

# TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

## 2022 ANNUAL ADDRESS TO THE APS: PROGRESS ON THE PATH TO EFFECTIVE STEWARDSHIP

### **Ms Justine Greig (Host)**

Deputy Secretary, Defence People  
Department of Defence

### **Dr Caroline Hughes (Welcome to Country)**

Executive Director  
AIATSIS

### **Professor Glyn Davis AC (Keynote)**

Secretary  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

### **Rebecca Skinner PSM (Panellist)**

Chief Executive Officer  
Services Australia

### **Jim Betts (Panellist)**

Secretary  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

### **Peter Woolcott AO (Closing remarks)**

Australian Public Service Commissioner

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Dr CAROLINE HUGHES: Hello and good evening, everyone. I am CAROLINE HUGHES and I'm one of many Ngunnawal Elders here on Ngunnawal country. Ms. Justine Grieg, Deputy Secretary, Department of Defence; Professor Glyn Davis, AC Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Secretary JIM BETTS; and Chief Executive Officer REBECCA SKINNER; PETER WOOLCOTT, AO Commissioner of the Australian Public Service Commission; and Deputy Secretary Grieg. Narragunnawali, everyone.

In the spirit of well-being and coming together, I'd like to acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this evening who are here in the audience with us, and of course our non-Indigenous friends, all of you that are here this evening, face-to-face or online.

As one of many Ngunnawal Elders, I have the cultural responsibility and privilege to provide ceremonial practises on our lands and that includes the Welcome to Country, and it is my absolute honour to be here with you this evening to provide that welcome. Traditionally, Aboriginal nations did not have what we have today or what we would call a leader. There were never kings or queens or chiefs, but rather a collective. A collective that worked together for the betterment of the whole community. They were experienced men and women who were held in high esteem, and they were gifted people that were able to command significant respect by the community.

There were no males who were the boss. There were no females who were the boss. It was quite collegial in the way that people worked together. Aboriginal leaders were people that others would listen to who can create and maintain a positive community health and well-being. How were they Elders? Well, they spent a lot of time listening, listening with their ears, but listening with more than their ears, with their eyes, and reading the vibrations around them.

They listened to many views, and they took considered time, time to consider the consequences and benefit of the decision that needed to be made on behalf of the whole community. They shared information and nurtured others on those journeys. Thus, leadership was and is a conferred condition that must be constantly earned. It is a process rather than simply an ascribed position in a hierarchy. Our Aboriginal leaders' authority depends on their cultural knowledge and reputation. Personal qualities recognise expertise as knowledge holders and their ability to look after others, the country and everything within and around, including the waterways and the skies.

Our Elders are our Aboriginal leaders and Eldership doesn't come with age, but experience and demonstrated experience and the ability to be kind, caring and influential, creating positive opportunities for others to grow as well. There are Elders and then there are old people and there is a difference. Elders inspire change and they ensure that brave forces are at work to ensure the successes of the whole, not of individuals. We are a collective and we know that if we can help others to trust in the element of growth, it builds change and helps evolution.

Empowering others is a powerful ingredient, not just for others but for our own successes and the successes of the community. And as leaders, we all, whether we are Aboriginal or non-Indigenous, have a responsibility to encourage, support and

allow others to grow. This can only lead to the success of society and as such, our nations, our nation here in Australia.

I'll be one of many that have been working to breathe the breath of life back into the Ngunnawal language and I'm really proud here this evening to speak to you in my language of my ancestors who were the very first human voices in this place, Ngunnawal country, the first humans that stood here and walked this country were Ngunnawal people and I'm honoured that we share our country here today with you. [Speaking in Ngunnawal language].

What I've said to you all is, distinguished guests, today we have all gathered on Ngunnawal country. This country is my ancestors' spiritual homeland, and together with you, in true reconciliation, we are keeping the pathways of our ancestors alive by all of us walking together as one. [Speaking in Ngunnawal language]. With respect, welcome to Ngunnawal country. Thank you for listening to me and hopefully you'll listen with more than just your ears. I'd like to now introduce Ms. Justine Grieg, Deputy Secretary, Department of Defence, as our chair this evening. [Speaking in Ngunnawal language].

JUSTINE GREIG:

Thank you, Caroline, and look, a very warm welcome to everyone here this afternoon and to everyone who are live streaming as well. As Caroline mentioned, I'm a Deputy Secretary at the Department of Defence, but also, I sit on the IPAA Council, and I'm really pleased today to be hosting this event. IPAA has been running this event for about a decade now and it's a tradition for us to hear from the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet, so a very warm welcome.

I'd like to introduce the speakers for today, but firstly, thank you very much to CAROLINE HUGHES, a Ngunnawal Elder who gave a wonderful Welcome to Country and we are honoured to be on Ngunnawal country. So, speaking tonight, Professor Glyn Davis, AC, of course, Secretary Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Ms. REBECCA SKINNER, Chief Executive Officer Services Australia; Mr. JIM BETTS, Secretary, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development Communication and the Arts; and Mr. PETER WOOLCOTT, AO, of course the Commissioner of Public Service Commission.

