strengthening, is expected to come over the next months and years. Similarly, learning that can inform practice in other places will also be harvested.

By its very nature, this project has involved extensive interaction and cooperation with state and territory governments, with Indigenous communities and with a variety of organisations. A variety of consultative and other mechanisms has been developed.

This report concentrates on explaining the structures developed by the Australian Public Service (APS) to support this large and complex whole of government project. The principal structures developed to support the Australian Government's response are as follows.

## **Ministers**

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs represents the Prime Minister and is responsible for this COAG initiative. A group of ministers with key responsibilities meets to consider these issues.

## **Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Issues**

For this initiative, a strategy has been put in place that gives day-to-day accountability at the Australian government level for progress in each trial site to an individual departmental secretary (or sponsor), whose agency will act as a lead agent within a trial site(s). The secretaries are members of the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Issues (the Secretaries' Group), chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, which meets once a month to oversee progress. They are supported by the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce (ICCT) and their own departments.

The Chief Executive Officer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) is a member of the Secretaries' Group and ATSIS plays a vital role in guiding and supporting activity in the trial sites.

## Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce

The ICCT is responsible to the Secretaries' Group for leading coordination across Australian government agencies and with state and territory governments, and for monitoring Australian government performance, including feedback to and from Indigenous communities under the whole of government initiative. Key areas of responsibility include:

- achieve agreement on trial sites with governments and communities
- assist lead agencies to establish their role
- develop appropriate monitoring, evaluation and other operating frameworks necessary for implementation of the whole of government trials
- clearly define emerging roles and responsibilities of lead agencies
- agree with secretaries on operational arrangements for the implementation of whole of government trials
- develop an education and training framework for line staff in agencies
- build on existing profiles for both monitoring and building baseline data for evaluation
- develop and implement a simple project tracking, monitoring and progress measurement system to:
  - provide accurate and comprehensive whole of government data on trial site projects and monitor and analyse these projects using a cross-government approach
  - document how agreement was reached on priorities with state and territory governments and communities and the lessons learned in that process
  - identify innovative and successful approaches and communicate them across other regions
  - provide feedback to other departments and agencies about the implications of new approaches for Indigenous-specific or mainstream programs (e.g. if one trial site identifies a helpful innovation in use of the Community Development Employment Program).

## Lead agencies

The Australian Government's lead agencies are at the forefront of change in APS approaches to the COAG Indigenous Trial. Secretaries have accepted key roles as champions for their regions and are the main drivers of change at the Australian government level. The activity of lead agencies has developed over the past 12 months, and includes:

- tailoring government action to identified community needs and aspirations
- coordinating government programs and services where this will improve service delivery outcomes and, where necessary, extending flexibilities in program guidelines to accommodate whole of government initiatives
- encouraging effective partnership arrangements across agencies and governments and innovative approaches traversing new territory
- breaking down silos and cutting through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly and avoid fragmentation
- working with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners with government
- negotiating agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management responsibilities for achieving those outcomes with the relevant people in Indigenous communities
- building the capacity of government employees to be able to meet the challenges of working in this new way with Indigenous communities and to understand how to deliver on whole of government approaches and outcomes (inclusion of whole of government outcomes in performance appraisal and assessment for relevant employees)
- identifying and clarifying relevant cross-portfolio accountabilities consistent with outcomes specified in the individual agency Portfolio Budget Statement
- effecting cultural change at all levels.

## Some examples of progress to date

### *Improving relationships*

All lead agencies now have employees working with the trial site communities. They are supported by the lead agency and the ICCT.

To get things done, the people in the sites need to develop effective relationships with community people and with a wide range of officials. Sustained progress depends on the quality of these relationships.

### *Changing the way we work*

With resources and accountability:

- the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, ATSISS and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) made a single, tripartite agreement to fund the creation of secretariat support positions for each of the Community Working Parties in Murdi Paaki.
- A single contract with the community for government agencies is being used in Wadeye to limit the administrative burden on the community.

By supporting Indigenous leaders:

- Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership is funded by DEST and Education Queensland and by an in-kind contribution from Griffith University.

By holistic approaches to development:

- Government agencies (Australian and state) business and traditional owners have supported the development of the Weipa Multi Purpose Facility which provides accommodation for 32 secondary school students, alongside a post-school training facility linked to the local employment market (Weipa and Comalco).
- In support of the Western Australian COAG site, the Minister for Justice and Customs has approved funding of \$50 000 from the National Crime Prevention Program to assist communities in the region hold a series of bush meetings on justice issues.

## **Challenges ahead**

### *Maintaining momentum*

The trials have highlighted the kind of work that needs to be done. Efforts to simplify the administrative burden on communities and to re-skill public servants are still at an early stage. The development of governance and of leaders to support new structures in Indigenous communities is beginning. While an evaluation is planned at two and five years, it is anticipated that focused effort will be needed to cement gains.

### *Embedding the drivers of change*

To be successful, the COAG Indigenous Trials need to effect long-term cultural change within the APS. Leadership throughout the APS is critical to embedding these changes and to ensuring that working in a 'whole of government' way becomes the norm. Changing the way the APS works with state and territory governments, Indigenous communities and people, and a range of other stakeholders may require a new approach. The trials are meant to demonstrate what is working and what is not. Actively looking for lessons to be learnt will be an important driver of change.

### *Engaging with the corporate and non-government sectors*

Government is not solely able to provide the resources and skills necessary for a sustainable future. Business and philanthropic partners are sometimes better placed and skilled to work closely at the community level.

Consultations are under way to develop a framework to strategically engage other sectors with Indigenous communities. This has been met with enthusiasm by the corporate and philanthropic sectors.

There is also the issue of how to build capacity in communities to deal with governance, dispute resolution and counselling and the time required for community development processes to bear fruit.

Communities at each trial site are at different stages and outcomes will vary significantly over the next five years. Some communities, for example, had already done considerable work regarding financial and alcohol management and welfare reform before the Trial process began, and work has also continued. The Wadeye community has undertaken a lot of work over recent years to develop their community governance arrangements. South Australia and Western Australia are at a much earlier stage of the process. NSW and Victorian sites will take a wider focus due to the more diffused and varied nature of the communities.