



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

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**Address on**  
**‘Perspectives of a Departmental Secretary’**

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**Introduction**

[SLIDE 1 - Cover]

It’s a pleasure to speak to you today. Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today, the Yuggera people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region. I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today’s event.

Today, I would like to discuss a range of issues that span the Australian Public Service, but most importantly from my perspective, about the role of a Departmental Secretary within this environment, and about the various challenges that come with leading a portfolio like Immigration and Citizenship.

[SLIDE 2 – APS Overview]

## Overview of APS

The Australian Public Service, or APS, is incredibly large and diverse and consists of over 223 000 employees. This number is significantly lower than the private US company Wal-Mart which has around 2.1 million employees, or the public enterprise of Indian Railways which has 1.6 million employees. However it is still a significant size and comparable to a large multinational such as Nestle, though despite the diversity of services provided by the APS, disappointedly this does not extend to the production of chocolate!

The APS, as the administrative arm of the Government, exercises authority on behalf of the Government and provides support to the Government in undertaking its roles and responsibilities on behalf of the Australian people. It is obviously not one single organisation, but a range of different departments, statutory, and executive agencies. It operates across all Australian States and Territories, and has numerous offices overseas, operating in some capacity for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. People doing amazingly different jobs such as scientists in the Antarctic, weather forecasters, plague locust eradicators, fishing inspectors, national park rangers, social workers, audiologists, diplomats, economists, lawyers, journalists, translators, accountants - you get the picture - and are all Australian public servants.

These departments and agencies are derived from the 18 portfolios related to the second Gillard Ministry – with a range of Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries – some agencies have both, such as ours, with the Hon Chris Bowen as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, and the Hon Senator Kate Lundy as Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Within the portfolio structure there are 20 departments, 78 statutory agencies, and 6 executive agencies. Within our portfolio we have two major agencies - the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and the migration and refugee review tribunals.

The APS completes its role through the provision of policy advice and through managing and facilitating the delivery of programs, regulations and services agreed by the government. In doing this some departments are policy driven, others are client service driven. Some, like ours, have both arms along with an administrative law functions.

### **Role of a Secretary**

Portfolio departments are managed by a Secretary, such as myself, who are appointed under part 7 of the *Australian Public Service Act 1999*. We are appointed by the Prime Minister for a period of up to 5 years on the advice from the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Public Service Commissioner, and can be reappointed.

As a secretary I am responsible to my Minister for the efficient, effective and ethical management of my department. I must also assist the Minister to fulfil the accountability obligations to the Parliament to provide factual information, as required by the Parliament, in relation to the operation and administration of the Department. This regularly involves the enjoyable task of fronting Senate Estimates Committee hearings. Our role has thus become, more and more over the years, a public one.

[SLIDE 3 – The department]

Of course, as a Secretary I am supported by a senior management team, or officers in my Senior Executive Service-the SES. Within my department I recently implemented a new structure which is designed around our core functions as a client service delivery organisation. This consists of four groups, each led by a Deputy Secretary. These include:

- our Policy and Program Management Group which focuses on the development and enhancement of good government policy and programs
- our Client Services Group which focuses on the delivery of our programs
- our Business Services Group who support the rest of the organisation to undertake their business
- our Immigration Detention Services Group, which given the increasing scope and responsibility associated with this work, focuses on managing this often very challenging issue.

As you will see from the hand-out, within these four groups are fifteen divisions each led by a First Assistant Secretary responsible for Branches, Sections, and so on.

I will discuss this in more detail a little later, but I'd first like to make the point that we do not do this as individual leaders but rather with the support of our valuable staff. All APS employees are appointed under the *Public Service Act 1999* - the principal Act governing the establishment and operation of employment in the APS. Under the Act the rights and obligations of APS employees, including the expected standards of integrity and behaviour, are outlined. As senior leaders we also have a responsibility to model the APS Values and promote compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Throughout the APS, staff fulfil a range of service delivery and regulatory functions and policy related roles that impact on a large percentage of the Australian community. Public servants are accountable to the Government, the Parliament and the public for the way in which they undertake these functions, including their performance, their financial probity and their ethical behaviour.