So with that, it really is my very great pleasure to introduce Professor Glyn Davis AC. Glyn began his academic career at Griffith University. He has combined an academic career with practical experience in government, serving as Director General of the Department of the Premier in Cabinet to the Premier of Queensland, Peter Beatty, from 1998 to 2002. Glyn became vice chancellor and president of Griffith University in 2002 and in January 2005 he was appointed vice chancellor of the University of Melbourne.

Glyn was selected by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to present the 51st Boyer Lecture Series in 2010 with the topic of the Republic of Learning, Higher Education Transforms Australia. In October 2018, Glyn joined the Crawford School of Public Policy at the ANU as a distinguished professor. In December 2018, Glyn became the CEO of the Paul Ramsey Foundation and in June 2022 he became the Secretary of the Prime Minister in Cabinet. Please make Professor Davis welcome.

PROF GLYN DAVIS AC: Thank you. Justine, thank you very much. There's something scary about hearing your Wikipedia entry read out so many times, but it's very warm and I appreciate it. It's an honour to join this tradition of the annual IPAA Review of the Year and I begin, as we all do, by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the unseated lands on which we meet, the Asnanawal Elder, Paul House, said beautifully last night at a function at Old Parliament House, "Respect is looking to see, listening to hear, and learning to understand." It's a great formulation.

And so, in that tradition, I too pay my respects to the Ngunnawal peoples, the Elders, past and present. And I, too, want to dwell on an important obligation we share, because public servants also honour memory. Alongside our roles of policy and impartial advice and service delivery, there's another key element to our work and that's stewardship. As stewards, we know that our society has no final goal, it has no end point. Our job is to endlessly keep open the possibilities for those who follow.

And few have expressed this, I think, more eloquently than the British philosopher Michael Oakeshott and he wrote, "In political activity, men," and I'm sure he meant women, "sail a boundless and bottomless sea. There is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting point nor selected destination. The enterprise," he wrote, "is to keep afloat on an even keel. The sea is both friend and enemy and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion." That is, politics and policy are a voyage on a boundless sea and the challenge, our challenge, is to keep afloat. "Dear God, be good to me. The sea is so wide, and my boat is so small," as the traditional prayer says.

Now, there are distinct stings in this nautical metaphor, Oakeshott was a sceptic about the role of government, particularly about the welfare state in the time he wrote. He was a sceptic about any normative goals for public policy and his metaphor of a ship afloat, a boundless sea, echoes very deliberately a warning from Plato that democracy is no way to run any society.

It was Plato who first articulated the idea of the ship of state, a reminder that navigation and steering are hard-won skills. And for Plato, a boat in which the sailors elect their leaders fight amongst themselves about destination and solve disputes by vote is certain to flounder and sink. That was a very influential view for 2,000 years. Yet history suggests that democracies can be wise, can be careful, and however much Michael Oakeshott disliked the welfare state, the millions it lifted from poverty during his lifetime might hold a different view, but Oakeshott was right about a very important crucial element of staying afloat.

He used a somewhat strange formulation of the traditional manner of behaviour to make a friend of every hostile occasion. What he was saying is that governing, like sailing, is a skill. It draws on collective knowledge which must be learned and developed and mastered by each generation to stay afloat. The ship of state needs people who understand the sea and its many moods. And in our democracy here in Australia, collective wisdom about governing draws on two key sources, politics which provides us with leadership and purpose, and a public service able to inform and record and implement democratic choices. There can be tension on the bridge,

as Plato feared, between the demanding, tumultuous immediate world of politics and the more measured approach of officials.

The German political theorist and philosopher, Max Weber, wrote that "Politics is a vocation, while bureaucracy is a profession." As usual, Weber had it exactly. Of course, every public servant has a vocation, a calling, and politics for many is the occupation of a lifetime. But Weber meant something very specific with his labels. He meant that an effective politician is someone who has a set of intuitive skills. They can read the mood, they can respond to the moment with conviction, moral conviction and responsibility. Skilled politicians sense the need for change before it's obvious. They lead. And that requires intuition and individual charisma.

By contrast to Weber, public service is a profession because it's training how to work in a much larger system. Public service works best amid stability and accumulated intellectual capital. It implies record keeping so that rationale and the authority of any decision can be clear, and public servants must be stewards, committed to keeping the boat seaworthy so that a new generation of political leaders can take their place at the helm. And since we are all in the same boat, staying afloat depends on a balance. Neither politics nor public service is enough. Politics without action is performance. Public service without purpose is bureaucracy.

So, in reflecting on 2022, I'm keen to discuss this value of stewardship, how public servants maintain the vessel for this endless voyage. And I do so amid some stormy seas. The year has seen not just the war in Ukraine and new COVID strains and a continuous cycle of devastating natural disasters, but also a trifecta of transitions from one government to the next, from one parliament to the next, from one head of state to the next, as we farewell to a monarch. And all of this happened in a matter of months during the year.

