

**SUBMISSION - Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government
Administration: Building the world's best public service – FOR THE
PUBLIC RECORD**

To ensure the dignity, integrity and success of the Australian Public Service (APS) into the future, vindictiveness and victimisation of individuals, not to mention discrimination, must be removed.

When the Secretary of the British Department of Agriculture, Sir Brian Bender, asked the Secretary of the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), to continue my placement in Westminster as an advisor, the Secretary of DAFF said NO!!!! I was forced to return to DAFF in Australia.

The Public Service Commissioner was unable to provide a solution when I wrote to her about the matter.

Before the APS can be reformed, there must be diligent adherence to the APS values.

I feel that the current APS system 'allows' the Senior Executive Service to victimise staff they dislike. Staff members who take initiatives that discredit the negative views held by their supervisors are further alienated within the organisation. It should not be the case that capable and dedicated staff have to leave the work or the department they feel passionate about in order to remove themselves from a toxic work environment.

In my case it was clear that the Secretary of the British Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) valued my advice on rural issues more than my own Department did and yet my Department was not proud of the work I was doing but chose to potentially defame me to British officials. Letters written to British officials outwardly denigrated and belittled me. The request from London would have had no financial implications for DAFF.

DAFF espouse their values [which are also incorporated in the APS values] as:

Integrity, Fairness, Openness, Respect and Professionalism

I can demonstrate that every one of these values was not applied when the leader of an international government department sought, from my Department, my expertise to assist in international policy advancement.

Throughout my career in the Australian Public Service, a succession of senior executive personnel have chosen to ignore the values of the APS as they applied to me. Clearly my career has suffered and opportunities withheld, until, on my own initiative, I sought a short-term placement with the British Civil Service. This placement proved my capabilities. I got to the point in my career where I felt I had to Anglicise my name in order to be thought of as 'one of them'. In fact at a very public teleconference in 1999 an SES officer told the audience that he couldn't pronounce my name as a participant.

Unfortunately I am not the only one to be a victim of victimisation. There would be countless other outstanding APS officials who, if only given the opportunity to shine, would contribute to a better, more efficient and results based service. The tax paying public deserve to see results from the public service they fund.

One of the most deafening criticisms I often hear about the organisation I work in is “what do you do?”. The abilities I have to contribute, in a practical sense, to the broader community, through my work in the Department, are countless. Yet the people determining what I do, do not have the same capacity and/or do not listen. Most SES remove themselves from the realities of what goes on in the real world, it’s no wonder the general public struggle to find worth in the work of some public servants.

There are countless abilities among APS staff that are ignored, sometime because of saying something at wrong time. I can hear supervisors saying:

“The time is not right for your suggestions staff member X”.

Staff member X might be forward thinking. This scenario could lead to criticism of that staff member, a changed view of that staff member’s abilities or countless other negative actions taken against that staff member. When staff member X’s foresight comes to be reality and indeed should have been adopted earlier, no recognition is given. Worse still is that staff member X’s ideas are credited to an SES officer.

I could go on with a description of a range of scenarios that contribute to APS staff being frustrated, demeaned or that cause grief to otherwise dedicated people. And yet, to embark on a path to find fairness, novelty and quaintly called a grievance process, spells the end to an officer’s tenure.

The APS will benefit enormously if everyone is held accountable for their actions and staff can find fairness without vindictiveness in their everyday work.

The Public Service Commissioner should be seen as an impartial adjudicator rather than an advocate for the seemingly ‘faultless’ Senior Executive Service. The mistrust that the Commissioner appears to have of staff below the SES levels is astounding. It seems that any criticisms of the SES is an affront to the selection/promotion processes. The Commissioner seems to take umbrage to criticism of the decisions of ‘their’ SES.

Spiro Adamopoulos
(aka Ross Adams)

20 November 2009