

DEBATING THE WWTW SYUDY PART II

G MCMAHON, DR A BROWN and DR P SWEPSON

June 2015

FIRST MESSAGE - G McMAHON

From: Greg McMahon
Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2015 12:09 AM
To: Paul Mazerolle
Cc: natasja.holtzhausen ; Near, Janet P. ; Nick Ciancio ; Oluf Husted ; patrick alley ; Paul Latimer ; paul stephenson ; pavel ; per larsson ; Peter Bowal ; Peter Bowden ; Peter Ezeah ; Prof. Dr. Horst Call ; public concern india ; Radu Ionescu ; Rehg, Michael ; Richard Moberly ; ries baeten ; Rodney Smith ; Roger Kline ; Rosemary Hirsch ; Sarah Wilson ; shannon walker ; Rik.vanSteenbergen@vc.fnv.nl ; Pam Swepson ; A J Brown ; Richard Wortley
Subject: Re: GETTING AN INTERNATIONAL VOICE FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Professor Paul Mazerolle,

Thank you for engaging WAGQ in this matter of the WWTW research. For our international colleagues can I acknowledge that you are the Pro Vice Chancellor for law at Griffith University, a former Director of the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at that University, and as you state one of the researchers on the WWTW project.

WAGQ does make a reply to your words herein, but also offers to come to your University and make presentation and stand for examination of our critique before you, your colleagues and your students. This is something that was offered when WAGQ made its formal complaint to the Vice Chancellor, Griffith University and sought independent review of the WWTW some years ago.

Your reference to *limitations to the WWTW project* appears to be more about the experimental methods used. WAGQ's lead in this area is Dr Pam Swepson, who received her PhD based on a social science methodology thesis from your University. I have attached a paper that Dr Swepson did for WAGQ some months ago providing a critique on the methodology used in WWTW, and for time poor colleagues, Dr Swepson today selected a short extract from the WAGQ paper against each of your six points.

The issue between Griffith University and WAGQ may be this - when does a limitation become a flaw, and when does an accumulation of flaws and limitations require that the research be deemed to have failed and / or should not be published. That was a governance issue for Griffith University and its Key Centre and the WWTW Steering Committee, in WAGQ's view. A dialogue between us, or at the Whistleblower's Research Conference, setting criteria for that research governance issue, is an example of how our presentation on WWTW can be directed at setting rules for the acceptability of limited or flawed methodologies for whistleblower research. Dr Swepson is our lead here.

I by comparison am a Certified Project Director and Registered Engineer. I review failed projects. My contribution to WAGQ's critique of WWTW is drawn in large part by what happened to Whistleblower Pam Swepson when a powerless ombudsman's only

suggestion to her was that Whistleblower Pam take her story to the WWTW research team then conducting the research. Whistleblower Pam Swepson did this, but was told that her story could not be used because she was no longer employed by the government agency. Please let me develop this critique by separate email later this week.

Thank you again for initiating a dialogue with WAGQ. Whistleblower research will not suffer from a frank and open discussion of lessons to be learned from what the Australian community of whistleblowers think of WWTW.

Regards

Greg McMahon
President
WAGQ

SECOND MESSAGE - A BROWN

On 13/06/2015, at 1:45 PM, A J Brown wrote:

Dear Greg

I trust you are well. Sorry for not replying earlier, but as you know we have been over most of these issues before.

Further to Paul's email, there are a couple of points that I didn't want to leave unremarked upon. I'm not copying everyone you emailed, just particular colleagues who may like to know I am not ignoring these additional points. Of course you're welcome to also pass this email on to whoever you like, although you should probably consider whether bombarding people with emails like those ones is actually helping you communicate anything constructively.

First, I am not aware that any of the researchers involved in WWTW have ever claimed, contrary to one statement in your emails, that bad treatment of whistleblowers was/is a 'myth'. That would be preposterous, as is that particular statement of yours, since our results and findings detail enormous evidence of the bad treatment and detrimental outcomes suffered by many whistleblowers -- in some respects consistently with other studies, in some respects differently. Whatever your criticisms of the methods or findings of any research project, I don't think you should be surprised by anyone not being enthusiastic about giving you a conference or other platform, if you are going to make such gross misrepresentations of this project, or any other project. As you know I've been always happy to listen to fair criticisms of both methods and findings, and to engage with those, but I don't think you're doing yourself any favours by carrying on in that particular way.

Second, with respect to your advice that Pam Swepson was 'turned away' by the WWTW project on the basis that we weren't interested in whistleblowers who had been sacked -- I view that as massively incorrect but I'm more than happy to hear from Pam or anyone else as to exactly what they were told if they did approach our project with potentially relevant information or experiences. Of course we would be talking about 2006-2008 or thereabouts. If she approached myself or any of the research team or staff, then our response would/should have been to ask her which organisation she was or had been employed by, in order to check if it was one of our 15 case study organisations. If it was, we would definitely have seen if her case fitted within the project parameters; if not, we would have explained that because this was a systematic study, the organisation(s) involved were outside those particular parameters, for purposes of our surveys, interviews and analysis, which was focused on the lessons and experience from those organisations.

Just to confirm this, you should note that contrary to your claim that we turned such potential participants away, our 'internal witness' and other case study organisation surveys did include people who had been sacked or suspended. You can see this on Table 5.13 on p.129 of our 2008 book, where 5.6% of the 141 whistleblowers in that survey said they had experienced being sacked (rising to 8.2% of all those whistleblowers who said they had been treated badly by anyone); and 5.3% of the 225 managers and casehandlers from those organisations also said they believed that type of reprisal (being 'sacked') had occurred at least once in cases with which they had direct experience. It was different with the wider employee survey

which was always going to be limited to current employees, with all the strengths and weaknesses of that approach, but we were at least able to get a bit deeper with the case study organisations. Anyway the implications of all that are discussed in our findings.

