
C A history of evaluation in the Australian Public Service

This appendix provides a brief overview of the history of evaluation arrangements in the Australian Public Service (APS). It first looks at arrangements that were put in place to encourage and support evaluation within public service agencies generally (section C.1). It then focuses on arrangements that were put in place over time for evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (section C.2).

C.1 A brief history of evaluation arrangements

Before 1988: growing recognition of the value of evaluation

Policy and program evaluation has a long history in Australia. Larger-scale efforts to promote formal evaluations for some policies and programs across the Australian Government can be traced back to at least the 1950s and 1960s (Sharp 2003, p. 6). However, recognition of the importance of evaluation in Australia began to gain significant momentum on the back of several significant reports in the 1970s that prosecuted the need for improved evaluation in the public service. These reports included the Coombs report of 1976 (box C.1), and the Baume report of 1979 (box C.2) (Gray and Bray 2019, p. 11; Sharp 2003, pp. 6–7).

While these reports highlighted the importance of encouraging and systematising evaluation, and the patchy state of then practice, progress in establishing appropriate arrangements to improve evaluation was slow (Auditor-General 1991b, p. 12). Sharp noted that during the period of the Baume report ‘... there seemed to be an increased interest in the establishment of evaluation within government organisations’ and cited examples where evaluation did become more embedded in government decision making (2003, p. 8). But Sharp also stated that arrangements remained ‘piecemeal’, and noted that a consistent framework and culture for evaluation remained elusive.

Box C.1 **The Coombs Report**

The 1976 Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration (commonly referred to as the Coombs report after the Royal Commission's Chair) was given a broad terms of reference to 'inquire into and report upon the administrative organization and services of the Australian Government'. This included considering the:

... adequacy of the machinery available to assess the relevance and economy of existing programs in meeting government objectives ... (Royal Commission Letters Patent, point (2e))

The Coombs report made wide ranging recommendations aimed at improving accountability and managerial practice in the public sector. Several of these recommendations centred on improving evaluation in the Australian Public Service, including that:

- there be a senior Minister for Social Welfare whose functions would include evaluating existing welfare programs (p. 429)
- a small policy unit be developed (housed within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) with part of its role to 'assist in the formulation and evaluation of programs against the government's objectives' (p. 433)
- improvements be made for collecting information for evaluating outcomes for services delivered by the states but funded by the Australian Government (p. 158, p. 421).

Source: RCAGA (1976).

One significant change that did emerge from the Coombs report was the expansion of the mandate of the Auditor-General in 1979 to include the power to conduct efficiency audits. This enabled the Auditor-General to assess the economy and efficiency of departmental resource use (in addition to its existing roles that largely centred on financial auditing) (Di Francesco 1996, p. 84; McPhee 2011, p. 6). This function — in effect — continues today through the Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) performance auditing work (ANAO 2017a).

In 1983, the newly elected Hawke Government implemented significant reforms to the administrative and budgetary processes of the APS. These reforms — collectively known as the Financial Management Improvement Program (FMIP) — aimed to enhance processes around identifying and setting budget priorities, put more focus on the goals and objectives of particular programs, develop program management techniques, and establish machinery for regular reviews of program efficiency and effectiveness (OECD 1987, p. 46).

Box C.2 The Baume Report

In 1976, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare was tasked with evaluating the adequacy of Australian health and welfare services, including with reference to mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of services. The Committee's subsequent 1979 report — *Through a Glass, Darkly* (commonly referred to as the Baume report after the Committee's Chair) — was largely condemning of the existing state of evaluation.

The essential prerequisites for evaluation ... are at present given low priority. The current level of activity relating to them is totally inadequate for ongoing evaluation. The evidence shows that too little ongoing evaluation is being conducted. Most of the evaluation that is undertaken consists of one-off, ad hoc studies which are inadequate for effective decision making. (p. 15)

The report espoused the need for — and the benefits of — evaluation in social and health policy and outlined the risks of not addressing the deficiencies in how evaluation was undertaken. It also explored why evaluation had been unsatisfactory, with significant findings including that evaluation was often viewed as threatening, that funding models did not encourage evaluation to be undertaken and that data necessary for evaluation did not exist or was not accessible.

