

Independent Review of the APS
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
Canberra ACT 2600

30 July 2018

Dear Review Team,

[Submission – Implementing Australia’s Open Government Commitments](#)

This submission addresses the relevance of the commitments made by the [Australian Government as a member](#) of the multi-national [Open Government Partnership](#).

Your terms of reference state that the “APS needs to be apolitical and professional, agile, innovative and efficient — driving both policy and implementation through coherent, collaborative, whole-of-government approaches.” It is reflects your review’s Scope of Review, which includes:

- acquiring and maintaining the necessary skills and expertise to fulfil its responsibilities. In examining these issues, the review will consider the suitability of the APS’s architecture and governing legislation. It will also consider how the APS monitors and measures performance, and how it ensures the transparent and most effective use of taxpayers’ money in delivering outcomes.

It is clear from the above quotations that your review is intended to embrace much more than “to understand and deploy technology and data to drive improvement”, important and relevant as those are.

The Open Government Declaration includes four major commitments made by Australia and its more than 70 fellow OGP member nations:

- Increase the availability of information about governmental activities;
- Support civic participation;
- Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations;
- Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability.

The Declaration and commitments reflect the observation that open government is associated with superior social and economic outcomes (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Cameron, 2013).

Australia’s first National [Action Plan \(2016-2018\)](#) made several specific reforms that are directly relevant to the four Open Government Declaration commitments. Recommendations for the second National Action Plan (2018-20), prepared by the Open Government Forum (of which I am a civil society member), are before Government at the time of writing. The recommendations again include proposed specific reforms addressing Australia’s commitments under the Declaration. Submission to OGP is due in mid-August.

One of the strong themes running through the first and second National Action Plans addresses the commitment “Support civic participation”. This theme aims to greatly strengthen the APS’s capacity to engage with communities and civil society more generally, applying and adapting a spectrum of forms and tools for public participation (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), 2007, 2014). States, territories, local government and foreign governments have used these to tap into deep knowledge, understanding and values in communities, complementing information held in agencies. This has enabled governments to enhance their decision-making and public trust.

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has led the development of the public participation reform proposals in the Action Plans.

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Beyond these specific reforms, the very process of the development of the first and second National Action Plans has enhanced civic participation. The Open Government Forum comprises eight (8) senior officials drawn from the agencies most directly associated with applying the Declaration's commitments plus eight (8) civil society activists selected through an open process. One from each part is a Co-chair.

The Forum and the associated agencies have actively sought to engage the community and civil society organisations generally and have attracted the participation of NGOs with specialist knowledge and/or interest in aspects of open government. The Forum welcomes and values such inputs and aims to reach consensus in making its recommendations.


The first and second National Action Plans have also included reforms that address other features of how the APS "monitors and measures performance, and how it ensures the transparent and most effective use of taxpayers' money in delivering outcomes". Another of its most important reform proposals has concerned implementation of "the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations", through recommendations for strengthening Australia's integrity framework, including the potential of a strong and comprehensive corruption control agency.

Recommendation

I strongly recommend that the Review propose that Australia's membership of the OGP and the Open Government Declaration commitments be building blocks for "driving both policy and implementation through coherent, collaborative, whole-of-government approaches" and for "how the APS monitors and measures performance, and how it ensures the transparent and most effective use of taxpayers' money in delivering outcomes".

To facilitate consideration of this recommendation, please review the Second National Action Plan as soon as it is available to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Coghill', is written over a faint, light blue grid background.

Associate Professor the Hon Dr Ken Coghill PhD

Member, Open Government Forum.

References

- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*: Crown Business.
- Cameron, D. (2013). PM speech at Open Government Partnership 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/open-governmentpartnership-summit-2013>
- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). (2007, 2014). IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. Retrieved from http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf