

**The Crawford Doctrine:
an informal sketch**

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In many ways, J G Crawford represents the best aspects of (i) Australian social science, (ii) Australian government administration and (iii) the Australian National University. He has claims to be one of Australia's distinctive voices in international political economy (through his many studies in the economics of trade), in government research and administration (through his public service involvement in the Department of Post War Reconstruction, and later as Secretary of what he insisted on calling the 'policy departments' (Crawford 1957) of Commerce & Agriculture, and of Trade), and in University governance (through his foundation Directorship of the former Research School of Pacific Studies, his Vice Chancellorship and later Chancellorship of the ANU).

Looking over his published reflections on the role of policy advisers in government, I note several themes that deserve recognition as part of what I call 'the Crawford Doctrine' about the core policy competency of career public officials. 'The Crawford Doctrine' is the belief that good government requires a good bureaucracy or public service, and that good democratic government rests on good academic policy analysis performed by bureaucrats or public servants trained in the professional responsibilities of policy analysis and advising. What is distinctive about 'the Crawford doctrine' is this pioneering recognition that public service, at its highest and most ambitious reaches, performs vital *policy* functions. Acknowledgment of this policy dimension of public service work goes unrecognised and the relevant skills go undeveloped when we rely on traditional distinctions between the so-called policy world of elected politicians and the supposedly subordinate administrative world of unelected officials. To put it simply and in Crawford's own words, 'the Crawford doctrine' acknowledges the vital policy and political contributions to democratic good government of bureaucratic 'statesmen in disguise' (to use Crawford's recovery of an older term: see eg Crawford 1960, 103).

As a government and university economist, Crawford used many opportunities to speak about and clarify the role of the trained policy analyst and policy adviser working in the government. Crawford was far ahead of his time in recognising the power of trained analytical skills to contribute to improved public service. Crawford's initial period of overseas academic study as a postgraduate study (1938-1940) was sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund in the United States through an early version of what were later known as Harkness Fellowships. He spent time at the Brookings Institution, that pioneering think tank which has inspired so many emulators around the globe. This exposure to the United States system of energetic national government during the recovery from the Great Depression seems to have left its mark on Crawford, whose later writings about the policy role of Australian public servants are unprecedented in their appreciation of the value of expansive policy responsibilities, over and above administrative responsibilities, expected of public servants.

Crawford's own career in government illustrates the importance of non-partisan policy analysis and advice to ministers. Not surprisingly, Crawford's first major position in Australian government was working under 'Nugget' Coombs as Director of Research in the very-much war time Department of Post War Reconstruction (1943-45), followed by his time as the inaugural Director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (1945-1950), before becoming a departmental secretary: a position he held for the decade 1950-1960. Crawford saw the government research bureaux as modelling the provision of a necessary 'fact-finding service' (to use his term) essential to contemporary government: a service providing government with 'the material and critical analyses of problems with which policy can be better made' as he wrote in 1952 (Crawford 1952, 101). If we ask 'which particular 'problems' were the leading policy priorities for Crawford?', the answer is: Asia Pacific problems of international economy and society. Crawford's distinctive public contribution was not simply to Australian policies relating to Asia and the Pacific, but more importantly to economic and social development policies more generally in the Asia Pacific region, including Australia. Through his influential research relating to

Japan and India and many multilateral issues, Crawford was one of the great framers of the contemporary Australian presence in the Asia Pacific region.

Crawford initiated policy: typically, he paved the way for politicians, instead of waiting for their call. It is during his time as a public service chief that Crawford articulated what I call 'the Crawford Doctrine'. To use one of Crawford's own remarkable formulations, properly trained public servants 'cannot afford *not* to have some audacity in assisting Ministers' (emphasis added). Of course, it would be inappropriate for public servants to have the audacity to abuse their administrative power over government; but for Crawford, 'the necessary audacity is that which tells Ministers their pet nostra are open to criticism or are ill-conceived in terms of national welfare'. Properly trained administrators 'must have the audacity of ideas of his own, but unpalatable as the task can be, and often is, Ministers must make the final decisions' (Crawford 1952, 102). He was under no illusions that, in democratic governments, the main burden of political responsibility rests with the elected government.

