



# MINISTERIAL SPEECH

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*Cabinet Secretary*

*Special Minister of State*

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**APS Commission Seminar**

**New Directions**

Canberra

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Thank you for that introduction, and for inviting me here to speak today.

First, let me acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, and pay my respect to their elders past and present.

I'd also like to acknowledge Carmel McGregor who, as you all know, is the Acting Public Service Commissioner after the appointment of Lynelle Briggs as the new CEO of Medicare Australia.

It seems that Lynelle and I are heading in opposite directions as she takes her considerable experience into the Human Services portfolio just as I move out of it.

During her time as the Commissioner, Lynelle demonstrated consistent drive for cultural change within the public service. I look forward to working closely with Ms McGregor and I extend my thanks to Ms McGregor for providing continuity and leadership to the organisation.

### **Opening remarks**

It's great to be with you today to talk about the Government's comprehensive reform agenda.

'New Directions' is a fitting title for this series of seminars in keeping with the willingness to adopt a reformist approach to government.

We came to office with a long-term policy agenda. We committed to:

- genuine long term health reform;
- decisive action on the challenge of climate change;
- comprehensive reform of our education system; and
- long-term tax and welfare reforms.

These reforms will lay the foundations for building a modern and prosperous Australia capable of confronting and succeeding in the face of the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Drivers of reform**

This agenda for change has been made more difficult to realise because we are now tackling these problems in the face of a global recession.

Despite the worst global recession in 75 years, Australians can be confident about our nation's future –we have the fastest growth, lowest debt, lowest deficit and the second lowest unemployment of all the Major Advanced Economies.

If we are going to respond effectively to the impacts of the global recession, this is exactly the time we need to be thinking about repositioning the APS.

The recent events may provide us with a 'catalyst for change', which as many of you know is a key factor in implementing organisational reforms.

The impact of the current financial crisis aside, there are a range of challenges in our environment that have for some time been building towards a need for further reform.

Contemporary public policy issues such as climate change are increasingly complex. Successfully managing these issues requires a reassessment of some of the traditional ways of working and solving problems in the APS. They challenge the governance structures, the skills base and the organisational capacity of the public service.

They require more collaborative and innovative approaches to working across organisational boundaries both within and outside the APS. We need to be thinking about more fluid organisational structures—with groups forming and reforming to complete work tasks, rather than traditional hierarchical models.

The ageing population is affecting the APS just as dramatically as the rest of the community. Around seventy per cent of the senior executive group, for example, will be eligible for retirement in the next ten years. This is a huge challenge in terms of succession planning and knowledge management. It presents an opportunity for reinvigoration and new ideas.

Part of this must be to embrace the career patterns of Generations X and Y. These generations have great expectations when it comes to their careers. While the employment network in Australia continues to be competitive, the public service needs to find new ways to attract Generations X and Y to its labour force.

We will have to become more open and responsive to employment from outside the APS, and it will mean that for many, periods of short employment within the APS increasingly become the norm rather than career-long employment.

Given this likely labour shortage in the public service, I also think the APS could be doing more to attract people from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous Australians and people with disabilities. While the APS has done quite well in the employment and advancement of talented women, in many respects the APS has stood still or gone backwards on employment opportunities in other areas in recent years and I genuinely believe that it is poorer for it.

In 2007-08, less than half of all APS agencies used recruitment strategies to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. An even smaller percentage of agencies specifically targeted people with disability (14%), older workers (10%) and people from a non-English speaking background (6%).

It is my view that the Australian Public Service should reflect the Australian society and the Australian people it serves, in all its diversity. There is a rich vein of well-qualified advice and understanding that is not being tapped. I think the APS should actively look to this labour source now and into the future.

Having previously been Minister for Human Services, I have a great personal interest in the delivery of services to the community. The public service must focus more on the people who they are trying to serve.

This will change the way it provides information, the way it interacts with the community and ultimately the way the service is structured.

The community at large does not understand the fine and often blurry distinctions between departments. What's more important they shouldn't care.

Over the coming decades the transformation of the Service Delivery network to use new and emerging technologies will be essential if government service delivery is to keep pace with community expectations.

### **Promoting integrity and accountability**

Transparency and accountability are cornerstones of good governance and government integrity.