I think each of these challenges teaches us something about stewardship in action. Consider the 2022 federal election and the crucial role the entire APS played in delivering continuity, or the official response to the death of the Queen, or the monumental and ongoing policy challenge of COVID-19. Each call to mind a different and crucial aspect of stewardship. So, a change of government, that's a moment when keeping the ship afloat truly matters. One group of leaders is suddenly replaced by another. But once again, 2022 proved that the APS handles electoral transitions with dexterity and grace.

A ministry and their staff just depart overnight. But meanwhile, all the services, all the things that we care about all must continue and they have to continue as that same public service is busy installing a new government and changing direction at the behest of that government. Just as the wind can change suddenly direction and require quick adjustment to the sails, so a change of government demands very quick machinery changes, new portfolios, departments, responsibilities must all be stood up overnight.

In 2022, as in previous election years, the Australian Public Service anticipated electoral possibilities with the Blue and Red Books setting out issues, timetables, plans. The APS was ready to rearrange important functions of government, to change policies to embrace new priorities and to support an effective transition of

administrations. Certainly, on seeing this very complex chain of events unfold, the incoming prime minister, Anthony Albanese, was impressed. He marvelled that Australia could have an election on Saturday, a swearing in on Monday morning and a new prime minister on a plane to Japan for an important global meeting before lunchtime on the same day, every detail anticipated.

Indeed, it was a public servant's job, even before the election, to make sure that Anthony Albanese held a valid current passport. He did not. And so DFAT worked very hard to make sure that he did by the time he got on the plane Monday morning so that he could depart on time for the QUAD. And I think the point is simple, the APS can deliver an orderly and sensible transfer of power and it can do so without concern, without anyone else worrying about whether the transition would happen, the new government would be sworn in.

The APS has since supported those new national leaders through their first parliamentary agenda, a packed schedule of international visits, national cabinet meetings and agenda-setting events such as the Sydney NG Forum and the Jobs and Skills Summit. Such stewardship reassures, government, this government, future governments and the Australian public that the ship of state can embrace a new course, can be configured anew even as its sails. And that same ability to sustain continuity through change carried us through the loss of Queen Elizabeth II.

No currently serving public servant or politician has lived through the death of the head of the Australian state and the ascension of her successor. Yet the Australian Public Service had planned for this eventuality for over a decade in the form of Operation London Bridge, a plan meticulously updated for successive governments, tweaked for each prime minister. So, when in September a call from Buckingham Palace came, if you're interested, at 2:35 AM Canberra time, the response was immediate, and it was sustained over the weeks that followed.

Operation London Bridge was a plan designed and executed by public servants in Britain and Australia who understood there wouldn't be a second chance to get this right. So, teams worked across APS agencies, to coordinate communications, to bring together the executive council, to organise a 96-gun salute, to deliver the proclamation ceremony, to coordinate the Prime Minister's attendance at a state funeral. Along the way, speeches were prepared, information disseminated, parliamentary sitting days rearranged, and a National Day of Morning arranged, and all coordinated with the Palace.

This was a whole of APS undertaking. Colleagues from PM&C and Government House began the process with a team in the office shortly after the news broke. They were in the office by 3:30 AM, working through the early morning and all the following day without rest to ensure that the plan unfolded as expected. The Department of Defence delivered the gun salutes and Federation guards and arranged ADF members to be involved in the Queen's funeral in the United Kingdom. Officers from Veterans Affairs were part of travel arrangements, along with skilled DFAT diplomats who assisted on the ground in London.

The Department of Parliamentary Services handled all the aspects of the events at Parliament House and new parliamentary sittings. The National Capital Authority

organised traffic and amenities as the public gathered at Parliament House. The ACT government lent a hand, too. Well, to be precise, 44 pairs of hands, to help with flag raising. As a PMNC colleague observed, and I quote, "To be part of such a historic moment was an honour and a privilege. The offers of assistance were overwhelming." And another said, "This was a testament to the very best traditions of the public service." Stewardship is the ability to anticipate, to plan, to record outcomes, to learn. Stewardship is about now and the future, a public service with a shared memory and a capacity to act when required, and such capacity may only be required occasionally yet it's vital when the inevitable wild storm descends.

And it's hard to think of a bigger wild storm than COVID. This pandemic has tested stewardship more significantly than any other challenge in our working lives. Again, it required extraordinary coordination across the APS, and it placed a stress on the Commonwealth Department of Health that it hadn't seen since its creation 100 earlier in response to the previous pandemic, the Spanish Influenza. COVID is a crisis with us still as colleagues in health and across the APS deal with new variants and plan against further outbreaks.

Now, earlier I suggested that our ship of state requires two very different sorts of skills to stay afloat, those elected to lead in a crisis and those who can advise, based on deep experience and then turn agreed instructions into actions. And during COVID, these two sides, politicians and officials, worked closely together, side by side, in media conferences explaining the advice from experts, the decisions from elected leaders. Since the start of COVID, politicians have been called on to understand the sea and its weather, to weigh political risks about lockdowns and borders and freedoms, to make final calls and to bear the political consequences.

