



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Strengthening Evidence-based Policy in the Australian Federation

Roundtable Proceedings



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Volume 2: Background Paper

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The Productivity 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. Its role, expressed most simply, is to help governments make better policies, in the long term interest of the Australian community.

The Commission's independence is underpinned by an Act of Parliament. Its processes and outputs are open to public scrutiny and are driven by concern for the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

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Preface

The Productivity Commission's 2009 Roundtable aimed to promote discussion on how to strengthen the use of evidence to better inform policy decisions. This background paper was provided to participants to facilitate discussion by exploring what is meant by evidence-based policy, and examining how it might be implemented in practice. It was principally prepared by Terry O'Brien and Kristy Bogaards, from the Commission's Canberra office.

In 2008 and early 2009, the Commission's Chairman, Gary Banks, gave a number of presentations on evidence-based policy making, the most recent of these being an ANZSOG/ANU public lecture in Canberra titled *Evidence-based policy making: What is it? How do we get it?* (Banks, 2009). This paper complements and elaborates on that address. In particular, it expands on the principles sketched on pages 8 to 18 and the institutional ideas at pages 21 to 23.

The first section of the paper provides a definition of evidence-based policy and briefly examines some features of an evidence-based approach.

Section two sets out some high level principles for evidence-based policy making that identify the main recurrent issues in policy evaluation. Such principles could be useful to governments, officials, journalists and the general public in structuring their thinking about policy.

Section three examines the institutional arrangements that strengthen evidence-based policy by improving transparency, helping governments support each others' policy evaluation efforts and building evidence into the decision making process.