

# POLICY FORUM

POD

## Policy Forum Pod Getting the public policy fit for the future

Episode 99

5 April 2019



Australian  
National  
University

**POLICYFORUM.NET**

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**About us:**

Policy Forum Pod is the podcast of Policy Forum.net - Asia and the Pacific's platform for public policy debate, analysis and discussion. Policy Forum is based at Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University.

Our regular podcasts are written for a broad audience of public policy professionals, and those interested in public policy throughout the region.

Policy Forum connects with the Asia and the Pacific Policy Society – a network of thousands of people involved in every level of policy around the region.

**Julia Ahrens:** Host 1; Communications and Engagement Coordinator, Crawford School

**Bob Cotton:** Host 2; Visiting Fellow at Crawford School

**Prof Sullivan:** Professor Helen Sullivan, Director Crawford School of Public Policy

**Harley Dennett:** Harley Dennett, Editor of *The Mandarin*

**Bob McMullan:** Bob McMullan, Visiting Fellow at Crawford School

**Julia Ahrens:** Hi, it is Julia here. Before we dive into this week's episode, we have a very special favour to ask. Next week, we will be putting on the 100<sup>th</sup> episode of Policy Forum Pod – what a big one for us. We are very excited for this, but we need your help to make it happen. For episode 100, we need your questions. They can be anything, policy or non-policy related.

Wondering how Australia can better engage with the Pacific or keen to find out how we could make Martyn stop obsessing about Brexit? Whatever your question, however sensible or otherwise, get it in. We will pick the best and put them to our special panel. You can find us on Twitter where we are [@APPSPolicyForum](#), on Facebook where we are [PolicyForumPod](#), or send us an email: [podcast@policyforum.net](mailto:podcast@policyforum.net).

[interlude music 0:00:52-0:01:06]

**Julia Ahrens:** Welcome to Policy Forum Pod – the podcast for those who want to dig a little deeper into the policy challenges facing Australia and its region. I am Julia Ahrens. Policy Forum Pod is produced at Crawford School, the region's leading graduate policy school. You can find out more about us at [crawford.any.edu.au](http://crawford.any.edu.au).

Today, I have got the great pleasure to be joined by Bob Cotton as my co-host. Bob is a Visiting Fellow at Crawford School and he looks back at a really extensive career as an Australian diplomat in the Asia-Pacific region. Bob, how have you been? Have you had your honeymoon yet?

**Bob Cotton:** Hi, Julia. Yes, I have had the honeymoon, thank you for asking. That was down at Tathra, where it is a lovely beach and quite deserted part of the world, and we had a lovely time. We are now back in Canberra, beginning to work, trying to renovate an old Canberra house,--

**Julia Ahrens:** It must be hard.

**Bob Cotton:** -which is going to keep us busy.

**Julia Ahrens:** It must be hard to settle back into normal life after such a lovely honeymoon.

**Bob Cotton:** Exactly so. Exactly so.

**Julia Ahrens:** [laughs]

Most of our listeners will know that each week we go over some of this week's most pressing policy issues so, Bob, what has caught your eye over the past week?

**Bob Cotton:** What really caught my eye, Julia, was the fact that Australia has just had the hottest March on record, which got me thinking again about climate change and the things that we need to do to take some serious on that. I noted an ABC Four Corners program on Monday night,

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which had an excellent program on climate change and looking at the different sectors of the economy.

One that struck me was agriculture. That struck me again about the Murray-Darling Basin plan and how that does not seem to be working the way it was meant to be working. Reminded me of the state of the Darling river, the dead fish, the poor farmers, but particularly the role of the states and the government does not seem to be working at all well. The role of the particular interest groups and industry groups.

I am thinking here of the irrigators and I think the part and influence that the irrigators and other interest groups can bring in to all of this is not really where we want it to be, and I think we do need some more regulations in this field to make sure that the general interest of the Australian public is looked after.

**Julia Ahrens:** Yes, I think everyone can remember the sour pictures of the Murray-Darling Basin and the millions of dead fish, and the fishers holding out this fish and presenting them to the public, and saying, "What are we going to do about this?". This is literally the question: what are we going to do about it?

**Bob Cotton:** Absolutely. All I can say is I am hoping, with some trepidation, that the current election campaign will see a bit more light and not a lot of heat on the respective climate change policies, but hope we have a government with a very clear mandate to move on and do this.

**Julia Ahrens:** Yes, I think that is what we are all hoping for. Talking about upcoming elections, I think we probably will not get around talking about the budget. It came up last night and, looking at its main points, such as tax relieves, and investments, and infrastructure, and the increase in the instant write-off threshold for small- and medium-sized businesses, it seems a bit like little pain much gain, which really sounds like more of an election campaign item than anything else. What are your thoughts on that, Bob?

**Bob Cotton:** My thoughts are pretty similar. I think, certainly, it is a bald bid to try and get some favour back with the electorate. I think the tax cuts, obviously, have an immediate sense of 'oh, that would be nice', but when you look into it the tax cuts are phased in over a long, long period and, really, this government is not going to implement any of them. We have to wait and see actually what they do if they are re-elected or what another government might do.

