

IPAA EVENT TRANSCRIPT

FRANCES ADAMSON ORATION Marking United Nations Public Service Day

23 June 2022

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Governor of South Australia

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Secretary, The Treasury

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- Gordon de Brouwer: Well, happy UN Public Service Day. What a great day. It's a very special event, and it's our inaugural event. My name is Gordon de Brouwer, and I'm the National President of IPAA National. We're going to start today's event with a Welcome to Country, but unfortunately our guests couldn't make it.
- Gordon de Brouwer: So I'd like to start with an acknowledgement, and acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people, and express my deep respect and acknowledge the Traditional Owners, so Elders past, present, and emerging. And very much in the spirit of the change that's happening in Australia, just express my own personal delight at the idea that now that we're moving to a national consensus around recognition and a voice for our Indigenous people. So I think it's a wonderful shift in our nation.
- Gordon de Brouwer: So welcome everyone today. And it's really delightful to have you here. You can see that there's a range of very eminent people and Secretaries, senior executives, guests, members and partners. I'm not going to acknowledge anyone, but I would like to welcome Professor Glyn Davis to his first IPAA event as Secretary of PM&C. Many of you have had a good experience with IPAA, so it's not novel for you, but it is novel for Glyn. So welcome.
- Gordon de Brouwer: And thank you also to our sponsor for the inaugural Frances Adamson Oration, Boston Consulting Group. And we really appreciate you supporting this significant event.
- Gordon de Brouwer: So today is United Nations Public Service Day, and it's celebrated on the 23rd of June. Inaugurated in 2003, the event celebrates the value and virtue of public service to the community. It honours contributions made to the cause of enhancing the role, prestige, and visibility of public service. And in recognition of the significance of this day, IPAA, through the National Council, has established an oration to be delivered by each year of a person with deep experience in progressing the value of public service.
- Gordon de Brouwer: So Her Excellency, the Honourable Frances Adamson AC, was approached by IPAA to have this event named in her honour, and then to deliver the inaugural oration. Her Excellency has experience in and empathy for public service in Australia, in its varying dimensions, from international, national, state and territory, and increasingly local. And she embodies the values of the public service in her own actions and in her own leadership. So we were delighted that Her Excellency accepted this offer, this invitation. And frankly, she's the ideal role model for Australians. And we're thrilled that she's here today.
- Gordon de Brouwer: So it's my great pleasure to introduce Her Excellency, the Honourable Frances Adamson, Governor of South Australia, to deliver her oration.

Frances, and I can say that now because I've done the protocol, is a proud sixth generation South Australian. She studied Economics at the University of Adelaide, and was the first female Captain of the Rowing Club in its 103 history.

Gordon de Brouwer: She went on to join the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs in 1985. She worked in Hong Kong during the early years of China's reform and opening, and eventually becoming Australia's Ambassador to China from 2011 to 2015. And we had a number of interactions in that role. In 2016, Her Excellency was appointed head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pursuing Australia's interests as world power shifted and the COVID 19 pandemic took hold. She led the department through a period of cultural change, not least encouraging more senior women into the ranks.

Gordon de Brouwer: She has been international advisor to the Prime Minister, and chief of staff to the Foreign Minister and Defence Minister. So has a broad perspective. In June 21, she was made a companion of the Order of Australia for eminent service to public administration through the advancement of Australia's diplomatic trade and cultural interests, particularly with the People's Republic of China and the Indo-Pacific region, to innovative foreign policy development, and high level program delivery.

Gordon de Brouwer: And she was appointed the 36th Governor of South Australia at that time. She's one of the most decent people I know. So IPAA is honoured to have you, your Excellency Frances, deliver the inaugural Frances Adamson Oration today.

Frances Adamson: Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal. Yanggu ngalawiri dhunimanyin. Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari. Nginggada Dindi wanggiraldjinyin.

This is Ngunnawal country. Today, we're all meeting on this Ngunnawal country. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the elders, female and male. Dr Gordon de Brouwer, National President Institute of Public Administration Australia, IPAA National Council members, former Australian public service colleagues, from graduates to Secretaries, it's lovely to be back, even if for one night only. Public servants from state and local government, whether joining us virtually or in-person. Over the past year, I have seen what you can and do, do. And let me just say, I have been impressed.

Frances Adamson: Distinguished panel members, everyone. Thank you Gordon, for your thoughtful introduction. I acknowledge with gratitude and admiration your own career, long professional and personal commitment to a public service, which meets the highest standards, and the example that you personally have set to that end. The Prime Minister's announcement yesterday of your appointment as Secretary for Public Sector Reform will be widely welcomed across the service. In fact, let's widely welcome it. Shall we?

- Frances Adamson: I congratulate the Institute of Public Administration Australia on its decision to mark United Nations Public Service Day with an oration. In 2002, the United Nations General Assembly decided to designate 23 June as United Nations Public Service Day, and reiterated that, "Efficient, accountable, effective, and transparent public administration at both the national and international levels has a key role to play in the implementation of internationally agreed goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration."
- Frances Adamson: This is a clear priority of my former DFAT colleagues, whose job it is to design our overseas development programs, particularly in the Pacific, which these days accounts for nearly half of our total aid budget. The quality of public administration is key to translating that support into economic growth and poverty reduction. Inclusive growth, that is growth that also benefits the marginalised, can only occur where the rule of law is strong and public administration is reliable and transparent.
- Frances Adamson: For this oration, though, its purpose is to engage the broader Australian public sector to reflect on and celebrate the critical role played by the public service and the institutional and individual integrity, resilience, and challenges in the service. Before I turn to the task at hand, let me say, I am deeply conscious of the honour IPAA, of which I am a proud Fellow, has paid me in establishing the oration in my name and inviting me to speak this evening.
- Frances Adamson: I confess, I took a little persuading. Over the years, I've been asked by a Foreign Minister, a Prime Minister, and more recently a Premier, each on one occasion, to serve in various capacities, which I had not previously envisaged. I asked for time to consider, and ultimately accepted what I can only describe as persuasive invitations. Now, there's only one person who has twice extended a similarly persuasive invitation to me, and that is Gordon de Brouwer, firstly, as IPAA ACT President, and now as President of IPAA National. All I can say to you is, beware of accepting his calls.
- Frances Adamson: Seriously, though, what I need absolutely no convincing of is the value of public service and the work done by public servants. I have always been proud to call myself a public servant, and I hope that whether you are new to the service or well into your careers, you too feel a sense of pride in the contribution that you are making.
- Frances Adamson: Just before I came downstairs, I was talking to my youngest daughter, Sophie, who's sitting in the second row here. And I said to her, I'd come and had a look at the room that we're going to have this in. I said, "Do you know, Sophie, it looks a bit like a wedding." And she said, "Mom, that's just you, renewing your vows to the public service after 35 years." To which I said 37 and a half.
- Frances Adamson: Perhaps more realistically, though, the pride you feel is mixed with exhaustion, given the extreme demands made of many of you, whether in

