

big thinkers

**(think tanks, knowledge
brokers, networks &
opinion shapers)**

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AFFAIRS OF STATE
 **A PUBLIC AFFAIRS FIRM**

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FOREWORD

This is the first comprehensive listing of the myriad of organisations that contribute to the policy process - ranging from think tanks, to business and trade union groups, to university co-operative research centres.

The guide is an invaluable and necessary guide to anyone who needs to know not just how decisions are made, but who is making those decisions. For the first time in Australia there's collected in one place essential details about people and organisations. The guide traverses all the public policy fields from economics, to foreign affairs, to education, to the environment. Organisations, from what these days is termed 'civil society' or the 'third sector' play a growing role in our society and the guide has a focus on non-government organisations and community groups.

A particularly useful feature of the guide is the listing of 'opinion shapers'. Opinion shapers are people whose opinion matters because of either the quality of their opinion or because they can disseminate their opinion through the media. Opinion shapers cannot be ignored.

This is the essential guide to the people and institutions that make public policy in Australia.

John Roskam
Executive Director, Institute of Public Affairs

INTRODUCTION

In November 1964, I was squashed alongside a wonderful American lady in a small polling booth in the horse-filled village of Potomac in Maryland, a 30 minute ride, by car, from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

‘Over to you, Al’, she said as she drew the curtain behind us, and under her watchful eye, I pressed my finger on the small voting machine lever to cast my (her) vote for President of the United States of America.

I am perhaps the only Australian ever to vote for the President of the United States! I also knew what was on her mind on ten other lever requests, including State Governor and County candidates, as well as education and liquor referendums. I was well prepared.

Over the previous several months since I had arrived from Geelong, she and her naval research aviator husband had had a running challenge with their AFS exchange student “son” for the year, to explain America to him.

Their America was changing before their very eyes. The Civil Rights’ legislation. Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. America’s, and Australia’s, entry into the Vietnam War. America was becoming very different.

And then I pulled another lever, which registered my votes and withdrew the curtain, which had been shielding us from roving eyes. And then I attended the President’s inauguration.

I returned to history and politics, and law and rowing degrees in Canberra. A first career in the international coal trade ended when the coal trade collapsed in 1980; who wanted the stuff. Various career changes in America and Europe, and Australia, with large corporates and SMEs.

The experience in the polling booth in Potomac continued to burn bright within me. Always comparing Australian with America and other countries in many ways. Twenty years as an amateur community and political activist.

Sixteen years as a public affairs professional. Resolving issues involving government. Rainmaking government business for the private sector. And fifteen years editing and publishing public policy digests. And many practical business/government-focussed directories and charts.

“In the current global economic climate and the rapid pace of change, now more than ever is a perfect time to think...”

My formative years in America afforded me a different approach to thinking about Australian public policy. In America, the public policy space is filled with numerous actors, all ever-present in the US political scene, from the political parties themselves, to interest groups, media consultants, spin doctors and professional political operatives, and think tanks. It is think tanks that this publication is principally about; and why not?

Think tanks, like similar opinion shapers, are as much a part of the Australian political and business landscape as they are in America. The Brookings Institution, the United States Institute of Peace and the Council on Foreign Relations have their equivalents in Australia and the field of thought produced within Australia is as vibrant, competitive and intellectual as that produced by our American cousins.

In the current global economic climate and the rapid pace of change, now more than ever is a perfect time to think about the impact and role of think tanks; not only on government but on business as well.

New, good ideas in public policy that may benefit us all are not solely the purview of parliaments and political parties. Ideas factories exist external to the party political system. As we conducted our research into think tanks and our project grew, we discovered that the Australian thinking space, otherwise known as “think-tankery”, is as vast as it is

complex and layered. As we mused on the topic of think tanks for you, we found the space further populated by knowledge brokers, networks and individual opinion shapers. All contribute to the thinking space.

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The important point behind any book of this nature is to get the reader thinking, whether in the areas of your own business or industry sector or on topics of public interest. We want to encourage you to think how the numerous degrees of thinking might interface with what you do and the work of those around you. You might think yourself to be an ideas factory.

In view of a disclaimer, we have struggled to contain our research and thought long and hard on who or which organisation might or might not be included. Australian think-tankery and the knowledge brokerage space, like any growing field, is a work in progress.

As we moved towards publication, new organisations continue to enter the think tank space. Most recently the Grattan Institute and the Public Policy Institute at Australian Catholic University. We have tried

to keep our work non-political and have not passed judgement on the organisations, centres and institutes we have included.

We know we have not included everyone in our publication and we expect to receive feedback and ideas for future editions. Our commitment to readers of this publication is a

promise to provide an update in six months.

As a final note, producing this book has been a challenging experience, but one that I have enjoyed especially while working closely with my colleague, Scott Samson.

Alistair Urquhart

Melbourne, 20 February 2009.