Also, some of the projections in those tax cuts that are based on government revenues, and so on, I think it is pretty much thinly based and perhaps a bit heroic, as people say.

**Julia Ahrens:** I think that you are making a very good point there about them being pretty heroic. If you want to try and sell it to the public, I guess, you have to sell it somehow but you can only

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hope that people stay realistic about the expectations that are going to come out of the budget of a government that is actually going to govern Australia for the next few years.

**Bob Cotton:** Correct.

**Julia Ahrens:** Absolutely.

Before we get started with the Pod, if you are not a member of our Facebook podcast gang yet, there is still time for you to join. It is the best way to share your ideas about future episodes of Policy Forum Pod with us and, also, chat to our listeners and our presenters. Just type in 'Policy Forum Pod' into the Facebook search bar.

Today on the Pod, we are taking a look at the future of the Australian Public Service. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, APS Review Chairman, David Thodey, released his interim report on the Australian Public Service Review, with dozens of recommendations on how to build a trusted and united bureaucracy. Some of his suggestions included implementing common pay levels and building greater transparency for the hiring and sacking of department secretaries.

During this presentation of recommendations, Thodey said, "I think that probably every recommendation I have put up there has been already canvassed before, so I am under no illusions that we have a silver bullet here that will make everything different." Some, though, have said that they have heard it all before, but these are not the only problems facing the Public Service, with some concerned about the politicisation of the Public Service in the past, from seemingly random sackings of departments heads to costings of opposition party policies.

Today on the Pod, we want to ask: what are the main challenges facing the APS? Will these recommendations make the APS fit for the future, and how can we ensure that it is not used for political agendas? Tell me more about the great line-up of guests that we have today, Bob.

**Bob Cotton:** We have got a great line-up of guests to discuss these questions. First will be Professor Helen Sullivan, who is the Director of the Crawford School of Public Policy and a Fellow at the Higher Education Academy and the Institute of Public Administration Australia.

We then have Bob McMillan, Adjunct Professor at the Crawford School. Bob joined Crawford after distinguished career in the Australia Parliament as one of Australia's pre-eminent Labor politicians. Bob is also a member of the High-level Advisory Group on Climate [Change] Financing.

And now, introducing Harley Dennett. Harley is Editor of [The Mandarin](#), based at the Canberra Press Gallery. *The Mandarin* is a website that covers public sector news, with a focus on senior executives and public administration professionals. It is terrific.

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**Julia Ahrens:** That sounds very exciting. I cannot wait to hear from our panel about the Review of the APS.

Before we get started, listeners do not forget to get in touch with us. We are on Facebook – you can find us on the [PolicyForumPod](#), on Twitter where we are [@APPSPolicyForum](#), or shoot us an email at [podcast@policyforum.net](mailto:podcast@policyforum.net).

Another request: do not go away. Stick around after the main interview because we are going to go over some of your comments, questions and future Pod suggestions but, for now, let's have a listen to what our panel have to say.

[interlude music 0:08:16-0:08:24]

**Julia Ahrens:** Welcome Bob.

**Bob McMullan:** Thank you very much.

**Julia Ahrens:** Welcome, Helen.

**Prof Sullivan:** Hi, good to be here.

**Julia Ahrens:** And Harley.

**Harley Dennett:** Good to be here.

**Julia Ahrens:** Thank you so much for joining us today. Two weeks ago, APS Review Chair, David Thodey, published the Review panel's preliminary recommendations and reiterated that we need a strong and confident public service with the interest of the Australian people at the heart of all it does as it serves the government and Parliament.

This is a question for all of you but, perhaps, I can start with you, Helen: do you think his review recommendations will make the APS fit for the future?

**Julia Ahrens:** Well, it is a very good question, Julia. At the moment, I think, on the basis of what has been presented, it is quite hard to say. My reason for saying that is not that I do not think they are good and sound recommendations, but I think, as they indicate in the paper themselves, the test of this will be in the implementation.

As many people who have studied the Australian Public Service and Australian Government for a lot longer than me, have noted this is not the first report that has made some of these recommendations and, while this Report, I think, has made them in a mostly comprehensive and comprehensible way, the challenge of what happens next and how do you make them happen is the big one for me.

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**Julia Ahrens:** What do you think about that, Bob?

**Bob McMullan:** Basically, I of course agree with Helen about the implementation question, but they are not exactly revolutionary changes. They are quite modest, but some of them, I think, could be quite important. There will be an interesting way of checking how we are going after the election – whether it is a re-elected government or a new government – how many machinery of government changes are there, because I think an important recommendation that they have made and that Martin Parkinson raised recently is we have got to stop fiddling with the structure of the bureaucracy.

The figures said 200 machinery of government changes in the last 20 years. Now, that is ridiculous. Probably only two of them actually made any difference to the way the country was run.

**Julia Ahrens:** Harley, what are your points to add on this?

**Harley Dennett:** Well, if we compare ourselves to the United Kingdom, where they barely have had any machinery of government changes between governments across whole decades, it makes Australia look like we have not made up our minds about what it is that we actually think our priorities.

