

## **Midterm Self-Assessment Report for Australia's First Open Government National Action Plan 2016-2018**

Very little time has been allowed for responses to the Mid Term Assessment Report and this is very disappointing given the OGP emphasises the requirement for engagement with civil society. I do hope that in future greater consideration is given, as members of civil society often have several commitments, with the health of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) being only one of them.

The Self Assessment document notes that the 'Forum's terms of reference require that it seek a high level of community engagement by electronic means' but from reading the report it seems that the web site is one of the main ways in which information is relayed to civil society. The web site is not user friendly (a point raised by several people who attended the last meeting between representatives of PM&C and civil society in Melbourne). It needs to be.

How many members of civil society are aware of the OGP and that it has a web site. From the figures quoted in the self-assessment report, the numbers are miniscule and the report does not make clear (see p.4) if the same people are attending information sessions, suggesting actions that need to be taken, contributing to the co-creation workshops and using Twitter. If the one person is involved in all four, the actual number of people engaging in the OGP process may well be embarrassingly miniscule. What is going to be done to engage civil society members beyond the few who belong to organisations dedicated to improving integrity in public life and delivering greater accountability, transparency and openness to citizens?

While the self-assessment report notes that feedback from the public was reviewed, it does not explain adequately the exact nature of the feedback received and what actions were taken to address the issues raised. Reviewing something can easily result in no action.

I question the wisdom of having 15 commitments with five "Grand Challenges". A more strategic approach would be to reduce the number of commitments by adopting a depth not breadth approach.

It is apparent that the Grand Challenges remain challenges for the OGP process. I say this for the following reasons:

- Transparency and accountability in business is being achieved through a royal commission process and not through OGP actions."
- Access to government information is still very poor. I refer the OGP to the saga that surrounds the OAIC and strongly suggest that fixing the problem should have been an immediate, and specific priority for the OGP.
- Integrity in the public sector has been hampered by the lack of a national integrity body, which is a cause the OGP could have been openly supported.

- Public participation and engagement is primarily taking place between what are often defined as “elite” groups. There has been little if any attempt to reach what are described as “ordinary” members of society. While this terminology is far from ideal, I use it here to capture the vast majority of people who are increasingly disenchanted with progress being made by governments to keep them informed about what government is doing in relation to accountability, transparency and openness and just as importantly are failing to do.

I am sorry if my brief comments appear to be negative but I am concerned about the lack of meaningful actions. However, I note the time frame of the self-assessment report and will keep a very keen eye what measurable outcomes are achieved through the OGP process and the procedures adopted to ensure that the OGP’s commitments are achieved.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and for the 24 hour extension you granted me. More time is needed in the future to allow for much greater civil society input.

Sincerely

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