



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Productivity Commission

2017–21 Corporate Plan



From the Chair



The Productivity Commission and its predecessor organisations have made a major contribution to the performance of the Australian economy and Australians' living standards.

This has been through detailed policy advice which has explored the full range of policy linkages and risks of unintended consequences.

The Commission is continuing its traditional role in providing advice on trade policy, infrastructure, regulation, and industry. Current global and national developments have renewed the focus in some of these areas.

Economic reform options are also being explored in the service and social policy sectors. The Commission is uniquely well placed to contribute to these national priorities, and to this end we have been building a capacity to contribute policy relevant advice in social and environmental policy areas. We are developing our capacity to provide assessment and advice in respect of water policy.

We will commence reviews of nationally significant inter-governmental funding agreements, while continuing to report on the performance of government services. In addition to our ongoing reporting on outcomes for Indigenous people, we will develop a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. And we will continue to focus our self-initiated research on policy relevant topics.

The quality and integrity of our work relies heavily on the capability and commitment of our people, and we will continue to invest in their ongoing professional development.

The 2017-21 Productivity Commission Corporate Plan, for the four reporting periods 2017-18 to 2020-21, is presented in accordance with Section 35(1)(a) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. The plan will be reviewed annually to reflect changes in our operating environment.

Peter Harris
Chair

Our purpose

The Commission's purpose, as embodied in the *Productivity Commission Act 1998*, is to provide Governments and the Australian community with information and advice that better inform policy decisions to improve Australians' wellbeing. To do this we apply robust, transparent analysis; and we adopt a community-wide perspective.

What we do

The Commission is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians.

The Commission is an advisory body. We do not administer government programs or exercise executive power. We contribute by providing quality, independent advice and information to governments, and through the communication of ideas and analysis.

The Commission is an independent agency of the Australian Government, located within the Treasury portfolio. Our activities cover all levels of government and encompass all sectors of the economy, as well as social and environmental issues.

Our core function is to conduct public inquiries at the request of the Australian Government on key policy or regulatory issues bearing on Australia's economic performance and community wellbeing.

The Commission also acts as secretariat to the inter-governmental Review of Government Service Provision, under the auspices of the Council of Australian Governments; has review functions in respect of national water planning; has functions to contribute to better evaluation of policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians; has review functions in respect of nationally significant sector-wide inter-governmental funding agreements; and has a role in advising and investigating complaints on the competitive neutrality of Commonwealth Government business activities.

How we work

We are evidence based in our research and analysis, which requires us to maintain strong consultation and engagement capabilities.



We operate independently

The Commission operates under the powers, protection and guidance of its own legislation. Its independence is formally exercised under the *Productivity Commission Act 1998* through the Chairman and Commissioners, who are appointed by the Governor-General for fixed periods.

The Commission has its own budgetary allocation and permanent staff, operating at arm's length from other government agencies. While the Government initiates our major tasks, our findings and recommendations are always based on our own analysis and judgments.



Our processes are transparent

Our advice to government, and the information on which it is based, are all open to public scrutiny. We publish all our working papers and models which have contributed to our conclusions. We run public hearings on our draft reports, and we use roundtables and seminars to seek informed input.

Our environment

Productivity enhancing reform will continue to be necessary for Australia to be able to maintain growth in living standards and meet additional challenges, including the ageing of the population.

We are but one source of policy advice to Australian Governments. However, successive Australian Governments, regardless of political persuasion, have sought our independent advice on better public policy design. Typically those areas are contentious, complex or may have a significant impact on different groups within the community.

Our capability

We seek to maintain a capability that provides rigour of analysis, transparency of process, and independence and balance in our conclusions.

Our major source of funding is from the Australian Government for operating expenses of approximately \$34 million per year. The average staffing level is expected to be around 174 for the period of this plan.

While we need to maintain our infrastructure and technical support, the majority of this funding will continue to be directed towards attracting and retaining high calibre staff that provide the intellectual and analytical capability that we need to maintain the quality of our work. This includes ensuring our modelling capabilities are fit for purpose for policy relevant research.

Flexible resource allocation to make the best use of our capabilities will be a continuing priority for the management group.

We will also maintain our capability to engage effectively and openly with all interested parties to inform high quality analysis and policy advice.

We will continue to develop our capacity to promote the outcomes of our work through different media during the period of this plan.