Now that we are looking at these issues again – another Review, it is up to the APS to define its champions who will implement this. It requires a government that will not just accept the recommendations but also give it the space to implement some of this, which no government up until now has really given it the space to implement those previous recommendations.

This will take champions on both sides of the political-public service divide, and whether or not that is actually achievable is quite up in the air because, while we have the suggestions from the APS Review, we have not been given any strategies for how to do that. There are many very wise minds looking at this already – not just the six people on the panel – and those wise minds have come up with some ideas. It is the ‘we do not know yet’ which one of those ideas are going to get traction with the people who will be in charge after the election and will be in those positions to do something about it.

**Julia Ahrens:** That sounds like there are a lot of question marks and it sounds like the implementation itself will be one of the biggest challenges of what is going to come out of this Review.

That leads quite nicely into talking about what are the other challenges that are facing the Australian Public Service. In this week’s Policy Forum Pod Facebook group survey – and a quick reminder to our listeners: get on to that group if you are not yet, we asked our listeners what they thought the biggest challenge facing the APS is. For listeners, it is clearly the politicisation of the APS but also the lack of trust in the bureaucracy and the erosion of policy capabilities by



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contracting out a lot of the work outside of the public service. These were really the biggest concerns that our listeners had.

Another of our listeners on Twitter, Cheryl Saunders, has added a comment, and she said, "Let me place a bid for working much better with other jurisdictions within Australia and outside it." Thank you very much for that comment, Cheryl.

Harley, would you agree with our listeners? What are your thoughts on this?

**Harley Dennett:** Well, I think it is wonderful what Cheryl wrote in, because I read her paper on working with other jurisdictions and I think that it was quite sound. It was just probably the best public service term for describing something like that.

It accurately describes the resentment that has built up in other jurisdictions due to various factors, such as the fiscal imbalance that has resulted in states being unable to afford the services that are within their responsibility, and we can also trace it back to a series of betrayals that have happened through [?? 0:13:47].

Prime ministers frequently drop last-minute agenda items on the states, the states, their public services are equally responsible with delivering the outcomes for Australia that federal public servants are and, if there is a dialogue between them, if there is an opportunity to learn, if there is an opportunity to exchange that expertise, then we are going to have deeply empty, vacuous policy development in this country. That is something that has come up time and time again – the shallow policy understanding.

Now, Cheryl and Ben Rimmer, who is former CEO of the City of Melbourne as well as a former federal public servant, and Professor Michael Crommelin have written a piece where they have talked about how that shallow policy understanding can be attributed to a couple of different factors.

Federal public servants nowadays rarely have any state experience – any experience outside of Canberra at all, and that is probably not so helpful. Ministers, however, they have their jurisdictions. They go and talk to--; That is their job, to go out and speak to Australians, and that is a really important part of our democracy. If we can feed some of that back into the public service, then it is not simply a one-way street.

I think that building that relationship with the other jurisdictions, re-building that trust is going to be pretty key to lifting us out of this malaise of poor levels of trust, as well as capability.

**Bob Cotton:** Helen, I was going to ask you: do you think that, in its current state, the APS will be able to take on some of these challenges?



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**Prof Sullivan:** That is a really good question and it goes to the heart of my confusion a little bit reading the Report. It is very elegantly crafted but you have, at one and the same time, a report that is very anxious to say to the readers public service in Australia is great – Australian Public Service is the third best in the world. Some work to do on integrity, capability, tax, social security, and a couple of other things, but it's the third best in the world, so you think, "Okay, so that is pretty good".

The Report then talks about all of these things that need to be done and, I mean, I kind of agree with Bob. Some of the changes suggested are quite small, but then the language that is used to talk about how they will be implemented is the language of transformation. It is a lot of that language of business-school consultancy, change-making and leadership, and all of that stuff which leaves people like me rolling their eyes, not because leadership is not important but it is such an overused word that you struggle sometimes to understand exactly what is meant by it.

For me, there is some dissonance there between the sense that the Australian Public Service is very well regarded internationally, but the Review panel seem to have some serious concerns and, at the same time, that what they are proposing seems to be, yes, quite modest, but then they feel the need to use the language of transformation. That long-winded answer to your question, Bob, suggests to me that they feel there will be some serious resistance to even making some of the modest changes.

I think, quite right, who knows what will happen after the election. I think the changes will be more difficult precisely because the Australian Public Service operates in a way that, as all institutions, is very resistant to change, and so even the most modest change, I think, is going to be subject to a fair amount of pushback.

I can just hear all of the people outside saying, "Oh, you are such a cynic and you do not--;" It is not that. It really does not matter how well structured the secretary's board is. It does not matter how the organisation of the APS see and the various other bits and pieces of the top tier – which the Report, to my mind, spends far too long talking about those things. Yes, they are important, but they are not everything, and the institution has demonstrated, as all institutions can, that it can write those things out.

So, I think in order to for these things to gain some traction, I think it really has to be, "Oh, [?? 0:18:25] to use the awful language of the Report?" by the body of the public service, by those people who, remember, only 20% of people who work in the APS according to the Report work in policy development; 70% of them are in the implementation and service delivery. Those are the people who really need to be won over. This Report, I do not think, was written for them, and I think that is a bit of a problem.