But they do so, drawing on advice from the Public Service. It has been officials who assemble the data, provide the options, and then get working on the actions. This has been a mammoth collective collaborative effort all through 2022. It has required mobilisation and leadership on a national scale. During the crisis, over the last two and a half years, thousands of APS staff have been redeployed to meet urgent needs, to process jobseeker claims, for example. More than 2,000 staff including museum curators and COMCAR drivers were seconded to Services Australia, trained and put to work. As one COMCAR driver observed during this extraordinary effort, and I quote, "It's nice to know that every claim we finalise means helping someone in hardship."

There's no better example I can think of than all hands on deck. In fact, in the 2020 APS census, nearly half the respondents reported shifting priorities to work directly on COVID-19 at some point during the year. Suddenly, we needed new policies, new forms of service delivery, and this was achieved with impressive speed thanks to collective commitment and much fine leadership across the APS. Of course, the COVID response was much more than a Commonwealth effort. The national mobilisation relied heavily on political leadership and the dedicated public services of the states and territories. But together, jurisdictions pursued genuine innovation, telehealth, digital vaccine certificates, huge vaccination centres and programmes, and even the failures. And we're not going to forget the COVID Safe app in a hurry,

helped us through learning, helped us see what didn't work and helped calibrate change.

Throughout the response, the APS drew on just deep reserves of expertise, from DFAT operations using Pacific Networks to distribute vaccines across the region, to the National Indigenous Australians Agency, deploying their local knowledge and links to help keep remote communities safe. And there's no doubt that at times this seemed overwhelming, a tiny vessel on a vast sea of uncertainty. Yet, as Oakeshott shot put it, "We used our resources to make a friend of this hostile occasion."

And we see that reflected in the recent independent review of Australia's COVID response, chaired by Dr. Peter Shergold. Along with some constructive advice, that review found that Australian governments, and I quote, "Got many of the big calls right." Review, reflection, evaluation, are all essential elements of good stewardship, whether a policy worked. The Shergold findings will help shape a longer-term pandemic strategy. And if the virus threatens, there is more to study, practices to change, better preparations to begin.

But the goal is not perfection, it's building on what we've learned to stay safely afloat. Like COVID, the next big storm will likely arrive unbidden and unwelcome. It will be again a world of unknowns and worse, struggle and strife on the high seas. Times when, like the ancient mariner, we find ourselves disorientated and at the mercy of an unforgiving ocean. Staying afloat requires the direction of those who lead, those elected to lead, and the quiet work of maintenance and storage, of ensuring we have the skills on board and the materials needed for our endless voyage.

Throughout 2022, the APS demonstrated just what it can achieve, the right people in the right place at the right time. We've demonstrated that if we plan, work together and apply what we learn, we can make the enemy see our friend. We've been reminded why stewardship should be a core value of the APS Reform Project, an essential element of capability and enduring responsibility. As public servants, we work with the elected officials as the stewards of this vessel. Our shared duty is to keep the ship estate seaworthy for this moment and for all who follow. For, as Genevieve Bell said in her marvellous Garran Oration, "Our ideas will always end up in someone else's hands, and when they do, we need to hope we gave them enough grace and shape to hold the future." Thank you.

JUSTINE GREIG:

Thank you for your address, Glyn. The concept of stewardship, and I've just written down here, keeping the ship afloat, and the importance of leadership and purpose is so important, particularly in the context of our APS reforms. As you've shared, our reform agenda is ambitious, it's urgent and it's certainly happening now. I was very fortunate to participate with 15 other colleagues recently in the across-government APS Academy programme, which worked through how we can be stewards of the Public Service, how we can better work together to deliver those outcomes and how we can take a longer-term view of what is required to ensure trust and to deliver reforms that benefit the Australian community now and in the future. There are quite a few of my colleagues here that were part of that programme.



And interestingly, one of the things we agreed as a group was that we must take a collective approach. And some people even went so far as saying it should be collective thinking, by default. And clearly the concepts raised by Glyn this evening parallel or bring that out even further. And I think it's that collective thinking that will provide us with that continuity through change. So, thank you very much, Glyn.

Look, I'd now like to introduce REBECCA SKINNER and JIM BETTS to join Professor Davis for a panel discussion with myself on APS reform. Rebecca commenced as the Services Australia chief executive officer on 16 March 2020. Before this time, Rebecca was the Associate Secretary of Defence. During her career, she has held deputy secretary roles in intelligence, strategic policy and corporate areas at Defence and served as a senior executive within Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Rebecca was awarded Public Service medal in June 2021 for her outstanding public service. JIM BETTS was appointed as secretary in July 2022. He's spent over 30 years working in government agencies in the UK, Victoria, and for the last eight years in New South Wales. Prior to becoming Secretary, Jim was a partner at Strategy Consulting EY Port Jackson Partners, having previously led the New South Wales Department of Planning Industry and Environment as secretary for two and a half years. There's more to say there, but I'll stop there with the introductions. I'm going to come and join you for our panel discussion.

I'll just check my microphones on. It is. So welcome. My first question is to Jim and Rebecca. This annual address is always an opportunity to look back and reflect and Glyn has shared many perspectives on that. From your personal vantage points, what do you see as one of the greatest challenges that the public sector has overcome this year?

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: You going to go first?

