

# TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

Secretary Series: Adam Fennessy PSM

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## **Adam Fennessy PSM (Keynote)**

Secretary

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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KATE DRIVER:

Yuma, welcome. Thank you for coming to IPAA ACT's Secretary Series. My name's Kate Driver. I have the privilege of being the CEO of IPAA ACT. I'm standing here on behalf of our board members this afternoon, many of whom have sent their apologies. There are quite a few things happening on the hill cabinet meetings and events, but I'm very pleased to be standing here representing IPAA ACT. Now am also very privileged to be a part of a few mobs here in Australia. I have friends who are close enough to be called family in, Darug country, Larrakia country and Murray country. And if any of you have met a Murray auntie, you know that you've been schooled right in understanding that an acknowledgement of country is not just something you do before the business of the event, but is actually to bring you into the space and time and to recognise that as we stand here on Ngunnawal country today where people have been meeting, gathering, sharing thoughts, stories, and ideas for tens of thousands of years, we are part of that tradition.

So, when I acknowledge the elders past and present of Ngunnawal country and families connected to this region where we have traditionally gathered for decades and in fact tens of thousands of years for our First Nations Australians, I also recognise that we meet on this place and in this time to continue that tradition of sharing thought stories and conversations. So, the Secretary series that IPAA ACT runs is about hearing from the leaders in our sector. I was very, very pleased to be able to welcome Adam as he approaches his first year in the chair as the secretary. And I'm excited to be able to share the fact that we've been speaking just in the room across the foyer with some of those emerging leaders in our sector.

We've got a group here who have spent the last two days thinking deeply about public sector leadership, many from the Commonwealth, a couple from the ACT, and a couple from our partners who have also joined as part of the broader group of public administration Australia. So, Adam, they've been spending two days thinking deeply about leadership and leadership practice on ethics and integrity and how to show up as a leader. So, you

probably have a very well-informed audience here today. Of course, two-thirds of the Commonwealth public service sit outside of Canberra, and so IPAA ACT represents those staff as much as we do those that are Canberra-based and those who serve in the ACT public sectors well.

But I want to introduce you to Adam Fennessy PSM. Adam is no stranger to IPAA audiences having become very involved in IPAA Victoria during his time here. He has come from 25 years of public sector experience at both the state and federal levels. A rare combination of experience that is highly valuable when we are talking in the leadership conversation that we just have next door about understanding the system that we exist in from all different perspectives and understanding the communities and the citizens that we serve in our role.

In that Adam's former roles include Secretary of the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Secretary of the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, and the Victorian Public Sector, Commissioner and Dean and CEO of the Australian and New Zealand School of Government, also known as ANZSOG. Adam also worked in the private sector as a partner in the global advisory firm, Ernst & Young, now known as EY. And Adam is also our FIPA, a fellow of the Institute of Public Administration and a member of the Champions of Change coalition. In 2018, he received a public service medal for leadership in the Victorian public sector. So, he comes to today's conversation a year in as Secretary of DAFF, and we invited him specifically at this time to give us the retrospective on the year that's been and the years that are coming. So, can I please introduce today's speaker? Adam Fennessy.

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

Thank you very much, Kate Driver, for your kind introduction. Good afternoon, everyone. I'll also acknowledge the country. We're a Ngunnawal country and I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people and other families and people with connections to the lands on which we're on today. Kate, I love your reflection. I've spent years living on Djadjawurrung country in Central Victoria. I started off down in Wurundjeri country in

Melbourne and now live and spend my time between Turrbal and Yuggera country in Meanjin, Brisbane as well as here in Ngunnawal. For me, it's been an important part of my life living in and connecting with regional communities, particularly now that I'm at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. And I have been in the role for almost exactly 51 or 52 weeks. So, I have had a great time being back in Canberra. I started my career here in Canberra as a graduate public servant.

I love the public service, I love IPAA and I love these sorts of conversations and connections. So, when I was asked Kate by you whether I'd be willing to do a secretary series speech, I said yes as quickly as I could. So, it's great as well to see many leaders here today. Heads of departments, senior executives, eminent former public sector commissioners, Andrew Podger who I could see coming in, board members I can see colleagues from our research and development corporations including, AgriFutures, Andrew, and many other distinguished colleagues and guests as well as some of my leadership team and a new member of the IPAA Council, Chess Bishop, Justine Saunders. So, lots of friendly faces here who along with me form part of that community of leadership in public service that I so love being a part of. I'll talk a bit today about the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, what we've been doing in the last year, and as importantly how we've been going about it and how a lot of our work is very closely related to Australian public sector reform.