The Baume report made 35 recommendations, many of which sought to improve evaluation in the Australian Public Service. The recommendations included:

- ... [that] the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet be charged with the responsibility for ensuring that adequate program evaluation is carried out by all Commonwealth authorities, and that it certify annually that the results of such evaluations have been properly reported to the Parliament (p. xi)
- ... [that] the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat ... prepare a document, or number of documents, outlining the methods available to organisations for the evaluation of their activities (p. xiii)
- ... [that] the Departments of Health and Social Security provide a consultancy service, free of charge, to enable organisations receiving health and welfare grants from the Federal Government to evaluate their own activities (p. xiv)
- ... [that], in future, Commonwealth funding for any health or welfare organisation be contingent on a written agreement by the organisation that it will conduct ongoing evaluation of a quality that is approved by both the organisation and the Government; and State Governments be encouraged to follow a similar practice. (p. xiv)

However, the report did stop short of recommending a centralised, systematic approach to undertaking evaluation:

It is clear to this Committee that the evaluation process ought to be the responsibility of the department providing a program or service, perhaps with access to specialised units in the Commonwealth Public Service to which it can turn for help with specific evaluation exercises. Centralised authorities should have the task of examining such evaluations with a view to ensuring that they are adequately carried out and that there is an analysis of the overall policy ramifications ... Centralised, systematic evaluation ... is neither practical nor possible. It is not practical because it does not sufficiently involve the operative staff, and thus is ineffective and more intrusive and threatening than necessary. It is not possible, because the resources that would be required would be vast and remote from the sources of data. (p. 46)

Source: SSCSW (1979).

In 1987, the Australian Government issued a requirement that all New Policy Proposals (NPPs) must include proposed arrangements for their future evaluation. Departments were also required to prepare plans for monitoring and evaluating their programs (Mackay 2011a, p. 2). A year later, the Government undertook a review of evaluation, which found significant issues with the way evaluation was being undertaken, including that:

- there was a lack of integration of evaluation into the corporate and financial decision making of agencies
- evaluations tended to focus on efficiency and process, rather than the more fundamental question of overall program effectiveness
- there was a poor level of evaluation skills and analytical capacity in agencies
- the role of central departments in evaluation — especially the Department of Finance (DoF) — was unclear (Mackay 2011a, p. 3).

The Government concluded that a more centralised and prescriptive approach to evaluation was required.

1988 — 1996: A more formalised approach was adopted

In 1988, the Commonwealth Evaluation Strategy — the first whole-of-government evaluation framework at the Commonwealth level — was endorsed by the Australian Government. The strategy had three main objectives.

1. To provide information about program performance and aid Cabinet decision making and prioritisation, particularly with respect to the budget process.
2. To encourage program managers within departments to use evaluation to improve their programs.
3. To strengthen accountability by providing evidence of the performance of program managers and the management of program resources (Mackay 2011a, p. 3).

In pursuit of these objectives, the evaluation strategy placed four formal requirements on departments. These were that:

1. every program was to be evaluated every three to five years
2. each portfolio was required to prepare an annual portfolio evaluation plan (outlining evaluations to occur over a three-year period), and submit these plans to the DoF
3. NPPs were to include a statement outlining arrangements for how the policy would be evaluated in the future
4. completed evaluations should be published, unless there were important policy sensitivity, national security or commercial-in-confidence considerations and that the budget documentation of departments should report major evaluation findings (Mackay 1998, p. 4).

Under the strategy, evaluations were to be conducted by line departments. But the DoF was given elements of an oversight role. It was empowered to provide input into agency evaluation plans and into the terms of reference of individual evaluations to ensure they aligned with government policies and priorities. The DoF was also available to participate in evaluations, subject to negotiation with the relevant line department (Mackay 2011a, pp. 3–4).

To promote compliance with the strategy, the DoF used a range of approaches. It provided departments with advice and support on evaluation, and possible access to resource agreements for line departments to aid in the management of programs that were found to be underperforming. The DoF's ability to influence the budget allocations of line departments was another incentive for compliance with the strategy. It also produced comparative rankings of departments' approaches to planning and conducting evaluations. These rankings were never publicly released, but were shared with department secretaries. The secretary and senior executives of the DoF also advocated for evaluation, and there was explicit support for evaluation amongst some ministers (Mackay 2011a, p. 30).

