Unit 5, 13-15 Stokes St
Lane Cove North NSW 2066
0434 715.861
scribepj@bigpond.com

15 August 2023

Institute of Public Administration
PO Box 4349,
Kingston ACT 2604

Dear Sir or Madame

**Australia’s recent crop of politicians and senior bureaucrats have been
*slow learners* with *short memories***

**A properly resourced Public Service, has in the past and can in the future, achieve *economies of scale*, not attainable by drawing from *outside the tent***

Arguably the most outstanding ‘public servant’ since Federation was Gerard “Gerry” Gleeson who served as Secretary of the NSW Premier's Department for 12 years until June 1988, much of it under Premier, Neville Wran.

Gerry was an outstanding public servant and spirited individual whose contribution made a patent difference to many of the facilities and institutions that add to the quality of life for citizens of NSW and Australia.

[**Known as Premier Neville Wran’s ‘*Mr Fixit***](https://www.smh.com.au/national/gerald-gleeson-the-man-who-became-neville-wrans-mr-fixit-20180101-h0c2rn.html)*’*, Gerry headed up the Premier’s Department from 1976 through to 1988 where he led the NSW Government through huge projects like Darling Harbour and the Bicentenary.

Perhaps Gerry Gleeson’s greatest legacy was his publication in the Australian Journal of Public Administration (March 1991) ‘**DECADE FOR DEBATE’** (1st Attachment) which recognised the enormous contribution of Australia’s Commonwealth and State Public Service departments/agencies.

Below are two pertinent extracts from Bob Hawke’s publication
**CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION** (2nd Attachment) that assist the resonance and significance of Gerry” Gleeson’s seminal publication ‘**DECADE FOR DEBATE’ (**16 pgs)**.**

“The public sector is a substantial employer and producer in its own right, **and its functions in regard to the private sector, such as taxation, regulation, economic analysis and policy advice, have assumed critical importance in determining the overall efficiency of our economy**.”

“The business of government must be the provision of the greatest public good at the least private cost - **and the public service must achieve those ends without losing its professional capacity to serve governments of differing political views and with different policy priorities**.”

During his 12 years’ tenure as Secretary of the NSW Premier's Department, Gerry Gleeson, experienced the material *economies of scale* that most ‘public service’ departments then displayed due to a collegiate, loyal, committed and a co-operative working collaboration. Those personal traits enabled synergies / substantive *economies of scale* because committed, capable, habitually selfless employees that had often worked together for several years and therefore knew the reliability and skills of each other, thereby enhancing synergies*.*

Professional and technical knowledge of the NSW public service, a proven track record; Gerry Gleeson had the lot and never backed-off from his beliefs.

Attachment C contain extracts from page 11 and page 14 of ‘**DECADE FOR DEBATE’**. The immediate extract alluded to a concern about the ‘public service’ out-sourcing its responsibilities/obligations, often to companies it was chartered to regulate. Below are key snippets:

Pg 11

 **“I will mention two other trends that irritate me. The first is the rapidly growing use of external consultants to advise on matters to many of which, in my view, they do not bring any special expertise or experience**. Hardly a week passes that I do not read a public advertisement seeking expressions of interest to examine and report on fundamental departmental matters. As secretary of a department I would be ashamed (or perhaps too proud is more accurate) before my minister to have to seek external help on anything but exceptional matters. I should be ensuring that I have high quality staff around me willing, able and competent to provide such advice. Today the public sector is frequently using personnel consultants and hence seems incapable of selecting its own senior staff - yet we used to have a proud record in respect of personnel practices and procedures. The public sector is now calling on external help to……. “

 Pg 14

“First, I was very fortunate because of the personality of the Premier from 1976 to 1986 Neville Wran - a man with personal charm, of great intellect, of extraordinary ability, a superb politician, one who constantly   demanded excellence. **He trusted me, he had confidence in me and he defended me frequently**. That relationship in itself provided great personal satisfaction.

**Then what stood out was the satisfaction about the quality of the policy advice and management service given to the Premier and cabinet by my department**.”

