

# TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

## Informing Policy Development: The Importance of Engaging Early

National Gallery of Australia

2 MAY 2019

Michael M.: Welcome to today's event, Informing Policy Development: The Importance of Engaging Early. Before I proceed with today, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we're meeting today. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture, and the contribution they make to life of this city and this region. I'd also like to acknowledge and welcome any aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event. I also welcome all of you. It's fantastic to see such a big group coming out early in the day for this event, and obviously it's a topic that has peaked real interest around the service here in Canberra. I'd also like to welcome our speakers, Mike Mrdak, AO Secretary, Department of Communications and the Arts. Natalie Howson, Director General Education Directorate ACT Government.

Michael M.: Mary Ann O'Loughlin, AM, Deputy Secretary, Department of Industry Innovation and Science, and Pauline Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary from the Department of Communications and the Arts. IPAA is delighted to be involved with the running of today's event, which is focusing on the importance of communication and stakeholder engagement strategies as a part of the policy development process to ensure a better chance of effective policy and service delivery. This event was first discussed about a year ago following an address by Dr. Heather Smith, the Secretary of the Department of Industry Innovation and Science at an IPAA event entitled Doing Policy Differently.

Michael M.: Heather spoke about the need for government and the public service to communicate the impact of the policies we implement. Her address was complemented by similar remarks by Chris Moraitis, the Secretary of the Attorney General's Department, when he spoke of the need for us to communicate, communicate, and communicate. I might add as Commonwealth Ombudsman, one of the things, or one of the common features, that seems to generate complaints and issues that come to our office is a sense that somehow rather the citizens, the people, have been left out of the design and communication about policy and service delivery.

Michael M.: So, what can we do about that? Following those events last year, IPAA worked with two communications experts. Virginia Cook from Industry and Kim Ulrick from Education to develop the event you're attending today, and both of those folks are here this morning, too. Welcome to you. Now, it's my pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker, Michael Mrdak. Mike has held the position of Secretary of the Department of Communications and the Arts since September 2017. He previously held the position of Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development since 2009. He was appointed an officer, AO, of the Order of Australia in the Queen's birthday 2016 Honours List for his distinguished service to public administration in transport, logistics and infrastructure investment.

Michael M: In November 2013, Mike received the Federal Government Leader of the Year award, recognising his outstanding leadership and work on major infrastructure projects, including the duplication of the Pacific and Hume highways. And, let me add, I'm pleased to say that Mike Mrdak is the only person I have recruited to the Australian public service who has made it to Departmental Secretary, which tells you something about how old I am. He was an impressive graduate in, I think, 1987 in Armidale, New South Wales. He was good then. I suspect he's better now. Please welcome Mark to the stage.

Mike Mrdak: Thanks very much, Michael, and thank you very much for the opportunity. And, thank you to IPAA for these wonderful opportunities to come together as a profession to talk openly around some of the issues that shape us as APS professionals. The real bonus of today is the terrific panel, which will be on shortly, which brings together three really experienced practitioners, and I think their experience to share with us is going to be a highlight. Really, my role is to provide, I think, a few observations about where we as an APS need to think about some of the issues that are emerging around our role in communications and engagement around the policy and programme and regulatory work we do. The first thing to say is making community engagement a core part of our work, and actually having the confidence ... and, that's a really important thing. We've got to have the confidence to build the sort of relationships that meaningfully engage the community we serve is actually a core part of what we do and really underpins our role as public servants.

Mike Mrdak: The PM&C Best Practise Guide says the following, and I think it's worth reflecting, "A genuine consultation process ensures you have considered the real world impact of your policy options. This is likely to lead to better outcomes and greater acceptance in the community, particularly among stakeholders who may be adversely affected by the policy." I think that captures a lot of what we need to be thinking about in how we do consultation and engagement. Firstly, it really captures something about the APS, which we often misrepresent and don't quite fully fathom ourselves. We're uniquely in the people business. In fact, we are a profession like few others that we are totally dependent on our personal relationships.

Mike Mrdak: If you think about it, to deliver for people in our communities, we have to convince another person in almost every step we take, everything we do. We have to be able to influence and argue the case with our colleagues, with ministers, the Parliament, legislators, the community about every policy step, every programme and regulatory action. And, so we have to be able to deal with people. Ultimately, we are a people business, and it's interesting in that context to think about that what all the research says is so many senior people on the APS are actually introverts. But, we're in a people business and you've got to think about how we manage to do that, but, anyway. The people business is the core of what we do, and the profession we work in is about people and how we manage relationships. So, to do our jobs well, to lead, you've got to be able to listen, learn and most especially we've got to be able to tell the story of how we got here and we've got to be able to tell the story of where we want to take people to.

Mike Mrdak: We need to recognise our ability to work with people in developing our ideas and listening, and developing those key concepts is a core part of our work. That means that the language and processes that we use are really important. Much more so than just about any other profession. So, let me just give you some thoughts I have about some observations about how we operate. First, as I said, we need to recognise that working with people is a core skill for all of us as APS professionals. Good, effective engagement and communication skills is now, and increasingly will be so for the future, a core part of what we have to be able to do. Accordingly, our language and the processes we operate under matter because those really determined whether we've got the credibility and the confidence with those people we're talking to and dealing with that we know what we're talking about.

Mike Mrdak: And, our language in how we communicate really matters. One of the things that I've constantly found in my career that often it's the language we use that kills us in communications. If you think about the business words we often use amongst ourselves, we understand it but that doesn't translate very well to the community we're trying to deal with, including ministers often. I suppose if I count down, there's a couple of words that drive me mad that we use all the time, and if you think about them, they just don't work. One of the ones I hate is holistic. What on earth does that mean? When we talk about we've got to deal with things in a holistic way, you go, "Really, isn't that what every common sense person would do?"

Mike Mrdak: But yet, we use words like that, and when ministers in the community here that, that we're going to look at this holistically, they think either we're just rubbish at what we do, or we don't care. Similarly, you know, words like stakeholder. I've never met Mr and Mrs. Stakeholder. We've got to start talking to people as they are people. We've got to call them what they are. They are individuals, or they're industry groups. They're not stakeholders. Stakeholders in talking about people in that generic concept way really kills us because we're not seen to be actually relating to the audience we're trying to talk to. The other word that I think we use badly is consult because we're not very clear what we mean by that.

Mike Mrdak: We keep saying we'll consult, but what do we really mean by it? So, the clarity of the language we use really makes a difference to the people we talked to. And, in talking to people, we've got to be very clear about what we're doing when we're engaging. We need to be very clear about whether we're genuinely seeking views on options, or whether we're seeking a reaction to a settled preferred position, and we've got to be honest about that to the people we deal with. There's often a real question in the community's minds on whether we've designed or engineered a process to genuinely seek input to finding the right outcome or whether we're simply running our own internal processes. And, this is only ministers often say this, "Oh, you're just running your process, and then talking to me because you've already got a settled position."