JIM BETTS: I'll give it a crack. So, I'm a newbie as you know. I started in July and the July seems like it was hard on the heels of the election, but when I arrived it felt like there was a lot of elapsed time between 21st of May and my arrival, a lot of happened had happened in that time. I've seen changes of government after long periods previously in the UK in 1997 and in Victoria in 2010. In the first case, you could see there was a change of government coming a mile off. In the second case, it was much less predictable.

The trauma of having a change of government can be quite significant and the capacity of the Public Service to win the trust of an incoming government after many years of working with their political opponents should not be taken for granted. So when I arrived six or seven weeks after the election and in the intervening period as I've seen the way in which the APS has engaged with ministers, with their officers, that continuity that Glyn referred to, but the respect on both sides has been quite shocking for somebody who comes from the New South Wales government, to be honest.

And I think there is real strength in the fact that the government comes into power with many people who have been cabinet ministers previously. There is that track record and that strength there, but the APS is also part of that bargain and the way

in which the invisible lines which make so much difference in terms of the respect for convention and the mutual respect between the roles of the politician and the professional public servant, those lines have been established so quickly and so effectively.

Now, I don't know whether my experience is unique, but I think it is a major achievement of 2022 that the operation of the public service and the elected officials, as I see it, has operated so smoothly. I think we would certainly have accepted, six months ago, where we are today as being the outcome of six months of hard work, to go through budget processes with ministers who haven't worked in ERC before, to get the good outcomes that we have and to establish relationships of trust and mutual respect privately and publicly. That sets us up well for the next two and a half years at least. And I think that's a huge achievement for the APS.

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: Thanks, Justine. And look, I won't cover the same ground in terms of the challenge of changing government. Our challenge in Services Australia had been in the landscape of that, sort of three things, concurrency, scale and customers' expectations. That continued to grow. We had elections, but before that, in February, we had floods that were so significant and extreme that we ourselves lost our service centre in Lismore, for example, but needed to get back in within a week to get a service centre, get a service delivery system up and running for people that were completely devastated, with staff that had been devastated and lost their homes.

Some of the real challenge for us in terms of that was seeking the customer expectation being met. We had a day where we managed to process 90,000 claims in one day to support those people. We thought that was incredibly heroic, until July. Brand-new government, again another scenario in New South Wales, 160,000 claims. So, we met a new benchmark. But the piece I'd like to sort of reflect on is the way in which those challenges were met by on-the-ground and local innovation. Lismore, particularly, stands out for an amazing scenario with a Services Australia van being parked there next to a Service New South Wales van across from our colleagues at Telstra.

Devastated citizens were arriving, they had lost their phones, they had no identification, and they therefore couldn't get any payment. So, it arrived to the New South Wales team would help them repatriate themselves with their digital identities. They would go across to Telstra and Telstra would support them to get a phone and that phone and the two teams would walk them over to the services Australia van and within 10 minutes, 15 minutes they'd have had a payment and they would be able to leave and at least have established some control back over their life.

And I think the challenge the Public Service was seeing was the ability for everyone to work together, innovate. I didn't direct them to do that. Andy Penn didn't direct the Telstra team and Damon Reese didn't direct the New South Wales team. So, the amazing capabilities of public servants to meet challenges when you let them have that agency in themselves really helped to overcome some of the challenges that we faced. We've done a whole range of other things, doing all that, but you must deliver your ICT, you've got to deliver your programme. So just a little plug, if you people

haven't got your myGov app sorted out, I'm happy to set up a self-done help desk over in the corner afterwards.

JIM BETTS: Thank you.

JUSTINE GREIG: Thank you both for those great insights. I've got a couple more of my own questions before we go to the floor. And Jim, I know this question is an important one to you. Embedding the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and improving outcomes for First Nations people, both within and outside the APS, essential to our APS reform. But in your experience, how does the APS build the cultural capability it needs to drive better outcomes for First Nations people and employees?

JIM BETTS: Well, it must be an absolute priority for leaders within the Public Service, very visibly and in a sustained, almost relentless fashion. We are way short of where we need to be in terms of all the key metrics in closing the gap and not least the foundational element of Priority Action 3 about actually getting our own house in order, ridding ourselves of institutional racism, establishing the kinds of cultural capability which enable government to engage on meaningful terms with community.

After everything that successive Australian governments have done over more than 200 years to those communities, trust is so easily lost, so hard to regain. And that visible commitment from leadership needs to be something which enables rather than controls. So, we will not become competent to engage with Indigenous people in this country unless we ourselves are led by Indigenous people. And that starts with looking at our own ranks, looking at our own leadership, strengthening Indigenous representation in the senior echelons of the Public Service and regarding intergenerational disadvantage and trauma for Indigenous people with the same level of urgency and unifying moral purpose that we bring to floods and we bring to bush fires and we bring to pandemics, and saying it is unacceptable if, on our watch,, in two or three years' time, we haven't materially shifted the dial, but we won't do that as non-Indigenous people merely by sitting here speculating about what community needs.

