

Executive Summary

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), as part of its reform agenda, tasked a combined Senior Officials/Heads of Treasuries working group to undertake a review of the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS), to consider:

- the extent to which the collection and publication of the data contained in the ROGS has enabled ongoing comparisons of the efficiency and effectiveness of Commonwealth and State government services;
- the degree to which data published in the ROGS has led to changes in the delivery of services by government;
- the ongoing usefulness of the ROGS to its government, non-government and community stakeholders; and
- the extent to which the Federal financial reforms agreed by COAG, and in particular the performance reporting framework in the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (IGA), will affect it.

In undertaking this task, the working group was required to consult with government, non-government and community stakeholders and take into account performance measurement arrangements within Australia or overseas.

The Report on Government Services

The ROGS is an annual publication which provides information to help compare the efficiency and effectiveness of government service delivery, focusing on the cost effectiveness (and, more recently, the equity), of government expenditure in key areas, within and between governments.

The publication of the ROGS is part of the Review of Government Service Provision, established in 1993, which is overseen by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP). The SCRGSP is chaired by the Chairman of the Productivity Commission, and comprises senior representatives from the First Ministers departments and Treasuries and Finance agencies of all governments, and

observers from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). It is supported by 12 sectoral working groups, the members of which come from sector-specific jurisdictional agencies (health, school education, vocational education and training, housing, children's services, police, courts and corrective services, emergency management, and aged care, disability and protection and support services) and provide expert input on their respective subjects. A secretariat is housed within the Productivity Commission.

The decision to establish the Review of Government Service Provision, its Steering Committee and, by extension, the ROGS, was taken by Heads of Government and Treasurers at the July 1993 Premiers' Conference. The Review's terms of reference were to develop performance indicators and collect and publish data to enable ongoing comparisons of the efficiency and effectiveness of Commonwealth and State government services, including intra-government services. The Review was also tasked with compiling and assessing service provision reforms implemented or under consideration by Commonwealth and State governments, providing case studies where appropriate.

The ROGS is the Steering Committee's response to its instruction to collect and publish data on service delivery, consistent with the performance indicators it has developed. The ROGS has not been used in any significant way to pursue the other aspects of the Review's work (compiling and assessing reforms and producing case studies). It *enables* comparisons of performance to be made, but does not make them itself.

EFFECTIVENESS

Performance Reporting and Performance Indicators

International and Australian research and experience finds that performance reporting can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of government services. For successful performance management, regular and continuous

monitoring is essential to determine the extent to which the desired outcomes have been achieved, and this requires structured reporting.

There is a growing commitment by all levels of government to the idea of regular and meaningful reporting on performance, both for internal management purposes and for accountability to the public.

The ROGS and Performance Reporting

The ROGS is a *learning and information exchange reporting system*, in which the collation and presentation of reliable, comparative performance data is the primary aim. It is not itself intrinsically analytical. It does not set targets nor does the ROGS seek to assess outcomes in terms of the impact on the well-being of the community which is the object of the services. Although comparison of government service provision exists in some other countries, there appears to be no equivalent to the systematic and comprehensive approach upon which the ROGS is based.

The two most frequent primary objectives of indicator systems are benchmarking sub-central government performance and measuring the efficiency of government spending. Other common primary purposes include promoting learning from good practice, improving quality of services and enhancing accountability. The ROGS pursues, or supports the pursuit of, all these objectives.

The ROGS uses a general performance framework, which identifies output indicators relating to equity, effectiveness or efficiency. It employs a sophisticated performance measurement approach, using a well-developed framework to guide its work, which contains most of the characteristics identified as belonging to a good performance measurement system.

Despite the separation in the work of the SCRGSP between the ROGS and the assessment of government service delivery reforms, it is clear that the aim of ROGS is to report comprehensively performance information that can be used for comparison and assessment. In turn, the comparison and assessment would then

promote government reform to improve service delivery, especially while also delivering cost effectiveness (better service at the same or reduced cost, or at least the same service at reduced cost).

Performance Indicators

The ROGS' first major role is to develop performance indicators and then to collect data against them.