I'm not pointing this out with the intention of continuing the debate on things that don't advance anyone or anything. But I'd be grateful if you could desist from the claim that we turned relevant cases away; and also, like I say, if Pam or anyone else got contrary advice regarding the research back when it was being conducted, then I would be keen to hear about the details. Even if it was just a misunderstanding, it would be good to know who specifically she approached and what she was told, especially if there was any record of it, since we obviously see it as vitally important to get these things right.

best wishes
AJ

Dr A J Brown

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<http://www.griffith.edu.au/business-government/centre-governance-public-policy>

Non-executive Director, Transparency International Australia

<http://www.transparency.org.au>

Now available: [A J Brown, David Lewis, Richard Moberly & Wim Vandekerckhove \(eds\), *International Handbook on Whistleblowing Research* Edward Elgar, 2014](#)

THIRD MESSAGE - P SWEPSON

On Sat, Jun 13, 2015 at 3:58 PM, Pam@swepson.com.au <Pam@swepson.com.au> wrote:
Dear Prof Brown

A WWTW researcher did indeed tell me that my experience of being a whistleblower was not within the parameters of that project, on approximately 13 Dec 2005.

This history of that contact with the WWTW project is this. In Nov 2005, I had received a final report from CMC Chair Needham to tell me that the CMC was taking no further actions on my claim that the State government was mis-reporting the fire ant program to the agencies that funded it and my claim of a campaign of reprisal against me.

Shortly after that, Ombudsman Bevan published a piece in the Courier Mail about the Whistleblowers Protection Act. Given his interest in protecting whistleblowers, I emailed him on 20 Nov 2005 to explain that I had received no protection under the Act, the CMC had allowed the government to change the terms of my public interest disclosure and the CMC did not investigate my complaint about mis-reporting. A/Ombudsman Frank King replied on 13 Dec 2005 to explain that my complaint was outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman's Office, but suggested that I get in touch with the WWTW study. I phoned the study that day and spoke to a female researcher, whose name I did not record, who told me that my case was not within the scope of the project. The only reason that I was given, as I recall, was the fact that I resigned from State government on 6th May 2005.

My concerns about the methodology of the WWTW project, which I consider has major flaws, are in the 2 attachments the Greg McMahon sent to Prof Mazerolle on 11 June.

Pam

‘Whistling While They Work’

Protecting whistle-blowers or protecting the watchdogs?

Dr Pam Swepson

Whistle-blowers’ Action Group Queensland

April 2015

ABSTRACT: Thirteen Australian government ‘watchdog’ agencies, with responsibilities for ensuring the integrity of agencies within their jurisdictions funded, partnered and provided oversight of ‘empirical research into whistleblowing in Australian public sector agencies.’ The final report ‘*Whistling While They Work*’ was published in 2009.

The study’s seemingly contradictory, and potentially dangerous findings, that public sector organisations should advise potential, but doubtful whistle-blowers to report while at the same time finding that a significant percentage of public servants fear reprisal if they do, could be the result of flawed research. The data for the study was limited to responses from a non-randomised, self-selecting and self-reporting sample of public sector agencies and staff via questionnaires that were biased towards responses positive to the agencies that participated. This suggests that the study was not able to fully and critically evaluate the current practices of Australian public sector agencies in relation to whistle-blowers and the study’s findings could potentially entrench those practices and protect the ‘watchdog’ agencies that recommend them.

The findings of the study ‘*Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organizations*’ (Griffith University, 2009) seem to be contradictory. On the one hand, the study finds that ‘*organisations can and should adopt a policy of ‘when in doubt, report’ to encourage the reporting of wrongdoing,*’ while at the same time finding that ‘*organisations need to improve their performance in supporting and protecting persons who come forward with reports of wrongdoing. There was ample evidence that this is one area where*

organisations are currently failing.' (Roberts, Olsen & Brown. 2009: 2). The study also reported that *'71.4% of respondents had directly observed at least one example of wrongdoing in their organization... 28.5% of respondents who observed wrongdoing they considered 'very' or 'extremely serious' did not report it or otherwise act on it... The main reasons given by respondents who did not report wrongdoing, was that nothing would be done about it, and that the management of their agency would not protect them from reprisals (especially when the wrongdoers were managers).'*' (Brown, 2007). Recommending that potential whistle-blowers come forward when it is still dangerous for them to do so, is obviously not in the best interests of potential whistle-blowers. The contradictory findings could be the result of a flawed research methodology.

In 2007, the research question was non-specific: *'empirical research into whistleblowing in Australian public sector agencies.'* By 2009, the research question had become clearly focused on the current practices of public sector agencies for managing whistle-blowers: practices endorsed by the thirteen public sector 'watch-dog' agencies providing oversight of the study.

The research was not focussed on whistle-blowers. This is evident in the fact that whistle-blowers who had left the public sector were excluded as respondents from a study *'on whistleblowing in the Australian public sector agencies'*. This was the case even though the study accepted the standard definition of whistleblowing as: *'disclosure by organization members (former or current)'* (Micelle & Near 1984:689). The study makes it clear that this was a deliberate choice. *'Responses did not include former employees who may have observed and reported wrong doing but since left the organization.'* (Brown and Donkin 2007: 11), and *'No effort was made to include individuals who may have reported wrongdoing but since left the organization. The non-inclusion of this group has greatest significance for obtaining an accurate picture of outcomes of the whistleblowing process.'* (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 19)

Responses to the study came from a small, biased sample of public sector agencies and current staff. It collected data from only four of the total nine Australian jurisdictions: the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australian governments, then from only 118 of the 973 agencies within those four jurisdictions and then from only 7663 of the 23,177 employees in those 118 agencies. The study sampled just .005% of the total population of 1.66m (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007) Australian public servants at the time. Also, the high non-response rate further compromised the reliability of the study's data: an 85% non-response rate from the agencies that the

study approached, and a 66% non-response rate from employees within the agencies that did respond. It would be impossible to generalise any findings to the whole Australian public sector from such a limited and biased sample.

Thirteen Australian government ‘watchdog’ agencies, from four jurisdictions, with responsibilities for ensuring the integrity of agencies within their jurisdictions, as well as one non-government partner, funded and provided oversight of this Australian Research Council Linkages project. The study explained: ‘*A steering committee representing the partner organisations oversaw the project, while the project team consisted of the lead researchers from each participating university plus three partner investigators, from the NSW, Queensland and Western Australian governments.*’ (Roberts, Olsen & Brown. 2009 p14).