The implementation of the strategy was not straightforward. Line departments viewed the DoF's oversight as intrusive, and expressed serious concerns about its role. The strategy also necessitated a cultural change within the DoF, away from a more traditional accounting focus to one more concerned with the performance of government programs, and with greater emphasis on research and analysis (Mackay 2011a, pp. 4–5).

In time — and after recommendations from the Auditor-General (1991b, p. 47) and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration (1990, p. 86) that the DoF be more active in monitoring and supporting departments in implementing the evaluation strategy — the DoF created a branch within its structure 'responsible for the provision of evaluation advice, support, training and encouragement to other departments and also within DoF itself' (Mackay 2011a, p. 5). The branch developed advice and handbooks on evaluation methodology, provided introductory training, shared evaluation best practice and promoted a community of evaluators within the public service (Mackay 2011a, p. 5).

There were mixed views about the performance of the strategy.

In 1991, about three years after the strategy was first adopted, its performance was examined in detail by the Auditor-General. It found that, while a considerable number of evaluations were being undertaken under the strategy, and there was increasing attention to systematic evaluation planning, implementation of the strategy was generally poor:

... there has been a significant body of recent evidence indicating that there is still a considerable way to go before progress could be considered in anyway satisfactory ... there has been evidence of deep-seated lack of understanding and acceptance of intentions underlying the Government's evaluation strategy. Whilst evaluation is making a significant contribution to the management of change in organisations and to the sharpening of objectives, there was some broadly-based and authoritative evidence of a reluctance at many levels to address fundamental questions of effectiveness. (Auditor-General 1991b, p. 31)

Some of the recommendations stemming from the Auditor-General's assessment were directed at departments, including that central management was actively involved in implementing the strategy and reviewing evaluations to ensure that they were high quality. But several recommendations centred on the DoF playing a more active role, including by: more tightly monitoring and reporting on the performance of evaluation across the APS; being more active in providing support to agencies to develop their evaluation capacity; assuming responsibility for coordinating the preparation and dissemination of guidance material on evaluation; and coordinating the development of evaluation standards (Auditor-General 1991b).

A second Auditor-General report, focussing on the use of evaluation in the preparation of the budget, found that while there were notable instances where evaluation informed budget deliberations:

The level of achievement in strengthening the use of evaluation in the Budget has so far been modest. (Auditor-General 1991a, p. vii)

It found that certain aspects of the Government's framework were not being followed — for example, only one-quarter of submissions to the 1990-91 budget met the requirement to outline evaluation strategies for new program proposals — and stated that it was vital that the DoF accept an 'oversighting responsibility for monitoring, reporting, and insisting on adherence to the framework by line agencies' (p. vii).

In 1993, the Task Force on Management Improvement reported that the amount and quality of evaluation had increased but also that this varied among portfolios. It also found that most members of the senior executive service were not using evaluation information in their work and that:

... ironically, there may be a tendency to focus on satisfying the requirement for evaluation ... rather than learning to use evaluation to improve program outcomes. (TFMI 1993, quoted in Halligan 2003, p. 88)

Over the life of the strategy, evaluation increased. By the late 1980s, all Government departments had prepared annual portfolio evaluation plans and by the mid-1990s, about 160 evaluations were underway at any given time (Mackay 2011a, p. 6). Between 1993 and 1997, over 530 evaluations were published (Mackay 2011a, p. 8). There was also some evidence that more evaluation was being used as part of the budget process. In the 1990-91 budget, about 23 per cent (in dollar terms) of NPPs were estimated to have been influenced by the findings of an evaluation, but by the 1994-95 budget, this was about 77 per cent (although data for the intervening years still suggested that fewer than half of NPPs were influenced by evaluation). And in the 1994-95 budget, 65 per cent of savings options were estimated to be influenced by evaluation (Department of Finance 1994b, pp. 3-4).

However, challenges remained. For example, there remained a lack of evaluation skills in many program areas in the public service, and a lack of experience in conducting or outsourcing evaluations, which had a detrimental effect on the quality of some evaluations

(Mackay 2011a, p. 8). Other issues included difficulties obtaining and ring-fencing evaluation budgets and the availability and integrity of long-run datasets (Ryan 2003, p. 7).