The ROGS is valued by many within government and non-government organisations as a major source of such structured data. It has driven considerable data improvement since its inception. Performance indicators have been established where none previously existed and a system and requirements for data collection and publication have been developed which enjoy strong support in government and non-government organisations.

The majority of ROGS users consulted for the report were satisfied or very satisfied with the ROGS. Users find the quality and usefulness of the ROGS' indicators, data and explanatory text good or very good.

The ROGS' performance indicators have also been used to measure Australian governments' performance in other performance reporting, such as in the IGA's performance reporting framework and the *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

Although some of the data within the ROGS, such as health indicators, can be found elsewhere, the ROGS coverage is often broader and includes more indicators. And many stakeholders agree the value of the ROGS lies in its compendium approach to presenting data across several sectors of government service provision, both government and non-government organisations regarding the ROGS as a primary reference point because it is the only publication they are aware of that contains the data needed in one place.

A significant proportion of the ROGS data is *not* published elsewhere. For example, the ROGS is the only data source in the areas of justice, police and emergency services. All chapters and prefaces in the ROGS report at least some data not otherwise published.

Timeliness of Data

To be relevant for policy decision making and accountability, data published needs to be the most up-to-date possible. Current data is not always available for the ROGS and some may be several years old (for example, if based on some surveys or the census).

As a guiding principle, the ROGS tries to publish data that are as timely as possible. There may be a trade-off between the accuracy of data and its timeliness, because up-to-date data might have had fewer opportunities to undergo audit or validation. However, the data can be improved over time as better data are developed.

Data discrepancies affect jurisdictions' responses to the ROGS. The 'Jurisdictions' Comments' that appear in the ROGS often do not address the data and issues raised in the body of the document, but rather refer to more recent data that has not been included. This leaves the impression that the ROGS text and the comments are disconnected.

Enabling Ongoing Comparisons

The ROGS is frequently used to compare the efficiency and effectiveness of government services, consistent with its primary purpose. However, it is questionable as to whether data included in the ROGS is always able to provide meaningful comparisons between jurisdictions, particularly if there are significant differences in the types of services that are required, or in the way services are provided. Although the ROGS has produced a comprehensive amount of data, not all of it has been used effectively.

Other Uses of the ROGS

The ROGS has improved management information within jurisdictions, contributed to developing or revising policy and programs or decisions, assisted in understanding and comparing policy across jurisdictions, provided input to briefing for executives, ministers and the judiciary, provided data that can be applied to internal reporting and policy analysis, and improved government accountability. SCRGSP Working Group members share experiences of reforms, assist each other to improve data and their understanding of what their data mean. Working Group members have often collaborated outside formal ROGS processes to the mutual benefit of their jurisdictions.

Changes in the Delivery of Services by Government

It was intended that the ROGS would encourage governments to ‘lift their game’, invigorate reforms and improve service delivery. Reform was expected to be an outcome of the comparison and benchmarking of performance that the ROGS enabled.

It is not possible to prove on the available evidence that the ROGS has *directly* resulted in reform. References have been made to the ROGS in parliamentary committees, government data and research websites and also in government publications, but it has appeared nearly always as one of many sources cited. While the publication of the ROGS arguably has the *potential* to promote reform, there is little systematic use of the ROGS for this purpose. It seems clear that the ROGS has a role in informing, influencing or aspiring to policy change, but it does not provide the sole basis for reform. The value of the ROGS lies in its capacity to provide supplementary, supporting evidence of the need for change, rather than as a main driver of reform.

There is also evidence to suggest that the *process* of publishing the ROGS provides a valuable forum for government agencies from all jurisdictions to discuss and compare their service delivery performance.

The original terms of reference for the Review of Government Service Provision mention that 'case studies of particular reforms could be provided where appropriate' to complement the compilation and assessment of reforms. Case studies would provide an opportunity for more in-depth analysis, especially highlighting areas of good practice and performance. However, after two compilations of case studies on reforms were published, in 1997 and 1998, this became the 'dead letter' of the terms of reference.