Mike Mrdak: Or, we're just running around regular policy development process, and then we're seeking to either educate or sell the answers that we've developed to a target of the community. So, we've gotta be very clear at the start of the consultation process. What are we trying to do? How does it integrate into our policy and programme development, when it takes place, to who, and have we got the right issues and are we being genuinely honest with the people we're talking to about what we're trying to do with the process? The traditional risk mitigation approach that we all fall back to is to basically minimise community and industry engagement so we manage any adverse reaction. That's been a traditional risk management strategy we've adopted and certainly the APS that I joined a long time ago, that was the main strategy we had was about not telling people too much because they might be not happy with where we're going, or we don't think they'd understand.

Mike Mrdak: That's just not sustainable. So, we need to think about what we really mean when we talk about consult. Thirdly, as I'm sure the panel will reflect on, we need to move with the times and utilise the communication's technology, which actually gets to people today and how people today engage. When it comes to information, there's no question that the more fragmented 24/7 digital landscape has made our task more complex. Increasingly, the public expectation is that government departments and agencies should and will provide up-to-date readily accessible information, and that's at variance often with our resourcing and capability. Additionally, there's a growing expectation ... in fact a demand ... that people should be able to respond in real time to us and also for us back to them. One way communication formats, which was our traditional risk mitigation approach, is no longer sustainable or acceptable, and we've got to recognise that.

Mike Mrdak: Added to that, the new digital world means that citizens can make their views known publicly with relatively little effort, and at times, with little factual information about the things we worry about. So, that means that's a real challenge for us. A community can pretty quickly engaged with digital platforms with very little information based on what they've heard from someone else or way networks now come together, and we find that really difficult to deal with, and so digital platforms and social media now are having a disproportionate impact on conversations in mainstream media, and importantly in policy development processes. While we have to be in that space, we also have to be finding ways to be able to have robust responses and exchanges to counter something which is an error or a misrepresentation, and that's really hard for us because that means we've got to be in that space regularly and we've got to push back, and that's something that's not our operating style.

Mike Mrdak: That is a real challenge for us because, quite rightly, we're bound by the code of conduct. We're bound by professional standards. We're held to much higher standards of behaviour than anyone else on the digital platforms. Quite rightly, we represent the Australian community, the best of the Australian community, but that's a real challenge when we're trying to work in that space where most people are now getting information, an environment, which according to some work the ICCC's now doing, about 60% of Australians are now getting their

primary news through Facebook. So, that's a real challenge for us about how can we play in that space, and those traditional ways we counted information that was wrong was is no longer available to us. The old methodology that we operated when I joined the public service, which was we read an ad in the newspaper, and our success measure in relation to seeking comments was that no one commented, and that was a good thing.

Mike Mrdak: And, we used to have guidelines about how large the egg would be, and we'd all debate was that too big? Would that attract attention? Those days are really gone. A, the community expectations of us are much higher, but also the way communities being informed is completely outside of those traditional mechanisms where we had greater control. We have to recognise that the digital environment is not a comfort zone for most of us, and it carries unexpected risks. Firstly, we are sometimes surprised by how few people respond to things and we assume that means that there's no interest, or maybe it's just that they're responding on different forums to what we're watching, but also what they're responding often today it can be a very high level of engagement and a very emotive level of engagement, and that really can catch us off guard because that's not a space in which we are comfortable and this is something that I'll finish on that I think we need to reflect on.

Mike Mrdak: We have to acknowledge that community consultation engagement is a hard and difficult area, and we need specialised skills and advice and the people who can work in this space, inside the APS much more so, going forward because it's not our natural comfort zone. And, we also need to recognise that our approach, and that that comes in the community and an industry we work with, the views can be very divergent, and we've got to be recognised what our limitations and concerns are. I'll come to that because we have to recognise, in my view, the broader community engagement outside the small groups that we work with, say industry or NGO's, the like, is something we're very anxious about. As senior public servants, we aren't very comfortable with talking to the broader community. That's not because we don't like talking to people. In fact, as I said, we're a people business, but the reality is as a professional service, not just the APS but the state and territory services and local government, the way we operate, we've generally worked through issues in detail.

Mike Mrdak: We weigh up options carefully. Our NPP's generally include options which are fully costed, researched. We do implementation planning. We know they'll work, and we go into the community knowing that they want to know the facts, that they want us to show that we are credible, that we've thought these things out. But, then we're genuinely shocked that the community, unlike us, is not anxious about subjective gut feelings about issues. We spend a lot of time taking subjectivity out of our work. We spend a lot of time talking about the facts, making sure we've got the evidence, making sure we've worked out the practical steps and then we're genuinely shocked that as a profession that people come back with subjective views on things, and we don't quite know how to deal with this. If you think about it, we're professionals whose very fabric is analysis,

science, facts, objective process and judgement , so as professionals, we do, we feel very uneasy about gut feelings and subjective responses.

Mike Mrdak: We almost see that as irrational in many ways, or weak, or shock, political that people have a view which is different to what the facts are. Because of the analysis, you know, we at times, I think, are often scared of the community because the community has views and emotions which says that even though we've got all the scientifically proven facts, the community may say that that's not fair or it fails the "What's in it for me?" Test, or it fails the "Why does it bother me, or just leave me alone" test. So, we struggle with that because we struggle with those value judgments, subjective arguments and emotions that are based on personal preference. Also, as a service, we struggle with self-interest because as a professional public service, we worry about things that most Australians don't have to worry about.

Mike Mrdak: We worry about the national interest. We worry about the long term. We worry about the implications of intergenerational issues. The reality is that we have a very strong sense of the national interest, and we struggle when individuals or industry groups or others just focus on themselves and not on the big agenda that we think is important, and I think we need to talk about that. The very fact is we have a very strong national interest, and it's much more than we actually often publicly acknowledge and talk enough about. So, we actually in our communications often see subjective views as a problem, and whereas the community doesn't say that at all. The community and the political process quite rightly captures those subjective views. That's what the political process is about, and we shouldn't diminish or disrespect that because that's the nature of a working healthy democracy, but we should be very conscious of that, our ability to interact with the community around our subjective value judgments because that often tailors how we structure our consultation engagement.