The partners and funders were the:

Commonwealth Ombudsman

Australian Public Service Commission

NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption

New South Wales Ombudsman

Queensland Crime & Misconduct Commission

Queensland Ombudsman

Queensland Office of the Public Service Commissioner

Western Australian Corruption & Crime Commission

Ombudsman Western Australia

Western Australia Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner

Ombudsman Victoria

Northern Territory Commissioner for Public Employment

Australian Capital Territory Chief Minister’s Department

Transparency International Australia

The fact that the ‘watch-dog’ agencies that funded the research also provided oversight of research into the current practices of agencies within their jurisdictions does raise questions about a potential conflict of interest for those ‘watch-dog’ agencies.

The oversight committee approved a research methodology that used a seriously biased sampling method as well as data collection and analysis methods that biased responses in favour of the current practices of the public sector agencies that chose to respond. The study collected data via six questionnaires. The study relied most heavily on the ‘*Employee Survey (2006)*.’ The study explained, ‘*The Employee Survey was the primary means for establishing a comprehensive picture of the current incidence of whistleblowing in the four Australian public sector jurisdictions studied.*’ (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 16). The study cautioned about the quality of the data of the Employee Survey because it relied on the self-reports of respondents. ‘*Relies on self-reported perceptual data that is subject to errors.*’ (Brown and Donkin 2007: 11). Questionnaires were biased to give a positive response. Nearly every item in the questionnaire presented only positive statements to elicit a response, instead of a balanced mix of positive and negative statements, and positive responses received the highest score and negative responses the lowest. The study explained, ‘*The Employee Survey..... all scales run from 1= strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.*’ Wortley, Cassematis & Donkin (2007: 37). This means that the highest score is always allocated to responses most favourable to the current practices of public sector agencies and the lowest score is always allocated to responses least favourable to the current practices of public sector agency. Hence responses to the Employee Survey are either unreliable self-reports or positively biased or both.

Q 1 asks about the organizational climate. All statements about the organisation are positive. A score of one is always allocated to the most negative response and a score of five is always allocated to the most positive response. **Responses to Q1 are biased towards a positive response.**

Q2 asks for self-reports of the respondent’s own work performance. All statements are positive. A score of one is always allocated to the most negative response and a score of five is always allocated to the most positive response. **Responses to Q2 are both unreliable self-reports and biased towards a positive response.**

Q 3- 12 asks respondents to respond to a fictional case study. Responses to fictional situations may/may not correspond to the respondent's own experience, actions or actually observed experience.

Responses to Q3-12 are unreliable.

Q15 is an attitude survey. All statements are positive. Like responses to fictional situations, respondents' attitudes do not necessarily correlate with their behaviours. A score of one is always allocated to the most negative response and a score of five is always allocated to the most positive response. **Responses to Q 15 are both unreliable and biased towards a positive response.**

Q 17 asks questions about the relevant legislation. All statements are positive. A score of one is always allocated to the most negative response and a score of five is always allocated to the most positive response. **Responses to Q17 are biased towards a positive response.**

Q18 provide a mix of both positive and negative statements about management responses to reports of wrong-doing. **Responses to Q18 might be unbiased.**

Q19 - 36 ask the respondents to report if they have observed and reported wrong-doing in the previous two years. 71% of respondents had observed wrong-doing but only 28% reported it, for fear of reprisals.

Data collected from the *Survey of Agency Practices and Procedures (2005)* are likely to be invalid for several reasons. Data was collected from a 10% (110 of 973), self-selecting, self-reporting, non-randomised sample of agencies. It would be reasonable to assume that those agencies would self-report a positive picture of the number of cases of alleged or suspected wrong-doing reported in the agency, the procedures and systems the agency has in place to support internal witnesses and the agency's responses to reprisals.

Data collected from the *Internal Witness Questionnaire (2006)* are likely to be invalid because they too rely on responses from a self-selected, self-reporting sample.

Data collected from the *Managing the Internal Reporting of Wrongdoing Questionnaire (Case-handler and Manager Survey)* (2007) are likely to be invalid because they rely on self-reports of case-handlers and managers whose role requires them to protect potential whistle-blowers. It is reasonable to assume that they would report themselves in a positive light.

While the *Integrity Agency Practices and Procedures Questionnaire* (2007) attempted to collect factual data, it did not inquire into how integrity agencies decide if claims of wrongdoing or claims of reprisal are substantiated and how agencies actually provide support for potential whistle-blowers.

Responses to the *Management of Disclosures by Public Employees Questionnaire* (2007) are likely to be biased because respondents are people whose role is to manage the reporting of wrong-doing and the protection of whistle-blowers. It is reasonable to assume that such respondents would wish to present a positive picture of their performance. Also, questions which ask respondents to speculate on the intentions, beliefs and actions of others (whistle-blowers) are unreliable and invalid.

Just as the study's data collection methods were biased towards responses favourable to the public sector agencies and their 'watchdog' agencies, so too were the study's data analysis methods.

Very little statistical analysis can be appropriately applied to data collected from non-randomised and non-representative samples. It is inappropriate to calculate percentages of such data, but the study did that and based its findings on them. It is also inappropriate to calculate percentages on data collected from five point, ordinal, subjective scales because they are not interval scales. The distance between the points on such subjective scales are not equal. As Jamieson (2004) says (*While*) *Parametric tests like means and standard derivations can be applied to interval data: the distance between points on the scale are the same, 'it is illegitimate to infer that the intensity of feeling between 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' is equivalent to the intensity of feeling between other consecutive categories on the scale.'* It is both inaccurate and dangerous to assume that the average of 'agree' and 'disagree' is some neutral 'neither agree nor disagree' point when the data clearly shows too opposing points of view. The only appropriate measure of central tendency of such data can be the median or the modal score, not the mean. As Jamieson (2004) explains, *'Methodological and statistical texts are clear that for ordinal data one should employ the median or mode as the 'measure of central tendency' because*

the arithmetical manipulations required to calculate the mean (and standard deviation) are inappropriate for ordinal data, where the number generally represent verbal statements.’ (Jamieson, 2004). This study did not report median or modal scores as a measure of central tendency, but, again, and inappropriately, calculated means and percentages. Taken together, with questionnaire items biased to give high scores in favour of the current practice of public sector agencies, plus inappropriately calculating percentages of those biased responses, strengthen the overall bias of the study in favour of the current practices of the responding public sector agencies and their ‘watchdog’ agencies. This is a serious methodological flaw.