It has been difficult for all jurisdictions to agree on what constitutes a national service provision reform, perhaps in part from the consensus nature of decision-making in the SCRGSP. Ultimately, tensions that exist in promoting reform are inevitable, and, in order to avoid the current default consensus model within the ROGS, there is a case for a body such as COAG to reinvigorate the imperative for a reform culture in performance reporting, including a re-statement of the ROGS' requirement for balance and objectivity.

APPROPRIATENESS

Is ROGS still Useful?

The ROGS plays a unique role in determining the equity, effectiveness and efficiency of government service delivery, as other government reporting processes in Australia do not address these matters.

The ROGS is valued by many within government and non-government organisations as a major data source. Its scope and content has grown significantly over time as governments' priorities change, as new performance indicators are developed and as improved data is available.

The uses and benefits of the ROGS, some of which were unanticipated at its inception, have also expanded over time. The use of the ROGS as a public accountability tool advances the commitment of all governments under the new federal financial relations framework to increase transparency of government

actions. Its role as a major data source contributes to a renewed emphasis, within government and academic spheres, on evidence-based policy.

The ROGS' focus remains on reporting outputs, despite moves to strengthen its outcomes focus in recent years. However, to ensure government services continue to deliver value for money, the measurement and reporting of performance in delivering these services is still warranted and there is still a role for the behind-the-scenes story of inputs and outputs. The federal financial framework continues to emphasise the measurement of outputs, along with objectives and outcomes.

The ROGS should continue to be the key tool to measure and report on the productive efficiency and cost effectiveness of government services and programs in the context of achieving a limited number of overarching headline outcomes.

Costs of the ROGS

Considerable support, both from government and non-government organisations, was expressed for the ROGS. On balance, the benefits of the ROGS were seen to exceed its estimated cost (at least \$1.6 million a year).

The New Federal Financial Framework

Significant changes have taken place in the reporting and assessment of government performance in service delivery since, in November 2008, COAG agreed on a new IGA that provides an overarching framework for the Commonwealth's financial relations with the States and Territories. The development of a new National Performance Reporting System (NPRS) is mandated by the IGA. The framework provides the opportunity to move, as far as possible, to a single, integrated national reporting system that will encompass the ROGS and other national data collections.

The NPRS will improve synergies between data collection, collation and analysis, and, ultimately, improve government performance reporting. As COAG has stipulated, the system must build on existing data infrastructure, and continuously improve performance data and reporting. This process will depend on collaborative

and cooperative effort on the part of relevant Ministerial Councils and data collection, collation and analysis agencies, including the SCRGSP.

Under the framework, the COAG Reform Council (CRC) provides annual reports to COAG containing performance information for all jurisdictions against National Agreement outcomes and performance benchmarks. These National Agreements cover the areas of health, school education, skills and workforce development, disability services, affordable housing and Indigenous reform. The CRC reports its own comparative analysis of the performance of governments in meeting the objectives of the National Agreements. The reports by the CRC will also highlight examples of good practice and performance so that, over time, innovative reforms or methods of service delivery may be adopted by other jurisdictions. To assist the CRC, the Productivity Commission will report to COAG every two to three years on the economic impacts and benefits of COAG's reform agenda.

Under the IGA, the SCRGSP is responsible for collating and preparing performance data for the National Agreements. This data is to be provided to the CRC within three months and no later than six months after the end of the relevant reporting period. These timelines will create pressure to improve the timeliness of data collections and reporting, especially in the areas covered by National Agreements.

This role places the SCRGSP at the centre of data collection for both the ROGS and National Agreement processes, and provides it with considerable scope to drive data improvement.

The new national performance reporting framework's stronger focus on the measurement of outcomes and outputs differs from the ROGS emphasis on comparative equity, effectiveness and efficiency, which spans inputs, outputs and outcomes. The differences in focus reflect the different purposes for which the reports have been designed. The CRC's ability to report on achievement of objectives and agreed outcomes and outputs under the COAG Reform Agenda will only be as good as the detailed data and indicators from which it draws (much of

which is also covered by the ROGS). In this sense, the COAG Reform Agenda has re-emphasised the importance of the ROGS.