And indeed, putting into practice a lot of the lessons learned at a very important APS reforms, including the 30 reviews. And then bringing that all the way back to what's my job, what am I here to do with our department, what's our role across Australia? When you know your why, you can get really focused and you can make a big difference in public service, which is what motivates me. So, for those who are less familiar with Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry. We have almost 7,000 staff across Australia. We have more of our staff outside of Canberra than in, we have just under half here in Canberra. And then we have large percentages in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, pretty much any capital city. Anytime if you're

fortunate enough to go away for a wonderful holiday and you come back through one of our airports and a lovely detector dog is just checking out your luggage, that's one of our detector dogs.

They're our staff at the front line in border security and protection around biosecurity. We will work very closely with our colleagues at the border force all the way through to scientists. We have laboratories full of insect collections so that we can keep our fruit and fibre products safe. We have testing facilities around Australia to manage biosecurity risk. We have a quarantine facility down in Melbourne where all the Melbourne Cup horses come soon from overseas. And in fact, now we've got a, I can't remember if it won a medal, but an Olympic horse that's doing the last of its quarantine after the Paris games. We have a lot of trade negotiating experts across DAFF where we're constantly in negotiations around products, exports, food and fibre around the world. We have entomologists who are experts in insects and have colourful ranges of tattoos on display as their own private collections.

We are the biggest employer of vets in Australia and we have expert lawyers, policy analysts and financial accountants. So, it's a great place to work. It's a very diverse workforce and very distributed. We have staff across all corners of the continent, and I say that because one of our areas of focus is how do we support a well-engaged connected workforce to deliver services in support of what we do and how do we think as much about how we work together as what we do. In terms of how we go about our work, we support around 100 billion in agricultural production every year, and of that just over three quarters in exports, about 75 billion. The numbers go up and down depending on climate. So, now we're tracking closer to about 86 billion of food production in a good year, which was 2223, it was getting closer to a hundred billion.

So that's a huge part of the national economy and that is distributed all the way through Australia into small regional communities and towns, farming communities, forestry, fisheries, people who are bringing life back to the land, including my colleague from AgriFutures who

were talking just before about that long-term learning and work about including with First Nations and other custodians of the land. We don't take these responsibilities lightly. We also carry out this work in a growing global context, we have more than 3 billion citizens now from emerging nations joining the middle classes and wanting to consume high quality Australian food and fibre. So, our role in global food security is important as well as regional diplomacy and food security across the Pacific where we do a lot of work with our new neighbours in biosecurity protection and economic development in strong alignment with Australia's interests in the Pacific.

So, it's a very complex and exciting space to work in that requires skills in our organisation to work closely with communities and very importantly work closely across our own organisation. So, one of our areas of focus over the last year has been how do we work together as one organisation, one DAFF? One of our core values as a department is working together alongside courage, diversity, and excellence. And that is in support of that \$100 billion food and fibre economy to bring that focus. One thing we have put a lot of our effort into in the last year is a statement of strategic intent. It's important for us to know our why, to know why we're here, to connect across Australia and also really motivate our staff and give our staff that connection to passion about what we do. With Tess Bishop who's sitting in the front row and Justine Saunders and others in our leadership team, we put a lot of focus on what is our story, how do we tell our story, how do we excite our staff?

How do we motivate our staff? And the focus of our statement of strategic intent is growing Australia together, going to that \$100 billion in food and fibre production and exports, that then links to our purpose and vision and defines our three strategic objectives, supporting our agriculture sector to be prosperous and internationally competitive. Secondly, and very importantly, increasing the contribution of ag fisheries and forestry for healthy, sustainable and lower emissions productivity. Particularly how do we look after our landscapes that have been looked after for more than 65,000 years? With that focus on sustainability, how do

we learn from the best of 65,000 years of land management along with the best in emerging and current scientific technology for that food and fibre production? And how do we support low emissions agricultural produce? Currently, we have the lowest emissions profile beef and the lowest emissions profile, wheat and grain in the world.

There's still a lot more work to be done there, and that gives our farmers a distinctive profitability opportunity if we can support that, keep our food and produce clean, safe, and well protected. And that makes a huge difference to support regional communities who are very proud of what they do. And then our third objective, so first is prosperity. Second is sustainability, and then the third is the protection around national biosecurity and providing the appropriate level of protection for our people, our environment, and our economy. The other day I was at Coles down at Civic trying to buy some eggs. I was cooking a bit of Thai and the shelves were empty and I was a bit annoyed. And then I remembered we've just got through one of the worst avian flu outbreaks in Australia in recent decades. So, our biosecurity systems are ever vigilant, there's very technical acronyms.