A 1997 Auditor-General report — completed just prior to changes being implemented to unwind significant parts of the strategy — also provides insights into the conduct of evaluation under the strategy, particularly in its later years. The report examined evaluation in four agencies in detail, reviewed the quality of a sample of completed evaluations and sought information (through a survey) on the practices of portfolio agencies across the APS (Auditor-General 1997, p. xiii).

The Auditor-General found that — under the strategy — many aspects of the management and control of evaluation were ‘operating adequately’ (p. xiii). The examined departments had developed satisfactory evaluation plans, mechanisms were in place aimed at assisting evaluation quality and that while quality varied, the ‘majority of evaluations examined did not have weaknesses such that the value of the evaluation report would be affected ...’ (p. 54). However, the Auditor-General presented some concerns about departments’ access to certain evaluation skills, and commented that:

It is possible that the mandatory requirement to evaluate all programs on a three to five-year cycle may not provide sufficient scope to allow agencies to focus on strategic priorities and issues of importance to government. (p. 20)

Even after the strategy’s abolition, there were mixed views about its effectiveness. For example, while acknowledging the strategy was ‘far from perfect’ and noting that it proved to not be sustainable, Mackay suggested the evaluation strategy did result in more informed decision making:

The Australian evaluation system lasted for a decade — from 1987 to 1997. During this time, Australia became a model of evidence-based decision-making and performance-based budgeting. By the early to mid-1990s, the evaluation findings that the system was producing were having a significant influence on the contents of departments’ policy advice and on the Cabinet’s budget decisions. Ministers frequently stated the high value that they attached to having evaluation findings available to better inform their decision making. Evaluation findings were also being used quite intensively within line departments in support of their ongoing management. (2011a, p. 27)

In contrast, Ryan, while acknowledging that the positives that emerged from the strategy should not be ignored, suggested that the strategy did try and do too much in too little time:

The 1988 Commonwealth Evaluation Strategy *did* expect too much too soon. Moreover, evaluation was regarded as a straightforward management tool that only had to be used to start producing results. The immediate effect was evaluation overload, patchy quality, unselective evaluation, and a certain waste of money. (2003, p. 8, emphasis in original)

1996 — 2007: A shift to more decentralisation

Just as the Hawke Government implemented a suite of reforms for the federal public service not long after entering office, so did the Howard Government when it was elected in 1996. The new Government sought to reduce bureaucratic ‘red tape’, promote a greater role for the private sector in policy design and service delivery, and make department secretaries (and the public service as a whole) more responsive to political priorities of government (Mackay 2011a, p. 11).

Line departments highlighted the burdens placed on them to plan and undertake evaluations to the new Government, and pushed for less oversight from — and reporting to — the DoF (Mackay 2011a, p. 14). In 1997, the strategy was abolished. Reasons given for the strategy’s abolition included that it was too cumbersome, that it was too resource intensive for all parties and that there remained issues with the state of program evaluation skills in the public service (Mackay 2011a, p. 14; Tunc 2010).

The support that the DoF provided to line departments to undertake evaluation was discontinued. While the DoF adopted a principles-based approach to encourage departments to evaluate key policies and programs, the decision whether or not to evaluate essentially laid with individual department secretaries and the extent that agencies continued to prioritise evaluation varied (Mackay 2011a, pp. 14–15). That said, agencies were still required to review lapsing programs, although this process was described as ‘mechanical’ with little impact on decision making, and was eventually abolished (Blöndal et al. 2008, p. 19; Hawke and Wana 2010, p. 78).

An ANAO report in 2003 found that most agencies were still undertaking evaluations, but evaluations were not frequently discussed in annual reports or used to support performance reporting (ANAO 2003, p. 13).

Further reforms came in 1999 with the introduction of the *Outcomes and Outputs Framework*. The framework was introduced to encourage agencies to ‘focus on ends and not means’ (Webb 2002, p. 12). Agencies were required to report on planned outcomes (results or consequences for the community that the Government sought to achieve) and on outputs (goods and services they produced in order to contribute to these outcomes) (Webb 2002, p. 2).

