

Federation Green Papers

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I am going to tell the story of how Crawford School worked in partnership with the Tasmanian Government to research and write its 2013 White Paper on Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century. This was the first White Paper that the Tasmanian Government had produced in a decade, and it came in on time and on budget. It could not have happened without a partnership with academia.

I think it is useful to highlight the following issues and lessons:

1. **Honesty about capability limitations:** one of the reasons this partnership worked is that the Tasmanian Government was prepared to admit publicly that it didn't have all the policy answers within the bureaucracy, and that it needed external policy expertise given its (understandable) lack of experience on Asia. Crawford School was approached by the Secretary of Premier and Cabinet after he had heard about the partnership model being developed here, and in the light of the Premier's announcement that there would be an Asian Century White Paper – something that the Tasmanian Government would struggle to deliver alone. Indeed, it is very rare for governments and bureaucracies to go onto the front foot like this on policy skill deficiency issues. Because the Tasmanian Government approached the challenge in this honest way, it was very easy then for it to talk about the Crawford partnership openly and from a position of strength - instead of pretending that Crawford School were consultants providing

expert technical advice but with the government officials really doing all the policy work “because only bureaucrats can write policy”.

2. **Joint risk management:** The project risks were jointly owned by the Deputy Secretary in the Department of Premier and Cabinet responsible for policy, as well as myself. The joint owning of risks prevented things from degenerating into a more asymmetric customer-contractor relationship (in which the contractor bears the risks but the customer the benefits). These have to be genuine partnerships.
3. **Prior White Paper experience:** One critical success factor was that the Deputy Secretary had prior Commonwealth Government experience in working on a major White Paper (Defence) – as did my esteemed colleague Peter Drysdale who headed up the Crawford team and who had played an important role in the Federal Government’s Asian Century White Paper.
4. **De-coupling the official statement and the evidence base:** The decision during the final stages to turn what was drafted as the Summary into the official White Paper itself, and what had been the entire White Paper into a set of background ‘evidence base’ chapters to support the White Paper was critical. This avoided the very onerous process of each Tasmanian Department repeatedly going through each draft seeking to weed out anything that looked like a funding commitment or that did not align with their prevailing policy stances and future intentions. Being part of a White Paper finalisation process is something that must be experienced to be fully internalised.
5. **Emphasise public value as a means of countering political parochialism:** We found it useful to stress the ways in which Tasmania can contribute to global public goods (notably by providing a hub for Antarctic and southern oceans/atmosphere research capability) as a way off offsetting more narrowly ‘transactional’ perspectives (how we can make money from Asia). I kicked off that approach by pointing out that one key question was “ask not what Asia can do for Tasmania, ask what Tasmania can do for Asiaand the rest of the world”.

Antarctic and southern oceans/atmosphere research capability are (at present) a good example of how different nations cooperate in an incredibly harsh environment to address global concerns.

- 6. Top-level political support:** Top-level political support goes hand in hand with projects delivering Green and White Papers. It was not especially easy to sell the global public goods aspect of the public value message to a constituency more narrowly focused on within-State concerns. I noted that the Premier chose to use the public value term in the title of one of her speeches – thus sending a helpful signal to us. Following the launch of the White Paper we were all delighted when Premier Lara Giddings came to Crawford School to personally thank the entire team that worked with her officials on the White Paper.
- 7. Federal-State relationships are critical:** Our efforts to highlight the importance of further developing Tasmania’s contribution to global public goods via a strengthened hub for Antarctic and southern oceans/atmosphere research capability required engagement with Federal-State concerns. In order for Tasmania to better position itself as a provider of global public good capability Federal assistance is necessary (diplomacy, inter-governmental domestic coordination, national interest funding etc). Subsequently, the Federal Government did announce new funding in this year’s Budget to support the further development of this globally-significant capability. If things had been pitched more narrowly around Tasmania’s within-state interests the Federal case would have been a lot harder to make. As such, this White Paper was a contributing factor to that success at the Federal-state interface.
- 8. This is demonstrable research impact for academics:** Clearly, academics working in partnership with government officials to produce a White Paper is demonstrable research impact, and especially when that White Paper then has knock-on outcomes. The all-important ‘audit’ trail is clear.

To my mind, this experience suggests that there may be scope for developing an important new vehicle for government – academic cooperation in Australia’s loosely federal system:

joint Green Papers that bridge the Federal/State/Territory domains and the government/academic domains.

Our experience here at Crawford School in research and writing a state government White Paper suggests that:

1. A Green Paper that raises policy options rather than stating agreed government policy (i.e. a White Paper) is a compelling cooperation vehicle.
2. There are plenty of major policy challenges that must be addressed at the interface between Federal and state governments – and in so doing assist the national interest.
3. Academic-government partnerships could be a really productive mechanism for preparing high quality Green Papers because they bring together complementary expertise from both sectors. As such, both sides move down the learning curve associated with getting better at working together, reduced risks etc.
4. Green Paper projects that bring together Federal and state governments via partnerships involving academics could be a useful new tool in a COAG context by providing a safer and more productive place for evidence-oriented policy innovation.
5. Such activities are, of course, clearly demonstrable pathways to research impact for academics.

So, my suggestion for today is that it would be useful to assess the attractiveness and the feasibility of launching a new policy innovation tool in Australia’s loosely federal system: **Federation Challenge Consortia** involving Federal and (one or more) state & territory governments *and* one or more universities. These partnerships would produce a form of **Federation Green Paper** that addresses how major challenges requiring improved Federal-State cooperation might be addressed.

In my experience, the inclusion of (the right type of) academics would be the critical enabler of success in such a context, not least because this may help to dilute COAG-type adversarial politics. Collaboration between institutions at the project and joint authorship level is, of course, core business for many academics.

I referred to the 'right type of academics' because this will require academics who genuinely want to make a contribution to public policy above and beyond simply securing funding and being in a position to report on 'research impact' in order to be compliant with professional and institution-wide incentive systems.

My final point concerns 'the right type of government officials'. The Tasmanian Government's honesty over its own limitations, its appetite for taking the risk of trying to deliver a major White Paper via an innovative partnership model and its willingness to work in a balanced partnership with us, highlights that these things will only work when one combines the right type of academics with the right type of government officials. If we get this right then the possibilities are compelling.