The study was aware of these problems. Wortley, Cassematis & Donkin (2007: 42 – 52), said *‘One problem with interpreting these results is that the directions of these effects are a matter of speculation,’* and *‘When interpreting the results it needs to be borne in mind that, in absolute terms, none of the groups responded negatively on any scale. The lowest score was 3.1, which is just on the positive side of the scale midpoint (‘neither agree nor disagree’).’* This is because the questionnaires were biased to give responses positive to the public sector agencies. *‘Further, there was not a single instance where the results dropped into the ‘negative’ range of possible scores.’* Again, this was because the questionnaires were biased towards responses positive to the public sector agencies.

Perhaps the most serious flaw in the study is the fact that it generalises its findings from a small, non-randomised, self-selected, self-reporting sample to all the 1.66million public servants in all nine Australian public sector jurisdictions. The study was aware of the problem of generalising. It said *‘(The data) Does not provide coverage across the full Australian public sector population, therefore its generalizability is constrained.’* (Brown and Donkin 2007: 11) and *‘....agencies (were) requested to draw random, representative samples, whether or not they did so was not within the researchers control.’* (Brown and Donkin 2007: 11), and *‘We recognise that the current research is not without limitations. For example, this study relies upon self-reported perception data that may be subject to errors in recall and specificity. Additionally, whilst great care has been taken to recruit a large sample size, the study does not provide coverage across the full Australian public sector population, therefore its generalizablity is constrained.’* (Paul Mazerolle and A J Brown 2007 p 106).

While recognising the flaws in the research design, the study claimed *‘some notional extrapolation.’* The study said: *‘As only four jurisdictions, and not all agencies in these jurisdictions were represented in the study, this result cannot be reliably generalized across the entire Australian public*

sector. Nevertheless, the range of agencies and size of the dataset make some notional extrapolation useful.' (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 25).

'Notional extrapolation' is a nonsense term that the study recognised. By 2009, with the support of the oversight committee, the researchers reported that the very same study had become 'randomised.' They said: *'The first report set out a new picture of the incidence, significance and management of whistleblowing in government agencies across Australia, from the Commonwealth, NSW, Queensland and Western Australian governments. It drew on information drawn from approximately 300 agencies who provided information about their whistleblowing systems and procedures, 118 agencies whose staff participated in a major randomised survey of public employees, and 16 of those organisations who participated as case study agencies in more in-depth research including further surveys, interviews and workshops.'* (Roberts, Olsen & Brown. 2009: 12)

The *'Whistle While They Work'* study concludes with a list of findings, all supportive of the current practices of public sector agencies in relation to whistle-blowing. All are based on fundamentally flawed research. Hence:

"Contrary to many expectations, a substantial majority of public officials who reported public interest concerns in recent years (up to 75%) also reported that management and colleagues treated them either the same or as well as a result of their having blown the whistle..... the fact that many officials clearly report wrongdoing and have their concerns addressed without indicating that they suffered unnecessarily, shows the positive health of much of the Australian public sector." (Brown and Wheeler 2007: 157) **Is not a valid claim.**

"Managing Whistleblowing: Conclusions. Whistle-blowers can blow the whistle without necessarily suffering, but only if they do it internally and carefully, have realistic expectations and organize their own support." (2007: viii) **Is not a valid claim.**

"Many organisations show a high level of staff and management commitment to the professional management of whistleblowing reports.....It is not inevitable that whistleblowers are destined to suffer." (Brown and Donkin 2007: 1) **Is not a valid claim.**

“This report sets out evidence to support this new picture of whistleblowing as it currently exists in the Australian public sector.” (Brown and Donkin 2007: 2). Is not a valid claim.

“The vast bulk of whistleblowing identified in the present research begins internally and is resolved without ever becoming public” (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 26) Is not a valid claim.

“A further strong indication is given by evidence that – contrary to strong popular and organizational myth – many public servants are not currently deterred from reporting whistleblowing even if they anticipate or have established from previous experience that whistleblowing is not an easy process” (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 27) Is not a valid claim.

“According to the Employee Survey, whistleblowing does appear to be highly valued by public employees in general.” Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 28) Is not a valid claim.

“Taken together, the above evidence of the incidence and recognized significance of whistleblowing yield a more positive picture of the role of whistleblowing in modern Australian public sector management than has previously been described.” (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 31) While at the same time saying “The fact that a considerable amount of whistleblowing occurs and is organizationally recognized, does not necessarily mean that.....reprisals do not occur or that many of those who blow the whistle do not also suffer as result of the experience.” (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 31) Is not a valid claim

“This chapter has reviewed the basic incidence of whistleblowing in Australian public sector agencies.....These show a more positive picture than previously believed.”(Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007: 36) Is not a valid claim.

“Our research indicates that public whistleblowing is statistically infrequent and usually represents the disclosure avenue of last resort, with the vast majority of whistleblowing taking place internally.” (Brown & Donkin 2007: 7) Is not a valid claim

“A major lesson of both surveys (Employee Survey and Internal Witness Survey) is that whistleblowers do not inevitably suffer ill-treatment by fellow workers or managers, and that many whistleblowers are treated well or no differently than before by members of their workplaces.”(Smith and Brown 2007: 85) **Is not a valid claim**

“This analysis has demonstrated empirically that the effort put into developing and implementing more comprehensive procedures is worthwhile. There are strong indications that comprehensive procedures raise confidence that the organisation will deal with reports effectively and sensitively, encourage reporting, and are associated with better outcomes for those staff who do report. In particular, comprehensive procedures for the reporting of wrongdoing and the protection of whistleblowers are associated with good outcomes as indicated by the measures of how internal witnesses were treated by management and their co-workers. Besides engendering good outcomes, comprehensive procedures are strongly associated with the encouragement of staff to come forward. Legislation itself also appears to have clear positive effects, although these may also relate to elevated expectations in good treatment by management, which may or may not necessarily pan out in practice.” (Roberts 2007:127) **Is not a valid claim.**

“As it stands, it already appears that many agencies take their procedures seriously, and rightly so as they do appear to have a direct impact in terms of encouraging their staff to report perceived wrongdoing. The good intentions of these agencies also then appear to be flowing through to the outcomes for whistleblowers, since management treatment of whistleblowers also appears better in those agencies with more comprehensive procedures.”(Roberts 2007: 128) **Is not a valid claim.**

Worryingly, this flawed study is now being used to inform whistleblowing legislation in Australia. The study says ‘*Since commencement of the project many Australian governments have commenced reviews of their whistleblowing legislation.....The most important review has been undertaken by the Commonwealth Government and Parliament, through the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (2009). Drawing on the ‘Whistling While They Work’ research, the Committee recommended the inclusion in proposed Commonwealth legislation of detailed requirements for agency procedures consistent with the program framework recommended by this report.*’ (2009).