Under the framework, related programs were allowed to be aggregated ‘with the intention of giving more emphasis to the overall impact — and effectiveness — of government activity in that field’ (Podger 2018, p. 109). Bray and Gray stated this was the subject of significant debate:

The aggregation of programs into ‘outcomes’ was the subject of considerable debate over subsequent years including whether the outcomes were overly broad and not conducive to practical accountability oversight by the Parliament, and whether the connections between inputs and outcomes were too uncertain. (2019, pp. 11–12)

Podger said that there was a less systematic approach to evaluation under the framework, and it seemed that it ‘was not given the priority it had attracted previously’ (2018, p. 110).

In 2007, the ANAO conducted an audit of the application of the Outcomes and Outputs Framework. As part of this audit, it surveyed 44 agencies and undertook an in-depth audit of three agencies. It found that while ‘the majority of agencies used outcomes and outputs information in [their] decision-making’ (p. 27), the audited agencies:

... did not generally report on the effectiveness of administered items in achieving outcomes. Agencies often provided details of activities undertaken or funding provided without demonstrating how these activities achieved programme objectives and, ultimately, outcomes. (ANAO 2007, p. 80)

2007 onwards: More changes

The election of the Rudd Government in 2007 brought several significant reviews across a range of policy areas, but there was no systematic change in the use of evaluation in the budget process, nor was there a consistent approach to publishing evaluations (Gray and Bray 2019, p. 12).

In 2009, the Outcomes and Outputs Framework was replaced with the *Outcomes and Programs Framework*. A central requirement of the new framework was that entities were to identify and report against programs that contributed to government outcomes, rather than reporting on output groups, meaning that programs became the building blocks of budgeting and reporting. Annual reporting on the delivery of programs and achievement against a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was a key element of the framework (ANAO 2011b, pp. 14–15, 37).

The application of the Outcomes and Programs Framework was examined by the ANAO in both 2011 — where it found that most of the agencies examined had scope to improve their development of KPIs and the reporting against them (and in some cases, significantly so) (ANAO 2011b, p. 17) — and in 2013 — where it found that agencies continued to experience challenges in developing and implementing meaningful indicators (ANAO 2013b, p. 19). The 2013 audit also found:

The broad range of roles and activities undertaken by Australian Government entities highlights that while some entities’ programs suit the development of relatively straightforward performance information, the less tangible nature of the objectives of some other programs is more of a challenge. A homogenous framework for application by all Australian Government entities, without recognition of the variety of entity activity/ies, has compounded challenges that entities have in implementing the Australian Government performance measurement and reporting framework. (p. 59)

In 2013, further public sector governance reforms led to the passing of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (Cwlth) (PGPA Act). The PGPA Act updated performance reporting for Commonwealth entities by combining the

requirements set out in two existing public sector governance Acts¹ and placing them under the one umbrella. The PGPA Act provides a set of principles by which an agency can demonstrate the performance of its operations, while retaining flexibility in how it delivers that information. The PGPA Act remains in operation today and the extent to which it promotes evaluation is discussed in chapter 2.

C.2 Evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

As well as recommending changes to the APS to improve evaluation more generally, the 1976 Coombs Report identified a particular need for ‘review and assessment’ of government programs in the policy area of ‘Aboriginal affairs’.

This Report has emphasised frequently the need for the progressive assessment of government programs. Nowhere is it more acute than in Aboriginal affairs. The complexity of the problems and the unexpectedness of many of the difficulties which have been encountered in carrying out apparently well-founded programs emphasise this need. (RCAGA 1976, p. 342)

The report recommended that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet periodically assess programs in the Aboriginal affairs policy area. It also recommended that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Institute of Aboriginal Studies collaborate in research into possible indicators of social welfare for Aboriginal people (RCAGA 1976, pp. 430–431).

In 1979, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs also called for more evaluation of programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this time in the context of health policy:

The Committee recommends that an independent evaluation team responsible to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs be established to evaluate the effectiveness of all Aboriginal health care services and programs in accordance with the World Health Organisation’s definition of health and the principles of self-determination ... (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1979, p. 109)

At about the same time, a dedicated evaluation branch was established within the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, whose remit included to ‘review and evaluate the effectiveness of Government programs in Aboriginal communities’ (Department of Aboriginal Affairs 1981, p. 49). In 1982–83, this function was merged into the Department’s budgeting branch (Department of Aboriginal Affairs 1983, p. 55).