But 'the Crawford doctrine' goes further. Recognising the legitimate final say of the Minister is one thing; Crawford's sustained insistence on 'the policy making role' of top government servants, however, is quite another -- especially when articulated by a national head of a government department. Crawford was not the outside academic expert peering into government and trying to describe what should happen. He was the inside academic expert articulating the inner realities of government service, and thereby breaking down traditional stereotypes, of which none perhaps is more controversial, now as much as then, as is his doctrine that top government servants not only *execute* public policy, and they not only *participate* in policy making, but they also *initiate* public policy (Crawford 1954; Crawford 1960). To be sure, public servants perform an important 'managerial function' (Crawford 1954, 160), but their really creative role is one of policy advising, where the secret of public and organisational effectiveness is to recognise 'that pure economic reason...is not enough' (Crawford 1954, 160). As an economist, Crawford was technically proficient across many areas of the discipline; but as a policy analyst and government adviser, Crawford was never merely a technician. Crawford remains a model

of the exemplary policy analyst because he never reduced his art to instrumental issues of technique. For example, when speaking of the role of economists in the policy process, Crawford argued that ‘the would-be economic adviser cannot keep out of the melee or lively debate about ends as well as about the means of achieving them. For ends and means may become hopelessly mixed’ (Crawford 1963, 5).

A consequence of this interest in practical problem-solving is Crawford’s belief that policy analysts ‘cannot live in an ivory tower’: they must try to find ‘answers to problems which frequently contain political or non-economic complications too’ (Crawford 1963, 7). Economic analysis is the necessary but insufficient element in so many areas of policy analysis and advice. A wider sense of policy judgment is called for, which Crawford identified with ‘the thinking function’ of the higher civil service. This thinking function aims at generating ‘the most factual and best ordered thinking ...officials can bring to bear’ in the provision of policy advice (Crawford 1957, 207). The ‘thinking function’ is designed not simply to generate good ideas but to put good ideas into practical effect by persuading ministers to take what he recognised as their ‘ultimate political responsibility’ for policy proposals, and by thereafter helping ministers through public explanation and justification of policies --- even where ministers decide on policies other than those initiated or recommended by public servants (Crawford 1954, 163-5).

This public role for officials as explainer and justifier means that public servants ‘cannot remain in a cloister free from public contact’ (Crawford 1960, 107). The challenge for officials is to retain their public integrity ‘in the eyes of the outside community’ dealing with ministers and government, so that officials are not treated, or worse, do not treat themselves, as ‘ministers in disguise’ (Crawford 1960, 107). To be ‘statesmen in disguise’ is to recognise that the arts of government are political arts, calling on contributions from elected and non-elected components of government. But to operate as ‘ministers in disguise’ is to invade the legitimately-occupied territory of elected politicians, when one should instead act as ambassadors from adjacent or outlying territories. Note that Crawford thought that ministers owed a debt of mutual obligation to public servants: indeed, he not-so-gently insisted that ‘it is not unreasonable to ask the

Minister to answer for and be loyal to his Department', if the Minister wants the Department to provide frank and fearless service (Crawford 1960, 110).

A final aspect of 'the Crawford Doctrine' is the importance placed on 'the art of public consultation on public policy issues' (Crawford 1960, 108; Crawford 1963, 14-15). Crawford anticipated the increasing importance of community consultation by government, and he saw that public servants as much as ministers would have to participate in this consultative process. The government agencies Crawford managed took pride in their capacity to consult with the interests they represented, including the unorganised voice of the ordinary producers and consumers affected by trade policy and practices. But remember that Crawford always described his trade agencies as 'policy' departments, reflecting his preference that the effectiveness of central policy agencies depended on their ability to get out and about, inside and outside Australia, consulting with those affected by government policy and always prepared to learn policy lessons from those having policies imposed on them from 'Canberra'. In this way, 'the Crawford Doctrine' reminds us of the underlying meaning of 'public' in that important phrase 'public policy'.

Selected public policy articles by J G Crawford:

1952 'Administrative aspects of food and agricultural policy', *Public administration*, September.

1954 'The role of the permanent head', *Public administration*, September.

1957 'The organization of the department of trade', *Public administration*, December.

1960, 'Relations between civil servants and ministers in policy making', *Public administration*, June.

1963 'The role of the economist in the public service', *Public administration*, March.

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