You get senior people into your department from community by appointing them. So let's get on with appointing them and if we need to change the rules, if we need to adapt our processes in order to do that, I think the rallying cry of closing the gap is so urgent and so clear that it is obvious that we should do that. In my previous department in New South Wales, I had 14,000 staff, 500 of whom were Indigenous. We attempted to turn every outward-facing mechanism we had, every programme, to pull every lever we could to the advantage of Indigenous communities, and we put our own Aboriginal staff in charge of that programme and that was the only way in which we could make material headway.

And without any form of quotas or positive discrimination, we started with two SES equivalents within that department and within two years had 14, because Indigenous people are not dumb, and they know when agencies are faking it and they know when they're for real. And we must persuade community that we are authentically committed to making a difference. And that means making ourselves culturally capable and it means being prepared to be led by community and

unlearning all those colonial practices of imposing our leadership models on them and flipping that script and doing it the other way around. That's what Priority Action 3 speaks to.

JUSTINE GREIG: Thank you.

PROF GLYN DAVIS AC: Fabulous articulation, Jim. Really superb.

JUSTINE GREIG: I think you've done; you've really told us what we need to do.

Professor Glyn Davis AC: Yeah, well done.

JUSTINE GREIG: Thank you. Very powerful. Look, Rebecca, you started to answer this question in your previous words, how has the use of digital and data changed the experience for Services Australia customers? How has it improved your ability to respond in these times of crisis that you've talked to us about? And how do you see the design of people-centred service delivery expanding across the whole of government?

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: Thanks, Justine. Look, I think I've been clear that, without digital and digitization investments, we could not have met the customer demand in the way in which customers expected to be served over the last two years. And we were also able to reuse a lot of the technology and investments governments had previously made. I think the point is that you can't serve customers just by digital. You need to build an entire service delivery system and governments already made those investments. We've had a massive investment and uplift of the myGov platform, which we re-platformed in September while everyone was asleep. We got through that. That was one challenge for the year. But that's in the context of delivering an investment of around 320 service points, shopfronts, that the Australian government shopfronts and then an enormous telephony capability. And you can't serve your digital customer. You need to design services that enable people to help themselves where they can.

But the rest of the service system has got to be able to catch those who either need greater support or are more vulnerable or have more complex needs. So, the system has to work together. We've spent a lot of time, two years, on developing and driving a philosophy of simple, helpful, respectful and transparent services. Whether that's the digital design or the experience that you have when you come into a shopfront. I think governments made huge investments. We are there to do that. And now our role going forward is how do you maximise those investments that government has already made to integrate the sorts of experiences citizens now expect across the different lanes?

People are probably less aware that one of the great challenges that we worked with the Australian Electoral Commission was to deliver telephony voting, without knowing how many people were going to need to vote. We took 85,000 calls collectively. We've worked with APS on the census, we've assisted DFAT, we've processed over 600,000 passports as part of our contribution to that. So, we've been able to do it. I think the opportunity is how we drive those design principles into the digital and other catchall spaces, going forward.

JUSTINE GREIG: Thank you, Rebecca. And I'm going to come back to you again because there's a great segue there. This is a question to the whole panel, but I'll start with Rebecca and perhaps then, you Jim and if Glyn could finish off, this is about looking ahead. So, thinking about your role as a steward in the APS, what are you most looking forward to in 2023?

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: I always look forward to the opportunity. I am looking forward to the moment that I saw in the Bureau of Meteorology's forecast that might suggest that it's not going to rain quite as much as we thought it was. That would be wonderful for a whole range of reasons, including I don't think this community should need to have any more trauma, but the opportunity to build on those infrastructures and systems to deliver an integrated citizen service is what really is a passion for us for next year. We've got a myGov platform, it's there now for everyone to be able to use and we are keen to work with people on how we bring that forward.

You might think we're all public servant dags and we've got like a daggy maga. It's super cool. And if you think JB Hi-Fi's cool, not as cool as myGov. They only have 14 million logins of 13 million logins a month: myGov, 30 million. Woolworths, only 24, even with all that online shopping. So, we have an amazing opportunity to access and support Australians through a platform that we've made enormous investments into, and we should be making the most of that. And I'm excited. So, if anyone's keen, I'm there.

JUSTINE GREIG: Jim?

JIM BETTS: Okay. Well, I now know that JB Hi-Fi is the benchmark for cool. I didn't know before this. That's good. You learn something new every day.

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: Big W, 11 million.

JIM BETTS: Oh, really? Okay. This is good. So, we've done a lot of work over the last six months, with much more to come around APS reform. We've done a lot of work around taking the government selection commitments and beginning to turn those into reality. We will need to shift gears and start thinking about how we put the policy frameworks, the evidence-based frameworks in place to inform the next wave of policy generation for the government as it thinks about moving into the second half of its second term.

And I would like actually the APS reform to be the job that we do, for us to live that reform around in-house capability, around putting citizens at the centre of everything we do, the First Nation stuff that we've talked about, the high levels of collaboration between agencies, thinking about the challenges rather than thinking about the bureaucratic silos, and embed it in our day job rather than talking about APS reform as something that might sit on the side.

JUSTINE GREIG: Glyn?

