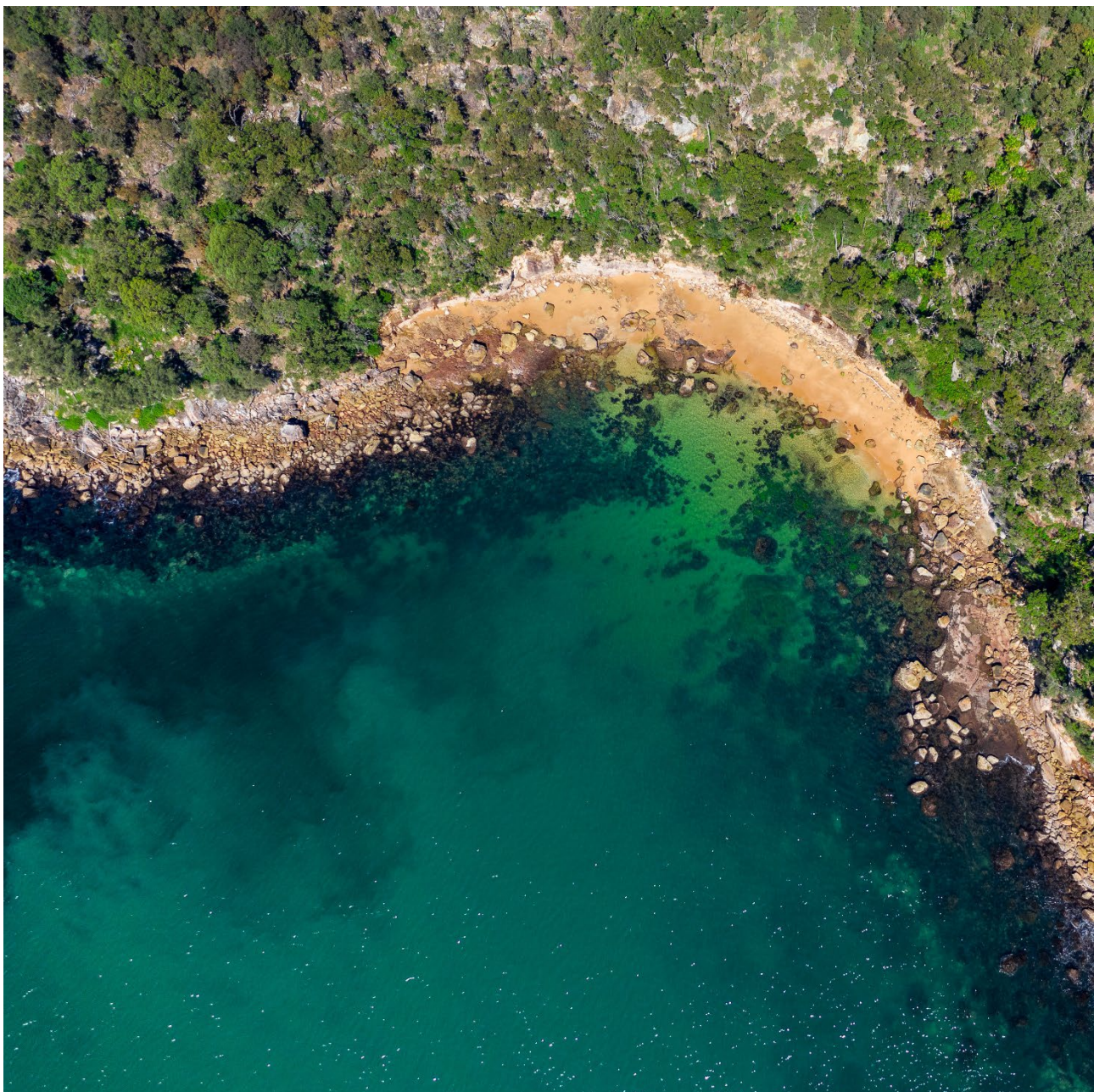




Australian Government

Secretaries Performance Framework

Strengthening the advisory, managerial and leadership capabilities of the most senior APS leaders



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Introduction

Purpose

In accordance with section 61A of the *Public Service Act 1999* (the Act), the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) and the Australian Public Service (APS) Commissioner have established a framework for Secretaries' annual performance reviews.

The Secretaries Performance Framework (the Framework) aims to strengthen the advisory, managerial and leadership capabilities of the most senior APS leaders. It consists of three aspects: an annual performance agreement, an annual performance review and ongoing development throughout the performance cycle.

A key feature of the Framework is that the assessment of behaviour (how outcomes are delivered) is considered core to Secretaries' performance, not just the delivery of those outcomes.