H7N1 is high pathogenicity avian influenza, H7 is the current strain. There was an outbreak in New South Wales in Western Victoria and in the ACT, and that caused the destruction of 1.7 million birds from the poultry sector. Cost us about a hundred million dollars, here, our egg supply chain. And when you understand the supply chain in Australia, one thing that helped us get through those couple of months was McDonald's agreed to shorten their egg McMuffin menu. So, they stopped serving it at 11 or no 10 AM each morning. They're the biggest consumer of eggs every day in Australia that got us through. So, Macca's agreed just to hold back on their egg McMuffins. It also shows the sophistication of the supply chain across Australia and how agriculture, fisheries and forestry happen all the way across Australia into cities, into manufacturing and into just-in-time logistics.

So, it's a fascinating series of connections and I know Justine one morning you were saying to me, "Oh, as long

as we can get Macca's to agree to pull back on their breakfast menu will probably get through." And then eggs are starting to appear back at Coles. So that's why I love this job you realise how complex Australian systems are for food supply, food safety and food availability. The other thing I'll reflect on is we've put a lot of focus of learnings out of the APSC-led capability review. And I know there are some colleagues here from the APSC, I was the Victorian public sector Commissioner for two years. They're critical roles and they're critical to the health and leadership of the public service in Australia. And I do want to pay tribute to Andrew. I think I've got three textbooks of yours on my shelf, Andrew, including that complicated one on China, which is very relevant to Australian food and fibre.

It's that leadership and focus on the strength of our public sector that I'm very proud about and that is something we cannot take for granted and we've got to invest in. So, I was a huge beneficiary of the capability review. One was done for DAFF and it was finished and published the day before I started. So, day one, that was my top priority to implement the APSC capability review. We were fortunate to have two very senior former public servants as independent reviewers, a good template that's been built on many years of work coming out of the Thodey review coming out of work that ANZSOG has done and it is utilised across Australia and New Zealand. That became my very strict focus for the rest of the year. How do we build on investing the capability of DAFF across all those different levers of our organisation from our digital capability, our financial management, our focus on our people, our focus on our policy capability and our link to our purpose and what we're here to do around that 100 billion of agricultural production.

So, the capability review acknowledged our responsibility as stewards of that economic activity. It enabled us map out our emerging challenges, regional food security, sustainability, productivity, education skills, empowering First Nations, and then allowed us to get to those building blocks that we all benefit from governance within our department, workforce planning, financial management, things that are core business and require us to think about the full range of skills we need across agriculture,



fisheries, forestry, A lot of that comes out of the 2019 Thodey review of the public service. So, we are building on many other expert reviews and I was very privileged to meet David Thodey a couple of years ago. He was at ANZSOG, a dinner with private sector leaders and was sharing his reflections on one of the hardest. He was so impressed with the complexity and skills of the public service that he saw firsthand through the Thodey review.

And I thanked him afterwards because I said to him, if I said that to a room full of private sector CEOs, they just assume I'd say that. But hearing it from someone like David Thodey gave her that extra level of veracity. And we've learned a lot from the implementation of findings out of the Thodey review. To become great at what we do, we need to work together as one department and that has given us that focus on one DAFF that I've mentioned. It allows us to be unified under that one purpose. And to me that means increasing on the success of landscape management, looking after food fibre, forestry, fisheries, and looking after land and country and building on those 65,000 years of success across Australia. So that is some of the richer reflections from my first year. The other thing I'll talk about and then I'll wrap up and see if there's some questions from the floor.

I've had a lot of experience and did a lot of work on the future of flexible work and I want to make a few comments about that today. Flexible work and supporting it is very important to me as well as doing a lot of work on that when I was the Victorian public sector commissioner. In that role, we learned a lot down there when Victoria against their will was locked down very solidly for two years. So that tested a lot of ideas. Can you work flexibly? Can you work remotely? What does that mean for frontline service delivery? And within about eight weeks from Easter 2020, a big and great experiment started in Victoria, particularly in Melbourne, Melbourne, Metropolitan. And they that state government had to try everything it could to keep a huge multi-billion-dollar economy and community running under very severe lockdown conditions. What allowed us to realise was that flexible work was a way to provide continuity of service to citizens.

