Will there actually be an aid minister under Abbott?

By Ashlee Betteridge and Robin Davies
12 September 2013

At the 2010 election, the Coalition promised to appoint a dedicated (though non-Cabinet) minister for aid and development. Julie Bishop also referred to the idea subsequently – but not during the 2013 election campaign and not in the Coalition's foreign policy document. So will there actually be a minister for aid and development under an Abbott government?

Greg Sheridan doesn't think so. He writes in *The Australian* today that:

> *The Coalition is not likely to proceed with its old idea of having a separate minister for aid and development. There will be a cabinet level trade and investment minister, but Bishop will be the senior portfolio minister… AusAID is likely to be much more closely integrated with the Department of Foreign Affairs.*

We're not sure about that last part, which if it is to mean anything would imply a reversal of Labor's decision in 2010 to accord AusAID Executive Agency status within the foreign affairs and trade portfolio. AusAID is already pretty 'closely integrated' with DFAT by virtue of serving the same portfolio minister, and Sheridan believes it will continue to do so.

Sheridan might well be right in predicting the demise of the promised aid and development ministry, if only because Abbott's ministry will have to be smaller than his shadow ministry was. Because the number of ministers is currently limited by legislation to 30 (of whom up to 20 might be in Cabinet), Abbott already has to shed two positions from his opposition front bench line-up. In addition, there's a limit of 12 on the number of parliamentary secretaries — Abbott currently has 15 in the shadow ministry.

There's plenty of gossip about which people might be promoted and demoted — but will there be room to add a minister for aid and development? Or even to keep a parliamentary secretary for international development (a role held by Teresa Gambaro in the shadow ministry)? The rules about the numbers of ministers and parliamentary secretaries apply to the number of people, not the number of portfolios, so Abbott could hand responsibility for aid and development, along with other things (Pacific island affairs, consular services, and so on), to a parliamentary secretary within Julie Bishop's portfolio. We'll have to wait and see.

Read more of our analysis on the new government and aid here.

About the author/s

Ashlee Betteridge

Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

Robin Davies

Robin Davies is an Honorary Professor at the ANU's Crawford School of Public Policy and an editor of the Devpolicy Blog. He headed the Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security and later the Global Health Division at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) from 2017 until early 2023 and worked in senior roles at AusAID until 2012, with postings in Paris and Jakarta. From 2013 to 2017, he was the Associate Director of the Development Policy Centre.

Link: https://devpolicy.org/will-there-actually-be-an-aid-minister-under-abbott-20130912-1/
Date downloaded: 28 March 2024