Data Overlap between ROGS and National Agreement Data Collection

There is significant overlap between the performance indicators in the ROGS and those under COAG's National Agreements, not least because the latter adopted many of the measures developed by the SCRGSP for the ROGS. The CRC will be reporting on most of the sectors covered by the ROGS, with the exception of Justice, Emergency Management, and Protection and Support Services. The CRC is also tasked with reporting on Competition and Regulatory Reform, which is not covered by ROGS. The CRC will also report on Indigenous Reform, the data for which is not specifically covered by the ROGS, except where covered by other sectors, such as education and health. However, the ROGS' Indigenous Compendium reports against all of the COAG Reform Agenda objectives for Indigenous Australians.

Where the ROGS and the COAG Reform Agenda both seek performance data, the ROGS data collection is generally broader and deeper than that required by the COAG Reform Agenda. As well, definitional and use issues make any comparison indicative rather than precise.

The combination of overlapping data requirements and divergent reporting objectives suggest the two reporting processes are complementary. The principal issue remaining is to ensure data is only collected once, regardless of the uses to which it is subsequently put.

IMPROVEMENTS

The ROGS and the New Performance Framework

Based on work done for this report, it appears that by international standards, the ROGS is a sophisticated performance measurement tool, using a well-developed framework to guide its work. It has driven considerable data improvement since its inception and the number of areas covered has expanded. However, the working

group came to the view that the robustness of the performance indicators and the comprehensiveness, comparability and quality of the data could be improved. Its current informal principle-based approach to its scope and data improvement should be formalised and strengthened.

Priority should be given to the harmonisation between the ROGS and COAG reporting requirements to reduce the reporting burden and improve the timeliness of data collected for the ROGS. The duplication of collection and reporting should be minimised to provide any advantage for reporting timeliness.

For services that are not affected by the IGA, consideration could be given to more timely publication of data once it is available.

Should the Performance Framework and Indicators be Changed?

The importance of moving to 'a single, integrated, quality, national performance reporting system' that covers the ROGS and National Agreement reporting should not obscure that the ROGS' performance indicators have been developed over many years and the SCRGSP and its Working Groups and secretariat have devoted considerable energy to building a framework specifically geared towards the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of government service delivery. Adopting indicators from the National Agreements without first examining their fitness for the ROGS' purpose could reduce rather than enhance the ROGS' impact.

More attention to longitudinal time series for each jurisdiction, accompanied by some discussion of the implications for service delivery could possibly provide enhanced comparisons of performance, not only across snapshots of jurisdictions at a certain time, but to compare the jurisdiction against itself – which to some, may be a 'fairer' comparison. While it would not be desirable to increase the size of the ROGS in its present published form – this is already the subject of some adverse

comment – it might be possible to add increased coverage of longitudinal single jurisdiction comparisons in electronic form.

Terms of Reference

New terms of reference are required for the Review of Government Service Provision to enable it to reflect the new environment in which it will be operating. The current terms of reference are high-level in nature, not prescriptive and have enabled the ROGS to evolve over time. Given this, wholesale changes in the terms of reference seem inappropriate. Existing flexibility should be retained. Any changes should build on this solid foundation and ensure that the ROGS continues to play an important role in performance reporting.

The new terms of reference should be endorsed by COAG to underline the continued commitment of all governments to reporting on the delivery of services. A number of supporting principles have also been developed to guide the SCRGSP in its approach to its work. These are intended to be supplementary to the terms of reference and also should be endorsed by COAG.

Providing the Steering Committee with an identified role and place within the COAG framework could potentially enhance the authority and contemporary relevance of the ROGS, recognising that the new performance framework is still evolving. This would acknowledge that the ROGS needs to align closely with COAG's performance reporting framework, while still recognising the ROGS's different role and scope.