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**Bob Cotton:** Bob, turning to you, some of these challenges, such as the rise of artificial intelligence and the politicisation of the APS, have been around for a while – they are not new, got any ideas why they have not been sufficiently addressed so far?

**Bob McMullan:** Well, they are quite different, of course. The politicisation, I am not so fast about that. I am really surprised people think that is the biggest issue around. In my experience, the Public Service are prepared to give you advice whether you want it or not. I think that is terrific. That is to their credit. I regard that as a compliment, but I do not--;

There are some problems with the appointment process at the top – and I think Martin Parkinson seems terrific, but I think the process by which people get appointed and the contracts for secretaries are a bit of a problem, but not a major issue. I think the people concerned are generally strong enough and capable enough to cope with that. So, I am not that fast about politicisation. I do not think that is a big question.

I will come back to artificial intelligence in a minute. I think the big challenge is...the outsourcing model has undermined the institutional memory of the Public Service, and I actually think the outsourcing model has outlived its usefulness. Making things challengeable and contestable did some good things and put some pressure on in a way that was necessary – and I do not think we should do none of it, but I think the mantra about outsourcing, et cetera, has outlived its usefulness.

Artificial intelligence is a big challenge for everybody. I do not just mean everybody in the government – everybody operating in whatever mode of activity they are, and as soon as you think you have caught up with it, it changes again, so I do not have a view about why the Public Service is not doing it better, but I am not sure that anybody is doing it very well.

**Prof Sullivan:** Can I just come in on that, if I may, because – just going back to the responses on Facebook which raise this question of both politicisation and outsourcing, I think there is also a danger here for me that the Report and the response to the Report gets too bound up in the processes, and the systems, and the strategies because there is a lot of that that is contained in the Report and its putative recommendations.

Some of the things, I think, that are really interesting are about reasserting, if you like, the need for proper in-depth expertise, whether that is in policy, or whether it is in particular areas of service delivery, or whether it is in regulation. I think the idea that is in the Report about restoring professions is a really great one.

One of the things I really like about the Report is that it, at one and the same time, talks about the importance of collaboration – which, again, is a never-ending theme but absolutely right, the importance of collaboration within government and also between governments, and with

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government and others, but also the restoration of boundaries that enable people to collaborate from a position of being better informed, being more capable. That is something that many people who study government and public administration have just missed altogether, that the pursuit of collaboration, whether it is through outsourcing or other means, without a strong body of professionalisation, however defined and in however many different ways, actually means you do not collaborate as well as you could.

I think that is potentially hugely significant, but I think it risks getting lost in some of the glossier questions around politicisation, and how many secretaries should we have, and how much power should they have, and who should appoint them. Again, those are [?? 0:22:54] important, but the Australian people, as far as I can tell being almost one of them myself, we are interested in what gets delivered and how it gets delivered. Those are the things, I think, that need to focus the minds in terms of implementation.

**Harley Dennett:** The ‘how it is delivered’ is actually something that requires skillsets that, perhaps, are not being well developed at the moment. It would be nice if there was a little more...emphasis put into co-design and other kinds of tools that are available to the Public Service, but it is caught up in a debate – an awkward debate – between deep expertise versus a generalist mindset and the idea that perhaps we need more [?? 0:23:41] experts, but that comes at the cost of the skills that are involved with the softer skills, as I call them, involved with collaboration and those kinds of things. That is something that the Public Service has not solved for itself.

The professionalisation, the reintroduction of professionalisation might genuinely help with providing multiple streams for people, as opposed to something that I know that many of us implicitly assist with, which is the problem of everyone has to be a generalist – everyone has to be because that is the only way that you can rise or have an influence in the public service. That is deeply problematic.

I am glad that we are talking about it and I think I agree with Helen that some of those strategies are just not quite at that point yet.

**Julia Ahrens:** Harley, I would like to bring that back to something that you addressed in the beginning, and it is more of lack of trust. You talked about the lack of trust with jurisdictions and to the Australian Federal Government, but how is it about the public trust in the bureaucracy? Does the APS have a bit of an image problem and, if so, what can we actually do to rebuild it?

**Harley Dennett:** It is funny that, throughout the Reports – there were many of the Reports – there has been this phrase that has come up time and time again that the APS is not broken, and that is--; [It] makes me question, “Why is that phrase popping up all the time?”

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There is a need to not demoralise the APS further but, at the same time, things do need to get fixed. One of the things that I think needs to be fixed is that accountability side of things. Yes, we have talked a fair about integrity and corruption in Australia lately due to various things – bribery scandals and what not, particularly in procurement, but the transparency and accountability is quite important when you are talking about the different models, such as the outsourcing and contracting.

Who is accountable in those situations? The public does not seem to know because they cannot get an answer out of the body, the organisation that is delivering the service that they are relying on. We can go to bodies that are federal estimates and things to get answers out of there, but that is not exactly public-accessible. That is not something that a member of the public is going to watch and feel like that...the issues that they are raising are being addressed.