PROF GLYN DAVIS AC: I agree with you entirely on APS reform, of which the wonderful work on myGov is a lovely platform. I think Gordon de Brouwer is doing a great job of leading us into the

next two years and it's going to be important but exciting to see what collectively we can do. There are two big developments in 2023 I'm really looking forward to, and this will sound perverse, but one of them is the National Anti-Corruption Commission, the NAC. I lived in Queensland in the late 1980s in the most corrupt state at the time in Australia, by a huge mile. And I watched the way the introduction of an anti-corruption commission, then called the CJC, just changed so fast, acceptable behaviour and ways people understood their job and provided... It was a transformation to the state in a way that's hard to explain, but if you lived it, you had the before, and after and it wasn't that vast numbers of people went to jail, but it just changed behaviour.

People realised they were being watched that transparency was now real. They stopped doing anything that might get them into trouble. I don't believe we have a major issue in the commonwealth, but we clearly have some issues and I think that NAC is a great way to just set the tone. We need to be positive about it and since we need programmes and training and so on to make sure that we take all advantage of it and that we do it well. But I think it's going to be important for the nation.

Even more important for the nation, though, is the Voice. I think that's going to be the big conversation of 2023. It is one of those rare moments of national reckoning where you have to look back and forward and ask, are we happy with where we are? Jim articulated some of the closing-the-gap issues, I thought, superbly well. But there's also that principled issue about who are we as a people, what are we prepared to do in saying, in apologising, in looking for reconciliation, and taking that forward. I think the Voice is an opportunity that we'll remember in future years as a very important marker in our society, regardless of which way the referendum goes, because it'll tell us something profound about ourselves regardless of the outcome, good or bad.

JUSTINE GREIG: Thank you, Glyn. Look, the opportunity now is firstly to the audience who are here and then we'll take some questions online. I can already see some questions coming through and there is a big ship theme.

PROF GLYN DAVIS AC: Sorry.

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: Captain.

JUSTINE GREIG: So, if anyone here would like to ask the panel a question, your time, your chance is now. I think there's someone up the back there.

MELISSA COADE: Hello panel. Thank you, for your insights. MELISSA COADE from the Mandarin. Professor Davis mentioned the COVID Safe app and the Shergold Report and sort of said that some of the stuff-ups that happen during public administration can be opportunities for learning and improvement. So, my question to the panel is, looking ahead to 2023, how does the Public Service reckon with fear about failure and also deal with the tension of the fatigue that they've all dealt with, responding to floods and COVID and so on, to fail with confidence?

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: I'd be happy just to comment on, I don't think you see it in terms of fear of failure or not. Good stewardship is about good risk management and it's about examining the systems that you're operating in, having good conversations, contestable conversations about what risks that you are confronted, and you provide appropriate advice, and you appropriately consider the risks. I think that's how you steward your way through some of the complexities where things may or may not go as well as they could. It's about continuing to examine the risks and adjusting your perspective, your operations or whatever it is that you need to do to chart the safest possible path through whatever rough waters there are. That's the way I would suggest we approach that.

JIM BETTS: I think leaders have a role in driving fear out of their organisations such that people are rewarded for putting their hands up when things go wrong and taking accountability for that. There is the nature of hierarchies, the nature of bureaucracies and the relentless scrutiny that we are quite legitimately under can lead people to be fearful. If we become highly risk-averse, we will lose our creativity, our capacity to innovate. We lionise the term innovation and it starts with something very basic, which is taking fear out of our organisations. Fear is toxic, it stops the real conversations taking place, it stops people trying new things, where there's a risk of failure. We have to embrace the capacity to fail.

JUSTINE GREIG: Okay.

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: That's awesome.

JUSTINE GREIG: Okay.

PROF GLYN DAVIS AC: No, I'm fine. That was it.

JUSTINE GREIG: Okay. So, I'm going to ask one from online. How important to stewardship is planning and thinking ahead to avoid icebergs like the Titanic? So, I'll open it up to the panel. Who would like to take that one?

PROF GLYN DAVIS AC: Well, we don't really want the Titanic if we can at all avoid it. And thinking ahead is sort of quite helpful. Not being arrogant about weather reports and not making bad movies that we all must relive it over and over again would be good. But I mean, no one's going to be against thinking ahead, but it's particularly hard to if organisations don't have capacity and it's really hard to find the language to talk about that. Because if you start talking about redundancy, you take us back to a world in which people are always cutting because if there's redundancy in the organisation, it shows that you're overfunded.

We have to get ourselves back into a mindset that says part of stewardship is about having the capacity in the organisation to have people who do get the moment to think ahead, to stand aside from the day-to-day, to reflect on what we've learned and then to take that back into practise. And we don't even have language to describe that anymore. So, we talk about capability, but capability means the people we have. Sometimes what we miss in the public sector is that team, ideally with

rotation, so it's not the same people, but there's opportunities for people to step outside the workflow, learn, share.

JIM BETTS:

I agree. I think if governments think they're at risk of being in power for quite a long time, they have an incentive to plan. If they're living moment by moment, media release by media release, clinging on for dear life, 10 years, 20 years into the future, their discount rate is very, very high and the value they place on the future is very low as a result.