responding to the global pandemic, geopolitical developments, or challenging economic and energy market conditions. It's hard to recall a time in the past few decades when such monumental and far-reaching challenges have confronted the globe in such a truncated time span. I acknowledge with thanks, your continued willingness reflected in the IPAA's census results to go the extra mile.

Frances Adamson: In the language often used by diplomats to describe foreigners' attitudes, you would say that I am well disposed towards the public service, although that doesn't mean I am uncritical or lacking in ambition for improvement. With a nod to the Chinese way of structuring these things and acknowledging the expectations of a narration rather than an ordinary speech, I'd like to provide you this evening with what I will call for encouragements and one and treaty

Frances Adamson: As DFAT secretary, I contributed, along with my Secretaries Board colleagues, to the Independent Review of the Australian Public Service led by David Thodey, the final report of which was published in late 2019 as our public service future. The report was produced in a strikingly inclusive and collaborative way. And along with my peers, I was strongly committed to its implementation. I believe there is much in it which continues to provide valuable guidance, not withstanding our natural tendency to regard anything pre-COVID as belonging to a different world.

Frances Adamson: I'm confident that Glyn Davis, a review panel member, will bring renewed vigour and rigour to the report's implementation in his current role as Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. And I know he will be ably assisted by another panel member Gordon de Brouwer in meeting the Prime Minister's public sector reform agenda.

Frances Adamson: Indeed, my first encouragement is to urge full implementation of the independent review in letter and in spirit, building on the good work already done. Sometimes we can be motivated to draw refresh on earlier good advice, because we've come to appreciate just how wise it was. This is such an occasion.

Frances Adamson: My second encouragement, to each of you, is to think more broadly about our times and what they require of you. Let me speak more briefly for a little while, anyway, about my own times. When I joined the APS as a Department of Foreign Affairs Trainee, or FAT, as we were known, in 1985, I was part of a OECD government-led drive to recruit economics graduates. It was a time of sustained and much needed economic reform led by Treasury, but engaging the wider public service.

Frances Adamson: My own contribution was clear to me. I was sent to the Australian Consulate General in Hong Kong to monitor China's then still new policy of gǎigé kāifàng reform and opening, and analyse its implications for Australia. In late 1992, I undertook a short-term assignment as a member

of the Australian delegation to the United Nations in New York at the 47th session of the UN General Assembly.

- Frances Adamson: The fall of the Berlin Wall three years earlier, had heralded the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1992, it produced a parade of leaders and foreign ministers, representing newly independent states, many of whom spoke in the general debate with a sense of optimism bordering on euphoria about the future.
- Frances Adamson: Though, an optimist by nature, I knew it was too good to last. But it was a new era which demanded new thinking from the public service. How to navigate what we came to know as the unipolar moment and prepare for what was really to come. The East Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, and the global economic crisis a decade later served to underscore the importance of strong institutions to confidence in financial markets, and ultimately to economic prosperity.
- Frances Adamson: Countries with weak institutions had nowhere to hide, and the COVID 19 pandemic has further underscored that point. 9/11 caused Australia and other countries to rethink our approach to countering terrorism in new and multifaceted ways which engaged the whole of government. There's been no going back from that.
- Frances Adamson: The work of public servants is often driven by the times, and much as there is a natural tendency to think of the day-to-day, it's always worth reflecting on the bigger picture. I've spoken a little about my times, but what about your times now. For well over a decade, the government has been dealing with the far reaching and ever sharper consequences of a major shift in global power and a significant and structural deterioration in our relationship with our major trading partner, China. The speed of technological change and the threats and opportunities it brings, challenges us all.
- Frances Adamson: So to the increasing impacts of climate change, and now rising inflation and interest rates, and failure in energy markets. This is a time for steadiness, for listening, and consultation, close collaboration, and a renewed depreciation of and respect for expertise in policy development, whether on the economy, climate change, China, or homelessness. A time to grow that expertise in a purposeful way through recruitment and development and to share it widely. And certainly a time for frank fearless, well-informed, creative and constructive advice, whether that be in your submissions to ministers, or as one of our panellists did recently, in considered authoritative public remarks.
- Frances Adamson: Your answer to the question of, what our times require review, will be personal to you as well as engaging the service as a whole. But I do encourage you to think about it, not just now, but as times change, as they surely will. My third encouragement goes to the culture of the public service, and starts with the need to continue to work at fostering a genuine

sense of belonging that goes beyond the ways we typically think about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Research, as well as our own intuition, shows us that belonging requires meaningful work, relationships, urgency, and accountability, and the public sector can deliver all four every day.

Frances Adamson: There've been steps forward and steps back, but if the challenges of our time are to be met, I believe the public service at all levels needs to be capable of drawing in, retaining and developing the skills and talents of all Australians, not just those it's traditionally sought to attract. Doing this effectively is not easy, but it is deeply rewarding.