¹ These Acts were the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (Cwlth) and the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* (Cwlth) (AGS 2013).

In 1990, the Hawke Government established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), and this brought major changes to how policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were evaluated.

Under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* (Cwlth), the Government also established the Office of Evaluation and Audit (OEA). The OEA was independent from the ATSIC Board of Commissioners, with a legislated remit that included evaluating and auditing the operations of ATSIC regularly (ss. 75-76). The Act also requested that the director of the OEA — in overseeing the operations of the Office — have regard to the desirability of evaluating and auditing programs at least once every three years (s. 78). Between 1990 and 2005, the Office evaluated a range of programs, including programs related to Native Title, housing, health, community infrastructure and legal services.

In 2005, ATSIC was abolished, but the OEA was retained under revised legislation — the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005* (Cwlth) — and moved to the then Department of Finance and Deregulation (Plowman 2008, p. 2). Its name was changed to the Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs) and its role redefined to include evaluating and auditing relevant programs administered by Australian Government bodies (s. 193W). In 2009, the Office was incorporated into the ANAO (in effect, ceasing as a standalone office) (ANAO 2011a, p. 1).

A coordinating office — the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) — was also established within the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in 2004. Its functions included ‘being the primary source of advice on Indigenous issues to the Government, coordinating and driving whole-of-government innovative policy development and service delivery ... and overseeing relations with state and territory governments on Indigenous issues’ (ANAO 2012, pp. 14–15). In 2006, the OIPC’s functions were absorbed into the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (ANAO 2012, p. 15).

In 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership ‘to achieve the target of Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage’ (COAG 2009, p. 3) and in 2009, the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse was established. Its key objective was to:

... improve access to evidence by analysing research and evaluation findings to identify what works to address Indigenous disadvantage. (ANAO 2019a, p. 57)

The Clearinghouse was jointly funded by the Australian, state and territory governments and jointly delivered by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. It maintained a register of government research and evaluations (which, by March 2014, contained over 1000 items) and produced 50 evidence synthesis reports (ANAO 2019a, p. 57). It also produced three ‘what works’ reports. A lack of robust evaluation of programs was a consistent theme in these reports:

A common issue identified in the ‘what works’ reports was a lack of robust evaluations to inform program development. In particular, the reports noted there was a lack of high-quality

quantitative social policy research in the Australian and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. (ANAO 2019a, p. 57)

A 2010 strategic review of Indigenous expenditure also commented on the state of evaluation of policies and programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It described evaluation activity as patchy and noted:

... the poor quality and lack of rigour of many of the evaluations that have been undertaken. Serious data limitations aside, many evaluations appear to have been conducted either perfunctorily — simply because they are required to be done — or for self-serving reasons, with a view to perpetuating the program. (DOFD 2010, p. 366)

In 2014, funding arrangements for the Clearinghouse were set to expire. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet advised that there was insufficient new research and evaluation being produced to sustain the existing rate of publication of the Clearinghouse. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs gave in principle agreement to fund the Clearinghouse at a reduced scale for an additional three years, pending the state and territory governments matching the Commonwealth's contribution. However, the Australian Government could not secure an agreement from all jurisdictions and funding for the Clearinghouse ceased (ANAO 2019a, pp. 57–58).

With the closure of the Clearinghouse, there was no whole-of-government approach to publishing and analysing evaluation reports for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That said, evaluation continued to occur at an agency/departmental level and the ANAO continued to conduct performance audits of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including in the areas of Indigenous childhood development (2013a), service delivery (2014), legal assistance (2015) and aged care (2017c)).

In 2013, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy was established, which saw responsibility for most programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (as well as some mainstream programs that primarily serviced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) transferred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (ANAO 2017b, p. 15). In February 2018, the Department released an evaluation framework document (ANAO 2019b, p. 7). The implementation of — and the evaluation of programs under — the Indigenous Advancement Strategy is undertaken by the National Indigenous Australians Agency today.