This flawed research was not able to fully and critically evaluate the current practices of Australian public sector agencies in relation to whistle-blowers and could potentially entrench those practices and protect the ‘watchdog’ agencies that recommend them. In October 2007, the Queensland Crime and Misconduct released a media statement that said ‘*New research busts whistle-blower bad treatment myth.*’

References:

1. Whistleblowing in the Australian Public Sector. Draft report 2007. First report of the Australian Research Council Linkage Project *Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations*.
2. Whistling while they work: towards best practice whistleblowing programs in public sector organisations. Roberts, Olsen & Brown. 2009 2nd report of the ARC Linkage Project *Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations*.
3. Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations. Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2005-2007. 2005 Survey of Agency Practices and Procedures.
4. Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations. Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2005-2007. 2006 Workplace Experiences and Relationships Questionnaire.
5. Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations. Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2005-2007. 2006 Internal Witness Questionnaire.
6. Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations. Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2005-2007. 2007 Managing the Internal Reporting of Wrongdoing Questionnaire
7. Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations. Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2005-2007. 2007 Integrity Agency Practices and Procedures Questionnaire
8. Whistling While They Work: Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations. Australian Research Council Linkage Project 2005-2007. 2007 Management of Disclosures by Public Employees Questionnaire
9. Likert scales: how to (ab)use them. Jamieson, S. Medical Education 2004: 38: 1217-1218.

EXTRACTS fm SWEPSON re SIX (6) POINTS DEFENCE OF WWTW by PROF MAZEROLLE

1. The research project was very large in scale and scope. The project was funded by the Australian Research Council after a process of independent peer review.

"Responses to the study came from a small, biased sample of public sector agencies and current staff. It collected data from only 4 of the total 9 Australian jurisdictions...then from only 118 of the 973 agencies within those jurisdictions and then from only 7663 of the 23,177 employees in those agencies: A sample of just .005% of the Australian population of public servants. The high non-response rate - 85% from agencies approached and 66% non-response from employees within the agencies that did respond - compromises the reliability of the study.

2. The project was largely a social science research project, although some legal research was also undertaken.

'The study's contradictory, and potentially dangerous findings, that public sector agencies should advise potential, but doubtful whistle-blowers to report while at the same time finding that a significant percentage of public servants fear reprisal if they do, could be the result of **flawed research**. The data for the study was limited to responses from a non-randomised, self-selecting and self-reporting sample of public sector agencies and staff via questionnaires that were biased towards responses positive to the agencies that participated. This suggests that the study was not able to fully and critically evaluate the current practices of Australian public sector agencies in relation to whistle-blowers and the study's findings could potentially entrench those practices and protect the 'watch-dog' agencies that recommend them.

3. The project relied on large scale surveys, interviews, case file reviews, and documentary analysis. In short, the methodology was multi modal.

'The study relied most heavily on the Employee Survey. The study cautioned about the quality of the data of the Employee Survey because it relied on self-reports.'...Questionnaires...were biased towards responses positive to the agencies that participated.'

4. The project had the benefit of a range of linkage/industry partners, many of which were integrity agencies. The partners participated on the advisory board, consistent with good practice. The project was lead by the research team, not steered by outside 3rd parties.

'The study explained that 'A steering committee representing the partner organisations oversaw the project' which raised questions of potential conflict of interest of those 'watch-dog' agencies.

5. The findings from the research has appeared in a range of academic outlets--journals, books, book chapters, generally informed by peer review processes.

'Worrying, this flawed research is now being used to inform whistleblowing legislation in Australia'

6. Like all research projects and research designs there are limitations to the WWTW project.

'The study's contradictory findings ..could be the result of **flawed research**' (not just limited research)

The sample composition issue you refer to near the end of your email is an example whereby a different study of former workers who were whistle- blowers could yield contrary results.

'The study accepted the standard definition of whistle-blowing as ' disclosures by organisation members (former or current)' ...(but chose not to include)...'individuals who may have reported wrongdoing but since left the organisation. **The non-inclusion of this group has greatest significance for obtaining an accurate picture of the outcomes of the whistle-blowing process**' (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen 2007).

It is important to understand that the WWTW project was a research project not an advocacy project. It is important to bring an objective and independent perspective on such matters to ensure that the findings and observations are examined and interpreted in an dispassionate fashion.

'The fact that the 'watch-dog' agencies that funded the research also provided over-sight of the research into the current practices of agencies within those jurisdictions does raise questions about a potential conflict of interest for those 'watch-dog' agencies.'

As a research project embracing quasi experimental methods, it is beyond argument that future studies using more or less rigorous methods could yield different results or even some similar results.

'While recognising the flaws of research design, the study claimed 'some notional extrapolation'. The study said 'As only 4 jurisdictions and not all agencies within these jurisdictions were represented in the study the results cannot be reliably generalised across the entire Australian public sector. **Nevertheless....make some notional extrapolation..**' (Brown, Marzurski & Olsen 2007). 'Notional extrapolation' is a nonsense term that the study recognised and by 2009, with the support of the oversight committee, the researchers reported that the same (non-randomised, self-selecting and self-reporting) study (had become 'randomised'. (Roberts, Olsen & Brown 2009)

FOURTH MESSAGE (LETTER) - A BROWN

Dr Pam Swepson
cc. Mr Greg McMahon
Whistleblowers Action Group Queensland

Dear Pam

Reply to various issues concerning the *Whistling While They Work* project (2005-2011)

I refer to your various queries and issues raised via emails over the last month or so, up to and including your most recent queries regarding communications with the Crime & Misconduct Commission and Ombudsman in 2005, and also to your April 2015 'critique' of the Australian Research Council Linkage Project *Whistling While They Work* as circulated by Greg to the International Whistleblowing Research Network and others, in response to an earlier reply to him from my colleague Professor Paul Mazerolle.