Frances Adamson: I learned that while I was DFAT Secretary, as we sought to go beyond implementing our women in leadership strategy and practical approaches to diversity and inclusion, to develop a culture of belonging. We worked to create a place of work where every person could thrive and contribute at their very best. For the first time in my career, I sought a mentor, Lisa Annese, CEO of Diversity Council Australia, and worked with Rhonda Brighton-Hall, Founder of mwah. Making Work Absolutely Human, to chart the way forward.

Frances Adamson: We made some modest progress, but building a culture across the APS where everyone is respected, feels they belong, and all talents can be harnessed will take sustained commitment and well-informed effort on the part of the entire service. And this should be a feature of how the public service government engages with the broader community. That people belong at the very heart of the debating discussion, the decision-making about public policy.

Frances Adamson: Although parliament has lagged behind the public service in the diversity of its members, the May Federal Election marked visible progress in better representing the diversity of Australian society with record numbers of women and indigenous Australians elected. Full implementation of the Jenkins review over the next two years would go a long way toward creating a culture of belonging on the Hill. Public services across the country, would be well advised to take heed of what is underway there, and redouble their own efforts to meet the reasonable expectations of Australians when it comes to conduct and culture.

Frances Adamson: It's not impossible to envisage a future where parliament itself leads the public service on diversity and culture. The election results challenged the public service to rediscover and sustain progress on women in leadership, and to do better in recruiting, retaining, developing, and promoting indigenous Australians, Australians living with disability, and Australians of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Frances Adamson: The priority being accorded the reconciliation agenda in Canberra, across the states, and in local government provides opportunity and indeed a responsibility for the public service to engage more indigenous Australians in more meaningful ways, to shape policy development and service

delivery, and to do so in ways that make indigenous Australians feel they are part of a culture where everybody feels they belong. In this context, I welcome the Foreign Minister's intention to appoint an Ambassador for First Nations Peoples and to ensure First Nations Peoples have a stronger voice in Australia's engagement with the world. That voice will resonate across the Southwest Pacific and in our wider region.

Frances Adamson: My fourth and last encouragement springs from long experience as a public servant, working internationally and nationally; and my more recent experience of South Australian public servants, both at state and local levels. It's an obvious point, but I make it because I'm not sure that the reality is always as good as we can get it. There are clear benefits to the public from close collaboration and cooperation between all levels of government as genuine partners. I've always known it, but it was brought home to me most recently, just last week, when I visited the Women's Information Services shop front in Adelaide and spoke to volunteers and the policy staff in the office for women within the state government's Department for Human Services, who work alongside them.

Frances Adamson: The policy staff were naturally working on policy, but what struck me was how positive they were about the individual and organisational working relationships they enjoyed with their Commonwealth counterparts. They clearly saw those relationships as being most productive in delivering for members of the public. Let me just say that that wasn't the answer I was necessarily expecting, and I stand corrected.

Frances Adamson: Through regional travel in South Australia as Governor, I've also seen the benefits of close collaboration between Local, State and Federal public servants, even though the sheer number of relevant agencies in the latter jurisdictions can be a challenge for the former. At a time when there are some really big issues out there, as we've already discussed, collaboration and coordination, where the light touch or structured, can make a real difference to citizens. This is not the moment to be prescriptive, but I do encourage public servants across the country to ensure your relationships with counterparts in the tiers of government, above and below, where you work are in good order, however you choose to structure those.

Frances Adamson: How government works and is able to be accessed and used by young people is something I'm looking forward to discussing with students in South Australian high schools, ideally all 280 of them, as part of their study of civics, and my engagement with them through the Governor's Civics Awards for Schools.

Frances Adamson: My one entreaty is in relation to integrity. When Steve Sedgwick report into consultations regarding APS approaches to institutional integrity was published in December, 2020, the minds of many public servants were on COVID responses. I know mine was. Mr. Sedgwick noted that, "Some in the APS and the government may not see investing in integrity as a short -

term priority, but complacency or a reluctance to invest arguably reflects a misalignment between short-term objectives and the professional interest of the APS leadership in their role as the longer-term stewards of a key national institution."

Frances Adamson: I was pleased to see the Australian Public Service Commission issuing updated guidance late last year, and adopting the report's broader view of integrity. And I'll quote again, "The pursuit of high standards of professionalism, which in turn means doing the right thing at the right time to deliver the best outcomes for Australia sought by the government of the day." Again, the 2022 election campaign should not leave us in any doubt about the importance the Australian people attached to integrity, and the structures required to support it.

Frances Adamson: Acting with integrity, is how the service maintains the confidence and trust of the public. Indeed, integrity is one thing that does shift community attitudes and trust in government. So it is one of the tools that public servants have in strengthening public institutions. On the flip side, we need look no further than the fear spotlight that social media, citizen led blogs, and traditional media place on real or perceived transgressions within our institutions. The public have a strong voice and an outlet for its expression. And nor should we be in any doubt either about the importance ministers attached to integrity within the public service.

Frances Adamson: In addition to the work the public service does in delivering the government's agenda, the service maintains the confidence of ministers, in part by not being political activists, by not obstructing, and by not leaking, and by enabling and supporting a seamless transition between governments when that occurs. It's a two way street, and there will be times when the service needs the courage to defend its governance. My one entreaty then is to make integrity a short, medium, and long-term priority for all public services in Australia

Frances Adamson: As a two-time Ministerial and Prime Ministerial staffer, I was delighted to read the advertisement in the national and local press on 28th May seeking expressions of interest from, "Australians with diverse backgrounds and life experiences" for ministerial staff positions to support incoming ministers. Successful candidates needed to share the values and priorities of the new Australian government, and among other things, to have demonstrated personal integrity.

