Complex portfolios get a clean-up

Bureaucracy
Marcus Priest

The new Gillard ministry has seen a re-ordering of the federal bureaucracy to clear up complex arrangements under former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

The structure of the ministry announced on Saturday splits a number of "super" portfolios and re-orders responsibilities in a number of areas.

The structure of the ministry reflects the policy priorities of Prime Minister Julia Gillard – education, regional Australia and sustainable population growth – and is likely to reflect recommendations of the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet.

During the election campaign, PM&C consulted heads of federal agencies and departments about bureaucratic changes. It is understood one of the issues that emerged was complex bureaucratic and accountability arrangements under Mr Rudd.

The major change to the ministerial structure made by Gillard was to create a ministry for jobs and workplace relations headed by Senator Chris Evans by splitting up her old portfolio of education and employment.

But while most of her old education portfolio went to former environment minister Peter Garrett, responsibility for the schools infrastructure program stayed in the jobs portfolio.

Responsibility for skills training and higher education, previously in the education portfolio, now lies with jobs and workplace relations.

Chief executive of TAFE Directors Australia Martin Riordan said the education portfolio change reflected Ms Gillard’s focus on productivity.

"Skills training has always been the poor cousin of education but this really tries to create a ministry of productivity," Mr Riordan said.

In environment, Ms Gillard moved responsibility for water from the climate change minister to the new Minister for Sustainable Population, Communities and Environment.

Urban Taskforce chief executive Aaron Gadiel said the new ministry combined three ministries.

Federal responsibility for urban affairs had been fragmented between four ministers, responsible for housing, infrastructure, environment and sustainable population, he said.

The biggest change was the creation of a new cabinet ministry for Regional Australia. The new minister, Simon Crean, will also take over responsibility for regional development and local government out of the infrastructure and transport portfolio of Anthony Albanese.

The other major change was to split and move the positions of Special Minister of State and cabinet secretary out of cabinet.

In 2007, the positions were brought into the cabinet and given to Senator John Faulkner. On Saturday Labor backbencher Mark Dreyfus QC was made cabinet secretary and former ALP national secretary Gary Gray was made special minister of state and will have responsibility for electoral and political reform.

Responsibility for freedom of information and privacy was transferred from the special minister of state to Home Affairs Minister Brendan O’Connor in the outer ministry.

There is no longer a cabinet position of human services and corporate law. Human services is now held by Tanya Plibersek in the outer ministry and responsibility for corporate law goes to new parliamentary secretary David Bradbury. Mr Bradbury will also take on responsibility for competition law and consumer affairs.