



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Advancing the Reform Agenda: Selected Speeches

Gary Banks

December 2012

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The Productivity Commission

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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Foreword

There is increasing recognition of the fundamental importance of productivity to Australia's future prosperity. But there is also much contention and confusion about what 'productivity' means, what is behind recent declines and how government policy can best promote productivity growth. The essays in this volume are broadly concerned with these questions. They have been chosen from among speeches delivered in a variety of forums since early 2010. They are organised here in two categories: those that focus primarily on the policy agenda and those that are concerned with how to get there.

As with the speeches published in an earlier compendium, a number were co-written with colleagues. Moreover, every speech benefitted greatly from wider feedback from within the Commission. In particular, a draft of my speech on the 'to do' list — the most recent and the first in this volume — was widely circulated among Commissioners and senior staff, whose comments and suggestions helped ensure that the final version was largely a collective view. Of course all of the speeches have had the advantage of drawing on the accumulated store of Commission research and policy advice.

Finally, with my third term as Chairman coming to an end, I take this opportunity to thank more generally all those with whom I have worked over the years. That includes above all the talented members of staff who have constituted the core of this institution's capability throughout its history. No doubt for many of our younger people today, the thought of staying on at the Commission as long as its Chairman would be incomprehensible. In my defence, I would say that I can think of no better place of work for someone who wants to make a difference to people's lives through good public policy, and doesn't mind how long it can take.

Gary Banks AO
Chairman
December 2012



Gary Banks AO

Gary Banks has been Chairman of the Productivity Commission since its inception in 1998. Throughout his career, he has also worked for all three of the Commission's predecessors — the Tariff Board, Industries Assistance Commission and Industry Commission. He spent nearly a decade working overseas with the GATT Secretariat in Geneva from the mid-1970s, as well as at the Trade Policy Research Centre, London. In the late 1980s, he was a consultant with the Centre for International Economics in Canberra. Since his first appointment as a Commissioner in March 1990, Gary has headed over two dozen public inquiries. As Productivity Commission Chairman, he has also chaired the Government Services Review process under the Council of Australian Governments. He headed the Australian Government's Regulation Taskforce in 2006 and was a member of the 1998 Review of Higher Education. He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2007, for 'services to the development of public policy in microeconomic reform and regulation'.

In early 2013, Gary Banks will take up a new role as Dean and Chief Executive of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, together with a Professorial Fellowship at Melbourne University.

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