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"Role of Governments, Cabinet and the Public  
Service"

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## **The role of Governments, Cabinet and the Public Service**

Dr Adam Graycar

Head, Cabinet Office

Department of the Premier and Cabinet

August 2006

1

I am very glad to have the opportunity to speak to you today for two reasons. The first is the importance of the topic of how Governments and Cabinet work. You will no doubt be overwhelmed by all you have already heard today but I hope you will feel that you have an appreciation of what we do as public servants and the system we work within.

The other reason I am glad to be able to meet you all today is that I would like this to be the beginning of an ongoing relationship between you and Cabinet Office. As we in Cabinet Office are the group within Government that is responsible for briefing the Premier on every proposal that goes before Cabinet, it is in both our interests to develop good dialogue. We have a good understanding of all of the other agencies within Government and the processes of Cabinet and Parliament and we are happy to help you at any time with queries or advice.





## Snapshot of the SA Government

- The government manages the State Budget of \$10 billion
- There are 15 Ministers sharing 46 portfolios
- 13 main Departments
- 86,885 public sector employees (72,141 FTEs) as at June 2004 which represented 12.1% of persons employed in SA
- 58% (41,962.4 FTEs) employed in Administrative Units, 42% (30,178.6 FTEs) in other public sector organisations eg Statutory bodies





## ■ What do Governments do?



Generally speaking a government exists to ensure the public good and welfare of its constituents. Governments pursue their objectives and election commitments through the development of public policy.

Bridgman and Davis say in The Australian Policy Handbook that “public policy is how politicians make a difference. Policy is the instrument of governance, the decisions that direct public resources in one direction but not another. It is the outcome of the competition between ideas, interests and ideologies that impels our political system”.

Every week Ministers in South Australia sit around the Cabinet table with a pile of documents, the volume and complexity of which would challenge anybody.

Knowing what policies to pursue challenges governments continually. Knowing what is the best course of action for practitioners is an equally important challenge.



## The role of Ministers

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- Premier assigns responsibilities
- Responsible to Parliament for portfolio areas assigned by the Premier





***"In the ordinary course of administering a recognised part of the government of the state..."***

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- direct & control statutory bodies & public corporations
- Obtain, retain and publish information
- Make delegated legislation
- Direct and control statutory bodies and public corporations



- Make contracts
- Make payments
- Buy and sell goods
- Lease land
- Build works



## The Role of Cabinet

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- What is Cabinet?
  - Cabinet is the central decision making body of government
  - Cabinet considers the political, policy and administrative implications of a proposal and settles a government position

Cabinet is appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Premier. It is chaired by the Premier. In South Australia all 15 Ministers sit in Cabinet.

All significant matters are required to be brought to Cabinet. These include:

- strategic policy
- legislative proposals
- inter governmental issues
- administrative matters
- financial matters



## Cabinet's Workload

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- In 2004 there were:
  - 53 normal Cabinet meetings
  - 65 special Cabinet meetings
  - Approx. 1480 Cabinet submissions
  - Approx. 530 sub-committee matters
  - Approx. 730 Cabinet notes
  - Approx. 2920 decisions on recommendations were made (around 2560 approved)





## The Role of the Public Service

- Public servants are part of the executive arm of government
- The work of public servants is driven by the policy priorities of the government of the day



There are several critical foundations of the public service.

We need a neutral, professional public service that provides advice to elected officials, enforces laws and regulations and ensures the delivery of services to citizens.

We need an accountability regime with many checks and balances in the system to ensure continuous respect for the public interest.



## Policy-making

- Nine features of policy making
  - Forward looking
  - Outward looking
  - Innovative, flexible, creative
  - Evidence based
  - Inclusive
  - Joined up
  - Evaluation
  - Review
  - Learns lessons



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10

(Source: Better Policy Making)

- Forward looking – takes a long term view, based on statistical trends and informed predictions of the likely impact of policy
- Outward looking – takes account of factors in the national and international situation
- Innovative and creative – questions established way of dealing with things and encourages new ideas; open to comments and suggestions from others
- Using evidence – uses best available evidence from a wide range of sources
- Inclusive – takes account of the impact on the needs of all those directly or indirectly affected by the policy
- Joined up – looks beyond institutional boundaries to the Government's strategic objectives
- Evaluates – builds systematic evaluation of early outcomes into the policy process
- Reviews – keeps established policy under review to ensure it

continues to deal with the problems it was designed to tackle

- Learns lessons – learns from experience of what works and what doesn't



## Developing Good Public Policy

“Good process cannot guarantee good policy but it does encourage rigour and prevent elementary mistakes.”