I think it useful to reply to those queries, along with Greg's repetition of various criticisms of the project, in a consolidated form, as follows.

1. I do not recall any specific approach or advice from either the CMC or the Ombudsman, in 2005 or any other time in the project, regarding your disclosures. If there any records that would confirm whether or not they communicated with us about you, they are now archived and not readily available, especially while I am travelling and on leave. In any event, if for example the Ombudsman's office did inform us as a courtesy that they had communicated with you or anyone else in your position about the project, it would have made no difference to what we did, other than to anticipate a possible email or phone call from you. To the best of my knowledge and recollection, none of the partner organisations ever gave the research team directions or suggestions regarding the relevance of any specific case, or how it should be handled by or in the research, as that was not their role in the project and they knew it.

2. You asked for advice on the roles and relationships of the partner organisations to the researchers, and said this information was not to be found in our reports. Please note below that I think you may be referring to the wrong documents. In any event, the roles of the Steering Committee, Research Team, National Project Group and the State/Territory Sub-Teams of the project are set out in the Research Plan which was always available to all project participants and stakeholders, which was on the project website, and a summary of which is still available on our archived site at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/business-government/centre-governance-public-policy/publications/whistleblowing/research>. These governance arrangements were in line with the project proposal approved for funding by the Australian Research Council.

3. In broad terms, as I have advised you, it was the Research Team who provided the leadership and took executive responsibility for the project. The Research Team had 10 members: seven full-time university academics, and three partner investigators, from the CMC (Sue Johnson), NSW Ombudsman (Chris Wheeler) and WA Corruption & Crime Commission (Glenn Ross and then Donna Oxley). The Steering Committee including industry partners kept a check that the project objectives were met, as well as individual partner organisations supporting the research by assisting with the recruitment of agencies, and participating (along with other stakeholders) with feedback on draft findings as they were made public, but prior to formal publication (on which, see point 12 below). A National Project Group took responsibility for the overall research design, coordination and administration, and the State/Territory Sub-Teams undertook the survey administration specific to that jurisdiction, conducted the interviews and generally supported the empirical research at the local level. This information has always been publicly available.

4. In terms of the broader issues of responsibility, governance arrangements, control and accountability on which we have exchanged emails, but on which I think we may still disagree, I suggest you consult the Australian Research Council's Funding Rules and other guidelines for ARC Linkage Projects – which are quite extensive. The project was established and executed pursuant to those Rules. I am not overly interested in continuing to debate issues of research project governance with you, without you having first done your homework and got your basic facts straight regarding the normal rules and protocols for the type of project concerned. Even then, I suspect there is limited value in such debate. I do agree that it is very important that research be conducted with a clear understanding of the various clients, intended end-users and stakeholders to the research. As previously indicated, however, I found it unhelpful that you used the term research 'client' 98 times in your own PhD thesis in 1999 without specifically defining or discussing it, nor even referencing the definitions or discussions of others.

5. Returning to your own case – as previously advised, if the Ombudsman's office suggested you approach the project with your case, that was entirely up to that office. There was no protocol or expectation that any partner organisation would make such suggestions to anyone. They had no power of 'referral' of cases, nor was such a suggestion part of the research plan or the participant recruitment process (see further point 8 below regarding the only time that they had a role in individual participant recruitment, as against agency recruitment). I suspect that someone in the Ombudsman's office was just being enthusiastic, and possibly sympathetic to your situation. The researchers were under no obligation nor ever felt any pressure to either include or exclude particular cases from empirical research, because the parameters of that research were not set by the partner organisations (which is why I have previously emphasised to you that this was not contracted research). Rather, the parameters were determined by the research design, as approved in broad terms by the ARC and then developed by the Research Team, in consultation with the Steering Committee and other stakeholders (including Whistleblowers Australia).

6. We naturally received many direct approaches from individuals with information they considered might be relevant to our research. As previously advised, our response was to check whether their situation fell within the parameters of the research design in some way, for the purposes of establishing whether they could/should be included in any survey sample or group of participants for interview. If they did not fall in these groups but wished to volunteer other information we typically were happy to receive it – however, we also typically explained that the research was being conducted according to certain parameters, and that as this was a research project, we were not in a position to assist with particular cases, even though we were sympathetic and hoped the results would contribute to better outcomes in more cases.

7. Although you have declined to confirm that the Queensland agency in which and on which you blew the whistle with respect to fire-ant program misreporting was the Queensland Department of Primary Industry, I am assuming that it was, from what I have read in the public domain. I can confirm that Queensland Department of Primary Industry was not one of the 118 agencies we researched via the Employee Survey, nor one of the 15 case study agencies in which we conducted the further surveys and interviews. Irrespective of what information or advice you were given in December 2005 by either the Ombudsman's officer or by the WWTW project researcher you contacted, you were not incorrectly excluded from the survey or interview programs.

8. As I have already previously explained, had that agency been a case study agency, then we would have invited you to participate in the further surveys and interviews even if you were a former rather than current employee of that agency. For the case study agencies, the partner organisations and agencies did themselves identify and contact persons they were aware of who had made disclosures in/about those agencies, inviting them to participate, irrespective of whether they were current or former employees. Due to confidentiality and privacy reasons, we were

never aware of who those persons were unless they then approached the researchers; but they were then included in the case study surveys and interviews. This is one way in which we did pick up former employees in the research, as documented in our 2008 book, *Whistleblowing in the Australian Public Sector* (Brown, ed, ANU E-Press) and explained in my last email to Greg McMahon. Claims that we designed the research specifically to exclude respondents who were former employees and therefore more likely to have adverse experiences as a result of whistleblowing, whether due to any desires or interests of any partner organisations (which to my knowledge were not present) or due to any other supposed aim of describing whistleblowers' experience in any particular pre-determined way, are incorrect.

