

Foreword

This collection of ‘critical reflections’ on Australian public policy offers a valuable contribution to public discussion of important political and policy issues facing our nation and society. These essays are important not only because of the reputation and position of the various contributors, but because they are incredibly ‘content rich’ and brimming with new ideas.

Contributors to this volume include politicians, senior public servants, respected academics and civil society leaders. Their views matter—whether or not one agrees with the propositions put—because of *who* they are and their capacity to influence and shape events. With few exceptions, the contributors are active *players*, not dispassionate observers of the issues in which they are engaged.

Their observations and commentary on Australian public affairs reach back into the recent past and, in some cases, the essays need to be viewed through the lens of antecedent and subsequent events. For example, readers of Ian Gill’s essay on creating a conservation economy in indigenous communities (Chapter 15), will compare and contrast his experience with Australia’s experience of the Northern Territory intervention. Readers of Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston’s essay on leadership in the Australian Defence Force (Chapter 12) will reflect on his remarks in light of recent controversies concerning the relationship between the Defence Minister and the civilian and military arms of the Defence portfolio.

Many of the essays in this collection are ‘primary sources’ insofar as they provide an important record of the views, hopes and frustrations of key decision makers working at the coalface of Australian political, social and economic affairs. It must be borne in mind, when reading some of these contributions, that the views expressed by the authors reflect a particular point in time: for example, John Brumby has contributed two essays to this collection, one prepared on the back of the National Reform Agenda (see Chapter 5) from a speech given while he was still the Victorian Treasurer and John Howard was still Prime Minister, and the other (Chapter 2) from a speech given after he became Premier and John Howard had given way to Kevin Rudd. Taken together, the two essays chart the political and policy trajectory of the development of his ideas as the federal reform agenda progressed.

The essays in this collection were originally presented either as part of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) Public Lecture Series in 2007 and 2008 or at the ANZSOG Annual Conference ‘Making Federalism Work’ held on 11 and 12 September 2008, in Melbourne. The sole exception is Peter Thompson’s essay reflecting on changes in the media landscape during his lifetime, which was prepared for a special ANZSOG workshop on strategic media management held in August 2006. The essays in this volume are grouped into four broad themes.

Part 1, *Reflections on Australian federalism*, contains essays by the Federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan, Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, Victorian Premier, John Brumby, and ANU academic Mark Matthews, each of whom outlines cogent arguments and prescriptions for a renewed and reinvigorated federalism.

In Part 2, *Reflections on Australian politics and policy*, Griffith University's Pat Weller paints a compelling—and at times amusing—portrait of cabinet government and Solicitor-General, David Bennett, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Chairman, Graeme Samuel, and Productivity Commission Chairman, Gary Banks, reflect on matters as diverse as constitutional litigation, the operation of the *Trade Practices Act* and the many iterations of evidenced-based policy.

In Part 3, *Reflections on leadership and governance*, the colourful former Telstra executive Phil Burgess¹ reflects on the cultural divide between public and private sector leadership; former Senator Andrew Murray speculates on the inclusion of political governance, transparency and accountability as part of a broader reform agenda alongside burning issues such as climate change, education and infrastructure; and Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston reflects on the principles on which successful leadership of the Australian Defence Force must be based.

In Part 4, *Reflections on adaptive change*, The Australian National University's Vice-Chancellor—sometimes dubbed the most powerful vice-chancellor in Australia—presents a compelling argument for 'rethinking, renewal and reinvigoration' in Australian higher education; social entrepreneur Ian Gill, President of Ecotrust Canada, outlines the Canadian experience in building a 'conservation economy' in indigenous communities and draws comparisons with the Australian situation; and, finally, well-known journalist Peter Thompson reflects on the technological revolutions shaping Australian media and popular culture.

Whether the authors are actors in the events and issues under discussion (such as Wayne Swan, John Brumby, Ian Gill or Graeme Samuel) or keen observers of events (Patrick Weller, Peter Thompson or Mark Matthews), the critical reflections contained within these pages offer much to those with an interest in the main currents of contemporary Australian policy and politics. I commend this volume to you.

John Wanna
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ENDNOTES

¹ Burgess, of course, was one of a trio of American executive imports (the others being Greg Winn and Bill Stewart) dubbed the 'three amigos', who, under the direction of Chief Executive, Sol Trujillo, saw a normally subservient Telstra muscle up to the Howard Government in the policy tussle over the regulatory burden borne by the telco.