Frances Adamson: It was noted that they would be working in conjunction with the apolitical Australian Public Service to deliver the government's agenda. The fact of the advertisement and the language used sends an unmistakable signal, and is a positive note on which to end my one entreaty, for integrity must be a shared endeavour between the public servants and the governments they serve with both working in the interests of citizens.

- Frances Adamson: Let me conclude with the following observations. A capable public service contributes to the effectiveness of the institutions of our democracy, the quality of governance, the health, education, and safety of our people, our security, the performance of our economy, and societal trust and cohesion. It's no exaggeration to say that the quality of public service contributes to a nation's strategic weight. Individually and collectively, you contribute to Australia's strategic weight. Australia's strategic weight in turn contributes to the stability, security, prosperity, and development of our region and to its character.
- Frances Adamson: In some respects, it's how we contribute to achieving the intent of the UN resolution I mentioned earlier, "Efficient, accountable, effective and transparent administration, nationally and internationally, and the implementation of internationally agreed goals."
- Frances Adamson: And my last word, simply to wish you and public servants throughout Australia and the world over a happy United Nations Public Service Day. Thank you.
- Gordon de Brouwer: Thank you so much, Frances. That was brilliant. That was great. Why don't we start now with the panel conversation, just to maintain the flow. And I'd really like to welcome to the lectern our moderator, to start with our moderator, Michelle Grattan. Michelle Grattan really needs no introduction. I mean, one of Australia's greatest, most respected, and prolific political journalists.
- Gordon de Brouwer: She's been a member of the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery for more than 40 years. And during the time, she's covered all the most significant stories in Australian politics. She's been the Editor, the former Editor of the Canberra Times, Political Editor of The Age, and has been with the Australian Financial Review, and the Sydney Morning Herald.
- Gordon de Brouwer: Currently, she has a dual role. She's Professorial Fellow at the University of Canberra, and Associate Editor and Chief Political Correspondent at The Conversation, which I'm sure we read on a daily basis. Please welcome to the stage Michelle Grattan.
- Gordon de Brouwer: And now to our three panel members. I'd like to welcome him up as Dr Steven Kennedy, who commenced as Secretary to the Treasury in September 2019. 30 years of public service, and Steven's held other senior positions, Secretary of Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities, and Regional Development. Try say that in a mouthful. And Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. He's a member of various government boards and activities given his role as Treasury Secretary. He holds a PhD in Masters in Economics, awarded the Public Service Medal for outstanding public service in the area of climate change policy. And like Her Excellency and myself, President of IPAA ACT. So welcome Steven.

Gordon de Brouwer: Renée. I'd like to welcome very much, Professor Renée Leon, Vice Chancellor, and President at Charles Sturt University, Australia's largest regional university. Renée will be known to many as previously as a public servant, including a Secretary of the Department of Employment, and Secretary at the Department of Human Services, also a former Deputy in Prime Minister's Department. Professor Leon also has a Public Service Medal for public administration in law and leadership, and worked in the Australian Capital Territory as well. And she's also a Fellow of IPAA.

Gordon de Brouwer: And I'd like to also to invite now Deanne Allan, she's the Director of the Policy and Evidence team in the Commonwealth Fraud Prevention Centre, which is part of the Attorney-General's Department. And the Centre supports Australia and government entities to effectively counter fraud. And Deanne is also a former Deputy Chair of the IPAA ACT Future Leaders Committee. So please welcome Deanne. And with that, I'll hand over to Michelle to moderate the discussion.

Michelle Grattan: Thanks very much. And thank you for the invitation to be here with you all tonight. And congratulations on that oration, Frances, which was really meaty and has given everyone plenty of material for thought and the basis for questions.

Michelle Grattan: Now, what we are going to do is have about 20 minutes discussion with the panel, and then about 15 minutes of questions. So please be ready and please be tough with the panellists.

Michelle Grattan: Now, if I can start with an easy question to all three of you. Just briefly, what should public servants be most proud of at, at the moment? And what one thing would you like to see done to improve the service as of now? Renée, can we start with you?

Renée Leon: So first of all, I'd say capability of the public service is something that we really ought to recognise and celebrate. There's been quite a lot said about the performance of the public service during the pandemic, but as someone who was there for long before that, I think it's worth recognising that you don't get there from a standing start, that the public service was able to perform as it did through the pandemic because of its deep capability in both policy and service delivery, and its commitment to really high standards in all facets of its operations. So capability of the public service is a really significant asset for the nation, and one that I'm sure the new Secretary of PM&C will continue to foster and build. So something to really be proud of, not just through the pandemic, but built on decades of commitment and service by the whole public service.

Renée Leon: In terms of things I'd like to change. And I've been out of the public service for two years now, so maybe this has already changed, but I always felt that the risk in the Commonwealth is that you're a long way removed from the people. And I noticed when I was in the ACT Public Service, you're much closer to the community that you serve and that improves your

ability to advise well. And so I would encourage the Commonwealth Public Service to do more to get close to where people really are, not just talk to the peaks, but talk to the people and hear what their needs and their experience really is.

Michelle Grattan: And Deanne Allan, would you like to-

Deanne Allan: Sure.

Michelle Grattan: ... follow on?

Deanne Allan: So I think we can be really proud that we get to work with other members of the public for the public service. I think that's really quite a beautiful approach to why working government. In terms of what I'd like to see changed, I mean, it's government, there's always going to be change.

Deanne Allan: But if I was going to pick one, I'm excited about working in an area where you get to be part of helping to increase the trust of the public in government. And if you go, say, with the pillars of trust, it would be that you're capable, that you're reliable, that you're honest.

Deanne Allan: And I think there's a few things that we need to remind public servants about is that trust needs to be earned, and it's worth that journey. And also that... Yeah, sorry, it's just that it's worth that journey.

Michelle Grattan: Steven.