Mike Mrdak: Sometimes I think we become a little bit too scared about hearing what people really feel and think in a subjective gateway, and we some have dismissed that a little bit too often. That, I think, means we go to risk mitigation strategies on engagement far too early. I've seen occasions where in work I've done, we go out and we talked to people, and we have this rational scientific approach. We've got the facts, we've got the proven research, and then the community's not supporting it or they're challenging us, or they rubbish us. Well, we react somewhat. We react. We shut down, we take risk averse options, we make sure we never asked them again for their views. We limit the information we provide. We do all of the human reactions we do because we start to form a view that these people are irrational. In fact, they're not. They're reflecting the community view and their gut feeling.

Mike Mrdak: In the worst cases, we throw our hands up and say to ministers and governments, Look. The community can't possibly understand this. They're irrational about this, but you've got to show political courage and just take the right decision." Then, we're genuinely surprised when ministers say back to us, "That's terrific. I've got a choice between your rational argument or a community that's really upset." We shouldn't be placing ministers in that position. We've got to have done the work

earlier to have understood all that, and we've got to have taken account of some of that subjective values issues quite early in our planning for engagement. I was truck by a quote in this year's WPP Leaders Report, which is a consultancy report out recently, which actually makes the comment that based on research, the problem is not that people don't trust government, but that governments don't trust people. We could probably debate that for hours, but it is an interesting perspective I think, and when we come back to the panel shortly, it's worth reflecting on that.

Mike Mrdak:

How do we actually view the community we're working with? To finish up, the other part of that also is that we've got to be also conscious not only about how we interact with the community, which is happy to have subjective views, but also the fact that often when we do engage, we can feel the cynicism of the community because we tend to engage with like minded people. You can see that because human beings, by our nature, we like to hang around with people just like us, so we talk to people that talk the same language to us, and we need to be aware that we often are consulting and engaging with relatively small groups, and on some issues that's fine and we shouldn't shy away from that. There are some areas where there are technical issues for which they're not matters the general community has got to be involved with. But, we also need to be aware of the fact that we're not falling into the trap of talking to the same organisations, such as industry associations, NGO's or researchers in academia where we're building specialist policy communities because we know them.

Mike Mrdak:

You can understand why. They talk the same language as us. We rely on often these days, particularly as departments and agencies have not had the resourcing to build technical capability in certain areas, or industry is moving so quickly that the technical skills are outside industry, not in government. So, we rely on these bodies for technical information. Importantly, they understand what we need and the pressure we face, so it's very easy to have a conversation with them, and we know they have a view and they'll give us feedback on our analysis. It's very easy and quite understandably, and we shouldn't shy away from the fact that this is part of the consultation and it's not wrong. We just need to be aware of the way in which we engage if we're going to do the right effective community consultation. This was really brought hand to me by an example I suppose I'll reflect on. I spent a lot of years working in the transport portfolio, as Michael said, and particularly in the aviation and airports area.

Mike Mrdak:

I can remember for a lot of the 1980s and 1990s, we in government and the aviation industry were of the view, and we debated long and hard that we couldn't possibly tell people where the flight paths to airports were because if we started to tell people where the planes were going to fly, they'd notice them. We spent a lot of time trying to avoid giving people information about where the planes would fly, what noise levels there were, and how often and what times of the day they'd fly because we were genuinely worried that if people knew this information, they take notice of it and complain about aircraft noise. Now, if you think that in this environment, it's just unsustainable, and there was some terrific work done over the last 10 or 15 years in the transport department by some



people led by a wonderful public servant called Dave Southgate, who actually turned it on its head and said, "Let's actually go differently. Let's actually give them all the information, and let's design an information which is digitally assessed that they can actually go into now and track every aircraft and gives them the noise levels and gives them projections and actually gives people an honest perspective on where they're living and what's happening, and at what times of the day, and people can actually plan their day if they're living in an area heavily overflowed in peak hours."

Mike Mrdak: "They can make judgments about how they structure their day." And, it was remarkable. What a difference that made to the community engagement in that area of airport noise. The community wasn't less happy about the fact that we're getting over flown by noisy aircraft three times a day, but at least they felt there was honesty and they felt that we were genuinely trying to get information in a readily available form to them. That model that was developed by Dave Southgate and his team in the transport department is now being adopted worldwide. It has turned on its head. It's actually taken noise data and presented it in a way that the general community can understand about what it means to them when you're trying to get your kids to sleep. That makes a huge difference. So, in finishing, if we're going to consult effectively, we've got to recognise we're in a people business, and we've got to get our language right. We've got to be clear who we're talking to and why.

Mike Mrdak: My view is if we're going to consult about options, don't start with a blank sheet. Always have options that you think are viable and rational, and you've got a preferred way forward. Don't start with generally done. Start with a blank sheet of paper saying this is all there. Narrow it down to what works. It really does make a difference, and we need to go where people are comfortable, and we do need to engage in the new agendas, the new forums like the digital platforms challenging as they will be for us, but ultimately we've also got to have rock solid relationships and networks with not only the industry groups and the NGO's and the others we deal with, but also the broader community to have that credibility. You just can't turn up occasionally and talk to them. It's got to be an ongoing relationship.

Mike Mrdak: Finally, like all things that we unfortunately undervalue in the APS, we also undervalue selling our achievements, and we also got to think about using the consultation engagement process to talk about the fact that most Australians can presume a very high level of service in everything they get from government in this country. We sometimes forget to tell that enough and often enough about the success we have. Thanks very much.

Michael M.: Thank you very much, Michael, for those holistic remarks. Or, maybe I should think of a different word. Smart. Well informed. Now, I'm going to invite the panellists to join us on the stage. Pauline Sullivan, if you could come out. Pauline is a first assistant secretary of the Market Reforms Division at the Department of Communications and the Arts. Pauline joins us today as both a colleague of Mike's, but also as someone with previous experience in Victorian State public service, so we should get a good state government perspective, I think, from

Pauline. Natalie Howson, please come and join us. Come on down. This is great. Natalie is the Director General of the Education Directorate at the ACT government. As many of you would know, the ACT government fulfils the role in fact of both state and local government functions in our territory with a more direct engagement with citizens and the APS.

Michael M.: I think one of the real strengths of IPAA ACT is that we bring the ACT and the Commonwealth together, and we really should learn from that. Can I also welcome Mary Ann O'Loughlin, AM, who is the Deputy Secretary at the Department of Industry Innovation and Science. Mary Ann joins us today in her industry role, but also reflecting on state government roles, including most recently with the Department of Premier and Cabinet in the New South Wales government. Please join me in welcoming them to the stage. Our format is for me to provide each panellist with a few minutes to reflect on Mike's points, and provide their own perspective on the topic. Pauline, can we start with you?

