

## Practitioners' Opinions on Barriers to Reforming the Federal System

*Mark Bruerton and Paul Kildea*

### 1 Introduction

Reforming the federal system has been an ongoing policy challenge in Australia. Over the last 40 years, there have been close to continual calls for reform of the federation, and governments have made several specific proposals for change during that time. Yet fundamental reform has remained largely elusive. The question is, why?

The difficulty of reforming Australia's federal system is something upon which scholars have often remarked. However, it is rare to hear the perspectives of those who work within government. To gain insight into what public officials think are the main barriers to reforming the federal system, we asked for their views as part of the *Future of Australia's Federation Survey: Australian Policymakers and Practitioners Study*. That study, conducted in 2015, resulted in over 1000 of the 2105 respondents to the federal and state agencies survey providing their views on barriers to reform. For further information on the *Future of Australia's Federation Survey*, see the Introduction in this volume. This paper analyses what survey respondents thought were the highest priorities for reforming the federal system and what they saw as the major barriers to those reforms succeeding.

### 2 Barriers to Federalism Reform: Approaches and Interpretations

#### 2.1 Reform

Any discussion about barriers to federalism reform must begin with an acknowledgement that the word 'reform', as used in this context, is open to multiple interpretations. First, some may see the term as applying only to changes that are initiated by governments as part of deliberate, stand-alone processes, whereas others will extend it to more informal, evolutionary changes that occur over time. Fenna sees reform through the former lens – he draws a distinction between reform and adaptation:

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.