

Future Earth Systems Pty Ltd

Submission to the Australian Government

**Reform of Australian Government Administration:  
Building the world's best public service**

November 2009





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## 1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the reform of Australian Government administration.

Australia's public sector is vital for the nation's future economic, social and environmental well-being.

The APS is a key part of our public sector although I am glad to see that the discussion paper notes the importance of State, Territory and local government to overall service delivery.

It should also be noted that community groups, NGO's and Australia's volunteers all play key roles in supporting Australian society.

In fact the delivery of 'citizen-centric' public services requires all of these participants to co-ordinate their activities in a collaborative and knowledge-sharing effort to make the 'system' work effectively and efficiently.

Stepping back and looking at the 'system' as a whole, it seems clear that it is not, in fact, a system - more a jumbled confusion of overlapping and constantly changing services, programs and projects delivered by well-meaning organisations and people operating in silos, without any systemic architecture or co-ordinating framework.

In this age of technological connectedness and digital technology, societies should be able to operate in a far more streamlined, efficient and effective way.

## 2. Systemic framework required

Government and community programs and projects should be organised against a consistent thematic model, geospatially referenced and linked to specific categories of citizens/stakeholders who can 'self-qualify' for interest/participation based on their roles (eg. parent, business owner, pensioner).

All public sector activities, regardless of jurisdiction/tier, agency or organisational responsibility, should be linked to an organised framework of objectives within a thematic hierarchy, with established measurements of output and outcome collected and reported continuously.

This framework should enable our society's agreed rules (created through legislative, regulative and other policy-making/rule-making activities) to be linked to both program/project delivery and objectives to enable continuous monitoring of outputs, outcomes and value for money.



A systemic approach to Australia's public service would enable us to operate much more effectively and efficiently, providing better quality services at a significantly lower cost, freeing up resources for improved policy development, monitoring and stakeholder liaison.

The current clunkiness of our (non-)system simply does not allow us to assess which of the activities across the public sector align to which themes, which objectives, which rules/policies, which geographic areas, which stakeholders or which time-frame...neither is there a fundamental framework in place to allow this information to connect together over time.

Design, development and implementation of this framework, and the modular systems platform needed to underpin it, should be a key objective for the APS review and Australia's public service overall.

### **3. Citizen's portal**

In regards to 'citizen-centric' services, it is a major exercise for a citizen to figure out who currently represents them in each jurisdiction, let alone which policy issues those representatives are espousing on the citizen's behalf, which issues are currently being debated, how the citizen's views and special interests are being taken into account, how aligned the representatives' views and voting records are with the citizen's own views, how changes to legislation will affect them and so forth.

A 'citizen's portal' is needed to transcend jurisdictional and agency boundaries, providing each citizen with a method to connect with their representatives, participate in policy debate, understand how changes affect them and track policy themes and issues which interest them.

This portal should enable the citizen to connect from policy through to the programs and projects which are implementing the policy and to the objectives and ongoing performance of these programs and projects. This greater level of access and transparency will improve understanding and engagement in public services.

### **4. Collaborative infrastructure**

Almost all government and community programs/projects are collaborations between multiple stakeholders.

On the delivery side, people are involved from different teams within a particular agency, often different organisations affiliated with the agency, sometimes different agencies and even different tiers. Plus there are the



contractors/consultants and other suppliers that may be involved in various aspects of the program.

And, of course, the actual clients who participate in the program – let's not forget them 😊

And on the monitoring side, representatives from the various tiers, special interest groups, participants from academia/research bodies and so on.

Currently, the information environment for these participants is fractured and unconnected with poor communication and knowledge-sharing infrastructure in place.

Each program/project should have a virtual collaboration space which allows participants to authenticate, access and participate as required, understand the context of this activity in relation to other public programs/projects (thematically, geographically and across jurisdictional domains) and connect from the program/project to the rules/policy debate area so the linkage can be better understood and improved participation in policy development and debate can be enabled.

Modern web technology and systems allow these connections to be achieved and Australia can lead the world in creating a public service that achieves a step-change in efficiency, effectiveness, quality of policy design/implementation and much greater levels of public participation.

## 5. The need for organisational reform

Chapter 2 of the discussion paper highlights the potential need for organisational reform of the APS (referred to as “systemic reform”).

It may be that we need to re-examine the role of ‘departments/agencies’ in the overall structure. In the Westminster system, departments are fundamentally temporary, ever-changing constructs which consist of a changing set of sub-organisations and teams with more specific thematic purpose.

The current costs and disruptions caused by the continuous re-naming of departments has become something of a nonsense. The modern service needs a more agile structure which can respond quickly to changing demands and enable staff to operate, develop and move around the service to maximize their contribution.