Pauline S.: Certainly. So, thank you very much. I guess as a starting point, I'd like to say I was thinking about this this morning. I actually think as public servants, the people we have access to and who we meet through community consultation and so forth ... I'm going to use a lot of words you hate, Mike and I have tried to find alternative words ... The conversations I've had with people over the years through consultation and so forth, it's a real privilege what people will tell us and how they will engage with us, so I think you actually need to remember that, that it is a rare privilege. I guess I'm going to do the usual order of threes. You've got to have the three points. I'm going to try and stay away from too many war stories, but I guess just some observations. Most of my career has been spent in state government. I've worked in New South Wales and Victorian government, as well as the international bodies. I guess these are my three points that I've come out with.

Pauline S.: My first observation around community engagement and so forth is the importance's around the integrity of the process. We all know the research, and you know there is the question about whether we don't trust people or people don't trust institutions. Around consultation, every time you are out there engaging, how you manage that will either diminish trust in the public service or it'll increase it. While we're all focused on absolutely getting the job done, if your process lacks credibility, it doesn't matter what outcome you've achieved, you've probably undermined your process. Or even worse, you may not achieve an outcome cause you'll fall to get traction with the people who absolutely matter. So, how do you get a credible process? In my view, don't over engineer it. It's not complicated.

Pauline S.: Three things in my view, honesty, just tell people what you are consulting on. If you can't deliver this, you're only focusing on this, tell them that. You may have to tell people things they don't want to hear, but it's much better in the long run that you've done that. Admit what you don't know. A lot of people like to stand up and look as though they're in command of the facts. I actually find it's easier just to say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll come back to you." Once again, in the long run people will actually respect your honesty. And, I guess the

third point is also make it easy for people to get involved. Recently over the last 12 to 18 months, there's been a consultation process going on within my division, which is around reform of something called the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation. This is something, a very longstanding community safe guard. It had already been through one consultation process in 2015.

Pauline S.: The Productivity Commission then had a look at it. So, that was a 12 month review process with two lots of submissions. When the next stage of work had to be done, in discussion with my staff, we decided that instead of yet again having another public consultation submission process, we basically declared the policy shop open. We said to everyone, "We're here. We'll get out and talk to you, but don't feel the need to put in a public submission", because we figured that there was probably nothing new to add. That actually went down really well with stakeholders. One of my [inaudible] went out to Longreach and up to Darwin to some fairly big conferences where a lot of the stakeholders we're going to be, and they responded very, very well to that rather than yet again having to write yet another piece of paper.

Pauline S.: Then, on to the second point in terms of consultation, and I've dubbed this the "I'm from the government, I'm here to help." One thing about having worked in state government, and I spent eight years in New South Wales advising on transport policy. As a citizen of Sydney, I spent eight years catching trains and buses and taxis and all of those sorts of things. Now, certainly I'm not suggesting that if you work in health policy, you should go and spend five nights in a hospital. Mind you, as an exactly-registered nurse, I would probably say there is some value in that. The point is that the lived experience absolutely matters, and engagement with anyone should not be an esoteric exercise. Get out of the office. Talk to people, be curious, understand their business, understand what how they operate, what their operating model is. All of those sorts of things.

Pauline S.: Get a really granular understanding because that's when you find out whether that perfectly formed policy proposal that you beavered away on actually is going to work, and that's when you'll identify your unintended consequences and all of those sorts of things. The richness of that information is invaluable, and you don't get through that just through reading submissions that have been posted on the website. I guess the other point in all of this, and there's a bit of self-interest here, and it goes to Mike's point about ministers. It might seem a bit obvious, but ministers are actually elected by people, and if you're actually out talking to those people who elect them, they take some comfort that the technocratic bureaucrats get their world. Never underestimate how many people out there that ministers are talking to. It gives them a level of comfort that the people advising them actually are out talking to the same people who matter to them.

Pauline S.: Then in closing, my final point, and this is actually the sort of down to you factor, and I hate the word resilience, but I couldn't find any other word around it. My earlier advice about the need to be honest, that obviously comes with a few downsides as you may have noticed. Once again, this is probably touching on some of Mike's points. Consultation's hard. People will say things that you probably don't want to hear. They may at times, you feel as though they're

impugning your personal integrity. That is just part of the process. I'm certainly not saying people should be disrespectful, but it is part of the process. Often times, what we're talking about and consulting on high stakes, it may go to people's vibe, their businesses, how they actually go about their lives, that sort of thing.

Pauline S.: I think it's important as individuals, we actually think about, before going into what may be contentious situations, how am I personally going to handle this? Have I actually got the tools to deal with a difficult situation? Just spend some time reflecting on that, and how you actually arm yourself with those skills. Talk to colleagues who've got experience. There's plenty of people out there who've done really difficult work. How have they dealt with situations? And, then I guess on the flip side, for everyone who's a manager, I think it's really important to support staff. The first time you sort of bundle people out there to start dealing with the people out there in the real world, it can be really confronting, and I think it's important to ensure that staff have support and they actually have the downtime to sit back, particularly with contentious consultations and so forth.

Pauline S.: I guess I've been lucky that I've had some very good managers who've just given me the space. If it's nothing else other than just a walk in, have a bit of a rant in their office and then walked back out. But, I do think just some of those support and resilience issues are important.

Michael M.: Great. Well thank you very much, Pauline. I'll throw straight to Natalie about an ACT perspective.

Natalie Howson: It's great to be here. I feel like I've finally made it in my career that I'm on an IPAA panel. Actually, Kathie Lee was offered the opportunity that she asked me if I'd like to do it because of some of the consultation work we've been doing in the Act, so it's really good to be here. And Pauline, thank you for your comments. You'll hear a lot of commonality, I think, in what we all have to say. From my point of view, having been a Commonwealth public servant, also a teacher and now working in the ACT, I just thought I'd start by sharing a personal reflection, and that is that what I discovered even though I've lived in Canberra since 1989, joining the ACT public service in 2010-11, I realised that I didn't know my community. And, what struck me was that we operate in these parallel universes. I worked in my latter stages in the Commonwealth public service with Centrelink, and I thought Centrelink was the penultimate expression of connection with community through the APS public service, if you like.

Natalie Howson: But, I knew nothing really. I'm in the mosh pit here in the ACT. I discovered a whole world of people, connections and community in Canberra that I had no idea of. So, for those of you in the Commonwealth public service, when your focus is so nationally orientated, I just want to remind you of that you can kid yourself sometimes that you're connected, and you may not be. The meta-concept for me that I just wanted to introduce is really one about trust in government, and that's something that's getting a lot of attention, I think, in the times that we find ourselves in at the moment. Public confidence in our institutions is directly related, in my view, to the trust in our delivery of services to

our community, and of course that translates also into trust in government. I think there's a meta issue here in relation to engagement and consultation.