**Bridgman and Davis:** *The Australian Policy Handbook*  
(3rd Edition, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2004)



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11

In public policy there are some perennial issues:

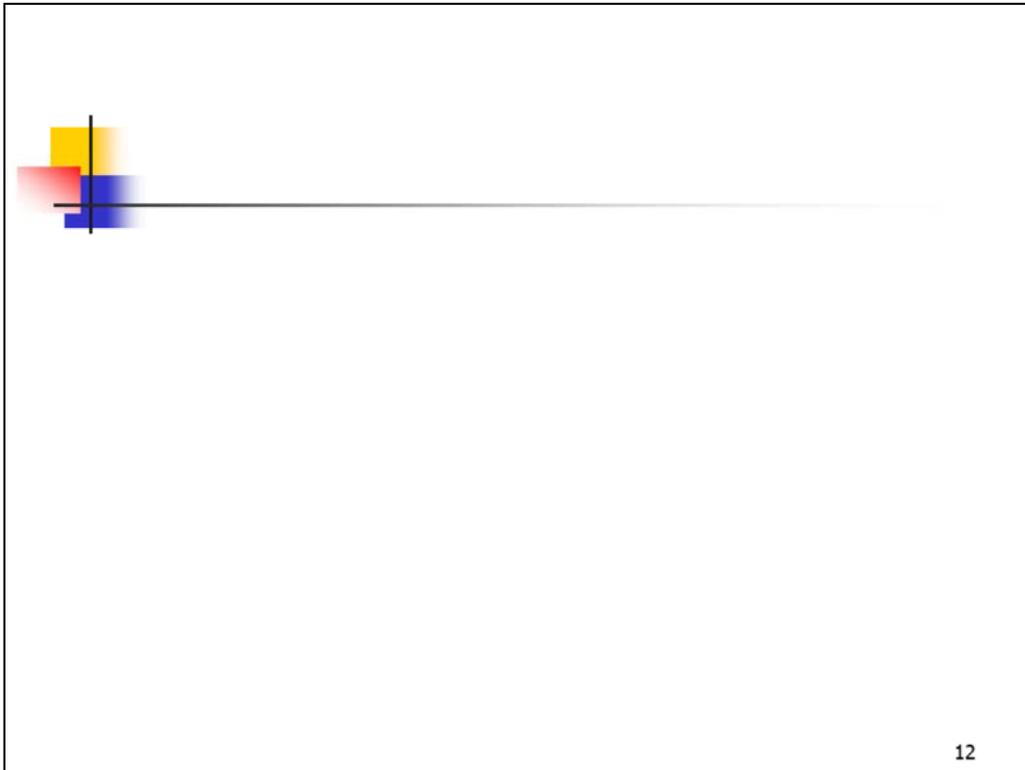
- How to ensure that our education system provides the most appropriate education for our kids
- How to make our diverse population strive for high standards of living while preserving our environment for the future
- How to make sure there is clean water for everybody when you turn on the tap
- How to stop people dying on the roads
- How to spread 40 years of earnings across 80 years of life

Many of the questions are perennials, but the answers change

- Who should pay for these things?
- Who should deliver certain services?
- Should the rich pay the same as the poor?
- If Bill Gates says its okay – is it?
- Should government steer more and row less or vice-versa?

How do we develop and maintain the skills to deal with the hardest

policy questions – about people and their lives and aspirations, about the industrial climate, about the sustainability of our national resources, about the protection of our borders?



We grapple continually and relentlessly in the State Government with cross-cutting issues such as water resources, population policy, ageing issues, workforce development issue, technology and society, housing, transport etc

To take but one example, consider the implications of an increasing number of people in our community experiencing mobility difficulties, whether due to disability or ageing. There is obviously a transport dimension because we can no longer assume that people can drive their car or walk a few hundred metres to the bus or train stop. There are going to be implications for our disability services and our health sector - we not only need to have the local GP or hospital services, we also need people to be able to access them. And we haven't yet started to consider the stock of social capital - if it is healthy, there will be strong networks of support and people will want to help each other out.

In the longer term, if more people in the community have limited mobility we will need to think about how this might affect future housing and planning needs. Local government will have a role - might community transport provide an option? is the local infrastructure is up to scratch? We may need to engage the

Commonwealth. So at a glance we can see that this one slice of a public policy issue has a myriad of intersections with other areas and tiers of Government. And this can change, depending on how we view the problem, and how we in turn propose to deal with it.

As Henry Kissinger once said, each success only buys an admission ticket to a more difficult problem.