9. Most of the concerns as raised and re-raised by Greg and now yourself, appear to stem from the limitation that the Employee Survey, as a survey of current employees, was indeed, by definition, not going to include the experiences of former employees of that agency. However, it does not take rocket science to figure that out. The limitation is common to most studies of this kind, and not unique to our project; you may wish to find an article by Janet Near and Marcia Miceli published in 2013 in the *Australian Journal of Public Administration* contrasting results and examining limitations from the major large-scale studies in the USA, Norway and ourselves; or consult the recently published *International Handbook on Whistleblowing Research* (Elgar, 2014) to see other similar discussion. We also deal with and discuss the limitation in some detail in our 2008 book (above).

10. For this reason, I am not going to respond again on the strengths and limitations of this particular approach, relative to ones based on even more self-selecting samples of whistleblowers such as those used by Dr Bill de Maria, as these issues are already dealt with in our publications as well as being a feature of the wider literature. The main point is that the search is ongoing for the best design, sampling, recruitment and analytical methods to try and understand a wide range of issues concerning whistleblowing, from basic incidence and significance through to impacts and outcomes. By moving on from the work of de Maria & Jan, we moved from a patently incomplete picture based on a patently imperfect method, to a somewhat more complete, but still not totally complete picture, based on a different method revealing different information. We have never claimed that this represents the perfect method or the endpoint of such research. If in the future I feel that you or Greg (or other stakeholders) are willing and able to contribute positively to the research design process for any projects for which I am responsible, I am happy to consider consulting you further; however, you should note that I would prefer this to be on the basis of a willingness to engage more effectively with prior results, methods and broader literature.

11. I note that in reply to my observation that it is preposterous to describe our research as claiming that bad treatment of whistleblowers is a myth, Greg has again cited the CMC's media release of 2007, and that this appears in the last line of your April 2015 'critique' (although your own reasoning is unclear because this seems to be an unfinished document). While that 2007 statement is again something we have dealt with before, I think it is relatively apparent that that release, and probably other statements like it, were not claiming that bad treatment does not occur – rather they were responding to widespread claims (based largely on de Maria's work, and his consequent self-defeating definition of whistleblowing itself) that whistleblower suffering is inevitable, i.e. that 100% of whistleblowers suffer bad treatment. If you or Greg wish to make a serious contribution to future improvements on any of these issues, I suggest you recognise the context of the statements and claims you are dealing with, when you profess to analyse them; and be more precise in the points you are trying to make, rather than presenting sweeping and inaccurate generalisations.

12. Beyond this, I do not propose to respond further to your 'critique' of our project, dated April 2015, for the following reasons:

□ Your critique does not respond to our published reports and findings. It refers only to our two draft reports, the first released in 2007 and the second in 2009 at the Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conferences in those years. In each case, the draft reports were released precisely for the purpose of attracting comment, criticism and feedback, which we received from a wide range of both experts and other stakeholders including Whistleblowers Australia. However, this was then taken on board for the final publications. Accordingly, you appear to be critiquing the wrong documents.

□ If you would like to critique our work I suggest you do so on the basis of the final published work – most notably our 2008 book (above); our 2011 practice guide (*Whistling While They* Roberts, Brown and Olsen 2011, also published by ANU E-Press); and the various refereed journal articles reporting results from our study including in *Journal of Business Ethics* and *American Review of Public Administration*.

□ Your critique makes a range of criticisms of the survey methods, claiming they are flawed or invalid, often without relating these to any particular analysis, finding or result. Unless you are prepared to identify how you think the choices of subjects, scales, items, coding or analytical method are impacting on actual reported results, as against how they relate to some non-existent methodological ‘ideal’, it is really not feasible, nor does it achieve any constructive purpose, to debate these questions.

□ A large part of your critique is devoted to declaring particular statements in our 2007 draft report to be categorically ‘invalid’, without much and in some cases without any supporting rationale. The use of the single word ‘hence’ on p.8 of your critique does not constitute a rationale. In addition to factual and logical errors in your paper, I have to admit to being perplexed by the way in which you seem so ready to declare conclusions drawing on the results to be categorically ‘invalid’, as if the alternative – that is, conclusions that can be deemed to be fully and categorically ‘valid’ – even exists. This seems to be quite at odds with your own PhD discussion about the limited value of concepts of objective scientific truth in research.

□ If you do seek to critique our work in a relevant and informed way, I suggest that you follow a more customary path of arguing why you think a particular interpretation or conclusion is more or less persuasive based on the available evidence (ours or anyone else’s), and what might a better way of interpreting the evidence, or stating a better conclusion in light of possible limitations. As against the dogmatic technique of simply declaring conclusions to be categorically ‘invalid’ in an unpersuasive manner. I make this suggestion in case you decide to mount a critique of our work in some constructive and useful way which contributes positively to the development of the field, such as by way of your own article submitted to a peer-reviewed journal in any of the many disciplines that I am sure would be interested.

I hope this assists you with some of the information you were seeking, and to understand my view on some of these matters.

Yours sincerely

A J Brown

Professor of Public Policy and Law

Centre for Governance & Public Policy

Protecting whistleblowers or protecting watchdogs?

Pam Swepson

[from The Whistle, #84, October 2015, NEWSLETTER OF WHISTLEBLOWES AUSTRALIA]

In June 2015, Greg McMahon, President of the Whistleblowers Action Group Queensland (WAGQ) circulated, via email, my paper “Whistling While They Work (WWTW): Protecting whistleblowers or protecting the watchdogs?” to an international network of organisations interested in protecting whistleblowers. Professor Paul Mazerolle, who is now Pro Vice Chancellor of Griffith University and who had been a researcher on the WWTW study, and Professor A.J. Brown also from Griffith University and lead researcher on the WWTW study, responded to Greg’s email and my paper to defend the WWTW study. With respect, their responses did little to answer the question I raised in my paper. WAGQ has long been critical of the WWTW study into whistleblowing in the Australian public sector, because the study’s findings are potentially dangerous to whistleblowers. The study was funded and given oversight by thirteen watchdog agencies from the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland, Victorian and Northern Territory and ACT governments and conducted by Griffith University between 2005 and 2007. The study’s findings are that “organisations should adopt a policy of ‘when in doubt report’ to encourage the reporting of wrongdoing” while, at the same time, acknowledging that it is not always safe for whistleblowers to do so. The study also found that “organisations need to improve their performance in supporting and protecting persons who come forward with reports of wrong doing ... (because) there was ample evidence that this was one area where organisations are falling down.”