It also forced them to work out how to continue to provide health services, education services, services to support agriculture or food supply when under extreme lockdown conditions. They learnt a lot and they learned a lot about workforce resilience and the ability to continue to run the education system, run the courts, do all sorts of things that weren't tested. And that became to me quite a laboratory to learn what worked, what we could learn from other parts of Australian government. So going back to flexible work, what I found and what the research shows, and when I say research, there's some great research, for example, from just down the road at UNSW Canberra, really good work coming out of ANU. Some real work out of Swinburne Uni in Melbourne and many others. UTS is another good institution looking at how do you increase productivity in the public sector under different conditions.

How do you measure it? How do you engage with your staff? So, what I learned is well-supported, trusted staff who are engaged, high-performing and will really deliver well as public servants. So, we are looking at how do we equip our modern employee experience at DAFF through flexible working arrangements, technology, workspaces, how do we equip our staff with the right tools and strategies? The best way to start is ask. Ask staff what works. We are doing a lot of work on that now, including aligning it with our new enterprise agreement at DAFF and very consistent with the APSC guidelines. Around 90% of our staff at DAFF have flexible working arrangements in place, which to me is the new norm for the public service. We've got a lot of people who comment on the benefit of work-life balance. I remember talking to staff who work on the Hay Plain in central New South Wales.

Not only do they like the Starlink, so they've got internet, but that keeps them connected to that part of their work where we do a lot of work, for example in the rice, cotton and wheat sectors in central New South Wales and flexible working isn't just about working from home. I learned a lot from a colleague of mine who worked at BHP on their flexible work policy and their motto was, work from where you get your best results, where you get your best outcomes. So that will depend on whether

you're a frontline or an office-based worker. We also did a lot of work into providing more agency and flexibility for frontline staff, particularly around rostering and support and supply of all those tools, pardon me, including digital engagement. And then my last reflection on organisations, including the public service, role modelling flexible work is important, particularly at the SES level.

So, I'm proud to say that we have three out of my five senior executive team work flexibly in across Australia. We have staff in offices outside Canberra. We also spend a lot of time in our regional offices, which keeps us connected with our frontline staff. We've also been piloting a regionalised program for our grads with placements in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. And we've been transitioning and upgrading our offices in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide, Cairns and things that are simple like collaborative workspaces, quieter focus areas, community hubs, and making sure that we're asking our teams what they need and what works for them. We're now doing that with our Perth, Sydney and Brisbane regional offices. The other thing for us is a supportive environment in a very well-distributed workforce is very important. And today is, R U OK? Day. So how are we bringing that focus to mental health and wellbeing, including with our staff who are posted overseas in agricultural trade roles?

So, we've learned a lot about psychosocial safety, particularly through the work that the APSC is leaving. I'm sure I have seen Rachel Bacon before. So, a shout-out, Rachel, to you and your colleagues. There's so much new and exciting research around creating safe supported and productive workspaces. So, it's something I'm also passionate about. And how do we work and learn from the APS employee census results. So great data that we've got to work with to understand the drivers of our organisations. So, there's some of the things I've also learned that bringing those learnings from across Australia into the APS and seeing that they're already here, they're being researched, they're being implemented, is very exciting. And then in DAFF measuring the positive changes in our census results around flexibility, staff engagement and other trends. Of

course there's always more work to do, making sure that we're working on those gaps in our capability and areas where we can improve.

So, my reflection there is that happy and engaged workplaces are productive, they're purpose driven, and they're great places to work. And to me that last point is what it's all about. I think it's an important measure of the level of laughter in the workplace and is a good indicator of workplace health. And my chief of staff, Jason Priest might say we laugh sometimes too much, other times, maybe not enough. But that's a good indicator of you wanting to get to work, you want to do something, know what you're there to do and enjoy it. So, in conclusion, I've touched a bit on our department's agenda around that 100 billion food and fibre opportunity that's done in a sustainable way, in a landscape-connected way, and in reflecting about what we're here to do as a public service, the world is changing very rapidly across or from a global context. So, we're always thinking about how do we best position ourselves, particularly for Australia's agricultural future as well as our economic future.

How do we focus on a sustainable and prosperous Australia through things that I've mentioned like biosecurity, agricultural production and trade? And as an important economic development agency, we are focused on these opportunities by uplifting our foundational capabilities across governance, workforce planning, and financial management. So, for me as well as that organisational focus, we steadily measure how we are changing and improving. We're focused on inclusivity and flexibility and seeking to get the best possible workforce in agriculture, fisheries and forestry. So, thank you for letting me share my reflections on my first year at DAFF. And Kate, thank you for allowing me to share that amongst this wonderful community of practice here in the ACT.