I am absolutely committed to progressing the important work the Rudd Government has commenced to strengthen integrity in the public service—and in our system of government more broadly.

Some of the measures already in place include:

- new standards of Ministerial ethics, a Code of Conduct for Ministerial advisers, and a Code of Conduct for lobbyists;
- new guidelines for government campaign advertising;

- new guidelines on public servants appearing in government advertising campaigns;
- a standard merit-based process for selecting most agency heads and statutory officers; and
- an inaugural report of the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act, reporting for first time on all employees of Ministers and other Parliamentarians.

### Ethics Advisory Service

Another important initiative the Government has introduced to maintain and strengthen the ethical health of the APS is the Ethics Advisory Service, in the Australian Public Service Commission.

This service is open to all APS employees, including agency heads and SES staff, who may wish to discuss and seek advice on ethical issues and ethical decision making—that is, on the application of the APS Values and Code of Conduct—whenever they need it.

Nothing of this scale, for this purpose, has been attempted by any other Australian jurisdiction.

### Whistleblower reforms

Effective government requires the ability for the Executive and the public service to be able to talk candidly about sensitive issues and be confident that those discussions will remain confidential.

Of course, we also need to protect genuine whistleblowers and undertake proper investigations of legitimate concerns.

In July last year we requested that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs inquire into whistleblower protections within the Australian Government sector. We are in the process of developing a response to the recommendations in the Committee's report.

### Freedom of information

In my role as Shadow Attorney-General, I was honoured to develop the policies for Freedom of Information (FOI) reform that formed part of our 2007 election policy document. Earlier this year, my predecessor, Senator Faulkner, announced the release of exposure drafts of the Government's FOI reform legislation, and these Bills will be introduced into Parliament shortly.

In May, Senator Faulkner announced a key element of the reforms: the establishment of the Office of the Information Commissioner.

The Office, which we expect to begin operations in 2010, will be a new statutory agency within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio, supporting two new independent statutory office holders: the Information Commissioner and the Freedom of Information Commissioner. The Privacy Commissioner will also be incorporated in the new Office, bringing the functions of information privacy protection and FOI together in the new agency.

These reform proposals demonstrate our conviction that government is accountable, not just at the ballot box every three years, but each and every day—and that for such accountability to have meaning, Australians must have the information available to them to assess, and engage with, the processes of government.

### *A pro-disclosure culture*

Our FOI reforms also propose a publication scheme that is aimed at fundamentally transforming the way both the public service deals with information, but also how citizens think about FOI. It's a two way street—we want both the government and the public to be thinking about FOI more broadly.

We want to transform it from a reactive model—where you make a request and you receive the information you requested—to a pro-disclosure culture where more information is put on the web so the public doesn't need to ask for it.

Of course, we don't want to just make vast quantities of information available on the web. We must ensure the information is useable in a way both government and the public expect it to be. The formats and standards used for publications must really encourage innovation from that type of information.

This is one of the central roles of the Government's 2.0 Taskforce; to advise government on how to make government information more accessible and useable. Because this Government acknowledges that information not only has to be put on the web, but it needs to be accessible and useable in a way the government and public are comfortable with.

### **Concluding remarks**

I've spoken today about the drivers for reforming the Australian Public Service and my view that we should treat the strategic challenges and immediate crises that we are facing not as excuses for timidly maintaining the status quo, but as catalysts for change. As I said earlier, now is the time to reposition the public service for the future.

I commend the APS for its ability to plan and reflect on where it is going. We already know that these challenges are coming, and in a sense that knowledge makes choosing the path ahead a great deal easier.

You, as members of the APS leadership group, are the custodians of the future public service and have a critical role to play in successfully transforming the APS so that it meets these challenges of the future. The public service will look to its leaders to provide vision and strategic direction, to model the APS values and to inspire others to reach new heights of innovation and creativity, and I am sure you will rise to the occasion.

If I can leave you with one thought, can I echo the words of the Deputy Prime Minister when she said “good government really can change lives<sup>1</sup>”. As today’s leaders of the APS, you have at hand the ability to work for and support good government.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. Julia Gillard MP, Women in Leadership address, Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi, 31 August 2009