[**Danielle Wood to become first woman to head Productivity Commission**](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/sep/06/danielle-wood-who-is-productivity-commission-head)

**Labor appoints well-known Grattan Institute chief after senior Victorian treasury official Chris Barrett pulls out of recruitment process**

[**Peter Hannam**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/peter-hannam)Wed 6 Sep 2023 14.13 AEST

The Albanese government has appointed Danielle Wood, a former [Productivity Commission](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/productivity-commission) economist, to head the institution after its first choice, Chris Barrett, pulled out.

Wood, 43, is currently the chief executive of the Grattan Institute, a think tank, and will become the first woman to head the commission in its century of various government incarnations.

Barrett, now a deputy secretary within Victoria’s treasury, had previously been named as head of the Productivity Commission. He opted to remain in Victoria after that state’s treasury secretary, David Martine, quit, leaving an opening that Barrett will now fill, the [Victorian government announced on Wednesday](https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/statement-secretary-dtf).

“Ms Wood is an outstanding economist who will bring exceptional public policy expertise to the Productivity Commission,” the treasurer, Jim Chalmers, said on Wednesday. “Her track record of leadership and innovative research at the Grattan Institute will greatly contribute to the PC’s mission.”

Wood’s appointment comes as Australia’s productivity rate has been at its lowest in more than six decades, [the commission said last year](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/03/environmental-and-covid-challenges-threaten-australias-productivity-rate-after-slowest-growth-in-60-years). The outgoing Reserve Bank governor, [Philip Lowe, has repeatedly warned](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jun/09/australias-productivity-plunge-why-is-the-reserve-bank-concerned-and-should-we-panic) that weak gains – or even falls – in the output per hour worked would put a brake on real wage increases without stoking inflation.

Wood said the commission was “a critical institution and has a big role to play in helping Australia deal with the major shifts underway in the economy and looking for new ways to turn them to our advantage”.

“The PC has been a hugely important organisation to me personally – it’s a privilege to be returning and an honour to have the opportunity to lead it at such an important time,” she said.

Originally from Adelaide, Wood graduated with an honours degree in economics from Adelaide University and has master’s degrees in both economics and competition law from Melbourne University.

Her previous roles include serving as the principal economist and director of merger investigations at the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and working as a senior PC research economist. Wood is also president of the Economic Society of Australia and a long-time advocate for women in the profession.

Wood will start in her new role “as soon as possible”, pending the governor general’s approval, Chalmers said, adding he wished Barrett well “with future endeavours”.

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Grattan’s board chair, Lindsay Maxsted, said the think tank was “very disappointed to be losing Danielle, but the government has made a fine appointment”.

‘Those involved in public policy in Australia know that Danielle is an exceptional economist, with an ability to break down a problem, pinpoint its causes, and then imagine and design practical solutions,” Maxsted said [in a statement](https://grattan.edu.au/grattan-institute-launches-search-for-new-ceo-after-danielle-wood-accepts-appointment-as-chair-of-the-productivity-commission/).

“Everyone at Grattan also knows Danielle as a thoughtful and welcoming colleague, a strategist, and an inspiring leader. She leaves with the best wishes of all of us.”

[Barrett’s appointment to the role in July](https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/media-releases/new-chair-productivity-commission) had drawn some criticism, as he had previously been chief of staff for former Labor treasurer Wayne Swan at a time when Chalmers was working in that office.