KATE DRIVER:

You too. Thanks, Adam. All right. I'm going to let you settle. We'll throw to the floor shortly for questions because one of the challenges with a good address with so much rich content is we'll never quite get to enough questions. But while we settle into that, and if you have questions, please put your hands up and a member of

the IPAA team will bring you a microphone so you can be heard. We have some colleagues from the media present and while I think there was so much great content there, I'll be slightly disappointed if one of the headlines tomorrow isn't about you thanking Macca's for assisting us with the egg shortage. I didn't fully appreciate their market influence in Australia. So our colleagues from the media, I hope you've picked up Macca's reference, but of course it was so much more in that and I'm sure people are eager to ask questions. A couple of the things that really struck me apart from your reference to the insect collection team, I've worked with insect collection people.

They are special, unique, amazing people. And if you ever want to see someone who is passionate about their work, ask them what they would be if they could be a bug, and you will have a good 90 minutes to process that. I came across some of those colleagues when I was in the cultural sector who worked on an exhibition on colour and we introduced insects and colour and wow, that was an eye-opening experience. Passion with a capital P. So, shout out to our insect scientists around the country. But apart from an enormously diverse workforce, some of the things you talked about around that sort of connective tissue where you'll be in regions, you'll have different professional backgrounds, different lived experience. Was that why, knowing your why, and I've been curious and questioning lately, why does purpose matter? Because we talk about it a lot in the public sector and there's some magic source there that it's a different experience working in the public sector. And by that I mean the broader public sector, not just those employed under the Public Service Act, but what's your why?

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

I think for me, I learned a lot as I was, when I moved into regional Victoria and lived with regional communities. And for me, I was very motivated by that immediate connection from what I could put into the community and the feedback I could get and seeing and experiencing that strength of local community was important. And for me, I lived in Bendigo and a few other areas of regional Victoria. And not only could I see the connection into particularly primary industries in and around Bendigo, but the innovation Bendigo Bank is an incredible

community banking model. There's a big defence force capability in Bendigo. There are all the beautiful old gold rush investments.

And then the legacy on that for that city is how do they keep building on that and giving that back to other parts of regional Victoria as a real centre. So, for me, knowing that I can be a part of that is more motivating than just turning up to work or living as a quiet member of that community. And knowing that I could see how I could contribute more broadly to that was always motivating for me. And so, for the public sector, knowing my why, and my purpose was always part of that. And I have worked in the private sector as well, and there's a great old phrase of employee value proposition, EVP, and you know what motivates you to go to work? And to me, it's having an impact knowing what that impact might be.

And for me, that is public value. So, I think I was far more motivated working in and around governments than when I was in the private sector, but also, I learned a lot in the private sector and learned how to do things more efficiently back into the public sector. But to me, knowing why I was there was an important part of my own professional development. And in fact, I remember doing a specific leadership course where we were all encouraged to write down our purpose for our career. And when you've got a clear line to that, it really helps you make your decisions about where you want to take your career. So, for me, purpose is a very motivating factor individually and then made me feel much more connected to the whole.

KATE DRIVER:

Fantastic. Well, we've got some questions. I think one down the front, there's the microphone's coming, that connectedness and the ability to work flexibly is a highly contested area. There was media that came out today around changes in the New South Wales government, where the flexible work policy now excludes the home as an approved workplace. You seem to be going in a very different direction at DAFF and for 7,000 employees who don't necessarily work in office-based jobs either. It's a very, very different proposition. But do you want to comment a little bit more on the 90% of your staff who are using flexible work and what that means in terms of

their EBP or just in terms of their purpose and their living experience?

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

So, our staff are very distributed, so we must put a lot of focus into our workplaces and what those different conditions look like and make sure our staff are connected. Now a lot of our staff will have an office to go to, and that is also an important interpersonal source of connection and particularly for different people at different points in their career. For example, if you're a graduate, that connection is important for your learning, you're mentoring and your development. For other people, they can be very productive, not necessarily in a normal workplace. If they're doing the work and it's helping us achieve our goals, then that's important.

If it's helping us achieve those aims of a more productive agricultural sector, then that's important. If we can attract the best staff from across Australia because of more flexible working arrangements, that's important as well because we can help grow agriculture. So, to me, they're more important than some of the details around, well, how many hours did you show up here or where were you working that day? Staff connection is important, and that's my other learning outside of COVID. It's not about abandoning one model for another, but it is about asking how are we getting our work done? Where are we doing that and how do we measure that and how do we provide value for money for the taxpayer?

