

## Media Release

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Join the public sector ‘to make a difference not a dollar’

**4 January 2009:** A new report from Deloitte on the Australian Public Service titled *Crossing the divide*, has found that senior executives from the private sector have been drawn to new careers in the public service because of the opportunity to take on a particularly complex and challenging role with the potential to influence policy and a view that they would ‘rather make a difference than make a dollar’.

However, the research also found that many felt hamstrung by a culture that avoided risk and restricted creative and innovative policy development.

The report was based on in-depth interviews with 40 business people who recently joined the most senior ranks of the public service - the Senior Executive Service (SES).

Canberra based Deloitte Consulting partner, Nick Myburgh who led the research said: “The overall message from the recruits was positive, they crossed the divide to the public sector to make a difference and found their SES colleagues to be highly talented and capable leaders.”

“However, there are still a number of stumbling blocks common to both State and Commonwealth government. The transferees found that ineffective performance management left poor performers languishing and made it hard to reward star performers.”

### **Lattice replaces the ladder**

Mr Myburgh continued, “Criss-crossing between industries and sectors to gain experience and seek out new challenges shows that careers no longer follow the traditional bottom to top, ladder model.” “The ability to switch between the public and private sectors and back again or follow a more lattice like career path is becoming increasingly common.”

The desire by the private sector recruits for more innovative policy development was further reinforced by a recent discussion paper from the Australian Public Service Commission<sup>1</sup> which recommended that, “The Australian Public Service needs to nurture a culture where new, innovative and creative policies are explored and experimented with. To make this happen the Australian Public

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<sup>1</sup> Reform of Australian Government Administration discussion paper, September 2009, p32

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Service needs to have greater tolerance for failure when it occurs as a result of carefully considered risk taking.”

Mr Myburgh comments: “Without an acceptance and understanding of risk, innovation and creativity is difficult. Many of the new entrants from the private sector that we spoke to said they felt hamstrung by a culture that avoids personal risk at any cost.”

“Our research showed that for public servants, the risks of being associated with a project that doesn’t deliver can be severe in terms of career progression. This aversion to risk is likely to hamper the transformation demands placed on today’s SES.”

The interviews that feature in the report took place between March and September 2009 and included SES members from West Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland State governments. There were also eight senior participants from the Federal Government SES.

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