Steven Kennedy: Thanks, Michelle. I'll extend on the capability point. I mean, I'm very pleased with the quality of people entering the public service. I think the capability is very high. And I occasionally hear concerns that somehow or rather there's a capability that's been lost in the public service. I don't share that assessment. I think the quality of people entering the public service is really quite remarkable. Frankly, I'm in awe of their capability.

Steven Kennedy: The part I'd improve is there needs to be further improvement in the diversity of the service itself. It doesn't appear to reflect the public it serves. And so that's the full cultural diversity, I think, of the public service.

Michelle Grattan: Can you expand on that a bit?

Steven Kennedy: Well, I could. For example, we have a number of staff from Asian heritage, who are Asian-Australians in my department, but there are very few people from Asian heritage in my Senior Executive Service. And so there's a sense in which the services began to transform itself. I mean, the numbers would be I think roughly 30% of Australians would be born overseas, but the service hasn't really fully transformed to reflect that community that we serve out there.

Steven Kennedy: And as they would say to me, they see very few faces of a similar face, if you like. Not sure if you had this experience, Frances. And I think that's

important. I think everybody is committed to it, but it does appear to move slowly.

Michelle Grattan: Do you feel that those people, because there are not similar faces around, feel that they're disadvantaged objectively, that somehow the system works against them?

Steven Kennedy: I think it's certainly very easy for them to feel that, and in the times that we live in, in the types of times that Frances referred to in her oration, that can perhaps become even more acute. The debates that we might be having on about geostrategic news, for example, can then get reflected in the way the community is responding to those concerns. And then even in the experience of individuals in their institution, in the public service, and whether when they look at their leaders, they feel their leaders have some sense, or perhaps even, full empathy for their experience in the light of that.

Michelle Grattan: Renée, Frances stressed the importance of integrity, how does, or should a public servant cope with a minister who wants to cut corners?

Renée Leon: Well, I think it depends on-

Michelle Grattan: You're ought to figure so well.

Renée Leon: I can speak. I think it depends on whether you mean cut corners in the sense of do things in a way that's not as at high quality as it should be. And, of course, the public service's role is to advise and advise ministers of risks and better ways to do things, but ultimately, of course, ministers decide.

Renée Leon: I think it's a different prism if the corners that the minister wants to cut are ones that go to the matter proposed to be done being unlawful, or unethical, or in some way clearly wrong. And then I think there is a responsibility of the public service to obviously, diplomatically and carefully, but to make clear to the minister the advice about what's unlawful or otherwise wrong about what's being proposed, and to propose and suggest other ways to achieve the outcome that the minister wants.

Renée Leon: And if in the end, the minister wishes to insist on going ahead with something that the public servant knows is unlawful, or unethical, or worse wants the public servant to do that unlawful, or unethical thing, then I think there are really clear responsibilities on the public service, either you have to have a frank conversation with the chief of staff, you have to say, "I'm going to put this advice in writing, if you persist." You have to talk to the public service commissioner and the head of PM&C about the dilemma that you're in.

Renée Leon: But the public service is the bastion of integrity, and does need to make clear to ministers where the lines are, carefully diplomatically, proactively

offer solutions, but not to collude in acts that would undermine the commitment of the public service to lawful ethical and national interest behaviour.

- Michelle Grattan: So a junior public servant who finds him or herself in this situation obviously should go to their senior, and a senior public servant has to be tough. Is that what you're saying?
- Renée Leon: That's right. Ultimately, I certainly don't expect a junior public servant to go toe-to-toe with a minister over an issue like that, but I would expect it to be escalated to senior public servants. And I think that's what we get big bucks for, is to show courage and to be prepared to say where the line is.
- Renée Leon: Now, hopefully that occurs rarely, and it ought to be rare. One of the things that we often congratulate ourselves about in the public service is that we are comfortable with ambiguity. And I think political life and public service life is often in circumstances where you don't know all the facts and things are changing. And that kind of ambiguity is quite appropriate for us to be able to swim through.
- Renée Leon: In recent times, I think comfortable with ambiguity has come to mean swimming in murky waters and managing somehow. And I think good government would mean that waters ought not to be murky as between the government and the public service. It ought to be clear where the ethical lines are, and both sides of the equation need to respect those.
- Michelle Grattan: Steven was encouraged by the people who want to become public servants, but do you think that the public service career has become less attractive to many younger people, perhaps because other areas are more lucrative, more attractive, more flexible, whatever. And if you do think that, what changes should be made? How do you make it exciting?
- Renée Leon: Well, I can only reflect on what it was like in the public service when I was last there, which is now two years ago. And you'll all have more experience of what the graduate intake's like now. But in the time I was in the public service, there was no shortage of brilliant, talented, committed, young people wanting to enter it. And I think that the generation coming through university now, as much, if not more than previous generations want to do work that makes a difference. And the public service is a uniquely special place to be able to do that. It certainly helps to have your government appreciating the public service and not criticising it. And so I hope we'll be seeing plenty of that from the current government.
- Michelle Grattan: Deanne, do you have some thoughts on this recruitment and making it attractive to younger people?
- Deanne Allan: Yeah. So I think there's a lot of talk at the moment about recruitment drought that we are in, not as many people are as applying to work in government. I don't know if that's just because younger people aren't

applying or perhaps there's more attrition at other levels that just can't be filled by people who are incoming.

Deanne Allan: But culture as a whole, I think over the last few decades, has said more and more bring your whole self to whatever it is that you do. So bring your culture, bring your gender, bring your diversity, bring your different languages. And I think that government needs to catch up with that. I think it's an expectation that government can bring that. And what I would love to see the Australian government saying in these advertisements to come and work with us is you bring your differences, we'll bring the common purpose. And then that is what we need to achieve.

Michelle Grattan: Well, I see they started to advertise.

Deanne Allan: Fantastic.

Michelle Grattan: I don't know what the Treasury does, does it? Advertise?

Steven Kennedy: Yes, we do advertise.

Michelle Grattan: You do advertise. Are your ads as good as ASIO ones? I've only noticed the ASIO one.

