

# Secretaries Board Terms of Reference

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## Purpose of the Secretaries Board

Section 64 of the *Public Service Act 1999* establishes the Secretaries Board and sets out its functions as follows:

- a) to take responsibility for the stewardship of the APS and for developing and implementing strategies to improve the APS;
- b) to identify strategic priorities for the APS and consider issues that affect the APS;
- c) to set an annual work program, and direct subcommittees to develop strategies to address APS-wide issues and make recommendations to the Secretaries Board;
- d) to draw together advice from senior leaders in government, business and the community; and
- e) to work collaboratively and model leadership behaviours.
- f) such other functions as are conferred on the Secretaries' Board by this Act.

In accordance with its legislated functions, the Secretaries Board provides leadership to the APS as an integrated organisation with a shared vision and purpose, with individual members of the Secretaries Board to retain autonomy and statutory responsibilities as the heads of their respective departments.

The Secretaries Board is committed to an integrated approach to national priorities. To support this approach, each Board meeting will include an update from relevant Secretaries on:

1. Government priorities
2. Budget and economic priorities
3. The geostrategic outlook
4. Risks and emerging issues.

The Board will also receive timely updates from relevant Secretaries on Major Policy Priorities.

In addition, the Board has identified the following four key priorities for 2025-26:

1. Delivery of the Government's agenda
2. Contributing to economic reform and productivity
3. National security coordination and resilience
4. First Nations priorities including Closing the Gap.

Some specific elements of the high level priorities for 2025-26 that are likely be of key interest to the Board in the coming twelve months could include:

1. Budget sustainability
2. Artificial intelligence and the role of Government
3. Implications of global fragmentation.

Other priorities may be determined by the Chair of the Secretaries Board in consultation with the Board.

## Membership of the Secretaries Board

The Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) is the Chair of the Secretaries Board. If the Secretary is not available, the Australian Public Service Commissioner or the acting Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will chair Board meetings.

In accordance with subsection 64(2) of the *Public Service Act 1999*, the Board consists of:

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- the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet as Chair
  - all other departmental secretaries
  - the Australian Public Service Commissioner
  - the Chief Executive Officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The Board may invite Agency Heads and senior leaders in government, business and the community to attend Board meetings to assist the Board with its considerations.

## Sub-Committees of the Secretaries Board

The Secretaries Board may establish sub-committees (referred to as senior leadership groups in the *Public Service Act 1999*), to assist the Secretaries Board in performing its functions (sub-section 64(4) of the *Public Service Act 1999*).

The role of sub-committees includes:

- Developing targeted forward work plans to address current and future Board priorities following the context of the strategic directions as set out by the Secretaries Board.
- Working in portfolio clusters to deliver Government priorities. This includes undertaking focussed pieces of work on specific emerging issues, as well as proactively identifying emerging risks with regards to longer-term issues, and proposing a path forward for the Board.

In establishing sub-committees the Secretaries Board may give consideration to:

- Whether the sub-committee is to be a standing sub-committee or a time-limited, more informal working group to deliver a specific task identified by the Secretaries Board.
- Membership of the sub-committee including inviting participation from relevant agencies beyond portfolio departments to provide a whole-of-government view, with membership to be regularly reviewed to maintain relevancy.
- Arrangements necessary to ensure an appropriate feedback loop between the Secretaries Board and the sub-committee – including regular reporting arrangements with clear actionable objectives, and any recommendations or issues to be raised for the Secretaries Board's consideration.
- Setting out the purpose, roles and responsibilities of the sub-committee and governance arrangements in a Terms of Reference, which should be endorsed by the Secretaries Board.

Currently, the Board is supported by the below four sub-committees:

- Capability and Workforce Committee;
- Secretaries Digital and Data Committee;
- Partnership Priorities Committee; and
- Secretaries Talent Council.

Chairs of the Board's sub-committees are responsible for providing six-monthly reports, at a minimum, to inform the Board of each sub-committee's strategic priorities and key deliverables. These reports will be presented to the Board for discussion by exception, or for consideration out-of-session. Sub-committees align their priorities with those of the Board.

The Secretaries Board Secretariat will work with relevant agencies and the secretariats for the Board's sub-committees to schedule these reports.

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The Chief Operating Officers Committee (COO Committee) plays an advisory role to the Board. The COO Committee is responsible for providing six-monthly reports, at a minimum, to inform the Board of its strategic priorities and key deliverables.

The Board may endorse relevant Agency Heads as members of the Board's committees.

## Working Groups

The Secretaries Board may also establish Working Groups to carry out work on behalf of the Board. Working Groups differ from sub-committees in that they do not include members of the Board and typically focus on completion of a stand-alone task.

## Meetings

The Secretaries Board will meet monthly from February to November, usually on the third Wednesday of every month. The Chair may call extraordinary meetings of the Secretaries Board, as required.

The Board is committed to a dynamic agenda that devotes sufficient time for strategic, forward-looking discussions on significant public policy or administration matters, while balancing the need for Board discussions on regular reports relating to matters of shared interest.

The Board proposes to discuss forward year priorities at its last meeting of the financial year to be agreed at the first meeting in the following financial year.

The Board will also hold annual strategy sessions.

## Attendance

Members are expected to attend all meetings in-person and as scheduled, noting proxies are permitted to attend when substantive acting arrangements are in place, or as agreed on a case-by case basis by the Chair.

The Deputy Secretary Governance and Corporate Group PM&C, First Assistant Secretary, Government Division PM&C, Assistant Secretary, Legal Policy Branch PM&C and the PM&C Secretary's Chief of Staff will attend all meetings as notetakers. Senior leaders or practitioners, including from outside the Australian Public Service, may be co-opted for items at the request of Board members.

All members must declare any potential, apparent or actual conflicts of interest as they arise.

## Out-of-session items

All matters requiring discussion and/or endorsement by the Board should be dealt with as part of a scheduled meeting. Papers may be considered out-of-session, with the approval of the Chair and the relevant member/s.

Out-of-session items will be circulated to members by the Secretariat.

Out-of-session items will be formally noted at the next available scheduled meeting.

## Review

The Terms of Reference may be reviewed at the discretion of the Chair in consultation with members of the Secretaries Board.

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## Transparency

The Secretariat will publish a Communique on the PM&C website within three business days following each Board meeting, outlining the key outcomes of the Board's discussion at the meeting.