Natalie Howson: Three things for me, too. The first is that it is a value's thing. It's about our values, and the way that we express our values in our behaviours and our rituals go to the very heart of engagement and consultation. Respect. You've got to give it time. Integrity. You've got to listen. Don't be arrogant. You've got to be open to what people have to say to you. Well, innovation of course, engagement and consultation I think breeds creativity, and I can give you many examples of that. Many minds always bring many perspectives, and if you can stay open to that, you'll do better policy work. And, collaboration. It's a human thing, and Mike's comments about the digital world that we find ourselves in I think can augment a human connection, and we can use digital technology to amplify our engagement and consultation processes, but nothing replaces that face-to-face human contact. You need to find your way to that.

Natalie Howson: As I said, you've just got to get into the mosh pit and find those connections. We talk a lot about complex policy being client-centred, or in my case, it's student-centred. If you really don't have a connection with your clients and students, how can you do good policy? The second point for me is the complexity of what we do. I think in that context, engagement and consultation is absolutely critical. We have to see a problem the way that people experience it, and going to that point about subjectivity, it's often the cultural issues that get in the way of effective implementation. If we don't understand the culture that drives what people do or how they think and behave, then again, we can't design good policy to deliver good outcomes for our community. I also think it's just simply a very intelligent thing to do when we're working in complexity.

Natalie Howson: The third point for me is that we all know that most reforms fail, that most of the literature research evaluation tells us that complex reforms often do fail. Change management often fails, and I think that good engagement and consultation with the people affected by the policy we're designing mitigates against poor implementation. So, often what we need to achieve, we have to achieve with others, and by taking the time to engage people and consult effectively, we're starting to build, if you like, the capacity and capability to actually deliver the outcomes because we need to do it with others. People also make things happen, not policies and systems, so again, it mitigates against poor implementation. It helps you test feasibility. You know, will these things really work? And, it gives you also for your own people, and this is something I learnt when I was in Centrelink something most compelling, which is that platform for change.

Natalie Howson: I remember working with Centrelink on client focus groups where we had a fishbowl model where staff that were involved in service delivery actually listened to a facilitated focus group about the customer experience, and in the end that was more powerful than anything else we could do to encourage and motivate and incentivize people to change their practise. You build in, again, I think some mitigation against poor implementation, and obviously it builds partnerships in the context of, again, delivering. Everything we deliver, we need to deliver with others. That's an important part. That'll probably be my introductory remarks, and

I'd love to talk to you about some of the examples that I've experienced to illuminate on that.

Michael M.: Fantastic. Okay, over to you, Mary Ann.

Mary Ann O.: Thanks very much. So, I'm the last of the talking heads. We're communicating. Everybody's saying how important communication engagement is, but I went to an IPAA event a few weeks ago, and David Thodey spoke about the interim results of the APS review. There was about 200 of us. 10 secretaries, public service commissioner, and lots of deputies, lots of SES. David outlined the four priorities for change. Strengthened culture, governance, leadership. Number two, build a flexible operating model. Number three, invest in capability and talent development. Number four, develop stronger, more open partnerships externally. After his speech, the audience was asked to vote on which of those four they thought would have the greatest impact on the future of the public service. Now, the loser and the layer guard by a country mile was actually number four, which was develop stronger partnerships externally with other people.

Mary Ann O.: In other words, communicate and engage. It got about 10%. It really failed. When he talked about this priority, David Thodey said, "The partnerships will be many and varied including with state territory, local governments, civil society, business community service providers, the Australian people gives rise to exciting possibilities to rethink how the APS designs and delivers government services. For example, seamless services, local solutions, design and delivered with states and territories, NGO's, communities, irrespective of which agency portfolio or even government is responsible for its provision." That sounds transformational to me, but only 10% of us think that that's going to have a really great impact on the future of the APA. Well, I think we got it wrong, and I'm going to illustrate with an example that comes from my time with New South Wales where the Premier set a target to reduce domestic violence re-offending by 25% by 2021.

Mary Ann O.: Now, the context for this is domestic violence is the space of, across Australia, policy failure. We spend hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, have done for decades. I think we're up to our fourth national plan, might be our fifth, and still the numbers keep increasing. Still, one woman a week dies from domestic violence, so whatever we're doing, I'm guessing it's not working. So, in New South Wales against this target, the New South Wales Behavioural Insights Unit trialling a measure for domestic violence, people charged with domestic violence, aboriginal defenders to increase their compliance with the apprehended domestic violence orders or ADVO's. No, ADVO's put very strict conditions on how and where a defendant can contact a victim. That can be very effective, but breaches are very common.

Mary Ann O.: So, the measure's called What's Your Plan, and communication engagement is front and centre of this work. The Behavioural Insights team undertook extensive field work to understand the issues and identified what needed to change to increase compliance. They talked with police, court staff, lawyers, aboriginal support stuff. The fieldwork showed that usually what happens is the defendant goes to court, they get an ADVO and they walk out. Good luck with that. ADVO's,

if you ever seen one, they're actually quite complicated and they're hard to read. They're hard to understand. They're hard to put into practise. So, the Behavioural Insight intervention involves one-on-one meetings with the defendants as soon as they get their ADVO with an aboriginal support worker after their court hearing, and they make a plan for how the defendant's going to comply with their ADVO. The plan's tailored and practical.

Mary Ann O.: Remember, we are trying to change ... In policy often, nearly always I think, we are trying to change people's behaviour to get them to comply. In this case, with an ADVO. How hard is it to change your behaviour? How hard for any of us is it to stop drinking, do the exercise, eat fruit and vegetables? That's what we do with policy, and we go to all these people and we say, "Change your behaviour, or else we're going to nab you again." So, we actually went and we said to them in these one-on-one meetings, "What would you do to change your behaviour?" An example is you get an ADVO where you cannot go home if you've been drinking. So, they sit down and they say to Fred, "What are you going to do? When do you drink?" "Oh, it's on a Friday night, usually after work." "Where do you drink?" "I go to the pub with my mates." "Then what happens?"

Mary Ann O.: "Well, the pub close. I go home. The missus says, where's my money? I've spent in the pub. I've spent it on the ponies. You know, we have a fight and it's on for young and old." Okay, okay, let's wind it back. "So, what can we do differently here? Where else could you go than home?" "Oh, well I drink with Bob. Maybe I could stay at Bob's place." We ring Bob up. Bob says, "Yeah, you can keep on the couch on Friday night." You get texts, you send each other texts saying, "Um, is it all right still if I stay the night?" "Yeah, remember you said you were going to do this." There's text they send themselves. So, it's an example of actually engagement and communication with the people that actually have to do this stuff that we say they have to. Now, the trial's still underway and the results aren't in yet, but there's compelling anecdotal evidence from the aboriginal support workers because they witnessed the change with these people. They see the aboriginal defendants.

