

Ministers

Ministers are politically accountable under our democratic system of government. If we take this and the role of the APS in supporting the government as a given, it is appropriate that political accountability drives APS activity in certain ways. Some issues raised in the discussion paper may be driven by political accountability of ministers (e.g. policy innovation, p 21 of paper), and are not independent traits of the APS.

- ❖ *APS reforms should recognise the ways in which political accountability drives the APS, and explore appropriate ways for the APS to manage these pressures*

The APS in 2020 and 2030

One basic tenet of strategic planning is to understand, however precisely or generally, your future operating environment. Whether clear or vague, a picture of the future operating environment would help guide any reforms. What functions will be required of the APS in 2020 and 2030? Will the balance of functions (e.g. services, decision-making, market regulation, defence, etc) remain the same? These pictures of possible APSs will imply a requirement for certain capabilities, and would help shape the advisory group's recommendations.

- ❖ *The advisory group should seek and draw upon 'future scenarios' of the APS and portfolio operating environments.*
- ❖ *The secretariat should ask each portfolio to do a few scenarios (1 page per scenario) describing their area of interest in 2020 or 2030.*

Citizen's perception of policy challenges

Specialist knowledge in the APS could be used to inform public debate to a much greater extent and in an objective and proactive way. I note that recent FOI reforms aim for a disclosure culture, however proactive and strategic information provision could sharpen public debate on priority matters and support better policy outcomes.

- ❖ *APS reforms should explore practical options for strategic information dissemination consistent with the apolitical framework in which it operates*

Labour supply

The discussion paper recognises the demographic shift behind our changing labour supply. Standard economic theory tells us that this will result in fewer people in our target labour market, and they will be more expensive. This has significant implications for the APS - it implies we will have to do more with less (i.e. increase labour productivity), or pay more (with resulting trade-offs across government or a need for higher tax revenue), or do less (against increasing citizen expectations).

- ❖ *The APS should look to manage labour supply pressures strategically*

Management challenges

Many issues raised in the discussion paper are about strategic management, and would be common to many large organisations. For example skills development (e.g. collaboration, strategic policy), shaping organisational culture to a desired optimum and fostering client focus. Capability to address these could be built through management development, based on a clear understanding of the desired behaviours, best practice and experience of other organisations. Forests have been consumed writing about these issues.

- ❖ *The advisory group should identify APS challenges where management development could foster the appropriate behavioural and cultural change in the APS.*

- ❖ *APS reforms should be guided by the experience of management in large private sector organisations.*
- ❖ *Priority initiatives could start with immediate effect. They are relatively cheap and don't involve structural change.*

A collaborative and innovative culture

Your paper recognises that increasingly multi-faceted policy challenges will increase the importance of collaboration across agencies and sectors, as well as innovative policy approaches. These appear to be in large part management development issues.

It is important to recognise possible trade-offs arising from accountability mechanisms (in agencies and to government). Accountability mechanisms are in place for good reason, but are not always conducive to innovation and collaboration.

- ❖ *The APS should instigate management capability initiatives to further promote a collaborative and innovative culture*

Citizen centricity

This may be problematic for industry or economic policy agencies, who serve citizens indirectly. It is important that the advisory group and any new APS philosophy recognise this, as good economic and industry policy can benefit citizens in a significant and recurrent way that direct servicing cannot. A good example is micro-economic reform of the 90's which has immense ongoing benefits to Australians' living standards.

- ❖ *Formal APS philosophies and aspirations should recognise activities that benefit citizens indirectly, for example industry and economic policy*

The aspiration

The suggested aspiration seems a little odd (pages 10 and 11 of the discussion paper). Do we just aim to be excellent? Aren't we aiming to achieve an outcome? e.g. to make a difference to the lives of Australians by supporting their elected government? Most public servants cite this as a key reason for joining and staying in the APS.

- ❖ *APS philosophies and aspirations should recognise the importance of achieving outcomes for the nation and its citizens*

END.