

DRAFT PROGRAM:

***Benchmarking in Federal Systems:
Australian and international experiences***

A joint roundtable of the Forum of Federations and the Productivity Commission

Participation: By invitation only

Date: Tuesday 19 October–Wednesday 20 October 2010

Location: Melbourne

This conference aims at generating comparative knowledge on the experiences of federal systems in introducing benchmarking methods in policies executed by constituent units in federal systems as a way to foster learning and to improve performance. The program will have an explicit focus on the implications of using benchmarking as an alternative to controls tied to fiscal transfers but also on the politics of benchmarking – how to put it in place and make it work. It will also look at benchmarking exercises that aim at producing an environment for learning and for identifying “best practices”. Finally, alternatives to benchmarking should be considered.

Benchmarking exercises have been widely adopted in federal systems. All federations face the issue of balancing the interests of the federal government in key areas of public policy with the desire of constituent units to have autonomy or at least flexibility in terms of how they manage major programs. In many federations, the federal governments using legal instruments or the spending power tied down the constituent units with very detailed restrictions regarding program inputs and management. This was often manifestly inefficient and led to a backlash.

Thus, in many federations there has been a trend towards a different kind of relationship between the federal and constituent unit governments in areas of joint interest. Conditions imposed on constituent units are becoming less restrictive. As such controls are loosened many federations are showing a strong interest in benchmarking in order to determine ‘good’ or ‘best practices’.

This conference will form the basis for the publication of a major comparative study of benchmarking practices in six countries: Australia, Canada, Germany, USA, UK, and the European Union. It is part of the Forum of Federation’s program [“Benchmarking in Federal Systems”](#).

Conference Agenda

DAY 1

Tuesday 19 October

16:00–16:30: Welcome

16:30–18:00

Session 1 —“Federalism and Benchmarking in Comparative Perspective”

Speaker:

- Prof. Alan Fenna, Curtin University, Perth (45min)

Discussion (45min)

19:00–22:30

Dinner for all attendees

Dinner speaker:

- **Helen Silver**, Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, on “Commonwealth–State Benchmarking and the State of Australian Federalism”

DAY 2

Wednesday 20 October

8:45–10:15

Session 2 —“Benchmarking as an Accountability Tool”

Speakers:

- **Prof. Kenneth K. Wong**, Chair, Department of Education, Brown University, on USA/NCLB (25min)
- **Dr. Clive Grace**, Honorary Research Fellow, Centre for Local & Regional Government Research, Cardiff University and former Director general of the Audit Commission (Wales), on UK/Benchmarking Local Government (25min)

Discussion (40min)

10:15–10:30: Coffee Break

10:30–11:30

Session 3 —“The Open Method of Coordination of the European Union in Action”

Speaker:

- **Bart Vanhercke**, Co-Director of the European Social Observatory (OSE) and former European advisor to the Belgian Minister of Social Affairs, on "Social Inclusion Benchmarking" (30min)

Discussion (30min)

11:30–13:00

Session 4—“Emerging Benchmarking Exercises”

Speakers:

- **John Wright**, President and CEO of the Canadian Health Information Institute (CIHI) and former Deputy Minister of the Government of Saskatchewan, on Canada (25min)
- **Dr. Gottfried Konzendorf**, Federal Ministry of the Interior, on Germany (25min)

Discussion (40min)

13:00–14:00: Lunch

14:00–15:00

Session 5—“The Australian Experience with Federalism and Benchmarking: ROGS”

Speakers:

- **Gary Banks**, Chairman of the Productivity Commission, on functioning of “Report on Government Services evolution and contribution” (20 min)
- **Lawrence McDonald**, Head of Secretariat for the Review of Government Service provision, Productivity Commission, on “Benchmarking and the Review of Government Services” (20 min)

Discussion (20min)

15:00–15:45

Session 6—“Benchmarking and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Reform Council”

Speaker:

- **Mary Ann O’Loughlin**, Executive Councillor and Head of Secretariat, COAG Reform Council (25min)

Discussion (20min)

15:45–16:00: Coffee Break

16:00–17:15

Session 7—“Australian Perspectives on Benchmarking”

Speakers:

- **Ken Smith**, Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland (15min)
- **Peter Dawkins**, Secretary, Department of Education and Early Childhood, Victoria (15min)
- **Ben Rimmer**, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Policy and Implementation, Prime Minister and Cabinet (15min)

Discussion (30min)

17:15–17:45 Wrap-up and closing remarks (30min)