About the AGLS

The Australian Government is establishing the AGLS as a formal professional network that automatically includes all government lawyers working in over 90 entities across Australia.

If you are a government lawyer, what’s in it for you?

- Membership of the AGLS will be a core part of your professional identity
- You will be a part of a professional network for collaboration and information sharing
- You will have access to training and career development opportunities like the Foundational Australian Government Lawyer Training program, mentoring and secondment opportunities
- A dedicated website will bring together resources and events to enhance your government lawyer experience and career pathways.

The AGLS will support and develop all Commonwealth lawyers and in-house legal areas, and enhance consistency and efficiency across the board. The AGLS will also re-orient and sharpen the Commonwealth’s internal legal services and foster a collegiate, whole of government culture and mindset.

The AGLS will replace the current Australian Government Legal Network (AGLN) and build on the AGLN’s work and the initiatives of its sub-committees. A Transition Steering Committee is guiding the transition process and will make recommendations to the Secretary of AGD.

The AGLS is expected to launch in 2020, and will likely coincide with the annual AGLN Conference. The AGLN Conference Committee is working to confirm a date and venue for the Conference.

How the AGLS is different from the AGLN

All government lawyers (including from the Australian Government Solicitor (AGS)) - will automatically be included in the AGLS. This will connect more than 2,000 Commonwealth government lawyers working in over 90 entities across Australia. Members of the AGLS will remain employees of their entity, but their membership of AGLS will be a core part of their professional identity. The AGLS will build on the achievements and experience of the AGLN and its Board and sub-committees.

The current proposal for the AGLS is that it will:

- Have a publicly accessible website that will provide information about training and events, and career and development opportunities.
- Involve a single governance structure headed by an AGLS Board reporting to the AGD Secretary. The AGLS may also have different sub-committees to the AGLN.
• Emphasise the role of government lawyers within the context of whole of government legal obligations. The AGLS will deliver this framework for government lawyers across all Commonwealth legal services and be more visible than the AGLN.

• Drive cultural change towards coordinated delivery of legal services by a cohort of government lawyers with a professional identity that supports their unique role in government.

• Focus on building in-house legal skills and expertise, increasing public service legal capacity and providing rewarding career pathways.

• Provide a professional network for collaboration and information sharing, including training modules and legal standards.

There are no plans to centralise legal services providers into a single department. Government lawyers will continue to be employed by their agencies.

How the AGLS will fit within the wider reforms to the APS relating to professionalisation

The establishment of the AGLS aligns with the final report of the Independent Review of the Australian Public Service, Our Public Service, Our Future, which recommends that the APS deliver on formal, focused professionalisation of all APS roles through the establishment of a ‘professions model’ (recommendation 20).

Current work to establish the AGLS includes developing competencies, learning and development frameworks such as training modules and focusing on career pathways for the professionalisation of government lawyers.

What the AGLS will offer

In addition to an AGLS website to provide you with information, news, training and development opportunities, there are a number of new AGLS initiatives that you can become involved in. These initiatives are focused on government lawyers building career pathways, developing expertise, acquiring new skills, building professional networks, sharing knowledge and learning foundational competencies.

In particular, we have been working on the following initiatives:

• The Foundational Australian Government Lawyer Training Program for new-to-government lawyers. This program offers training to government lawyers in identified core skills. The three-day training program covers a broad range of topics of relevance to new-to-government lawyers including managing legal risk, advice writing, the Legal Services Directions 2017, good decision making and wellbeing tips for government lawyers. Sold-out training programs were run in May and November 2019, with the next program expected to be held in the first half of 2020.

• The Pilot Reciprocal Secondment Program facilitates secondments between private practice lawyers and public service lawyers, and between public service lawyers, on a reciprocal basis. Among other benefits the pilot assists in-house lawyers to strengthen their current legal professional skills as well as building insights and gaining new perspectives from other legal practices. If you are interested in
participating in the reciprocal secondment program, please email LSreview@ag.gov.au and we can let you know when the next set of exchanges will be run, following evaluation of the Pilot Program.

- The Whole of Australian Government Legal Advice Database will be a central database to share key legal advice of broader relevance to Commonwealth entities, with appropriate protections for the security and integrity of the material. The aim of the database is to reduce overlap and duplication of legal advice across the Commonwealth, improve the management of Commonwealth risk and promote greater consistency in Commonwealth entities’ approach to cross-cutting legal issues. AGD, including AGS, are currently working to progress the implementation of this database.

