

Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees
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Reflections on 10 years as Auditor-General for Australia

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Key drivers for my role

The importance of:

- performing well in providing Parliament (and citizens) with assurance in relation to the operations of government, particularly given the information asymmetry between Parliament and Government
 - worldly understanding, objective reporting and constructive recommendations
- ANAO moving with the times, allocating resources to audit topics astutely, investing wisely for tomorrow, maintaining effective relationships, contributing to better governance in our region

Pre-conditions for success

- Contemporary mandate
- Leadership, independent judgement, relationship management – staying connected
- Appropriate levels of resources and skills

Making a difference through our audit program

- Understanding of topics/issues
- Engaging at senior levels
- Moving beyond frameworks to what is happening on the ground
- Separating wheat from chaff
- Reporting objectively, candidly and constructively
- Leveraging resources and audit messages for better public administration

What I have learnt

- Financial statement audit role is important but performance audits have a higher profile and generally of greater interest
- If Ministers/CEOs are given a ‘fair go’, they are most likely to accept the audit conclusions/recommendations
- Legislated powers should be used if required to deliver on the expected role
- Benefits of working on messaging in reports; answering the ‘so what?’ questions
- The better the standing of the office, the easier the access for staff and their engagement with the right people
- Demanding work for the staff of the ANAO, requiring skills and resilience

Strengths in government administration

- Governance frameworks
- High profile ‘events’ (policy development, administration)
- Public Sector reform – early adopter/adapter
- ICT – early adopter/adapter
- Public Sector values/culture/collegiality/accountability

Soft areas in government administration

- Monitoring and responding to changes in significant risks and/or identifying new risks
- Policy/systems' implementation under pressure
- Losing sight of the guiding principles, getting lost in the weeds; taking a narrow view of responsibilities
- Performance measurement for programs and outcomes, particularly assessing impact

How Committees can assist the Auditor-General

- Respect different roles, and keep in touch
- Let the Auditor-General know what is working well and, particularly, what may be improved
- Speak with one voice; limit any internal committee differences when reporting

ANAO going forward

- Mandate – in good shape but a few areas to consider in next periodic review
- Resources – OK now, but tightening
 - continue to partner with firms to manage risks
 - adjust for greater use of ICT and new delivery models (being ‘future fit’)
- Strategy – continuing a strong focus on audit quality: in policies, audit support, audit execution and reporting

ANAO going forward (cont.)

- Reporting – our reports are now shorter but we are working on
 - better messaging in, and timeliness of, reporting
 - e-reporting and citizen engagement
- Relationship with the JCPAA
 - good, and we will work hard at keeping the relationship in sound shape going forward

Thank you