Within this framework it is important to note that public servants have particular obligations and responsibilities, such as the required standards of behaviour set out in the APS Values and Code of Conduct within the Public Service Act. These standards underpin every action and decision made by APS employees. Core elements:

- Being apolitical and impartial in dealing with the Government and the Australian public.
- Being professional through standards of behaviour and accountability and transparency.
- Merit as the basis of staffing.

Within my department we currently have around 8000 staff working in over 60 locations across the world. We are a big multi-faceted organisation. I'd like to give you a sense of the scale and breadth of what my department does.

### **Role of the department**

From the outside it could be easy to overly simplify our work, but equally easy to be awed by the volumes that we manage. For example last year over 28 million passengers crossed our border, over four million visas were issued, and there were around 120 thousand conferrals of Australian Citizenship.

We are a diverse and far reaching department, and in some way, the work of the department has directly touched over half of the population as nearly one in two of our population was either born overseas, or had a parent who was born overseas. Further it could be argued that we have an impact on every Australian's life through our interest and work in Australia's future workforce needs, and our future population.

The importance of the immigration portfolio is evident in our statement of purpose - *building Australia's future through the well-managed entry and settlement of people*. We have a key nation-building role that requires us to collaborate and share leadership with other portfolios. We play a critical role in the government's sustainable population and productivity agendas.

We have responsibility for key aspects of border security policy and operations, visa compliance, law enforcement functions and immigration detention. We administer policy for migration and temporary visas, refugee and humanitarian entry, for settlement, Australian citizenship and policies to enrich our multicultural society.

Many of the decisions we make are very sensitive. They relate to refugee applications, identity and character considerations for visa and citizenship applications, as well as matters of national security.

Our decisions and operations can be the subject of great public interest and also generate discussion in the Parliament, the media and in the community. For example, last year we took over 5000 media enquiries, this year we have already taken over 1500! You will no doubt be aware that on a daily basis you can read articles commenting on our business in some form or another – sometimes positively!

My role, as Secretary, is to ensure this all occurs efficiently, seamlessly, legally, and within government guidelines. As you can imagine on some days this involves me calling upon my juggling skills-or those of my executive assistant, to ensure that what we need to get done *is done*.

As an example I have provided you with an example of my diary – a *day in the life of Andrew Metcalfe* so to speak. Now I won't claim to send the invitations for all of these appointments, indeed nor will I claim to be able to be open the electronic diary, however I will claim the credit for undertaking such an agenda every single day.

It is, as you can imagine, challenging. At the same time I get to work with a number of talented people within my department, and also externally. I administer a program that is at the very heart of nation building, and it is a role that I find very rewarding.

To add context, I'd like to drill down on some of the divisions within the department to give you more perspective on the wide range of issues that my we manage.

[SLIDE 4 – Border Security, Refugee and International Policy Division]

Firstly I'd like to have a look at the Border Security, Refugee and International Policy Division:

- Branches:
  - Principal Advisor
  - Humanitarian
  - Onshore Protection
  - International Cooperation

- Border Security Policy
- Regional Cooperation
- Geneva

[SLIDE 5 – Visas and Offshore Services]

As a contrast, let's drill down on our Visas and Offshore Services Division:

- Branches:
  - Global Manager Visas (Skilled and Family) and Queensland State Director
  - Global Manager Visas (Temporary) and West Australia State Director
  - Global Manager Operational Integrity and South Australia State Director
  - Global Manager Services Centres
  - Global Manager Health
  - Offshore Biometrics Workforce
  - Regional Directors Offshore

These are only examples of only two of the department's fifteen divisions. As you can imagine, considering the broad spectrum of my department's reach, the other thirteen are just as varied in nature of work. While the group structure I described earlier is designed to allow each group to essentially manage their core business within a broader umbrella, it is my job as Secretary to ensure this does not occur in isolation from each other. Indeed the group structure is designed to remove bad practices such as this, or a 'silo effect' from occurring.