More emphasis on the public accountability aspect of the ROGS' role would be consistent with decisions taken by COAG in the context of its reform agenda. Since December 2007, COAG has emphasised the need for public accountability and transparency in government service delivery. The ROGS' role as a public accountability tool should be incorporated in the terms of reference, giving it a formal status as part of the ROGS' functions.

The relationship between the ROGS and the other national reporting mechanisms, including with the data collators and ministerial councils, should be clarified. The terms of reference should also include an ongoing review element, so the ROGS can be adapted to the new performance framework as it is being implemented. This could be one purpose of the triennial review of the ROGS recommended in this report.

The ROGS might provide more time series data, to aid comparisons over time. It would be worthwhile making this an explicit directive about this in the terms of reference.

Performance Indicators

There need to be improvements to the performance indicators so that comparability and timeliness are enhanced. By making a reference to continuous improvement of data, the Steering Committee should, over time, be able to work toward improved practices in data collection and enhanced comparability. Also, by taking a central role in quality assuring data the Steering Committee could act as a driver for improvements in quality and timeliness.

The robustness of the performance indicators and the comprehensiveness, comparability and quality of the data might be further improved, including considering the appropriateness of national definitions, and the quality and number of performance indicators.

The Steering Committee, its working groups and its Secretariat do have a program of review of performance indicators and data quality. However, in the light of the criticisms raised in the review process and the current variable utility of performance indicators, a thorough review of the existing indicators should be undertaken. This review would seek to:

- streamline the number of indicators,

- where possible, develop collection strategies for indicators for which data is currently not available,
- eliminate indicators for which data is not (and is unlikely to become) available, or which are no longer relevant, and
- improve comparability.

This review should be undertaken by the Steering Committee and an independent reference group in 2010 and report to COAG so its outcomes can be reflected in the 2012 report. The review should be conducted in close association with the Ministerial Council for Federal Financial Relation (MCFFR) review of data quality and timeliness and the development of the NPRS.

All performance indicators used for the ROGS should comply with the characteristics set out in the IGA — they should be: meaningful; understandable; timely; comparable; administratively simple and cost effective, and accurate — and be otherwise consistent with the NPRS.

Following the review of all performance indicators the Steering Committee should employ a culture of continuous improvement. This may include keeping logs of data issues to inform rolling reviews, under which each sector should be reviewed once every five years.

Role in Compiling and Assessing Reforms

There is a need for the ROGS to be more strategic than simply a data collection for the nation. There is scope to enhance this aspect of the ROGS by, for example, highlighting best-practice reforms in different jurisdictions, and perhaps, creating a ‘mini case studies’ series where best-practice and innovation can be highlighted, promoting a culture of continuous learning and improvement. This supplementary work could be done outside the annual ROGS process. Alternatively, best-practice case studies could be included in the ROGS, as long as this did not increase its length.

Care needs to be taken that this work complements rather than duplicates the work of the CRC, which is also tasked with producing examples of best practice. In the first instance, examples from the ROGS should be from service sectors not covered by the National Agreements or subject to CRC analysis.

Service Areas Covered by ROGS

The ROGS has expanded over time to cover a range of service areas across early childhood, education and training; justice; emergency management; health; community services and housing.

A set of criteria for determining what service sectors should be covered by ROGS would be useful and should be developed in 2011, for COAG endorsement. This criteria could then be applied to review existing areas and when considering new areas for inclusion.

Expanded Reporting of Existing Data

Comparisons over time can highlight whether government service delivery is improving, and there was support for a greater emphasis on comparisons over time for each jurisdiction, rather than between jurisdictions. Currently, there is less systematic emphasis on longitudinal data to enable such comparisons. Where there are jurisdiction-specific services being delivered, there would be value in reporting data about them, even where comparison across jurisdictions is not possible, as this might allow comparisons of performance over time, and overall judgements of service delivery performance to be made. Such reporting also appears to be consistent with greater transparency and accountability of government service delivery.

Strengthening Comparisons of Efficiency and Effectiveness

A primary objective of ROGS is to allow comparisons of equity, efficiency and effectiveness across and between governments to improve government service

delivery. Therefore, the comparability of performance indicators across jurisdictions and over time is essential.