Mary Ann O.: It's the first time anyone's asked them, "What are your goals? What can you do about it?" We've got trust that you can actually pull this off, but let's support you in understanding how it is best for you. This is a completely different approach to policy development, but it's not policy development and oh by the way, we'll communicate and engage so you get it. It's actually policy development through communication and engagement. It's co-designed, as we use that pretty awful term, but it is co-designed with the people and the workers, and the front-line workers who actually have to do our policy. So, genuine communication engagement is actually about power sharing, which is why we don't like it to be frank. It's about sharing information, sharing data. It's sharing access to government, and it's sharing ownership of policy and process and influence, and it's really hard. But, hey, it just might work.

Michael M.: Terrific. Well said. That was a compelling example, and I liked your reflection on the Thodey reviews, so I'm going to ask one question before we throw to the audience, so audience members think about a question or two. I'm gonna start

with Natalie. We talked about the importance of engaging with stakeholders, in engaging with community, but sometimes things get in the way of that. We might be dealing with someone who's Cabinet-in-Confidence. We're working on budget proposals that are Cabinet-in-Confidence, and the very thing you're trying to develop policy about you can't consult about. Or, a minister's office might, let's just say, say, "Oh, you can't go and talk to so and so because we don't like them." Or, you're going to [inaudible 00:46:45]. Or, perhaps less so in the ACT context, you might be dealing with something to do with national security and so forth. Can you just sort of reflect, here locally in the ACT, how might you grapple with those kinds of considerations that I might invite others to chip in on that, and then we'll throw to the audience for some more questions.

Natalie Howson: Sure. Well, I think having the long view is really important, so that value of respect, it has to be given time. I think there's a lot we can do if we actually understand consultation engagement, building networks as core business, so that before we're in the focused cabinet process, we've already built up quite an extensive understanding and authentically engaged with the breadth of issues. I really think it's incredibly important that advocate bodies have a voice because sometimes we are in a process where we can't present alternative views, and it's, I think, a tragedy overall that governments are increasingly reducing their support for advocacy bodies that can represent different elements of our community and their voice. Take disability for example. I think that's something where I've learnt most importantly that people will only communicate their genuine views and thoughts through trusted networks, and we need to partner with those networks.

Natalie Howson: So, there's that long view that isn't always the case. I do think sometimes though, we get a little bit too precious about confidentiality, and I think there are practical ways of managing that. For example, we're in a process at the moment which is heading towards cabinet on the development of a new early childhood policy, but we've been working for the last 12 months with an advisory group that we've built up strong confidence and trust with, and they are, I think, very appreciative of the confidentiality and sensitivity issues around what we're doing but committed to helping us to deliver good policy outcomes, are willing to sign up to confidentiality agreements so that we can engage them in more and more of the detail of the policy process. I'm really fortunate to have a minister that supports that, of course.

Natalie Howson: The other thing is that I'm really lucky to have a minister that wants to take the time to get it right. And, I have to say that having been schooled in public service in the Commonwealth where I think policy production is on really acutely and an irrational timeframe sometimes, I had to reeducate myself about taking time and doing it properly. My minister is Yvette Berry, and she was adamant that until she had felt she'd heard all the voices in our community and they'd been properly engaged with, we wouldn't be progressing forward. I think ultimately she's built in, as I said earlier, that mitigation against poor implementation, and I think it's good to give ministers advice about that. That comes back to the points that were made about being really clear about what's the objective in your consultation and



being honest with that. If you can't take people through the process in the time that it will take, then don't pretend that you are.

Natalie Howson: The other thing I think with aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it's something where you have to build up relationships over time, and you need to work with people in the community that are leaders that can help express their voice. In the ACT, we're extraordinarily lucky, I think quite privileged to have the aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elected body who can represent the views of community and engage within a context that aboriginal people have confidence in and trust, and we use them a lot.

Michael M.: Sure. Anyone else on the panel want to chip in on this one?

Mary Ann O.: Just really quickly I'd say to the Minister mainly, and I think it was a point Natalie made, mainly reform and policy fails, so you're up for failure. Why does it fail? I think primarily, hugely, it's not because we don't work hard, think hard, aren't clever people. In fact, in some ways we too clever. Like we think we're clever, therefore we think we know the answers. Actually that's not true and where it fails is in implementation. So, stop thinking about the policy. We do 10% implementation thought, 90% policy thought. We should flip it. You should do 10% policy, 90% implementation thought, and Minister, if you don't want to fail, think about implementation and think about communication engagement.

Mike Mrdak: I think the other thing, Michael, just saying is picking up Natalie's point depth. Our core business age is corporate knowledge, and we have to have depth in areas. I think all too often, the community and Ministers get frustrated because we've got people relatively new in roles, and we're being asked to give advice on areas for which they don't have depth. In the absence of the consultation being able to be done because of cabinet or budget processes, we often just don't have the information base. I think it's a real issue for us. One of the key things in Thodey is capability development. Depth of knowledge in the relationships, kind of to Marianne's point, is really important, and I think that's something we undervalue as a service.

Natalie Howson: Yeah, if you're starting engagement at the point where you're thinking about writing your cabinet submission, you've obviously gotten way too late.

Michael M.: So, let's have a question or two from the audience. There are roving mics, I think.

Speaker 6: My question was about the policy programme. Let's call it a divide because I think in some ways it represents that way. Programme delivery people often have really deep relationships with communities, and often the policy development process is happening in isolation from that. What's your vision for how to address that divide and how do we get the best results of people working together within those different sorts of activity areas in government?

Michael M.: Mike?