There's also, there is a lot of debate when I'm involved in these debates, I'll always ask, well, what is the latest research telling us? And that's where some good old-fashioned evidence is helpful. The ACT government's done some interesting work on this here in Canberra, particularly in partnership with UNSW Canberra. And I know that different public sector commissions are always looking for where that evidence base is moving and looking globally as well for trends around workforce. What I've seen as well in cities is workforce will eventually vote more with their own feet. So how do you go to where your workforce is and will be coming from and how do you put into that whole equation the sort of conditions that will keep attracting good staff?

KATE DRIVER:

Yeah, great. Valuing connection and outcomes over

hours. Sounds like the way that DAFF exists, which is fantastic to hear. Well, there's a question here in the front row.

FRANK EXON:

Yeah. Frank Exon from the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Whilst you were speaking, you were talking about the complexity faced by your department, the science, the indigenous knowledge, all the challenges that supply chains, et cetera produce. And I was reminded last month that the national science and research priorities were launched by the Australian government had five priorities. And one of those priorities was around elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, because obviously in a western science paradigm, they haven't always been there. And I'm curious how that plays out in your thinking in terms of DAFF now and into the future.

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

So, we see that as a huge opportunity. Two months ago in Brisbane, all the agriculture ministers met as they do I think about twice a year and have launched the First Nations agriculture forestry and fisheries framework. So that has enabled us to go deeper down that path. And what might development of indigenous economic opportunities look like for native food products, fisheries and forestry? What does that mean for intellectual property, for workforce and working with a global perspective. We've also done some interesting partnership work with the work was kicked off by what used to be called, PIC, the indigenous consulting company, have done some good evidence-based work through Selwyn Button and others who have been involved in this space. So, to me, everything we do at DAFF, we link back to closing the gap and the national priorities. And our focus is on economic inclusion and empowerment.

So, what does that look like in practice? There are some great economic and product development opportunities coming up across Australia. How do we put the right systems in place? How do we get more capital into that investment and create potentially global markets as well as local markets? So, to give you an example, the Budj Bim down in Gunditjmarra country has been eel fishing for maybe 40,000 years. So, what does that look like as a



local economic opportunity and potentially maybe a product development opportunity in aquaculture? And that's with the Gunditjmara traditional owners and the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, which is your neck of the woods, Andrew.

So, they're exciting, but it's a complex space. Who owns the IP? What's the workforce requirements? Where are the paths to market and where might the investment come from? So that process has been First Nations led. Sarah Burr is a Wurundjeri woman leading that for us, and it's required us to use different forms of governance and work very closely with states and territories and do it differently to how we might put a normal, when I say normal, your IDCs and your white paper, green paper. So that'd be something it'd be great to talk to IATSIS about. We're already working with NIAA on that one as well.

MELISSA COADE:

Hello. I'm Melissa Coade from the Mandarin. Sorry to ask you this question because you're one of my favourite secretaries, but I was sitting in the Parliament House, Queen's Terrace Cafe the other day and got pinned by one of the protesters pro sheep export, and they were telling me very firmly that they believed there were activists embedded within the Department of Agriculture and that was facilitating the government agenda to stymie sheep export. What are your thoughts on the department's role addressing this idea of community satisfaction? Particularly where there are certain policy areas you must deal with which don't always garner 100% consensus.

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

Yeah, so Melissa, thank you for that question and you are my favourite public sector journalist. Yeah, and that's on the record and you know that that's correct. So, look, one of the challenges in agriculture is the trade-offs and the coming together of competing values is ever-present. So how do we balance animal welfare needs with economic opportunities? And for example, with live animal trade that is protein we can send to other parts of the world to keep them well-fed and nourished and animal welfare itself is a very important driver in that as well. So that's where we have brought about as much science as we can about how to bring the best animal welfare for those industries. And in the case of sheep exports, we've also

looked at global trends and changes. I think we export about 12% now of sheep from that part of Australia and no other jurisdiction exports that anymore.

And we've also looked at how do we value-add and move to a processing focus. While has a real impact on people's livelihoods. So, the government policies to phase that out over a four-year period and do it work very closely with those affected industries. And that's difficult. It disrupts people's livelihoods. People have every right to come to camera and express that concern. And our role is difficult because we've got to balance current industry opportunities, the need to get protein to help nourish the world and do it in a way that could be well regulated through Australian systems. If we don't do that, other exporters might step into space. At the same time, we've got to do that consistent with Australian, broad Australian values and that's difficult. We do a lot of work in those difficult spaces around natural resource management.

