
A welcome to ‘the Commission’s’ 30th anniversary celebration*

Gary Banks
Chairman
Productivity Commission

Ladies and gentleman, it is my pleasant duty to welcome you one and all — and to clear the airwaves on our video-conferencing facility for the Treasurer, who will address us shortly.

Thirty years ago today the legislation enacting the IAC was assented to. We in the Productivity Commission thought that we could not let such an anniversary pass without a celebration, or without producing a short history of the institution, which the Treasurer has kindly agreed to launch.

- Your attendance in such numbers here tonight, both in Canberra and in Melbourne, shows that you agree, for which we are grateful.

You can’t imagine how gratifying it is to me and my colleagues at the Commission to host such a gathering of people who have meant so much to the work of this organisation and its predecessors.

- All of you have shared a commitment to making Australia a better and more prosperous place through economic reform.
- And those of you who were present at the birth of the IAC will be especially conscious of how much reform was needed and how difficult the obstacles were.

In scanning the list of attendees again today I was planning to identify those more eminent guests whom I should single out in these introductory remarks.

* Remarks to a joint gathering in Melbourne and Canberra to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the creation of the IAC, 11 December 2003.

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- But it soon became obvious to me that there were far too many to mention in five minutes.

So let me therefore simply identify you by your ‘category’ or ‘role’, from the Commission’s perspective.

- I will nevertheless make a few exceptions, in the hope that you will indulge me when you hear who they are.

First, can I begin by welcoming the several heads, and many officials, of government departments and agencies — Commonwealth, State and ‘national’. You have played an increasing role over the years in shaping the Commission’s program of inquiries and research, for which we are grateful.

- And you have also had the key task of turning our reform proposals into concrete legislative or regulatory measures, as well as administering them.
- You have not always supported our advice, of course, but that is to be expected, given the contentious policy areas which form the Commission’s stock in trade.

Second, I welcome the heads and other members of a variety of industry associations, community organisations and companies who have attended tonight.

- Your active participation in the Commission’s public processes over the years has helped ensure the relevance and integrity of its findings and policy advice, even if, again, our bottom lines have not always coincided with yours.

Thirdly, it is a pleasure to see a contingent of academics and representatives of ‘think tanks’ here. The Commission has benefited greatly from the ideas and intellectual rigour that you have so willingly provided. Our links with academia are at least as strong today as those of the IAC in the 1970s. And indeed we continue to recruit some of you to our own ranks at various levels of the organisation.

- In welcoming you as a group, I hope you will allow me to make special mention of Prof. Max Corden. Max has been a source of inspiration and guidance to this organisation from its earliest days, and it is great to have Max back in Australia contributing to our activities once again, including in particular by giving the inaugural *Richard Snape Lecture* in October.

Fourthly, can I welcome the people from economic consulting firms who have come tonight — no doubt in part because of the expected networking opportunities!

- You have helped lift the quality of the policy discussion in our various inquiries and made us work harder to support our conclusions, which has been a good

thing all round. You have done that so well, of course, because most of you were trained at the Commission!

Next, can I hail those members of the press who are here, and others who couldn't make it. No matter how well or concisely we try to write our reports, at the end of the day most people only learn about what we say through your efforts. You have carried our message to the general public as well as to policy-makers themselves. And you have supported this institution at critical times in its history, when there was a desire to 'shoot the messenger'.

Next on my list are the political representatives and advisers — those at the coal face in initiating inquiries and translating ideas into actions. This institution has been lucky enough to have many political champions for its work over the past 30 years. Bert Kelly is of course the name that comes most readily to mind from the very early days. But this evening can I mention Stewart McArthur, whose recent efforts in defending tariff reform in his Victorian constituency have been firmly in the tradition of the original Modest Member.

Next, but not least, can I welcome Commissioners and staff, past and present, from the Industries Assistance Commission, Industry Commission and Productivity Commission.

- In particular, can I break my rule again, by welcoming four of the foundation Commissioners of the IAC — Colin Conron, Dave McBride, Roger Mauldon and Hilda Rolfe.
- The effectiveness of any organisation depends heavily on its people, and this institution has been blessed with committed, talented people at all levels through the years — and I'm pleased to confirm that this is just as true today.

Finally, before I introduce the Treasurer, can I welcome three past Chairmen : Bill Carmichael, Tony Cole and Greg Taylor. Apologies were received from Mike Codd, Steve Sedgwick and Bill Scales, all of whom had unavoidable commitments but sent their best wishes.

I know that Tony and Greg won't mind if I pay special tribute to Bill Carmichael, who as a close advisor to Alf Rattigan was instrumental in charting the important new directions of the Tariff Board in the latter 1960s and in designing and establishing the Industries Assistance Commission in the 1970s. As eventual Chairman of the IAC in the 1980s, he again played a key role in broadening its horizons beyond the traditional focus on industry assistance.

That must be the longest and most heartfelt welcome in history — at least in this institution’s history. But I have left my most important duty to last.

Peter Costello, Australia’s Treasurer, was responsible for creating the Productivity Commission out of the Industry Commission, EPAC and Bureau of Industry Economics. That turned out not to be a straightforward political task. But he saw it through and has strongly supported the Productivity Commission’s role and work ever since. Under Peter Costello, the Commission has acquired significant new functions and has been given the opportunity to contribute to important and diverse public policy issues — from the waterfront, to gambling, to broadcasting, to the Great Barrier Reef, Indigenous disadvantage and the affordability of First Home Ownership. Of course, he has never forgotten our roots and our traditional core business, making sure that those hardy perennials, TCF and PMV, also had a place on our agenda. What’s more, he was clearly also successful in ensuring that our recommendations were acted upon.

Can I ask you, therefore, ladies and gentlemen to welcome the Hon. Peter Costello to address us on the 30th Anniversary of ‘the Commission’.