Context

The Governor-General appoints Secretaries on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.¹ Secretaries' roles and responsibilities are specified in section 57 of the Act. Secretaries are bound by the APS Code of Conduct in the same way as APS employees² and must uphold and promote the APS Values and Employment Principles.³

Secretaries are appointed for an initial period of five years unless they request a shorter period.⁴ The Act provides that Secretaries hold office on a full-time basis and can be reappointed beyond their initial term.⁵

The terms and conditions of employment for Secretaries, including remuneration, are determined by the Remuneration Tribunal under the *Remuneration Tribunal Act 1973*. The Tribunal establishes a classification structure for Secretaries including corresponding pay points. The Tribunal also assigns each office of Secretary to a classification, thereby determining the remuneration of that office. A Secretary's individual performance does not influence the classification of their office, the remuneration allocated to that classification by the Tribunal or the pay point to which the office is allocated. Financial compensation in the form of bonuses is not available to Secretaries.

¹ Section 58 of the Act.

² Section 14 of the Act.

³ Section 12 of the Act.

⁴ Section 58 of the Act.

⁵ Section 58 of the Act.

Application

The Framework applies to all members of the Secretaries Board established under section 64 of the Act. The Board consists of all departmental Secretaries, the APS Commissioner and 'such other persons as are nominated in writing by the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department.'⁶

The performance cycle runs on a calendar year basis, unless otherwise agreed by the Secretary of PM&C and the APS Commissioner.

In the event Secretaries are newly appointed, their performance reviews may occur at a later point in the year. These Secretaries' performance assessments will take into account relevant achievements and behaviours prior to the review.

⁶ The NIAA CEO is currently a member of the Board in accordance with paragraph 64(2)(d) of the Act.

Secretaries Performance Framework

Subsection 57(1) of the Act states that the roles of the Secretary of a Department include, but are not limited to:

- (a) principal official policy adviser to the Agency Minister;
- (b) manager, ensuring delivery of government programs and collaboration to achieve outcomes within the Agency Minister's portfolio and, with other Secretaries, across the whole of Government;
- (c) leader, providing stewardship within the Department and, in partnership with the Secretaries Board, across the APS;
- (d) any other role prescribed by the regulations.⁷

The Framework assesses Secretaries' performances against these three core roles — principal official policy adviser, manager and leader noting that both the manager and leader roles incorporate whole of service aspects. Secretaries' performance assessments will consider both outcomes and behaviours.⁸

In addition, Secretaries have agreed a Charter of Leadership Behaviours which should be reflected in everything they do. The Framework also separately assesses Secretaries' adherence to the Charter of Leadership Behaviours.

Principal official policy adviser

Being the principal official policy adviser to the Minister requires that Secretaries ensure their Minister is well informed when making decisions, is well positioned for influencing collective decision making by the government, and can be confident that decisions across the portfolio are effectively implemented in the way intended. They do this by:

- keeping the minister informed about the Department's responsibilities, programs and government processes;
- communicating the Minister's directives, objectives, priorities and decisions to the Department and portfolio;
- coordinating high-quality advice from the Department and portfolio and adding value to policy analysis and advice, ensuring it is thorough, timely and considers diverse perspectives; and
- monitoring issues that may impact the policy landscape, and alerting the Minister to emerging risks or opportunities.

As principal policy advisers, Secretaries are also responsible for setting the strategic agenda for their department in line with the Minister's priorities, and driving achievement of policy and program outcomes as identified by their Minister.

⁷ There are no additional roles prescribed under the *Public Service Regulations 2023* at present.

⁸ Consistent with recommendation 2 of *Louder than Words: An APS Integrity Action Plan*.

Manager

As managers, Secretaries' responsibilities include:

- clearly translating the objectives of the government and their Minister to the Department and portfolio;
- ensuring good lines of communication across the portfolio, with Ministers and central agencies;
- fulfilling their duties as accountable authorities and Agency Heads;⁹
- leading strategic planning and direction;
- facilitating high-quality advice and/or delivery of services to the Australian community;
- managing the resources available to the Department, including people, efficiently and effectively in accordance with applicable frameworks;
- managing the communications from the Department, and relationship between the Department and others; and
- coordinating systems, staffing and finances within and between portfolios.

There is significant need for cross-agency responses to social, economic and national security challenges.

Secretaries lead the development and implementation of government policies and programs across their portfolio and, with other Secretaries, across the whole of Government.

Leader

As leaders, Secretaries set the tone and create the culture necessary for a high-performing APS. They are often the first, and last, source of the frank and fearless advice to government that is a cornerstone of the service.

As leaders, Secretaries have the responsibility of ensuring their Departments, their portfolios and the APS more broadly adapts to the challenges it is intended to meet. In their Departments, they do this by:

- having a top management structure that facilitates effective administration with appropriate lines of accountability;
- using the management structure to monitor program performance and implementation of government decisions, and to manage risks;
- having effective staffing arrangements and succession planning that builds long-term capability and sustains core knowledge and expertise;

⁹ For instance, under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* and the *Public Service Act 1999* and subordinate legislation.