Sustainability is important. And ultimately there's a lot of long-term consumer trends where consumers will want to know, where is my meat from? How is it farmed? What sort of animal welfare conditions were placed around those products? Eggs are a good example of battery eggs and there's been a lot of really good work with the RSPCA and the retailers over the last number of years around the welfare of chickens. So, we do a lot of work with the live animal industries and with animal welfare groups and it's a balancing act and it's not easy. So that's one of the things that I do love about public sector and public purpose work is it's not easy and you've got to navigate and just keep up the conversation, work with groups, listen, learn and bring empathy to what impacts this has on farming communities as well as issues of importance to other parts of Australia. That's more of giving you a flavour of that issue rather than giving you a crisp answer.

KATE DRIVER:

While people are thinking, there's one down here. So, what I heard in that answer is there's a lot of thinking and a lot of balancing of views, and I was thinking you opened your address referencing the pillars of APS reform and the first pillar being people in business at the centre and the protester that Melissa spoke to at Parliament house

was one of those people. What's the kind of processes as the leader of a department of 7,000 people, all of whom will bring different personal views to their professional life where they act with integrity, impartiality, upholding values, how do you navigate that process as a leader to encourage people to really analytically think through those kinds of not straightforward conversations with stakeholders who are not necessarily involved in the science and the process of the department is weighing up and how you communicate that out again?

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

So, I often reflect about technology and there's a lot of good data and science we can use. The best technology for a public servant is the multi-thousand-year technology of listening, maybe a million-year-old technology. So, in the case of that very challenging issue of animal welfare and animal production, I have spoken to and listened to so many different groups, engaged openly, gone into conversations that can often be uncomfortable and modelled that as well and ask my team to get involved and then do it myself as well, because I've got to be prepared. So, I think the first round of live media I had to do in this job was earlier this year in this space. And my view as well, I'm not particularly well-trained in media, but if I asked my team to do it, I'll do it too. So, I polished up my media training and got into it.

And it's also the other aspect of data and technology is connecting in with different parts of the community to always find out where these ideas and sentiments are going. And the market is a very nebulous concept, but consumer preference is having a big impact on what's going on in Australian farming. And that's not easy because there's a long tradition of European farming in Australia and there's a long tradition of knowing where your markets are and what they want. So, what I'm finding is some of the very interesting groups, there's an interesting group, farmers for Climate Action, they're thinking ahead to make a good premium on your beef production.

If people know it's using less water, it's got a low carbon, it's less nutrients on the paddock, people will be prepared to pay more money for that. And so, to some extent, the market is helping sort out these things, but

also if we wait for the market to sort it out, we'll be either waiting for too long or we might've stuffed everything up by time the market comes through. So, we're doing a lot of interesting work in sustainable agriculture thinking about the future. And again, a plug for AgriFutures, sorry Andrew, I think I've referenced you three times now, but there's a lot of good research and development in social and other community drivers as well as complex systems like agriculture. So, we do a lot of R&D investment with our partners at AgriFutures and Charles Sturt Uni and others. Just to use that one example.

KATE DRIVER:

I think there's one just back here and then we'll come to the front.

BADEN MCMASTER:

Okay, thanks. Baden McMaster, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission more around public sector leadership. And you were talking about one DAFF and trying to instill that within the organisation. What's been your experience? Any cause of wisdom in terms of there's a finite budget envelope that agencies have and coming together for one purpose. Obviously, there's different areas of the organisation that when trying to reconcile are going to be winners and losers. How do you bring whilst individual senior execs and then flown down to parts of the organisation? How have you managed to be able to get that message across and get the organisation to work as a single cohort and the senior executive as a single cohort whilst managing those unders and overs negotiations within the organisation as well?

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

So that's a real challenge. And the first thing is I think I've got a great exec team and we've been very explicit about how we work together. We spent some really good time earlier this year on what our leadership charter was, and one DAFF is very much part of that because language is important. It's not my money or my team, it's our money and then it's not even our money, it's taxpayer money and what are we here to do. So, it's always bringing in that bigger picture and any organisation above about a hundred people becomes complex and human behaviour kicks in and this is my patch and I understand that patch. And when I'm under pressure, I'll know what to do here. And when it becomes too complex, I'm not quite sure what to do next. So, the ability to work in complex

ambiguous environments is ever present.