Our management of risk

The Chairman of the Commission is the accountable authority.

Our risk management plan sets out our approach to managing our risks. We maintain an active risk register, and an external judgment capability on our Audit Committee.

As a small, but high profile agency regularly facing criticism from sectional or partisan interests, we face risks to our existence from time to time.

Aside from this — an inherent part of the task — the risks that really matter to us are maintaining our reputation, via the quality of our work, and ensuring that our consultation processes remain relevant. Our key strategy for dealing with these risks is to test our propositions openly, through extensive engagement with interested parties and the public.

We also have risks related to attraction and retention of quality staff. Maintaining capacity and capability will be a constant management focus over the course of the plan.

Our performance

The outcome objective against which our overall performance is assessed is:

Well-informed policy decision making and public understanding on matters relating to Australia’s productivity and living standards, based on independent and transparent analysis from a community-wide perspective.

Assessment of our performance is complicated by our being one contributor among many to any policy outcome. Furthermore, as our public inquiry and research outputs contribute to public debate and policy development across a range of complex and often contentious issues, our contribution is best considered over the medium term.

Government decisions in response to our inquiry reports and commissioned research studies provide a tangible indication of their usefulness to the Government, Parliament and the broader community.

Even when our specific recommendations are not supported by government, our reports and analysis can play a significant role in informing governments, parliaments and the community about the trade-offs in different policy choices.

We aim to complete projects, reports and associated activities that are of a high quality, useful, comprehensive and timely.

A summary of our performance framework is illustrated below:

Our purpose	Well-informed policy decision making and public understanding relating to Australia’s productivity and living standards			
What we do	Inquiries Government commissioned public inquiries	Research Government commissioned and self-initiated research	Performance reporting and analysis Commissioned by Government or COAG	
How we do it	Transparency	Robust analysis	Community-wide perspective	Clear and engaging communication
Our performance criteria	<p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuable source of robust evidence-based analysis to inform public policy in Australia Generating effective public debate Recognition that our approach to evidence-based policy analysis is worthy of consideration by other governments <p>Delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging effectively with the community Open and transparent processes Timely reporting 			
Our core capabilities	High calibre staff		Systems and support to engage effectively	

Indicators of performance include: our work being widely referenced in public policy forums; projects and reports meeting commissioned timelines; and open and transparent processes being followed. We rely mainly on qualitative indicators given the nature of our work.

We will continue to report annually against these indicators, as well as other general assessments of our performance that may be evident from year to year, including drawing from internal evaluation and using case studies. We also intend to conduct a major qualitative survey of policy makers, inquiry participants and peers every three years to help gauge the relevance, analytical rigour and clarity of our work, as well the effectiveness of our participatory processes, our openness and transparency. We will conduct the first survey in 2017-18.

Our individual topic reports also record the extent of consultation with, and participation by, interested parties, and the extent of peer review.

A range of indicators will inform our performance assessment as follows:

	PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT WILL BE INFORMED BY SURVEY RESPONSES AND REVIEW OF OTHER INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Impact	<p>The Productivity Commission is a valuable source of robust evidence-based analysis to inform public policy in Australia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey responses (Qualitative) • Number of major projects commissioned by government (Quantitative) 	Triennial Annual
	<p>The Productivity Commission generates effective public debate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey responses (Qualitative) • Composite indicator of success in generating effective public debate (Qualitative) based on internal review for each report of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - degree of acceptance of recommendations - media mentions - mentions in Parliament - report downloads • Requests to present (Quantitative) 	Triennial Annual Annual
	<p>The Productivity Commission is recognised as a model for evidence-based policy analysis worthy of consideration by other governments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views of international bodies and interest from other governments in PC approach (Qualitative) 	Periodic
Delivery	<p>The Productivity Commission engages effectively with the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey responses (Qualitative) • Composite indicator or opportunity for public participation (Qualitative) based on internal review for each project of engagement including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - holding of public hearings - holding of roundtable discussions - holding of workshops with technical experts - use of issues paper, draft report and two rounds of submissions 	Triennial Annual
	<p>The Productivity Commission's processes are open and transparent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey responses (Qualitative) • Key data sets and/or modelling made available (Qualitative) 	Triennial Annual
	<p>The Productivity Commission delivers reports within agreed timeframes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of reports delivered on time (Quantitative) 	Annual

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