My father, Thomas Edward Johnston, worked for the PMG (now after privatisation known as Telstra) for 43 years, retiring in the early 1980s. The commitment to always serve to the absolute best of his ability was palpable, not just within him, but amongst fellow PMG employees. With three young children my father took time off work to study and attain an Electrical Engineering degree from NSW University that facilitated his responsibilities. That was back in an era before scholarships and cadetships. Hence our family tightened its belt for a few years. [**A colleague in the PMG was Jack Black who was one of the most successful contestants on the popular BP ‘Pick A Box’ mental knowledge program hosted by Bob Dyer**](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0872060/mediaviewer/rm2452948993/?ref_=tt_ov_i). The PMG at least ‘til the mid-1980s possessed a wealth of loyal and committed employees who generally signed-up for life and were habitually ‘*loyal to the core*’.

ABC *‘Four Corners’* recent program *“*[**Shadow State: How consultants infiltrated government**](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-06/shadow-state%3A-how-consultants-infiltrated/102686146)*”* focused on *The Big Four* accounting firms consulting for government departments and costing the taxpayer billions of dollars each year, with little transparency and almost no accountability. PwC has recently attracted damaging headlines over its use of confidential government information to help its clients avoid tax. *Four Corners* revealed unacceptable practices by one of Canberra's biggest players: KPMG. Through forensic examination and whistleblower accounts, the program revealed KPMG has faced accusations of repeatedly "wasting" public money while contracted by the Depart. of Defence. The investigation also revealed controversies and conflicts of interest in other firms like Deloitte, Accenture and PwC.

*Prima facie*, since the turn of the century the aforementioned loyal, skillful and committed public service has eroded, ostensibly because politicians and senior bureaucrats lost sight of the substantive ‘*economies of scale*’ attainable from sourcing intelligent, skillful Australians who want to serve the community; Australians where the size of the pay-packet *is not the be all and end all*.

Seemingly in more modern times the pertinent Minister appoints the Head of the department/agency s/he is responsible for. That practice appears in violation of the [**Values and Code of Conduct in Practice for the Aust Public Service**](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.apsc.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2021-03%2FIn-practiceweb.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)and comparable codes of behaviour within State Govts.

4th Attachment contains three pages green highlighted from a 70 pages doc titled
[**Values and Code of Conduct in Practice for the Aust Public Service**](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.apsc.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2021-03%2FIn-practiceweb.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)**.** The three pages in 4thAttachment contain stern obligations to act in the best interests of the public and not to be negligent.  For example:

2.3 **Providing information**

2.3.1 In doing their work, employees are expected to exercise reasonable care in providing information. Information may be sought and provided face to face, over the telephone, electronically or in writing. In all cases it is important to have regard to the following:

1. **employees have a duty to exercise reasonable care and diligence to ensure that information provided is accurate**

### Care and diligence in connection with employment

3.3.5      **Employees are required to act with care and diligence in connection with APS employment**.

3.3.6      Care and diligence have their ordinary dictionary meanings of ‘serious attention and solicitude to work’ and ‘earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken’.[[1]](#endnote-1)[i] The standard of care and diligence required of an employee may depend on their role and level of responsibility. **For example, the level of care and diligence required of senior managers responsible for the delivery of a program of work may be higher than that of other employees delivering single elements of that program**. It is expected that employees are fair minded and take reasonable steps to keep themselves informed, capable and aware of the law when exercising their role and responsibilities.

3.3.7      In some cases, the skills and experience of the employee may be relevant to whether they have acted with care and diligence. For example:

a.    an employee who has received training in a specialist skill may be expected to exercise those skills—a person who was known not to have those skills could not reasonably be expected to exercise them

b.    an employee with many years of relevant experience might reasonably be expected to discharge their duties more effectively than an employee who had no previous directly relevant experience.Section 4: Managing information.

4.1.3     Australian Public Service (APS) employees must be able **to demonstrate that their actions and decisions have been made with appropriate consideration, with care and diligence, and using Commonwealth resources properly.**

Yours sincerely

Phil Johnston

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)