There is a definite gap in that entire space. It is not just integrity. It is not just transparency. It is not just accountability. Trust is all of those things and – I will take that back to that they need to work more with the states because they do have a close relationship with the communities, local government, as well – until we have a system in place that actually genuinely allows for some feedback Martin Parkinson has talked about and, I believe, he is in the process of implementing a survey of community, how the community values, and sees, and rates the services that they get from government.

That is a great first step, it is just not quite enough, I do not think, and so that trust element of it – and while we may see some stats that say that we are not that far down in comparison to other countries, the truth is if we are talking about it all the time then the Australian people are not satisfied. You cannot just simply rely on these external assessments to say that we are doing okay. We are not doing okay. We need to do better.

**Bob McMullan:** Well, I think there is [*sic.*] two related questions around that. One is: there is a declining trust in institutions, not just governments, not just--; I mean, I had much rather be trying to defend the reputation of the public service than the bank, so I think...the survey material does not actually indicate that there is a crisis of trust in the public service. I am not saying most of the reforms you talked about are not things that would have to happen and would make it better. I think they are and should, but we have to keep it in proportion.

I mean, compared to...politicians, banks, whatever, the Public Service still stands reasonably high, but your point about...getting access to...information when things are contracted out, even as a backbench member of Parliament or an opposition member of Parliament, it is very difficult sometimes to find out. You go to different places and you do have privileged access, but you still cannot find out who is doing what and to whom, because it is being contracted out to somebody who is contracted out to somebody else, and even the most basic things, like what is the working

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conditions that apply to this person who is answer the phone in the public service office, the answer is you do not know, and they do not know and it is just totally wrong.

**Julia Ahrens:** Bob, you have talked a bit already about the politicisation of the APS and you gave your thoughts about how you think it should be our main focus, but it seems to at least be the case that the Australian Public Service has fallen victim to various incidents of politicisation. For example, in 2013 the then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, was very quick to remove a few department secretaries – this is also something that you addressed around the hiring and sackings of secretaries.

I think Crawford's Richard Morgan commented that the message he was trying to send was aimed at the business community. He wrote that "Abbott's private sector allies looking anxiously for signs of his back-sliding into a comfortable centrism would have expressed deep concern. This was an easy win that he could not afford to pass up". More recently, in February this year, the Labor Party accused the Federal Government of politicising the APS by employing Treasury to cost policies that were similar to Labor's negative gearing plans.

Helen, a question to you: is Australia's Public Service particularly vulnerable to politicisation and, if so, why?

**Prof Sullivan:** Well, I think Australian Public Services has entered territory that it cannot really step back from now. I mean, once you change a public service from being something that is entirely apolitical and something that still in the UK is largely without political interference, once you change that, which has happened in Australia, then of course you increase the vulnerability. There has been a long debate about what could and should happen as a result of the change.

I think I am with Bob on this. I think it is probably something that exercises us more, perhaps, than it should, partly because it is done, it is not going to go away, we need to find a way of managing it. I think the Report does some good things in suggesting more stringent procedures and better rules, but I think there are more important things to worry about, and politicisation is one of those things that I think sells newspapers but I do not think it necessarily, provided we have the right safeguards, I do not think it necessarily is something that should be as much of a cause of alarm as perhaps it is made out to be.

I do think that what the Report is suggesting is needed and is sensible, but I do not think we should spend too much time on that when there are other things that, I think, are perhaps more important.

**Bob Cotton:** Bob, I would like to ask what you would think an apolitical public service would look like, and I was just wondering if you would like to reflect a bit on the recommendations in the Review report about staffing administrative offices and the role that they play.



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**Bob McMullan:** Absolutely. I think this is where the interface the political pressure comes from and is very difficult to manage. I think everybody who has looked at it recently, including the Public Service Review, but I [?? 0:31:58] remarks by Terry Moran recently in the same direction, saying we need to have an accountability process for ministerial staff, which I absolutely agree with.

To my great embarrassment, John Howard [?? 0:32:12] the phrase called 'the McMullan Principle', with which I do not agree but which I did once articulate, which is...staff answer to ministers, ministers answer to Parliament. That still is the core principle, but you cannot apply it totally and it is very difficult having a principle named after you that you do not agree with.

Nevertheless, that is the way the world is, but I think there is a number of issues around training of staff, accountability of staff, responsibilities of staff, which are in this Report and in other recent suggestions which I think are very, very meritorious. The idea that you will have some sort of ratio of public services in not-ministerial offices I do not think that makes sense at all. Ministers will decide who they have, and they will not be dictated to by any set of rules, but the idea that they should be accountable, that there should be some structure around it is very important.

There was a Senate Committee in 2003 that looked at this and made a series of recommendations. History has passed it by a little bit but the core principles they put in place then are still correct.

**Bob Cotton:** Okay, thanks. Harley, we have talked a fair bit about politicisation of the APS and what the APS can do about it or otherwise. If we look the other side, what can we actually do to make the politicians – as it were it is a big ask, behave a bit better?