- Mike Mrdak: I have a very strong view you can't separate out policy and programme. I've been through various restructures in my career where people have crowded policy areas, which have sitting as a way from programme delivery. You just can't do it. You just missed that linkage. These guys have worked in actual delivery areas. I just have a strong view. Most of your policies is actually done by your programme implementation, your regulators. That's where the policy actually is, and that's where your depth is. You can't separate that by having ... It's good to have policy development units that are doing some of the strategic forward agenda work, but the bulk of the policy work's got to be down the line areas, and I think that's something we, certainly at the Commonwealth level ... and I've got some very strong views about the increasing centralization on policy advice in this town. The line areas, the line departments have got to have carriage of policy because that's where the implementation and regulatory areas are.
- Pauline S.: I'll pick up. Particularly on regulatory issues, I've spent a lot of my time in policy areas advising on designing regulatory regimes. One of the best experiences anyone can have who does do that policy work is go be a regulator, because then you've gone from being the person who desires that terrific legislative regime to the person saying what idiot designed this? They clearly had no idea what they were doing. So, that's a good experience. But, also particularly there is nothing worse than when you're the regulator, you get legislation punted over the fence after it's law. One of the things is particularly in that regulatory space, my view is whether the regulator is within the Department or an external agency in the policy design process, those people need to be absolutely joined at the hip. It's actually incumbent on us, quite frankly, because I think the other thing with this conversation, it's not about others, them and they. It's actually how we take responsibility for leading these processes.
- Michael M.: Over to you.
- Speaker 7: Hi. Thank you for the discussion. I'm just interested, we've talked a lot about respect and how to respect the people that we're engaging with. I'm just interested to what degree you think it's important to have the conversation that the people that we want to talk to want to have with us rather than going out with always a predetermined idea about quite a narrow conversation that we might want to have. I think that that came to me that that's important if we want to earn their trust and to show that we respect them, then you know, understanding what they want to talk to us about and giving them the space to be heard is important as well. Just interested in your thoughts on that.
- Michael M.: Mary Ann, do you want to have a crack at that one?
- Mary Ann O.: Yeah. It's a really, really excellent point, and I think it does go to the previous question as well is when we ... I mean I've not been long at the Department of Industry Innovation and Science, but when I went in there and I thought, "Oh, we've got a network", that's gold. For anyone in this audience who doesn't belong to a department with a network, with front line staff, I'm really sorry for you because that allows the conversations. It allows open much more open conversations. I know our network, when they go out and they're talking, they

have a number of things to talk about, but it's the best ones that got to be that open conversation. Also, then you get ideas from other people rather than I've come to you with an idea. The whole idea about linking the information in intel or intelligence understanding of people who are actually out across Australia in the front line.

Mary Ann O.: The wonderful thing, you look at the Commonwealth public service, we are actually all across Australia, you know. I just don't think we use enough of those networks to let us understand, us in Canberra, and appreciate what the issues out there. But, I think that's a great avenue for those open conversations.

Natalie Howson: I've got another comment on that. I think you actually should be designing into your policy development process a very open first phase, and if I can put in a plug for the ACT, we're very proud of this work that we've done on the future of education and our consultation report's available online. What we did over the course of 18 months was built in a period of time where it was a very open, if you like, not restrained discussion about what this community wanted in relation to the future of education. It involved everybody that was part of this process from students, parents through to educators themselves. We learned a lot about how people were thinking about our education system. And in fact, what it led us to was to be even more heroic, if you like, braver about what might be possible because what the community had to say about their ideas and where they wanted to go was actually really inspiring.

Natalie Howson: With them, we're able to bring it into a much more specific and rigorous consultation process that helped us with the policy design. But, that very open listening, and that's what you have to get into the mosh pit. We went to school fetes. We used digital technologies and platforms. We adopted this great idea we saw at a kid's birthday party where kids would have a video booth where they'd go in and do their own video clips, but we asked them questions while they were in there, and we were able to use that sort of material. We ended up with over two and a half thousand students contributing to the policy development process in that very open phase. In fact, if you look at what the ACT designed into their future of education, we've got one element which is actually very unique. Most jurisdictions are doing very similar things, but what our community told us was that they wanted communities of learning and schools to be really multifaceted places that met all the needs of children and young people, and that's quite different to what we see in many other jurisdictions.

Speaker 8: Thanks for the conversation. Mary Ann's rather depressing point that at a gathering of the leadership, communication and engagement was lowest priority. Today's turnout might suggest that communication engagement is a higher priority at a lower level, so that would suggest to me that there's a gap between the two. As representatives of the latest ship, what can you do to lower the gap or make that gap less obvious?

Michael M.: Great question. Who'd like to have a crack at that? While you're thinking about it, I'll say something about there is a role for agencies like mine as the Ombudsman. We constantly see implementation issues and call them out to agencies, and many

of the agencies who we work with are in this room. So, that's one of the things we can do is keep spotting those implementation issues and try and identify systemic solutions for them that are listening to the voice of the citizens.

- Natalie Howson: I've got a vested interest, but I actually think it's so important that those of you that are interested in pursuing a career at high levels get some experience in the mosh pits of service delivery. It's really critical to your understanding, and then you will value how important communication engagement is to good outcomes. It's just essential.
- Michael M.: Mary Ann, you were about to say something.
- Mary Ann O.: No, I thought Mike might have-
- Mike Mrdak: Well, I agree totally. I think the messaging we as senior leaders have got to say is just that. We expect people's career development to include a range of areas including, as Pauline says, you've got to done those raw hard roles at the coalface with people, and to Natalie's point, we should build that into our expectations of senior leadership development much more so rather than just looking for people who have worked in policy, which has often been the case. Secondly, I think we've got to tell the stories. We've actually got to tell the stories of what's worked and importantly also what hasn't. I mentioned those examples around the airports business. We couldn't get our heads around that we could trust the community with information, and we were genuinely surprised when we got a different result. I tell that story repeatedly because everyone then goes, "Well, surely yes", but it wasn't that way and we weren't talking enough about it.
- Mike Mrdak: We weren't talking outside a small group of people who were running it, so telling the stories that we're talking about today really makes a difference to our development about how we think about those things.
- Pauline S.: I think there's also a cultural piece which is still there, which is if you're really smart, you're in policy. If you're not, well ... Basically, that's where the smart people go and everyone else, well, you know, you're good at your job, but not necessarily as smart. I think that's diminished over the years. The other thing I would observe, I actually started in the Commonwealth and wandered off to state government and came back. I think there's a real issue, "Oh, you've worked in state government, you haven't been in the Commonwealth the whole time." So, I think there's a cultural piece around recognising that these skills matter. It doesn't suggest that somehow your intellectual capability is down-graded because you've worked in service delivery, and I don't think anyone would obviously say that, but I still think there is a cultural piece there that underlines that, and I think everyone needs to tackle that.
- Pauline S.: But, I also would reinforce Mike's point about talking about what works and what doesn't so people aren't as scared about going out and doing consultation because I do think there is a fear, and it can be scary walking into a room of people that probably aren't that pleased to see you. Or, they're just suspicious in the first instance. You know, why is the government turning up?

