

Media release. 19 July 2019

Ethos CRS and the Digital Transformation Agency to update Australia's definitive publishing style guide

Ethos CRS has been appointed by the Digital Transformation Agency to undertake the first stage of the project to develop the seventh edition of the Australian Government's *Style manual*. The *Style manual* sets the standard for writing and publishing and is to be updated for the digital age.

Chief Executive Officer of Ethos CRS, Chas Savage, said that Ethos CRS wants to produce the definitive digital style manual, one that is recognised by all users as setting a new authoritative standard—both in Australia and internationally—and one that helps make government communications simple, clear and consistent.

Mr Savage said the objective of the project is to refresh and define government style and provide comprehensive advice on whole-of-government standards and publishing requirements.

“But this project is not just about commas or fonts or formatting. It is important because clear writing by government is important. People should be able to understand their rights and responsibilities, how they can access services and how they can meet obligations. Our objective is to make documents clearer and the lives of readers easier.

“We also know that the current edition, published in 2002, is silent on the style conventions that enable the creation and use of digital content. A whole generation is waiting for the Australian Government to define digital style.”

Ethos CRS will collaborate with the Digital Transformation Agency to scope out the detail and digital architecture of the new digital *Style manual* in stage 1, which is to begin in July 2019. Work to develop content will commence after the successful completion of stage 1 and the Digital Transformation Agency aims to release the live product in 2020.

Ethos CRS is Australia's leading consultancy for advice on clear writing and clear English for government and business. They are a specialist company based in Canberra that is expert in communications, writing and editing, policy, regulation and leadership.

“The ability of the Ethos CRS team to produce a comprehensive, practical and authoritative *Style manual* is based on a long experience training government employees to write clearly.

“With our partners, the Australian National Dictionary Centre at The Australian National University, Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand, and Principle Co, Ethos CRS has drawn together experts in government writing, in contemporary Australian English usage and in clear writing conventions as they are practised around the world.

“This team understand the principles that underpin the work of drafting clear documents and we know what makes government documents comprehensive, practical and authoritative,” Mr Savage said.

For further information or interviews contact

Patrick Quinn Quirk, Adviser to Chas Savage, Chief Executive Officer, 02 6247 2225

Background

- The purpose of the *Style manual* is to define government style and provide comprehensive advice on whole-of-government standards and publishing requirements. The intended outcome is to achieve clarity, consistency and excellence in government publications.
- The *Style manual* provides detailed advice on best practices in writing, editing, design and production. It is the standard reference tool for the Australian Government and is widely used in the commercial and education sectors.
- The current *Style manual*, the sixth edition, was published in 2002 and is 550 pages long. It has long been a valued reference, but is silent on the conventions that writers and editors must adopt in a digital environment.
- Since the sixth edition was published in 2002, many changes have occurred in how the government manages information. Information and communications technology have profoundly changed almost all aspects of society. This includes the way governments operate, deliver services, communicate, and create, store and disseminate information.
- The first edition of the *Style manual* was published in 1966 as a result of a 1964 report by the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary and Government Publications.
- In 1966 the metric system had just been introduced in Australia and the style manual used spellings such as ‘kilogramme’.
- The second edition was published in 1972; the third in 1978; the fourth in 1988; and the fifth in 1994.
- The first five editions of the *Style manual* were edited, published and printed by the Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS) using external editorial committees and in-house expertise.
- In 1996 the AGPS was privatised. The Australian Government continued to be responsible for governance. The then Department of Finance and Administration commissioned the 6th edition using a new approach to producing, marketing and distributing the *Style manual*.