Perhaps departments should be seen as management organisations acting as shared services hubs and ‘policy co-ordination and advice’ providers to the ministers in regards to the minister’s portfolio of responsibility.

These organisations can handle workforce planning and management issues as well as the practical services such as office accommodation, accounting,



systems and so forth...while the sub-organisations can focus on thematically specific policy and service/program/project delivery.

Each thematic sub-organisation should have a senior executive (perhaps CEO) accountable for the effectiveness and efficiency of policy delivery in that specific thematic.

Department senior management should be accountable for providing an 'inspiring environment' for the thematic units to operate in – through creation of a teaming culture for collaborative policy development, effective systems platform and a working environment which enables all sub-organisations and participants to be the best they can be.

Staff members in the specific thematic areas would identify strongly with the APS as their employer and with the specific thematic area as their working environment...with the overall 'department' having a lesser importance to them.

Staff members working in broader departmental roles would identify with the departmental construct as a 'management team' and would work to continuously improve the team's services and 'nurture' the changing family of sub-organisations to enable them to reach peak performance.

This construct would also enable the internal contestability of ideas and policies mentioned by the Prime Minister and create an element of competition for the most effective working environment for sub-organisations.

In many ways this is a continuation of a gradual shift in the direction of thematically specific organisations (eg. Commercialisation Australia, Tourism Australia and so forth) which has been happening for some time...but **without** recognition of the need to re-align the role of the departmental constructs.

The term 'super-departments' has been mentioned in some circles. The approach described above would naturally tend towards larger and fewer departments...but it should be noted that it is not a move towards centralisation of administrative authority. In fact this re-alignment would create an ideal dynamic tension between efficiency of shared internal logistics/economies of scale and empowerment/red-tape reduction of disaggregated, thematically-specific organisations.

CEO's of sub-organisations would liaise directly with their governance committees/boards and with the ministers and ministerial advisers in relation to specific thematic policy and delivery – and with departmental heads as their employer, performance manager and public sector adviser. But CEO's would be given broad flexibility for managing their teams, services and stakeholder management as required for their thematic area.

Departmental Secretaries and other senior officials will advise ministers on the broader co-ordination of portfolio policy advice and implementation, and on departmental performance and workforce issues. This provides ministers with the ability to look critically at performance of specific thematic policy areas and make changes as necessary.



Changes to departments – reducing numbers or creating new departments if needed, or changing the thematic make-up of sub-organisations within departments – will be much easier and less costly/disruptive.

Portfolio changes at cabinet level would be made easier.

A major factor in driving efficiency will be the systems platform operated across the service. Modern web technology allows for systems to be modularised with specifically functionality and branding for thematic organisations' requirements, while enabling consistency in 'user interface' and re-usable modules across the entire service. This will create the ability for thematic sub-organisations to be 'portable' between departments – so they can continue to deliver their services programs and projects without disruption – and will enable staff to move around between thematics and broader departments while continuing to develop their understanding and effective use of the 'systems platform'.

Since these systems also provide the interfaces to the community, it is vital to create a consistent and continuously improving platform.

## 6. Wrap-up

Establishment of a world class public service will power Australia's economy and improve the quality of life for all our people. It will also enable Australia to make a significant contribution to social, economic and environmental improvements in an international context.

Harnessing the power of web technology in a modular, systemic framework will enable Australia's public services to be delivered in a more efficient, effective and participative manner, creating the quality of services and value for money that we want.

I commend the committee and sponsors for setting out to build a world-class service. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the contribution effective systems can make to the service with the committee in more depth.

Best wishes and good luck with this fascinating challenge.

Sincerely,

chris

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## 7. Cover sheet for submissions

DETAILS FOR PUBLICATION	
Individual name/group name/organisation name for publication on the website	<a href="#">Future Earth Systems Pty Ltd</a>
CONTACT DETAILS	
<p>We need to collect some personal information in case we need to contact you should further information or clarification be required on your submission. Personal information may be disclosed to the Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary or to members of the Advisory Group on the Reform of Australian Government Administration, or to employees of Australian Government agencies assisting the Advisory Group for the purposes outlined above. Contents of your submission may be included in subsequent publications.</p> <p>Please provide at least one contact address; a telephone number is optional. If you are making a submission for a group or organisation, please provide contact information for one member of your group or organisation.</p>	
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Please tick this box if you wish for your submission to remain confidential (that is, you <b>do not consent</b> to having your submission published on the internet).	
If you wish for only parts of your submission to remain <b>confidential</b> and not be published on the website, please outline the confidential sections clearly below (with page numbers where possible):*	
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THIRD PARTY PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Please tick this box <b>if your submission contains personal information of third party individuals</b> , and strike out the statement that is not applicable in the following sentence: The third party individual <b>consents / does not consent</b> to the publication of their information.	