**Harley Dennett:** The politicians have their own levers. They are accountable to the people directly, and there is not much that we need to do to change how politicians work. Unless, of course, we decided to enforce some kind of ministerial code of conduct on top of that that goes beyond what public can see, but then we have the problem that, well, if the public cannot see it now what is the likelihood if public will ever be able to see it to be able to determine if something is going--;

You cannot have a public service right now, such as the Department of Finance, which is responsible for implementing certain safeguards, if you like, on ministers, on Parliamentarians. You would have absolutely no power to enforce those rules, not while politicians themselves decide that for themselves.

What we have seen this week, for instance, with the chastising of Senator Fraser Anning is a good example that politicians will self-regulate as long as the public are backing them. We have regular elections to solve that. I would love it if we could have a serious debate at some stage about whether or not Australia should stick with its quasi Westminster system versus a full-on

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Washington system, but I think, if we are struggling with some of the debates right now of just can we get public services capable of delivering on what it promises, that might be a little bit out of our reach right now.

**Bob Cotton:** Bob or Helen, how would you like to add to those comments?

**Prof Sullivan:** I mean, I think the--; For me, the Report comes at a time when, in a way, it could be seen as highly pressing, but it also runs the risk that...events are just going to get away from all of us, and that is where, I think, I probably do not have quite as much confidence as Harley in the self-regulating capacity of politicians.

He is right, absolutely, that they are more accountable to the public and, in Australia, given the electoral system and the frequency of elections, one would think that that would have some kind of positive effective, but the evidence does not seem to suggest that it does. My worry is that more and more people are being turned off politics not just as active citizens but from going into politics in the first place.

We have seen, just this last year, resignations of very many very senior, very capable women on different sides of politics, who have stood down for many different reasons. None of them are reasons that men have ever given for standing down – family responsibilities, the fact that you might have been the best leader, but you could not possibly be elected because you were a woman. Those kinds of things – I think that is of great concern to me.

What our Parliament looks like, what our state governments look like, what local government looks like – that is really important to how people respond to their politicians. I think in Australia we are far too comfortable with this idea that, somehow, it does not matter if they all look the same because they have Australians' interests at heart, and that then gets us to the question of 'which Australians'.

The Report does talk a lot about Australians' interests and the Australian public but, of course, it is not a homogenous thing. What will benefit some people at one point in time is bound to upset other people, and so the question of diversity, which I raised the last time I was on this podcast and received some interesting criticism for, to me remains whether it is in the politicians or the public service.

If your politicians and your public service do not reflect the population that they are serving, then you are going to have a disconnect and, I am afraid, in Australia we have that disconnect compounded by the gender malaise that seems to be affecting all democracies where people are falling out of love with the system. That, I think, is incredibly dangerous.

**Bob McMullan:** I agree with a lot of that. I think there is one extra or two extra things I want to say. One, the voters are showing more willingness to throw people out even in what people



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always thought were safe seats. In New South Wales, it was quite dramatic for the National Party, but I think whether Tony Abbott wins or loses he is certainly going to run in a seat that everybody thought was safe for him.

I used to say in my own constituency I was never in any danger from a Liberal beating me but, if I did something that people did not like and a strong Independent ran, I would be in trouble. Fortunately, neither of those things happened or at least were seen to happen.

The other thing I want to say is, look, there has been some discussion about training, et cetera, for advisors but, also, I think we need to put in place some process for training for future ministers. I mean, we still operate on the system as if it is 19<sup>th</sup> century England and a chap walks in off the street, and is the minister, and goes off to the club from time to time. It is as if there is no skillset required, there is no--; and some ministers fail, even though they had the potential to be very good because, before they got their feet under the desk, they had made some mistake.

There was an example recently with a newly appointed Cabinet Minister in this Government, who I think, by repute, is quite a competent person but she had made two gaffes within 24 hours. Now, there is no way you cannot give people training after they are appointed ministers because you are just running from day one, but we need to focus on the people who are the next generation of ministers and provide them with some training.

Martin Parkinson raised the possibility that the public service should do that. I think public servants should be involved but it is not a task I think the public service can do, but I think government needs to focus on funding that [?? 0:40:17] amateur is long gone.

**Julia Ahrens:** You have all mentioned so many great ideas already, but as we are quite rapidly having to wrap up the podcast now, I would like to ask you if you had one piece – just one piece – of advice to give to the APS Review panel on how to better address the challenges that are facing the public servants, what would it be – perhaps starting with you, Helen?

**Prof Sullivan:** For me, I think the biggest gap in the Report, as it stands, is the work around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is a section at the end of the Report which says a lot of good things, but I think there is so much evidence of what has not worked that the Review team has an obligation, it seems to me, to focus more on how the public service can better respond to and serve the needs of that population.

**Julia Ahrens:** What about you, Bob?

**Bob McMullan:** I can back to, probably, what I said right at the beginning. I think, in this part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the outsourcing model has outlived its usefulness, and they should be questioning it, and challenging it, and putting it to bed.

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**Julia Ahrens:** Harley?

**Harley Dennett:** For me it is the talent pool. It is an awkward topic. In the APS, no one wants to say that the people who are there now are not good for it, but if you compare it to the other jurisdictions, particularly the states and territories where they do have people in very senior roles, who have quite deep personal experience, who have lived experience, that is quite lacking in the federal public service. I want the APS Review to tackle that.

