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SECRETARY'S REVIEW





THE YEAR IN REVIEW: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2007–08

The 2007–08 year was eventful, marked by the success of significant projects such as Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Australia 2020 Summit, along with new agendas for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the establishment of the innovative Community Cabinet meetings. It has also been a year marked by transition and change.

PM&C continued to excel in its co-ordination of whole-of-government efforts. We provided critical coordination support for the Northern Territory Emergency Response, including managing several legislative packages to tight deadlines. We demonstrated our ability to manage the logistics, security and policy elements of significant events, with the successful staging of APEC Leaders Week in Sydney, which culminated in the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting on 8–9 September 2007. For the 2020 Summit, we coordinated bringing together over 1,000 participants to discuss key issues facing Australia. The event attracted much community and media interest, and its success – in spite of short timeframes – was a credit to our staff.

Community Cabinet, held in four different locations around Australia in 2007–08, showcased

our skill and responsiveness in serving the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary and the Cabinet.

PM&C also continues to provide strategic policy direction, notably in support of the ambitious reform agenda announced by the Council of Australian Governments on 20 December 2007. There are four COAG meetings planned for 2008, supported by seven working groups, each headed by a Commonwealth Minister. The focus of the reform agenda is to boost productivity, increase workforce participation and mobility, and deliver better services to the community.

Significant progress has already been made, including:

- agreement to 27 areas of regulatory reform to reduce compliance costs and enhance productivity, including a landmark agreement to implement national occupational health and safety laws across Australia
- a national partnership agreement to help close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage through joint funding of almost \$550 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years, and
- the signing of the historic intergovernmental agreement on Murray–Darling Basin Reform supported by almost \$3.7 billion in Commonwealth funding for significant water projects in five jurisdictions.

Beyond providing policy coordination and strategic policy direction, a key achievement was guiding the transition to the new government. The fact the new government has been able to implement its priorities so promptly is testament to the expertise and professionalism of our staff and those of other departments and agencies.

I started in this department on 3 March 2008, well into the financial year. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of my predecessors: former Secretary, Dr Peter Shergold AC and Deputy Secretaries Ms Jenny Goddard and Dr Louise Morauta PSM. They worked tirelessly during the year to achieve many of these outcomes.

DRIVING CHANGE

The department has evolved dramatically in recent months. It has been through a thorough process of review and change as part of striving to establish itself as the pre-eminent source of public policy advice in the Australian Public Service.

To support the implementation of the government's election commitments, we have established new work units, including the Social Inclusion Unit, the Office of Work and Family, and the Community Cabinet Secretariat.

To make sure we are best placed to give effect to the Prime Minister's policy agenda, we underwent a major organisational audit in March and April of this year.

The audit, led by the former Commonwealth Ombudsman Ron McLeod, found we had been heavily focused on the day-to-day activities of government, and that our capacity to provide strategic policy advice to the Prime Minister could be improved. To address this, we have established the Strategy and Delivery Division and strengthened our ability to manage key strategic international issues.

The review recommended a new streamlined structure which was accepted and took effect on 1 July 2008. The details of the new structure are outlined in chapter 2.

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

Our department occupies a leadership position in the Australian Public Service (APS), and we value the strength of our capacity for policy innovation, coordination and implementation. We strive to be a model of APS excellence in these areas.

These three goals can be achieved with a focus on continuously improving the quality of our advice and service delivery, our staff development and our good governance processes.

The quality of our advice will be enhanced by our new structure, which emphasises the importance of strategic advice and forward-looking policy development, as well as by continual staff development.

Strengthening our governance systems also remains a high priority. Support to government operations will be enhanced by streamlining these functions into a Ministerial Support Unit. The implementation of new business planning and budgeting processes will consolidate our new structure and create a sustainable department to focus on high-quality support services to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

MEASURING OUR PERFORMANCE

As a key central policy agency, we play an important role in translating ideas into policies that benefit everyday Australians.

Measuring our policy coordination performance against quantitative measures has been harder this year than usual. As described above, a large amount of our time and effort this year has gone into supporting the transition to the new government.

Our goal continues to be to maintain and improve our good reputation for policy innovation, coordination and implementation, and to be a leader in providing high-quality policy advice.