## Leadership Behaviours

I'd like to turn to how, as Secretary, I do this.

Our department's motto is *People our Business*. It is designed to encapsulate the very essence of what we do – working with people. Indeed, as the leader of such a diverse and challenging department it is essential that I ensure that my senior leaders *work with people*. This is a very simple concept, but can be applied within every facet of my department's work. For example:

- As a leader I must *work with people* to ensure that they are the right people for the jobs and empower them to do what they need to do.
- As leaders, my SES must *work with their people* to provide clear vision and meaningful direction.
- Across our departmental groups, we must *work with people* to ensure that we do not fall into the silo trap I spoke of earlier.
- As a senior leadership group, we must *work with people* to ensure that they are trained and well supported.
- Importantly, as departmental officers administering a very large and complex range of programs, we must *work with people* including other departments, service providers, clients, stakeholders and the community.

I believe that my department has made very significant progress in leadership behaviours over recent years. These values are incorporated in my department's 2010-11 Strategic Plan - I have provided copies of this for you today. You will note in the plan that the first part talks about what we value as a department - our departmental *triangle* setting out the very core of what we do. I'll briefly go through this with you.

[SLIDE 6 – DIAC Values]

At its core:

- Fair and reasonable dealings with clients
- An open and accountable organisation
- Well developed and supported staff

Supporting this:

- Evidence based work – ensuring that ‘what we do’ is based on sound data
- Humanity – ensuring that we do our work within the APS core values, extending to our clients and stakeholders
- High Performance – ensuring that we value and reward a culture of high performance

Surrounding all of this is the issue of integrity. As many of you would be aware the visa system and our national borders are fraught with issues relating to integrity. Entry to Australia and remaining here are very valuable commodities, and one could argue we hold one of the most valuable instruments of any government department-the ability to grant Australian Citizenship. As a central agency involved in border management, at times we need to be proactive in our management of this issue. The following video provides an example of the way in which we have done this through a communication strategy aimed at victims of people smugglers developed by our National Communications Branch:

[SLIDE 7 – Slide - Video clip – Left behind]

This example focuses on one of our many responsibilities - as I’ve indicated there are many more that are varied and far reaching. As a contrast to the last video the following clip provides a short snapshot of the various areas across the department:

[SLIDE 8 – Slide - Video clip – A day in the life]

Consider some of the issues I have spoken to you about today, and apply them to these situations. Administrative and policy work, visa processing, compliance work, border control, dealing with clients, dealing with stakeholders, dealing with the Minister and other government departments.

When I was appointed as the department's secretary in 2005 a key point I made to my SES was that leadership is not something that just happens - it is about providing a clear understanding of expectations so that we can build capability and support leaders in their roles. It is about creating the environment for people to succeed, to achieve results. Since that time I have ensured that leaders within the department focus on the following:

[SLIDE 9 – Leadership behaviours]

- providing vision and meaningful direction;
- operating consistently with the things that we value;
- communicating constantly and meaningfully;
- creating the environment for success;
- functioning as team players; and
- persisting to achieve good outcomes.

I think we have done well to integrate these leadership values into the department - my challenge now is to ensure that we continue to ensure that they become the norm-our culture.

## **Conclusion**

I hope that my talk and the materials you have been provided with have given you an insight into the role of senior leadership within the Australian Public Service. It is a role that is challenging, but very rewarding.

In closing I'd like to leave you with a short video that shows, despite what some media commentators say, that everyday the department does exceptional work, and we are involved in inspirational stories of people.

[SLIDE 10 – Slide - Video clip - Reunification of separated twins]

[SLIDE 11 – Questions]

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