

I am writing this submission as a committed public servant who would like to see the APS improve its capability to provide high quality and impartial advice to the government and to contribute to the effective use of public funds. Suggested recommendations for the review are outlined below.

**Recommendation: That the review avoid making broad, aspirational recommendations and instead recommend specific and time-bound actions and assign responsibility for these actions.**

Given the rare opportunity provided by this review to formally reflect on the core functions of the APS, it is critical for the recommendations to be meaningful and influential.

**Recommendation: That the Department of Finance undertake a review of Departmental outcome frameworks and the extent they are facilitating the achievement of better outcomes for the Australian public and a high performing APS.**

The current focus of most Commonwealth Departments has been to progress achievements against outcomes that directly link to impacts on the community. While this may be a laudable goal, and also appropriate given the need to be accountable for expenditure of public funds, in reality, this approach risks politicising the critical process of reporting and evaluation (including communication with the public, such as annual reports).

For example, in some cases, outcomes (in the broad sense of the word) stated in Departmental corporate plans have become political in nature (e.g. protecting Australia's borders, responding to climate change), which has resulted in low quality reporting.

Poorly designed outcome frameworks can also risk the integrity of the APS and contribute to erosion of public trust in government.

The frameworks that underpin reporting in Departmental annual reports are important accountability tools that can drive performance improvement. The APS has justifiably moved away from reporting on outputs, but the shift to reporting to outcomes may have gone too far, as the achievements of long-term policy outcomes are for the most part outside of the direct control of the APS. The value of reporting against long-term policy outcomes as a measure of the performance of the APS will therefore be limited.

Outcomes that are within an agency's control, such as delivering on the core functions of policy development, program implementation and regulatory administration would deliver more meaningful and appropriate reporting. If reporting frameworks are not designed as a vehicle for meaningful reporting then an important opportunity and critical tool for driving improvements in public sector performance is lost.

Lastly, central agencies such as the Department of Finance have a key role to play in driving improvements and collaboration throughout the APS, particularly in relation to accountability given the conflicts of interest inherent in positions of leadership. Driving accountability from within an agency is particularly difficult given these conflicts of interest. On the other hand, there appear to be few incentives for any APS Department to lead in becoming a high performer due to the risks of providing frank and fearless advice to government.

**Recommendation: That the review make recommendations that target lifting the capacity and capability of SES in the APS.**

The fast pace of globalisation and technological change is making public policy more complex than ever before. The Senior Executive Service are not operating at a high-level and are ill equipped for building a resilient and high-performing APS for the future. Capability standards and recruitment practices require urgent review and action. Legal or structural mechanisms for protecting the independence of the APS are also required, as there seem to be no limitations or public consequences for political appointments to senior positions in the APS (and terminations).

Major structural change, such as that alluded to above, requires strong leadership. Without this, any change effort is likely to be limited and short-lasting.