Steven Kennedy: Yeah. I'll send them through. They're brilliant, I would say. I'd just like to speak to any graduates in the room. It's a wonderful place to work.

Michelle Grattan: You've got them all though already. It's the ones out in the street you've got to attract. Now, Steven, do you think we've seen since the Keating government really increasing insecurity at the top of the public service with the contract system and so on, and obviously it sort of matches the private sector. But has this greater insecurity over three decades or whatever it is at the top made public servants, and we are talking obviously about senior levels here, less likely to have an appetite for really frank and fearless advice?

Steven Kennedy: It's hard for me to comment on the long history. I can only reflect on my own experience, and I've obviously served with some colleagues up here. It hasn't, and those colleagues, I know because I sit in the rooms in the BRCs or the Cabinet discussions put their advice, frankly. I see very few, if at all, people who are holding back because they're worried that they could be sacked tomorrow. Quite frankly, Michelle, if you are doing that, it's a disaster you got into the position in the first instance.

Michelle Grattan: But it's also human, surely.

Steven Kennedy: Well, possibly, but if we go back to Renée's earlier comments about behaving ethically and behaving in the right way, you just simply, once you go into that position of deciding that I'm going to slightly change this, because I'm concerned that someone might be unhappy with it, or I'm trying to second guess someone's advice, you won't also be respected for

very long. Because where part of the public services independence comes from its independent formulation of its advice. So if it doesn't independently formulate its advice, it won't be taken for very long.

Steven Kennedy: So look, I'm quite open to the debate. There are different models. We often remark on the New Zealand model for the appointment of secretaries. The third review looked very carefully at the appointment of secretaries. There is, and I'm quite open to change that might happen there, but in the vast majority of circumstances, and I certainly try to live up to the qualities of my colleagues, my colleagues do give their frank and fearless advice, often it is in private.

Steven Kennedy: And so I think that is a sort of an interesting dimension for us to think about in how the public responds to that. They don't know what we say in private, and so they don't know how frank we're being or perhaps how clearly we're saying to the government, not for an ethical issue, but we think you are wrong, but we do, do that.

Michelle Grattan: Renée do you see this-

Renée Leon: I think I could add something to that. So I was asked to contribute to a paper being written by a think tank a few years ago while I was still in the public service about courage in public life. And we had quite a deep discussion about the occasions where courage is called for. And one of the seminal reflections from that was that courage ought not to be called for too often, because if you are required to call upon courage, it means that you are in quite a tight spot.

Renée Leon: And my reflection on the public service, especially in recent years, is that senior public servants have had to really draw on their reserves of courage in order to give frank and fearless advice. And I think that the termination of the secretaries, of which I was one, sent as it was intended to a pretty clear message to the public service about the limits of frank and fearless advice.

Renée Leon: And so I think there has been some risk of damage to the willingness of senior public servants and the extent to which they're prepared to die on any particular hill. In the end, yes, we do give frank and fearless advice, but I think people choose their moments carefully for that. And probably there are times where the judgement has been made that perhaps this is not the hill I'm prepared to die on.

Michelle Grattan: There's also surely the question of whether it's always a black and white situation, if you know that a government would not countenance certain advice and yet you feel that is advice is correct. Do you sort of cut your losses and move back to what they might countenance or not?

Steven Kennedy: Well, I mean, as a starting point, I think it's always worthwhile remembering that you could be wrong.

- Michelle Grattan: So could they, though.
- Steven Kennedy: And so could they. But a little bit of humility in putting this advice can go a long way. Because for the reasons I spoke about earlier, even the diversity of our experience, we could well be wrong. We're pretty regularly wrong. That's not surprising, that's sort of how we learn.
- Michelle Grattan: You better keep that in house.
- Steven Kennedy: Rarely at Treasury, of course, but in another place. Just a bit of Treasury exceptionalism there. But we can be wrong. So I do think it's actually very important to mention of the way we go and give that advice. And I do think people do get put in really difficult situations, there's no doubt about that.
- Steven Kennedy: With my experience in climate change policy and other things, I have always made it clear where my view differs from the government, and it's important that they understand it. I think otherwise, they won't understand where I'm coming from, but of course, I'm not going to be gratuitous. And every time I walk in the room, say, "By the way, I think you're wrong and you should change this." They're pretty aware of that. And then I will get on with it after that point. But to pick up Renée's earlier point, I do acknowledge that there has been... The courage point is a good point.
- Michelle Grattan: I'm going to open it up to questions now. And if anyone just likes to put up their hand, I think we've got microphones. And I think Frances is also happy to answer some questions, as well as the panel. So if we got a volunteer to start this carriage, please.
- Frances Adamson: Ellen's right there.
- Renée Leon: There's a microphone getting to someone just behind you.
- Andrew Podger: Hi, Michelle, Andrew Podger here. If I may, first of all, Frances, that was a fantastic speech, and thank you very much for it. I'm a little bit uneasy about some of the comments made by the panel about capability and a bit of complacency about capability. I think it's all very well to welcome the new government's attitude towards public service, but we have to reflect on whether the public service bears some of the problems, some of the reasons for concerns under previous governments.
- Andrew Podger: And it's not just a matter of one government doing good things and one government doing bad things, but whether the public service might have some lessons to learn. I'm thinking about issues such as Robodebt, or car parks, or sports routes, and issues there, which might go to issues of courage that Renée is talking about.
- Andrew Podger: And I also note that frank and fearless advice has never been a problem with policy, it's always been a problem when it's been to do with an ethical issue or a legal issue, what you put in your annual report, or what advice

you give when a minister is trying to bend the procurement rules. It seems to me that those things do require courage. But I wonder whether the panel might reflect a little bit more, whether there have been some issues on capabilities that need to be thought about more carefully Renée.

Michelle Grattan: Renée.

