

Chapter 3

The COAG Reform Council: A View from the Inside

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I Introduction

A dominant theme in Australia's history is that intergovernmental cooperation is both necessary and desirable. Cooperation is necessary because of the nature of the division of responsibilities under the Commonwealth Constitution and the evolution of the revenue arrangements and roles and responsibilities of the levels of government since federation. However, cooperation is also desirable because it has the potential to provide a mechanism for bringing to bear a sense of national purpose, and the expertise and experience of governments in service delivery.

The Council of Australian Governments ('COAG') was established in 1992 as a forum for Commonwealth, state and territory leaders and it has evolved to be the peak intergovernmental institution in Australia. Key national reforms are initiated, developed and monitored by COAG, and the COAG process provides an important institutional framework for ongoing policy and fiscal cooperation between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The COAG meeting of leaders is the public face, and culmination, of a broader set of intergovernmental arrangements.

The COAG Reform Council, of which I was Deputy Chairman from 2007 to 2011, is part of that broader make-up of intergovernmental cooperation in Australia. The council was set up by COAG to assist it to drive the national reform agenda by strengthening accountability through independent and evidence-based monitoring, assessment and public reporting on the performance of governments. The council is a 'joint venture' of all governments, but is independent of individual governments. The council reports directly to COAG, and subsequently releases its reports to the public.¹

This chapter focuses on the council's role in intergovernmental relations and the opportunities and challenges that arise for the council in fulfilling this role. The context of this role, in my view, is that intergovernmental relations in

¹ COAG Reform Council reports, and more information about the council, are available on the COAG Reform Council website <<http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au>>.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.