**Julia Ahrens:** Thank you, everyone, so much for sharing your views and thank you so much for being on the podcast.

**Bob McMullan:** Thank you.

**Prof Sullivan:** Thank you.

**Harley Dennett:** Thank you.

**Julia Ahrens:** Thank you, everyone, again. Listeners, also please stick with us because, in just a few seconds, we will be back to have a look at your comments and suggestions for the podcast but, for now, let's hear from our friends at The Familiar Strange about why you definitely need to subscribe to their pod if you have not done so already.

**Julia Brown:** Hi, I am Julia Brown.

**Ian Pollock:** I am Ian Pollock.

**Simon Theobald:** And I am Simon Theobald.

**Julia Brown:** Some of your familiar strangers from The Familiar Strange podcast.

**Ian Pollock:** The Familiar Strange is a podcast about doing anthropology – that is about listening, looking, trying out, and being with in pursue of uncommon knowledge about humans and culture.

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**Simon Theobald:** Subscribe to The Familiar Strange podcast at our podcasts' sound cloud, Spotify and all the other familiar places.

**Julia Brown:** And find our blog at [thefamiliarstrange.com](http://thefamiliarstrange.com).

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**Ian Pollock:** Is that it?

**Simon Theobald:** That's it.

**Julia Brown:** Excellent. Check us out and keep talking strange.

[interlude music 0:43:16-0:43:20]

**Julia Ahrens:** Thank you so much Helen, Harley and Bob. Listeners, what do you think of this discussion? Please, keep sending us your feedback, questions and comments. Also, if you are keen to build your career in the public service, you might want to take a look at Crawford's degree programs. From Environmental Management and Development to Policy Communications, we really offer a wide range of post-graduate degrees that can help you take your career to the next level. You can check them out on our web page. That is [crawford.anu.edu.au/study](http://crawford.anu.edu.au/study).

If doing a whole degree sounds really like a bit much, you could also check out our wide range of short courses. Just go to [crawford.anu.edu.au/executive-education](http://crawford.anu.edu.au/executive-education) and have a look at what might take your fancy.

Each week, we get the great chance – and I always love this part, where we get to look at your comments and suggestions for the podcast. I would like to start with, actually, a comment on last week's podcast, *Countering violent extremism*, with Jacinta Carroll, Anoooshe Mushtaq, Mathieu O'Neil, and Caroline Fisher.

In this episode, our panellists discussed countering violent extremism policies and whether policy-makers have a bit of a blind-spot when it comes to right-wing extremism. The panel also discussed how the mainstream media reports deadly attacks and whether the social media giants are pulling their weight in preventing violent content spreading.

We had a comment by @DigbyHowis on Twitter. They wrote: "Thanks for answering my question, Jacinta Carroll. It is very true the law is agnostic to groups and only looks at threat. I think there is a severe form of communal violence which has emerged, which doesn't fit nicely into our mode of Islamist terrorism Las Vegas/Christchurch."

There has also been a follow-up comment by @faintglow. They wrote: "The law is not only a framework. It is also a tool that is wielded according to the inclination of those authorised to do so. There are lots of competing interests and the authorities need to sound intel to guide decision-making, including right-wing versus Islamist threats." What do you think about that, Bob?

**Bob Cotton:** I think I will have to agree with @DigbyHowis and also with @faintglow on their comments. I think the law is agnostic. Yes, it is important that we cover and deal with communal violence threats across the whole spectrum of our community.

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I know from my own experience in dealing with the State and Federal Police and also some of the national security public servants that it is a hard task. You have got to get really engaged with the communities and to follow what is going on and to be engaged with them, to get a sense of where these threats might come from, and just to [?? 0:46:14] emphasise that it is a lot of hard work, a lot of resources are needed.

I am told that, if you need to [?? 0:46:20] somebody for 24/7, it is a lot of people on three shifts and a lot of money required, but you have got to do it if you are going to get a change of trying to nip these sort of threats and actual acts of violence in the bud.

**Julia Ahrens:** I definitely agree with you that we need to look at the whole spectrum of communal violence, and Digby addressed this by saying yes, we need to look at what has emerged.

I feel like this has not just been a recent problem but it has been a problem that has been around for a very long time. For example, in Germany, we are still in the process of prosecuting one of the perpetrators of a right-wing terrorist cell that was active in the early 2000 and late '90s, so it is a very recent problem. We are still dealing with it and it is good to keep it on our radars and be very much aware of it, and maybe also talk about it a bit more openly and a bit more directly – I think particularly the part of right-wing terrorism.

A big thankyou to everyone who has commented and, also, please keep sending those fantastic comments in. You can reach us at [@APPSPolicyForum](#), [PolicyForumPod](#) on Facebook or just drop us a line, [podcast@policyforum.net](mailto:podcast@policyforum.net).