Renée Leon: So I still pay tribute to the capability of the public service, but Andrew, I completely recognise your concern that there have been events and trends that have risked undermining the continued strength of that capability. I think the extent of outsourcing that's occurred inevitably means that people in the public service just don't get enough practise in doing the thing that's been outsourced.

Renée Leon: When I was at a much more junior level in the public service, the rule was you only really outsourced for things that you weren't going to need to do very often, and therefore there was no point keeping that capability in house. By the time I left the public service, we were clearly outsourcing activities and capabilities that used to be core public service work. And so the more you do that, the more people don't get practise.

Renée Leon: When the Thodey Review was on foot, we had a discussion with secretaries, ably supported by a secretariat within PM&C. And we came to this question about capability, and hopefully one of the very junior people in PM&C had no sort of backwardness about coming forward to have something to say, which I love about the current entrance in the public service. And she said, "I'm an EL1 in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and all I ever do is write talking points."

Renée Leon: When I was an EL1, I was definitely involved in writing and thinking through policy. And so that, to me just spoke volumes about how we had gone too far in disempowering, that capability building that you have to do with the people coming through for them to be seeing policy being developed and learning from the example of how you develop and advise and how you consult and collaborate. And if they don't get to see it happening all the time, how will they grow that in the way that we teach people through apprenticeship?

Renée Leon: So I don't think the public service has completely lost all its capability clearly, but there are some areas where we have allowed it to start to drift and we do need to rebuild it. And I think the Thodey Review recognised that, and that the work that's already been done setting up the Public Service Academy is part of trying to rebuild that. But muscle memory, you can't really replace muscle memory as a way to know how to do things. And we need to have more of that in house.

Michelle Grattan: Steven, had outsourcing affected Treasury positively or negatively?

Steven Kennedy: Much less so ourselves. We haven't been under-

- Michelle Grattan: Wouldn't allow it?
- Steven Kennedy: No, we haven't been under quite the same funding pressure, but it just in the sheer staff numbers. But the types of issues that Renée previously dealt with in a sense a lack of flexibility for her to deliver what she sought to deliver as secretary, where her hands were really tied around public servants versus contractors, is not wise. And I think that's an issue.
- Steven Kennedy: To respond to Andrew's broader issue. The reason I often talk about the younger people coming into the service about capability, because we just need to be clear about what we're talking about with capability. The idea that some of our processes need to be improved and our leadership might need to be improved, I couldn't agree more with Andrew. And in that broad sense of capability, I do agree.
- Steven Kennedy: I'm always just concerned that the conversation about capability is often about the people entering the service, and I don't think that capability has been diminished at all. But for those of us who lead, and for those of us who are trying to design better processes in the way that place operates, that broader organisational capability, yes, of course, we need to continually refresh that. And it is potentially diminished in some areas.
- Steven Kennedy: But we need to be clear about what we're talking about when it comes to capability, and this sort of notion that all the brightest people joined the public service in the past, and that's just not the case anymore, is wrong.
- Michelle Grattan: I'll refrain from asking what happened to that pesky person who-
- Renée Leon: I hope they [inaudible].
- Michelle Grattan: ... talking [inaudible] survive. Do we have another question?
- Helen Sullivan: My name's Helen Sullivan, I'm from the ANU. It's my ambition to get in before Andrew Podger or any one of these events. I almost made it this evening. Frances, thank you so much for your oration. I want to pick up on one of the points that you raised, which is a subject that I've spent my whole academic and practical life studying, which is that of collaboration.
- Helen Sullivan: And you made mention of both how important it was, and also gave an example of where it happened, which when you give those examples, they seem incredibly ordinary things that should happen all the time. And yet we know that they don't happen all the time. In fact, they happen much less often than they should regularly whenever there's a review, or when we have an election and everything gets mugged.
- Helen Sullivan: One of the things that gets talked about is we need more collaboration, we need to be better at collaboration. And yet there's a lot of endeavour, and I think in some cases endeavour is the best you can do, particularly when you're dealing with some really tricky policy issues. But I wonder, and I

want to bring this issue back to the question of what I think the distinction that Steven was drawing between capability and capacity. I just wonder where the panel thinks collaboration sits as a feature of the system capacity, the capacity of the public sector, both the public service system, but also the broader public sector system, to actually enable collaboration. Because we don't lack capable people, but the system does appear to lack capacity to enact that collaboration in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Helen Sullivan: And I wonder if that is part of what I would argue is really the stewardship role of the public service. And in that, it's not just about individuals having courage, although there've been many cases where they've needed courage. But if the system itself, if the stewardship of the system itself is lacking, it does seem to me that courage then becomes more required because you are very much an individual actor, as opposed to being somebody who feels supported and belonging, all of the language that you've already used.

Helen Sullivan: So I guess my question is we know collaboration's important, we struggle to do it. Is there something about senior leaders' roles as stewards of the system that might help better enable collaboration, but also perhaps reduce the need for courage?

Michelle Grattan: Steve, you want to start on that?

Steven Kennedy: I think your experience in the public service can assist in a collaborative endeavour. Well, I can't remember precisely, feeling a bit embarrassed since tour of the Thodey Review here, but there was a conversation in the Thodey Review about the experience of senior leaders and where they'd worked in the service. And I think that goes to, have you developed some deep empathy for the experiences and the challenges that others might be facing in different parts of the service?

Steven Kennedy: So I think one small thing we can do is not insist that everyone goes and works in every single area of the service so you've got some sense, but encourage. There's shared sense of purpose, Deanne spoke about, I think is strongly felt elsewhere. And then if your own experience of just working in a few places and more deeply experiencing the trials and challenges of other parts of the public service, you find it a lot easier to collaborate and understand, because you've developed an empathy or an understanding of what others are doing.