- demonstrating and promoting the APS Values and Employment Principles, and adherence to the Code of Conduct through their personal behaviour, and ensuring accountability for behaviours as well as outcomes;¹⁰
- driving a culture in which staff feel safe and empowered to collaborate, express concerns and ask questions;
- promoting security culture and capability to protect Australian Government information, assets, and interests;
- fostering an ethical, professional and productive culture throughout the Department; and
- ensuring the systems that underpin the Department's operations are robust and seamless.

Secretaries work closely with their colleagues to address common challenges and are expected to take a whole of service perspective. They do this by:

- actively participating in Secretaries Board and its subsidiary bodies;
- identifying opportunities to collaborate across portfolios to achieve outcomes for the Australian people;
- sharing information, expertise and resources where appropriate to assist outcomes in other portfolios; and
- ensuring their departments work effectively with other departments and agencies to address cross-portfolio challenges.

In 2024, the Australian Government amended the Act to introduce Stewardship as an APS Value. The concept of stewardship in the APS is understood as follows:

The APS builds its capability and institutional knowledge, and supports the public interest now and into the future, by understanding the long-term impacts of what it does.

While all APS employees must uphold the Stewardship Value, Secretaries have a deeper responsibility for the APS as an institution, and are accountable for driving the achievement of whole-of-APS outcomes, and acting in the long-term interests of the Australian community.

Leadership behaviours

Secretaries are expected to act in accordance with the [Secretaries' Charter of Leadership Behaviours](#) (the Charter) in everything they do.

Released in 2022, the Charter sets out the behaviours Secretaries expect of themselves and Senior Executive Service (SES) officials, and want to see in leaders at all levels of the APS. The Charter requires Secretaries to be dynamic, be respectful, have integrity, value others, and empower people.

¹⁰ Including by actively supporting and cooperating with APS-wide requirements and policies, through adherence to legislation, and by enacting positive duties under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

Process

As already noted, the Framework has three aspects: an annual performance agreement, an annual performance review and ongoing development during the performance cycle.

Secretaries will meet with the Secretary of PM&C and the APS Commissioner to discuss their achievements for the previous year and forward objectives at least annually.

Performance agreements

Secretaries will develop performance agreements that identify priority deliverables for each of their three core roles — principal official policy adviser, manager and leader.

Secretaries will identify up to five priorities within (or significantly within) their influence and control that must be delivered, or demonstrate significant implementation progress, within the performance cycle reporting period.¹¹ Priorities must be such that Secretaries will significantly influence their achievement, including by working closely with their Minister. Secretaries must:

- discuss the inclusion of priorities in their performance plan with their portfolio Cabinet Minister(s);¹² and
- ensure each priority can be supported by performance metrics, agreed between the Secretary, Secretary of PM&C and the APS Commissioner.

The Framework supports the inclusion of performance metrics and KPIs informed by a combination of qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Secretaries will also articulate their intentions for leadership behaviours.

A significant challenge facing Secretaries is finding the time to undertake ongoing development. Secretaries' performance agreements should clearly articulate what development challenges or opportunities they wish to address over the coming year and how that will be achieved (e.g. through formal training, mentoring, peer support etc.).

Performance reviews

Performance review discussions will be supported by Secretaries' performance agreements, a self-evaluation undertaken before the discussion, discussions with Ministers by the Secretary of PM&C and publicly available data. The Secretary of PM&C and the APS Commissioner may exercise their discretion to consider other materials and information they consider relevant to the performance discussion.

The use of enduring, credible and some publicly available data sources is critical to ensure Secretaries' performance reviews are consistent, fair and transparent. Enduring data sources that utilise annual

¹¹ The selection of priorities should reflect a balance between existing functions and new activities.

¹² Secretaries should discuss priorities in their performance plan with all portfolio Cabinet Ministers.

reporting (e.g. APS Census, agency corporate plans) also facilitate visibility of year-on-year progress against standard corporate responsibilities and commitments.

Secretaries' leadership behaviours will be measured via an evaluation that invites anonymous feedback on their performance from relevant stakeholders such as portfolio Minister(s); SES leaders and APS staff within a Secretary's department; and external APS stakeholders. Secretaries will receive a 270 degree evaluation every second year.

This approach ensures input and feedback on Secretaries' behaviours and performance is received from all directions, including Secretaries themselves.

The previous year's performance agreement and Secretaries' self-evaluations will be reviewed during the performance discussion, to determine the results against these goals and commitments, and inform the concurrent development of the current year's performance agreement.

The Secretary of PM&C and the APS Commissioner will write to relevant Ministers on Secretaries' performance reviews, and to the Prime Minister on all Secretaries' performance reviews. The reports will identify key achievements and key areas of focus.

Ongoing development

Secretaries are expected to undertake the development activities identified in the agreement during the following year. This will then be reviewed in the subsequent performance discussion.