The role of the AGLS Transition Steering Committee

The AGLS Transition Steering Committee (Committee) was established in April 2019 and is comprised of representatives from General Counsel Working Group agencies, the AGLN Board and other agencies. The Committee is leading the transition to the AGLS and will make recommendations about its establishment and its priorities.

The Committee holds regular meetings. Discussions have focused on governance arrangements for the AGLS (developing Terms of Reference for the AGLS Board, the proposed structure of AGLS committees), developing a General Counsel Charter, a definition of ‘government lawyer’ and considering funding options for the AGLS.

The Committee will make recommendations to the AGD Secretary (or his delegate) about the transformation and transition of the AGLN structure to a new AGLS governance structure.

The future of the AGLN, including its Board and sub-committees

All government lawyers will be automatically included in the AGLS, once established. This is a change from the current arrangements governing the AGLN.

The AGLS will build on the work of the AGLN, including that of the Board and sub-committees. Please be reassured that the important work of the AGLN Board and its sub-committees will continue, both until and after the AGLS is established. Between now and the establishment of the AGLS, it is business as usual. The AGLN Board will meet regularly until the AGLS is established. Once the AGLS is in place, the work currently undertaken by the AGLN Board and its sub-committees will continue, with some adjustments made to the governance arrangements. There will be no stops and starts and we are all working towards a seamless transition.

Over half the members of the AGLN Board are also members of the Transition Steering Committee, so the Board’s views are very well represented. AGLN sub-committee chairs have provided their views on the proposed AGLS committee structure.

The future of the General Counsel Working Group (GCWG)

Until the AGLS is established, the important work of the GCWG and its sub-committees will also continue. Between now and the establishment of the AGLS, it will be business as usual.
When the AGLS is established, the GCWG will no longer meet. It is expected that an AGLS Board will replace the governance functions of the GCWG and the current thinking is to also establish an AGLS committee to replicate some of the broader functions and benefits of the GCWG.

**Membership of the AGLS**

All government lawyers (including lawyers within the Australian Government Solicitor) will automatically be members of the AGLS. The Committee is developing a definition of ‘government lawyer’ for the purposes of the AGLS.

At this stage, the Committee intends the membership base for AGLS to be inclusive and encourage broad participation and engagement in the service, while remaining consistent with the recommendations in the Secretary’s Review of Commonwealth Legal Services.

**The AGLS across Australia**

The Committee acknowledges and has discussed the importance of the AGLS engaging with government lawyers across the Australian Government, wherever they may be located. For instance, the Committee has discussed developing a Regional Engagement Strategy to engage and develop AGLS members outside of Canberra.

The Committee is interested to hear from government lawyers located outside of Canberra about how best to do so.

**Participation in consultations on the establishment of the AGLS**

All government lawyers and General Counsel are encouraged to participate in and provide feedback on the transition to the AGLS. If you have ideas, you can make a formal submission by emailing lsreview@ag.gov.au, or speak to your General Counsel or a member of the Committee. In particular, we are interested in your views on how you think the AGLS should operate once established to ensure it meets the needs of government lawyers.

**Resourcing for the AGLS**

The establishment of the AGLS is being progressed within existing resources. The Committee is investigating funding options for the service. Secretariat services for the AGLS will be provided by AGD.

**Annual AGLS conference**

The AGLN conference is an annual event that is greatly anticipated and enjoyed by many. The draft Terms of Reference for the AGLS Board propose that an AGLS Conference Committee be established. We expect such a committee will continue the great work of its AGLN predecessor.

**Further information about the AGLS**

In addition to checking for updates to this information sheet, the Committee will be providing regular updates on the transition to the AGLS to General Counsel and heads of legal, through the OLSC and AGLN Newsletters and at other forums.
Work is underway to develop a standalone AGLS website. Once that site goes live, we will have a platform to disseminate updates more widely and easily.

For more information about the AGLS or its initiatives, please email LSReview@ag.gov.au.

For more information about the Review and its recommendations, visit the Secretary’s Review of Commonwealth Legal Services page on the Attorney-General’s Department website.