The comparability of indicator data varies across service areas and over time. Data is considered to be directly comparable when definitions, counting rules and the scope of measurement are consistent and the sample size is large enough to be statistically reliable.

There was clear support for improving the comparability of the information in the ROGS, including developing clear and robust national definitions. This would allow greater comparability of performance between and within jurisdictions. If there is no prospect for national definitions and related quality data sets, then consideration should be given to omitting certain indicators.

Timeliness and Data Accuracy Issues

As a guiding principle, the ROGS tries to publish data that are as timely as possible. In some cases, there may be a trade-off between the accuracy and timeliness of data, because up-to-date data might have had fewer opportunities to undergo audit or validation. However, publication can increase the scrutiny of data and encourage improvements in data quality and timeliness.

The timeliness of data in the ROGS is largely determined by the timeliness of underpinning national data collections. Work is already underway to improve data timeliness, as part of the reporting on National Agreements performance indicators. Further improvements in data timeliness may require jurisdictions and the data agencies re-engineering data collection and validation processes, including through improving technology.

The underlying principle should be timely production of data sets that can be used by the ROGS, the CRC and others. Any streamlining of the data collection process should recognise the multiple reporting requirements of government agencies and other organisations and take into consideration the capacity for these costs to be absorbed.

Priority should be given to the harmonisation between the ROGS and COAG reform agenda reporting requirements to reduce the reporting burden.

For service areas that are not subject to the IGA, consideration could be given to more timely publication of data once it is available. Incremental reporting when data becomes available, and then updating all relevant data over recent years at regular intervals, may be preferable to waiting until all data are available. This would be subject to the benefits of timeliness outweighing any additional administration costs incurred resulting from a series of releases, rather than a single release.

Within the COAG framework, data is required to be independently assessed for data quality before it is provided to the SCRGSP. It has been suggested that similar data quality statements are appropriate for all data published in the ROGS.

The SCRGSP should continue its role in driving improvements in data quality over time, in association with collection agencies, the CRC, the MCFRR and the other Ministerial Councils seeking to strike a balance between timeliness and quality in order to maximise the utility of the information. In particular, it should adopt a stronger quality assurance role in relation to the ROGS.

It should also ensure there are standard data definitions to provide greater comparability between jurisdictions and across sectors; standard reporting timeframes; a program of indicator development; and reduced data gaps, overlaps and duplication.

Presentation and Publication of Information

Although the ROGS as a compendium of information is useful and well-regarded by many users, the current size (two volumes with around 1,600 pages) and structure of the ROGS can reduce accessibility and make navigation difficult. The ROGS should be streamlined.

A move away from the current paper based publication towards a web-based format may provide ROGS' users with more timely, relevant, and accurate information and may allow the ROGS reporting to be brought forward by up to one month. It would also allow different timeframes for different sectors, providing some opportunity to respond flexibly to any impact on the process from the NPRS.

These improvements would help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ROGS. In the event of one-off costs to update systems, the SCRGSP might reduce these by seeking the assistance of experienced government web-publisher, such as the ABS. As a beginning, the Steering Committee should establish a ROGS information portal as a repository and primary publication method for the ROGS data which enables increased secure manipulation of data, data correlation, reports against indicators more frequently where data is available and imposes no additional administrative or reporting burden. The development of the information portal should include investigation of how data collection methods can be improved, including how electronic data submission might improve them. The release of data might be staggered to provide more up to date information to meet policy and program requirements. Examples of the work of other agencies and international practice should be considered, to establish what could be adapted to Australia's circumstances in this regard.

Appropriate safeguards to protect the integrity of the data also must accompany any changes to the accessibility of the ROGS. Consequently, any changes should be introduced carefully, and the experience and expertise of other data publication agencies should be utilised in developing any new systems.

However, despite the strong support for a more web-based approach to the ROGS, some users prefer the hard copy as a reference tool. The hard copy should continue while efforts are made to move over time to increase reliance on electronic publication.

