

Australian Government

Open Government Partnership Australia

End of Term Self-Assessment Report for Australia's First Open Government National Action Plan 2016-18

Comments on 5.2 Enhance public participation in government decision making

The report indicates that “substantial” progress has been achieved against the stated commitment that “focuses on improving participation and engagement to enhance policy and service delivery outcomes”. (page 70)

While the work done to scope the issues and options provides a starting point to achieving this goal, a rating of “substantial” progress is arguably a gross overstatement and undermines any confidence in real (beyond rhetoric) public participation in government decision making being achieved.

The work to date seems to rely heavily on public servants, organisational representatives and experts with limited input/ engagement with members of the public. The views of all stakeholders are important in the design and delivery of an effective approach. However without significant collaboration with members of the public the approach seeks to engage, it will follow in the footsteps of the policies and service delivery outcomes which the initiative acknowledges have missed the mark.

A key challenge for the Australian Government (and others) is to shift its mindset and its approaches in ways that promote and value public/ citizen/ community engagement as essential to the success of policy and service delivery outcomes. What is emerging world-wide is the need to partner with citizens and communities as essential to understanding the issues, designing strategies, effective implementation and review. One attempt to describe this challenge has been documented recently by the international Partnership Brokers Association. (See *Shaping Sustainable Change: The role of Partnership Brokering in Optimising Collaborative Action*; ed. Leda Stott; Routledge/ Greenleaf Publishing 2019 chapter 8)

I hope that the next stage of the work will seek to, as the saying goes ‘walk the talk’ and ensure that the voices of members of the public inform strategies that are most likely to be effective to improve participation and engagement in government decision making.

Regards, Marcia Dwonczyk

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