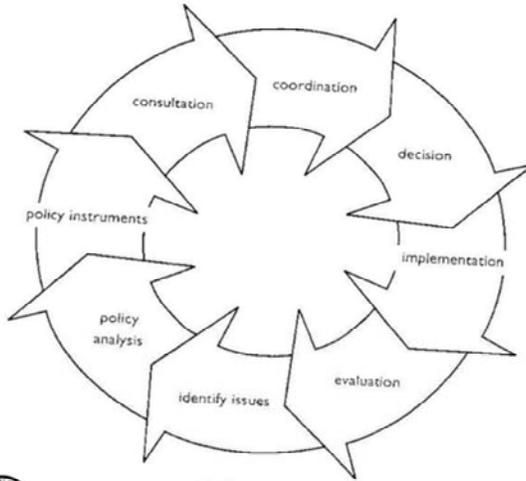
## The Policy Development Process

- There are various different models of a good policy process
- The *policy cycle* approach is probably the most useful
  - Policy develops through a standard sequence of tasks
  - The cycle approach stresses that government is a process





# The Australian Policy Cycle



**Bridgman and Davis: *The Australian Policy Handbook* (3rd Edition, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2004)**



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# Identifying Issues

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- The problem?





## Policy Analysis

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- How important is this problem?
- How much time and effort should be expended in seeking a solution?
- What is the best approach?





## Policy Instruments

- There are four main policy instruments
  - Advocacy
  - Money
  - Government action
  - Law



- Advocacy – educating or persuading to achieve policy objectives
- Money – using spending and taxing powers to shape activity beyond government
- Direct government action – delivering services through public agencies
- Law – legislation, regulation and official authority



## Consultation

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- A tool used to test the policy with the wider community and key stakeholders
  - Information
  - Consultation
  - Partnerships
  - Delegation



It is most important with consultation to acknowledge that whilst it has an identifiable place in the policy cycle consultation is actually continually occurring and shaping and reshaping the policy as it develops.



## Coordination

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- Government processes to minimise policy conflicts
  - Consultation
  - Cabinet process





## Decision

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- Cabinet's decision is the pivot of the public policy cycle
- Of the vast range of policy development activity being carried out across government, around 12 are presented to Cabinet each week for discussion and a decision.



Cabinet submissions are the basis for the Cabinet decision.

They follow a strict format and include:

- Economic, budget and financial implications
- Impact on community including small business, environment, regulatory impact, regional impact and social
- Spread and results of consultation

Properly prepared Cabinet submissions aid effective decision making and aid effective implementation.

In Cabinet Office our role is to analyse the submission and provide advice to the Premier and ensure that a whole of Government approach has been taken to develop the policy proposal.

Of course despite all the best efforts and following the rigour of the policy process there is no guarantee that the policy will be approved in the recommended form.



## Implementation

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- A good policy development process is of little value if the policy is not implemented
- Consider the implementation needs early to foresee any possible pitfalls





## Evaluation

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- The systematic and objective assessment of a government program
- The effectiveness of the policy is reviewed and a new cycle of analysis begins





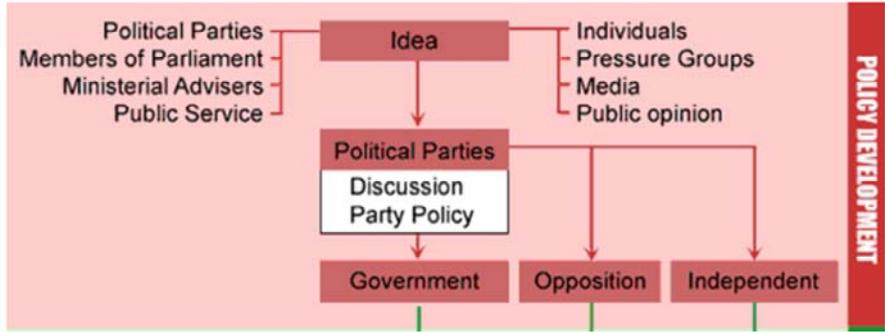
## Parliamentary processes

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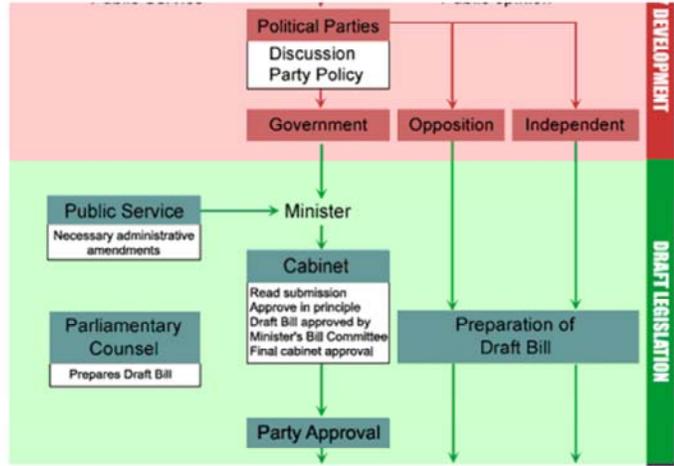
- Responsible Government:  
'government by representatives of the people who are chosen by the people.'



# The legislative process



# The legislative process





## Parliamentary processes

- Controls on the Executive
  - Legislation
  - Appropriation
  - Questions (on and without notice)
  - Annual reports
  - Parliamentary Committees
  - Ombudsman
  - Auditor-General