And we have some people who are good at that in certain ways, like complexity of say, science, but how do we bring in the messiness of humanity? So, to me, the social sciences are so important, it's an important skill set. And then those foundational skills of the public service are negotiation, managing interpersonal relationships, managing the performance of your team. I used to reference the great day mid-average for a great public service lesson driving into the skid. If you feel a bit uncomfortable and if you've ever driven on a country road and you've lost control and you've got to drive into the skid, that's scary. When you do it, you know in the public service, you're taking on an uncomfortable challenge. And that's normally where you start getting good change.

So, investing in my leadership team has been a real priority, and that's what we do because we need to do that when things aren't as difficult so we can make difficult trade-off decisions. And there's some good tools and guidance to do that well in APS. And a lot of the work that came out of the FODI review has really helped. So, a lot of it is sticking to, not sticking to the basics, but going back to the basics of what does our capability look like? How is it mapped out, where are the gaps? What do we invest in? And hence for me, it's managing staff, managing budgets, managing governance, things that might sound less exciting, but help us be a good high-performing organisation.

KATE DRIVER:

We've got time for one more question. If you wouldn't mind handing the microphone forward, that would be great. Thank you.

SPEAKER 6:

Thanks, Kate. Adam, I wanted to pick up on that capability piece. I sometimes feel like one of those old coots up in the stalls in, The Muppets.

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

We're all for Statler.

SPEAKER 6:

Grumbling about. Exactly. And do we need a new kind of public servant for the big, interconnected challenges we've got? I mean you've talked about one DAFF, but DAFF needs to be working with energy or on the rollout of rewiring the nation across the bush. And obviously with

the indigenous agencies with health as we've seen, is it just doing good old public service better? And often if I think my land care experience, a lot of the stuff we were doing in the early nineties is way better than what we're doing now in terms of bipartisan support, 10-year programs, links into education, links into use of citizen science and so on. Do we just need to be getting back to basics as you said, or do we need a new type of public service that's equipped for a compressed political cycle, the social media amplification of polarisation and so on? Is it much harder to do that hard stuff now than it used to be?

ADAM FENNESSY PSM:

Yeah. So, I'll finish with perhaps an agricultural example. I think in short; it is hard to do that and it's really rewarding. So, I talked about H5, sorry, H7, bird flu. We've been working in preparation for H5, that's everywhere in the world, except Australia. And some will be aware it's hit Antarctica and it's spread by wild birds. So, I mentioned that because we're taking a one DAFF approach. And then beyond that, we're taking a one health approach. So, we're working with health, the Environment department, the National Emergency Management Authority and Prime Minister and Cabinet. And we've been practicing, we've been doing exercises, getting ready, what might it look like when it comes. And that act and process of practicing has been hugely helpful. The first session was just with Commonwealth agencies and there are about six or seven agencies in the room. And then the next session was with the states and territories, and industry.

And then the third session, which we had this week was with not-for-profits, First Nations and others. So, we just kept pulling the circle out wider. Now that preparatory work will help us if H-five hits us. And it's apparently due to hit us this spring, which is about now. It's only bad flu, so don't worry. But it's very bad for chickens and for black swans. But to me that was exercising those skills and capabilities of interoperability working across into other agencies. And one of my learnings over many years in the public services to develop that skill, you've got to practice. And in fact, we discussed it yesterday at the secretary's board and we learned a lot about that out of COVID. So, to me, I love that sort of work because you

connect, learn new insights, work with other people, and that's a critical capability for the APS as well as in Australia for any public servant to work across the states and territories.

So that to me is a critical skill for a contemporary public servant. And it's not easy because we've got busy day jobs, and we've got to do all the things that are under our nose. That's why I do love working in Australia, although sometimes I wonder if the states and territories make our job harder or easier being a former state public servant and then thinking all the way back to my local community or sort of my local landscape, what does it mean back home? So, I think that is a critical tool for the toolkit of the modern public servant. And to me, that's one of the most rewarding parts of my job. So, I think it's very important and it's a part of my job I really like doing.

KATE DRIVER:

Thank you so much, Adam. Unfortunately, we've run out of time. I'm sorry to break the spell. You can feel the energy in the room. People are really engaged and there's so much more that we could continue to speak about. I think as the granddaughter of a cattle farmer who learned to drive on country new South Wales roads and learned how to skid around the corners, and that perhaps wasn't in the driving instruction, but certainly learned how to deal with that. I imagine that it was a slightly parallel universe you find yourself in where spend an hour standing on stage talking to people about chickens and sheep when you've been sitting in the roles that you have over your career. But it just demonstrates the richness of a public sector career, both in and out of public service and in the broader sector. But can I ask you to thank Adam, for today's guest.