Starting with the 2011 ROGS, the existing two volume compendium should be revised over time to a streamlined report of key indicators, minimising descriptive text, including a concise executive summary.

In working towards making the ROGS more complementary to CRC reporting, it may be appropriate to review the timing of the ROGS publication. However, it is too early to make a decision given the CRC reports are not fixed in their timing and the actual impact of the one report on the other is not yet established. No decision to alter the ROGS timetable should be made until the impact of the reporting timeframes for the ROGS and the CRC can be reviewed after the initial rounds of CRC reporting. Any recommendations for adjustment to publication schedules should be made to COAG through the MCFFR's NPRS development process.

Governance

According to evidence provided for this report, the current governance arrangements for the ROGS are 'working well', are the 'best arrangement', and are a 'major factor in the success of the ROGS'. The role given to the SCRGSP under the new federal financial relations strengthens the case for continuing with these arrangements.

The Productivity Commission and the Secretariat within it are assessed as 'focused, committed, responsive and collaborative', 'very open to resolving issues' and 'professional, influential, logical, pragmatic and yet able to take the political imperative into account'. The Productivity Commission's position as independent of government is seen as a good attribute for its role in the ROGS reporting process. The Steering Committee and Working Group structure is seen to provide formal and informal information sharing and learning – in addition to performance reporting comparison across jurisdictions – regarded as a unique and valuable experience.

There is now considerable experience within the Productivity Commission in managing the processes that support the SCRGSP, as well as in filling a stewardship role for the data holdings of the Review of Government Service Provision.

Nevertheless, it might be useful to update the existing business rules and instructions for Steering Committee and Working Group members.

To ensure the ROGS continues to be a contemporary and strategic reporting tool, the Steering Committee should regularly review its operations, reporting to COAG every three years, commencing after the end of 2011-12 financial year.

The Decision-making Process – a Consensus Approach

As the consensus approach has fostered collaborative working relationships between the jurisdictions, it seems appropriate that this approach remain, where it works. Where consensus cannot be reached the Steering Committee could use a majority approach, with the independent Chair having a casting vote in the event of a deadlock.

Steering Committee

The independent chair, also the chair of the Productivity Commission, promotes transparency between the jurisdictions, neutralising concerns about a Commonwealth Government-dominated exercise imposed upon State and Territory governments. Given the expertise and the experience in this field the chair of the Steering Committee should remain with the Productivity Commission.

It is important that the Steering Committee be high level, strategic and reform oriented. Senior representation can help provide this strategic focus.

Working Groups

The Working Groups would benefit from more senior membership so that decisions at meetings could be made and these representatives could carry these forward in their jurisdictions.

The Working Groups should work with the data structures supporting Ministerial Councils on National Agreements, where appropriate, rather than creating new systems and processes.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat is regarded widely within government as having performed its task in support of the Steering Committee well, diplomatically and successfully, particularly given the potential sensitivities of coordinating a multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency primary stakeholder group. It is seen as highly efficient and effective in the provision of secretariat services and to be doing its job effectively, undertaking excellent work, and to be very helpful and responsive to requests.

The collocation of the Secretariat with the Productivity Commission is anticipated to assist with the development of the Commission's two- to three-yearly report on the economic impact and benefits of COAG's reform agenda, which has been commissioned by COAG. The synergies of having these functions in one organisation – data collation and reporting for the COAG Reform Council, the assessment of impact and benefits of the reform agenda, and data collation and reporting in the ROGS – is further strengthened by other related activities with which government has tasked the Commission, such as the production of the biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report and the Indigenous expenditure reporting.

In addition, the Secretariat has already applied a range of quality control processes, revised over time in accordance with a continual improvement approach. A performance assessment of the ROGS database was planned for 2008-09, but was postponed pending the outcome of this review. The Secretariat has undertaken work that has led to increased data disclosure and improvement in data consistency.

The Productivity Commission is best placed to continue to provide Secretariat support to the Steering Committee. The positive comments received from many involved in the production of the ROGS suggest it has the necessary staff skills and knowledge-base to continue to undertake this role very well.