Now, we are getting on to another very interesting part of this podcast, which is your suggestions for future podcasts. We are really keen to get your thoughts on what topics you would like to see covered on future podcast episodes, so jump into our Facebook group – do it right now, and let us know what you would like to see covered, because that is just what Paul, Tasman and Sean have done. Paul wrote – hello Paul, by the way –

**Bob Cotton:** Hi, Paul.

**Julia Ahrens:** -“I have a suggestion to the podcast team. There is a need to discuss the merits and demerits of the Royal Commissions of late and whether the intended Royal Commission is targeting violence on disabled persons. What is the role of public participation on this? What can the government improve in order to implement the recommendations and what are the lessons learnt from past Royal Commissions? This and much more can enable us to understand the different approaches to ensure public policies are well designed, planned and implemented.”

We have got another one here, by Tasman. Hi, Tasman.

**Bob Cotton:** Hi, Tasman.

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**Julia Ahrens:** *[It is]* good to have you onboard. He writes: “National security policy, foreign policy, international development policy, public administration issues” – which we have addressed today, “Pacific Islands, PNG” – also a great list of things and we will talk about it in just a second.

Last but not least, we have Sean. Hello, Sean.

**Bob Cotton:** Hi there, Sean.

**Julia Ahrens:** “More climate change from a scientific, social and economic perspective and, perhaps, do a series of podcasts where each episode looks in-depth at Australia’s relationship with a particular country in the region and what their policy landscape looks like.” It is a lot to unpick there, Bob. What do you think about those?

**Bob Cotton:** Well, thank you. I think they are all great suggestions. Coming back to Paul and the Royal Commissions, that is a huge field of work there, which is really very stimulating. Questions come immediately to mind: will we look at the once currently under way, such as the one that he has mentioned on the disabled persons and whether there is violence going on there?

My understanding is that people are always invited to participate, and give their evidence, and appear before Royal Commissions but we have seen with the most recent one on the banking sector finance and superannuation the amount of people wanting to appear and the amount of time the Royal Commission had to consider it had to be quite severely limited, so people were frustrated there.

Also, I think Royal Commissions open up a deeper purpose and concern, which is we seem to have a lot of them these days. I think it points to the mismatch or conflicted [?? 0:50:16] of maybe government problems are getting that very much more complicated, so I think we would have to narrow it down to one or two, and I would really try to figure out should we concentrate on one that is currently under way. Another one would be the Royal Commission to Aged Care. Those would be the two, I think, we would cut on.

Final point for you on that one, Paul, is that, of course, governments have to take the recommendations of the Royal Commission and then see which of those they can implement and how should they do that.

Coming now to Tasman. Wow, thank you, Tasman, this is great: national security policy, foreign policy, international policy – great stuff.

Also, Sean, “more climate change from a scientific, social and economic perspective” – I think that is a great idea. I think we could look at that, for example, with both New Zealand and the with Indonesia. That would be quite fascinating. We have a lot in common with New Zealand, we have a lot of intergovernmental arrangements. New Zealand Government sits as a member of



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the various ministerial Australian Government committees, so there is a lot of interaction there. New Zealand is going about climate change policy in a different way from us.

Then, Indonesia is both another country where we could just confine this to climate change and just see what Indonesia and what we are doing, because in all of this there would be a future potential for us and Indonesia as we are moving to renewable energy and particularly use of hydrogen.

**Julia Ahrens:** I definitely agree with you on that, Bob, and I think from what Sean said to also include the social view of this, because there seems to be such a hot topic – quite literally – in public discussion. We see all across Europe and also Australia that people are that young people taking their Fridays off and trying to protest for climate change and, I guess, this is the movement that Greta Thunberg has really kicked off, so something that is really interesting and we should-  
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**Bob Cotton:** Just to insert there, I actually attended that demonstration here, in Canberra Center, because I had a free day. I must admit I was very impressed by their knowledge, and their acuity, and their intelligence, and the way they put forward what they thought would be a sensible future not only for us but particularly for them.

**Julia Ahrens:** It gives us hope for the future, really, [crosstalk 0:52:22].

**Bob Cotton:** Indeed.

**Julia Ahrens:** Thanks to Paul, Tasman and Sean for letting us know your suggestions through our Facebook podcast group. It is really you, listeners, who make sure that our well of ideas never runs dry. It is exciting to see that there are now more than 100 people on the podcast group and I would really want to cease the moment to welcome this week's new members that helped us crack the 100, so a big hello to Criselle DC, Sean Watt, Clare Brereton, Dorji Tshering, Crina Moşneagu, Tasman Bain, Velisubhle Buti, Keyla Costa, Jessica Coote, Avery Poole, and Jo Fielding.

Before we wrap up, I have another favour to ask of you. If you like Policy Forum Pod, could you please leave us a quick review on iTunes. It only takes 30 seconds – just find that fifth star. It will be a big help to us in getting the word out about this podcast.

Also, do not forget to get your questions in for the big, 100<sup>th</sup> episode of Policy Forum Pod next week. We really need your ideas and questions for this one. We will be back next week with another episode of Policy Forum Pod but until then from me, Julia, cheerio.

**Bob Cotton:** And me, Bob, thanks again.

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[closing music 0:53:34-0:53:55]

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