- Michael M.: Okay, thank you very much. We've got time for one more question. There were a lot of ... Hello.
- Speaker 9: Thank you very much. We've been talking a lot about engaging with communities and other people on particular policy and programme issues, but when we do that, I think we assume a lot of knowledge about what the APS, for example, is or what the government is and what we're trying to do. Is there a role for us communicating more broadly outside specific policy or programme issues about the role of the public service and what we do, and would that help us with particular policy or programme engagement?
- Michael M.: Who wants to attack that one?
- Pauline S.: That's a good question.
- Mary Ann O.: I didn't know about that, but okay. Why should they? Why should they? It matters us to us but I mean ... You know, my daughter went to school for those days they go to school and she came home and said, "Oh, we had to say what our parents did." At the time, I had a pretty important job, so I sat up and I went, "So, honey, what did you say?" She said, "Oh, I said, you worked in an office." And, I thought that's actually what I do because if we go and explain, "Now, let me tell you about the public service and everything", that's not what she ... Obviously, it doesn't resonate with anybody, but if you actually start to talk about, which I think this is the sort of communications, we're talking about engagement talking about today is actually you going out ... And, the question earlier was understanding and getting ideas and engagement.
- Mary Ann O.: I mean, if in the conversation it comes out, "Oh, I work for the Commonwealth government", okay, but I don't think that's the point. They just don't know if you're commonwealth, state, local. They've got an issue, they've got a problem and they want you to fix it. And, if you can't fix it, then they want you to find someone who can. That thing about, "I can't, but let me get back to you", I think that was a point made earlier, "... and I'll find out." So, I think that's really what you have to do about engagement. Come from where they are, not from what you think they should know about.
- Natalie Howson: I agree with Mary Anne, but there is another perspective on it, and I think that's one more about who we are and how we attract a diverse workforce. I think it's important that we do actually let people know the things that happen as a result of the work that we do, and we're a great place to work.
- Michael M.: Good place to finish the general remarks. I'm now going to invite members of the panel to imagine you're tweeting some of the most powerful people in the world. Tweet. I don't tweet, but imagine you did. What would be your tweet to the audience to finish up this, that's a takeaway Twitter message. Mike?

Mike Mrdak: Be courageous in the sense of being willing to have an open conversation. Don't ever shy away from the fact people are actually, I think, interested in what we can do for them. Let's have the conversation openly with people. I think that makes a difference.

Michael M.: Mary Ann?

Mary Ann O.: I'd say-

Mike Mrdak: It's a bit too long for a tweet, but [crosstalk 01:05:54]. You can tell I don't tweet.

Michael M.: I didn't give you a heads up what I was going to do.

Mary Ann O.: Oh my God, now I've got to get the characters right. So, within a tweet I'd say, remember it's 10% policy, 90% implementation.

Natalie Howson: Today, I walked in the shoes of a Year 12 student, and boy did I learn a lot.

Pauline S.: It's probably around that. This is definitely too long for a tweet. Be Curious. Understand who you're talking to, where they come from. Be curious, and then think about what does that mean for what I'm doing? And importantly, your Minister wants you to be curious.

Michael M.: You've got two ears. You've only got one mouth. Okay. Now we have a couple of people to come up and give a word of thanks. Virginia Cook and Kim Ulrick are going to come and speak very, very quickly at the lectern. They were driving forces behind this event. The presence of so many of you here today highlights just what an important topic this is, so thank you for doing what you've done. Over to you.

Virginia Cook: Thank you, Michael and to the panel for a really useful discussion, a really insightful discussion. It's great to see IPAA as a communications expert focusing on communications and, by extension, engagement with people as a key input to shaping policy development and programme design. It's good to see so many people here from policy and programme areas, as well as from communications areas. Kim and I, we actually met working in the Department of Communications many years ago, before Mike was there, in the communication's area and we often talked about even then the importance of early input into policy design by communications teams. One of the things, the tenets for me in my role is that communications leaders and those who understand community engagement should be key partners in all the work a department does, and at all stages. I think that's increasingly happening across the APS and certainly is happening in our department.

Virginia Cook: Michael touched on the genesis for this event. Heather's remarks and other senior leaders about communications. Mike, I think you've very eloquently contributed to that ongoing conversation today. Thank you. Understanding the community is at the core of everything we do. We do have to speak differently, think differently, listen differently was a huge message today, and work differently. An important

message is that communications and effective engagement is not a job for communication teams alone. Yes, they're a centre of excellence, but it's got to be a mindset that's got to unite us all. The only other comment I'd make before Kim actually comments on the speakers today and gives a formal vote of thanks is clearly we could have had another five conversations today, and we're really keen that IPAA keeps this particular discussion and this theme going in future events. So, when you're filling in your evaluation forms today, if there's something that leaps out and you think, "Gosh, we could have a great discussion about a particular element of communications, community engagement, etc", please let us know.

Virginia Cook: I'm going to hand over to Kim now. Thank you.

Kim Ulrick: Thanks Virginia. I'm one of those rare people that has both communications and policy experience and background, a rare beast in the public service, I think, but it's been really telling for me that I thought the comments, which I'll touch on in a moment from the panel and, and Mike as our keynote speaker were really telling. I have had conversations over many years of my public service career where people have said to me, "Why do we want to talk to the public? We don't care about what they think. Or, it's going to distort the hypotheses that we've already developed." We just go to the same people and ask them the same thing. That has changed over time, but I still don't think we've got it right, and I think we've heard from our panel about ways that we could improve that. As somebody that really cares about the role of public servants and has been a proud public servant for many years, I think we can do better, and I think as a collective we should do better.

Kim Ulrick: I also just want to echo Virginia's call that we don't let this be the end of the conversation, and that we do have an opportunity to keep working together. I really do hope that we keep that going. Thank you firstly to Michael for his wonderful chairing today, and also to Mike and the panel. I think there was some really thought-provoking messages that came through. Some of the common themes for me were around honesty, language, making it easy for people to engage, and building those partnerships and networks with the community. I thought Mike's comment about the fact we are in the people business ... Absolutely ... and it can be challenging for us to work in that weed world of subjectivity. The other point that Mike made that resonated with me was it about the government not trusting the people, and the flight path example is an absolute cracker.

Kim Ulrick:

Pauline, she talked about the lived experience, that it matters that we do have to talk to people and the Ministers expect that we are doing that, and they expect we are talking to the people they are talking to. Natalie talked about, I loved it, being in the mosh pit. I had a great image as you were saying that, Natalie, and that she realised that she knew she wasn't connected. We heard later on in the discussion about being at the front line and using those frontline networks and service delivery networks. I loved the point you made that if we're doing the engagement at the time that we're writing the CABSUB, that's way too late. Mary Ann, she also talked about the fact that genuine comms is about power sharing and good policy development is through communications. I think I'll leave it at that note. Just want to say very much, thank you. We do have a small token of appreciation, and could you please join me in thanking Michael and our panel for a wonderful day.