With a background in social science research, and now a member of WAGQ, I critiqued the methodology of the WWTW to find major methodological flaws that biased the results of the study strongly in favour of current practices in the public sector for supporting whistleblowers. Hence, the study could potentially entrench current practices and, coincidentally, support the watchdog agencies that promote those practices and that funded the WWTW study. Hence the title of my paper is “Whistling While They Work (WWTW): Protecting whistleblowers or protecting the watchdogs?” The fact that in October 2007, the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission, one of the funders of the study, was quick to claim that “New research busts whistleblower bad treatment myth” gives some weight to that concern. Professor Paul Mazerolle defended the study by saying “The research project was very large in scale and scope.” It wasn’t. The WWTW study claims that its results are relevant to all 1.6m Australian public servants, but it collected data from only 4 of the 9 Australian jurisdictions, from only 118 of the 973 agencies within those four jurisdictions and then from only 7663 of the 23,177 employees in those 118 agencies. It was a sample of just 0.5% of the total population of Australian public servants. And a non-response rate of 85% from those agencies the WWTW researchers approached and 66% non-response rate from the staff in the agencies who did respond at some level severely comprises the reliability of the study.

Professor Mazerolle also said: “The project relied on large scale surveys, interviews, case file reviews, and documentary analysis. In short, the methodology was multi modal.” The research

report states that the study relied most heavily on the Employee Survey and that ex-public sector whistleblowers were explicitly excluded from this survey. This has been always been WAGQ's main criticism of validity of the WWTW study: not interviewing whistleblowers who, for various reasons, have left the public sector. My further criticism of the WWTW's Employee Survey is that the design of the questionnaire biases responses in favour of the current practices of Australian public sector agencies in protecting whistleblowers. It introduces this bias by:

- Relying on self-reports. The research report itself cautioned about the validity of self-report data.
- Framing the response to each item in the questionnaire in terms positive towards current practices. To avoid bias, the questionnaire needed to contain a mixture of positive and negative statements about current practices.
- Collecting responses via a five point, subjective, opinion scale (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") and always giving "strongly agree" a score of 5 and always giving "strongly disagree" a score of 1.
- Summing and averaging subjective responses. The data from subjective opinion scales cannot be summed and averaged because the distance between opinions points is not equal: the distance between "neutral" and "agree" may or may not be the same as that between "agree" and "strongly agree." The only legitimate measures of the central tendency of subjective scales are the median or modal scores. Instead, the WWTW summed and averaged the subjective data of the Employee Survey to produce nonsensical statistical results and claim some "notional extrapolation" (another nonsensical term) to the total population of Australian public sector employees.

Professor Mazerolle also said "Like all research projects and research designs there are limitations to the WWTW project." It is my professional opinion that the methodology of the WWTW was more than limited: it was fundamentally flawed. And it is my opinion that, because the methodology of the WWTW study was so flawed, it could not critically evaluate the current practices of Australian public sector agencies in protecting whistleblowers and, hence, could potentially entrench those practices. Another consequence of this flawed research could be to protect the watchdog agencies that recommend current practices, including those that funded and provided oversight of the WWTW study.

The only criticism that Professor A.J Brown, also from Griffith University and leader of the WWTW research team, made of my critique was that it based largely on the study's draft report to the Australian Research Council in 2007. Professor Brown felt that I should limit my criticism of the WWTW project to his description of it in the book he co-authored in 2008. I considered that contemporaneous reports of the researchers in 2007 were more likely to accurately reflect the researchers' findings and concerns than later reports. Indeed, the study's 2009 report to the Australian Research Council, entitled "Whistling while they work: towards best practice whistle blowing programs in public sector organisation," co-authored by Professor Brown, states that the WWTW study, which the 2007 report had described as a non-randomised survey of self-selecting agencies and selfselecting staff with a very high nonresponse rate was, by then, "randomised" (p12) and, therefore, relevant to the entire population of Australian public sector employees. So, I suggest the question remains, was the purpose of the "Whistling While They Work" study to protect whistleblowers or to protect watchdogs?

Dr Pam Swepson is secretary of the Whistleblowers Action Group Queensland. For a copy of Pam's paper referred to in the opening paragraph, contact her at pam@swepson.com.au.

Response to “Protecting whistleblowers or protecting watchdogs?”

AJ Brown

In response to Pam Swepson’s final question: no, neither the aim nor the effect of our research project was to protect watchdog agencies. It was to gain a much more comprehensive understanding of how much whistleblowing goes on in the Australian public sector (much more than commonly understood), how important it is from a public interest perspective (very!), and how organisations are responding to it in the first instance, given that the vast bulk of whistleblowing occurs internally and often goes no further (we found they often respond poorly but sometimes much

better than one might expect! — and everything in between). The aim was to begin to identify when and why, so that we could start to identify better and worse practice, and increase knowledge as well as lift the standards on what employers and organisations should be doing to facilitate and respond to whistleblowing. We’re happy we were able to begin doing that, and further research is continuing to that end. If anyone would like a copy of my detailed response to Dr Swepson’s concerns (contrary to the impression created by her article, it is a five-page letter), I am more than happy to provide it on an individual basis. However, I still fail to understand why Pam bases her interpretation of our findings and recommendations on our two draft reports (2007 and 2009) which as I reminded her, were “released precisely for the purpose of attracting comment, criticism and feedback, which we received from a wide range of both experts and other stakeholders including Whistleblowers Australia” and which “was then taken on board for the final publications” in each case: our 2008 book *Whistleblowing in the Australian Public Sector*, and our 2011 organisational guide, *Whistling While They Work*. Both are downloadable for free as ebooks from ANU Press, and I encourage anyone seeking to form their own view on the aims, scope, nature and usefulness of the research to simply have a look for themselves.

AJ Brown

AJ Brown is professor of public policy and law at Griffith University and was lead investigator in the *Whistling While They Work* project.