Steven Kennedy: And then it's just partly attitudinal. I mean, I feel like the collaboration through the pandemic was excellent. I'm not sure how others saw it from outside, but there was a genuine sharing this word co-design. But we did literally see people from different places in the same room to design policies. So the question's often put to me is, well, that was great, but does it only really occur in the crisis? In part, because that's what the

crisis demanded. Is there an opportunity to allow that to just be more a natural way of the way we do policy? I'd say absolutely yes.

Michelle Grattan: Deanne, do you have thoughts on this?

Deanne Allan: Yeah, I think that collaboration and capability development would be inextricably linked. And something that I tell myself often, and I tell my team this as well, every single person you meet knows at least one thing that you don't know. And so when you come to collaboration, you come with genuine interest, you go there to learn, you're there to listen, you're there to adapt. And that is how you develop that capability. I mean, this is really just in a team environment, and collaboration as policy, and government is a much bigger conversation as well. But if you take it to that level, I think absolutely linked.

Michelle Grattan: But isn't it also true that you do get some departments that are naturally more competitive and wanting to draw everything to themselves than other departments?

Deanne Allan: I feel like that's a spicy question.

Steven Kennedy: No, I've never...

Michelle Grattan: So I asked Steve, so I may embarrass you, Steven.

Steven Kennedy: It's a good question. There's no doubt ego-

Renée Leon: I think her excellence has got view on-

Frances Adamson: Oh, no. I'm just reading the wrap ups.

Michelle Grattan: Not to lay on to this.

Steven Kennedy: Look, very briefly. I mean, some of that can occur. Some of it's, because it's interesting and people like the conflict and the thing that arises from it. A lot of it is just simply down to us and the behaviours that leaders will demonstrate. And I think in short it can occur. That's not really about courage, that's really about attitude, culture and leadership. It need not occur, and really starts with the leaders to make sure it doesn't occur.

Renée Leon: The only thing I'd add, Michelle, is that I think there's a lot of willingness to collaborate on a personal level. My experience from everywhere in the public service is that people are really open to and want to collaborate, but there are structural difficulties. And I think Helen's point goes also to collaboration across levels of government, where you're serving different masters and different policy agendas. And often they won't let you talk to each other.

Renée Leon: And sometimes even within government, ministers are pursuing somewhat different agendas and they don't want you to collaborate with

PM&C, or tell Finance what they're really doing. Sometimes you're working for a not entirely aligned system, shall I say? And so I don't think that's any fault of public servants. I think we all recognise that we are a big machine and we need to work together. And the whole cabinet process is designed for that, that we all comment on each other's submissions so that government can in the end make an informed decision. So I think we are doing pretty well on that within a system that inevitably has got some tensions pulling you in other ways

Michelle Grattan: It opens a million questions, but I don't dare to let you go any longer.

Bailey Hand: Hello. I'm Bailey Hand, partner at Boston Consulting Group's Public Sector Practise, and actually a former decade long public servant in the US system. So John Adams once wrote in a letter to his son public business, my son, must always be done by somebody. And if wise men decline it, others will not. And if honest men refuse it, others will not. And after hearing your oration, your Excellency, and the insights from this panel, I for one, I'm very thankful that you wise and honest individuals answered the call to public service.

Bailey Hand: The role of government and public service is only becoming more important. As you noted in your second encouragement, the challenges we're facing geopolitically or domestically are becoming harder and more complex. And these are problems that public servants play an essential role in helping solve. Public institutions are facing an imperative to get better at policy making, delivery, public engagement, partnerships with industry, academia, all levels of government to tackle these challenges. But also at a higher level, to demonstrate that our democratic form of government is actually able to manage this complexity and deliver for citizens in the world more broadly.

Bailey Hand: So therefore, it is a privilege for BCG to support this event, honouring the value of public service as it is an honour for us to work alongside so many of you daily to help the public service deliver better. So thank you very much, your Excellency Governor Adamson, our moderator and panellists, Michelle Grattan, Steve Kennedy, Deanne Allan, and Renée Leon.

Bailey Hand: And thanks to our IPAA host, including Dr de Brouwer and Caroline Walsh. And a particularly big shout out to the IPAA team members, Christina Gibson and Jo Girdler, who have gone above and beyond in coordinating this inaugural event. So a happy UN Public Service Day.

Gordon de Brouwer: Thank you Bailey. So I think we're going to bring the event to a close. I'd like to reflect it by hand, Frances, on your oration because there are two bits around the future and one bit about the present. And the two bits about the future are, you started off in speaking an Aboriginal language. And our country's at an inflexion point. The vice-regal representative for South Australia is speaking an Aboriginal language to people. Very profound. So thank you. And it is an inflexion point of where we're going

with reconciliation in this country and recognition. So I think that's a really nice pivot to the future.

Gordon de Brouwer: The second is in the structure of your argument, the four encouragements and the one entreaty, you've set a structure that future presenters, future orators are going to have to come back to and address. And they're fantastic issues for public administration. They go to the heart of public service. So thank you, because you've set the structure now for the future. And that's very powerful.

Gordon de Brouwer: The last bit is just I'm reflecting about what it means for us now, or of you, you've talked about public policy being a public servant. It's not as an observer of public life, it's as a participant, as a doer in public life. So what I take from listening, it's an exploitation, do. Is what I take. And that's very nice message. I really liked it. So thank you so much.

Gordon de Brouwer: So again, on behalf of IPAA, I'd like to thank everyone for joining us today, as well as those online. I hope you've enjoyed the event, and you can see that the people here have also enjoyed it. And so please continue the conversation over refreshments with other guests in the foyer.

Gordon de Brouwer: I would like to add to Bailey, this event really was the brainchild of Caroline Walsh and Frank Exxon in the IPAA team. And the IPAA team, they're the ones who prosecuted it and pushed me and engaged with me, but it really comes frankly to staff at IPAA. And it shows that you can make a difference, so I did. You can do things. You're changing the world, you're providing a debate and encouragement. So thank you very much to you, for what you've done. But please join me with thanking panellists.