But in my game, in infrastructure, you can make dumb decisions quickly and it takes a lot of effort and investment of time and collation of evidence to make the right decisions and you live with the consequences of those decisions for hundreds of years to come. So incredibly important. And I would add, do it publicly. Put the plans out there, make them capable of being contested and require both the public service and the political class to defend their strategic policy settings.

REBECCA SKINNER PSM: The only thing I'd add is, in an operational context, having a planning culture is important. Not necessarily the sort of planning of a new Harbour Bridge type of moment, but even if you're looking in the medium-term horizons about what you might need to be delivering in the future, I think that having a good set of capabilities around planning and contestability and open discussion that makes sure that you've thought of everything and that your plan is well-rounded around the risks that you can identify, we'll assist you to deliver in times where perhaps uncertainty rolls at you.

JUSTINE GREIG:

Look, I think that's the perfect way to conclude the panel in terms of us managing that uncertainty. Look, could everybody please join me in thanking our panel today? Terrific. I now would like to welcome PETER WOOLCOTT, Public Service commissioner, to the stage to make some closing remarks. I think most of us are very familiar with Peter's background and indeed he's been our Public Service commissioner since August 2018. Thank you, Peter.

PETER WOOLCOTT AO:

Thank you, Justine. It's my pleasure to wrap things up and to say some thank you, really. Thank you, Justine. And thanks to our panellists, Rebecca and Jim, for your reflections on why reform matters on First Nation's peoples and the impact we can have on people's lives when we get it right. Thank you also to Glyn for sharing your thoughts on the nature of public service and of stewardship. Keeping the ship steady through turbulent times is a major endeavour requiring both coordination across the APS and very careful calibration.

I know all of you listening today have worked incredibly hard this year to keep us on course, so I say thank you to all of you for the things you have achieved this year and for the way you have conducted yourselves. Your professionalism, skill and sense of purpose, shine. Skilled hands, indeed. Let me draw a bit further on Glenn's analogy. You'll all be familiar with thesis as paradox, where the question poses whether a ship that has been restored over time by replacing every single wooden part remains the same ship.



The Public Service, since its inception 122 years ago, has gone through a process of enormous change and renewal. The pace of that change has at times been meandering and at times accelerated. The Public Service today is profoundly different from what it was even a few decades ago. And we are in a place where reform is being accelerated for us to deal with expectations of government and the people and the complexities of rapid technological, societal and geopolitical changes.

It is a never-ending voyage, as Glyn says, but there are some things that are immutable that underscore the fact that this is the same ship, however different it may look. The dedication to purpose to public service and to our values is at the core of what we do and binds us together as public servants. We don't always get everything right, mistakes are made, but we continue to serve the Australian people very well and Glyn has adequately stepped that out. Eloquently stepped that out, is what I meant to say.

I was recently in Luxembourg representing Minister Gallagher at an OEC ministerial on building trust and reinforcing democracy. The conversations were striking in how all democracies are being challenged by the fracturing of public cohesion that social media can bring, and the actions associated with foreign interference and fringe groups. The concept of a genuine partnership with civil society, with business and with marginalised groups was seen as crucial in meeting these challenges, as was the need for greater transparency in government to build trust.

Glyn has referred to the seamless transfer of power last May to the Albanese government. The role that the APS and the AEC played in this was fundamental and widely seen as best practice. As Tom Rogers has said, "Trust in electoral system is not so much about the winners and how they react, but about how the losers respond." And as a nation and as a public service, we did exceptionally well. None of us are on this vessel alone. We are at our best when we work together, with each other, with government and with the Australian people.

The 30 Review was right to emphasise the concept of partnership as the key to building trust. The policies we deliver and the services we design must meet the needs of those we serve. The themes of collaboration, stewardship, and partnership run strongly in today's APS and will grow stronger in our practice as we bring the APS reform priorities to life, embodying integrity, doing our job well and putting people in business, at the centre of everything we do.

As we chart a course into 2023, may we continue to pull together, continue to deliver for the government and communities of Australia and take pride in our work as servants of the public and the stewards of the APS. And let me wish you all the best for the festive season and let me stop now so you can all have a drink. Thank you very much.

JUSTINE GREIG:

Thanks, Peter. And look, thank you again to Glyn, Rebecca, and Jim for the words this evening. It went too fast, from my point of view. It was just such a rich session. Look, in closing, I'd like to thank IPAA ACT's partners, our partners, for their ongoing support, KPMG, Hayes, Telstra, Minter Ellison, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, and Microsoft. On behalf of IPAA, I want to thank you for attending tonight either

here or virtually. It's really been just a timely reminder of the need to be pragmatic and focus on excellence in implementation and delivery for the Australian people as we move forward to next year.

If I can ask all our guest speakers and panellists, along with the secretaries and agency heads that are here this evening, to come to the stage in a moment because we will have a photograph. And look, on behalf of IPAA, tonight's event, I'm just concluding the event for this evening, and it is the last event for IPAA ACT for 2022, but we are really looking forward to 2023 and sharing in your company for what should be a good year for IPAA, as well. So, with that, I invite those that are here for refreshments and thank you everyone, once again.