



# Australian Senate Occasional Lecture Series

## Between Law and Convention: Ministerial Advisers in the Australian System of Responsible Government

→ Dr Yee-Fui Ng

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Friday 21 July 2017, 12.15pm to 1.15pm • Main Committee Room, Parliament House

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Dr Yee-Fui Ng

Ministerial advisers have been increasingly thrust into the limelight through scandals that appear on the front page of the newspapers. Political advisers have also come to prominence through television series such as *The Thick of It* (UK), *The West Wing* (US) and *The Hollowmen* (Australia). The rise in significance of political advisers has occurred in countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. This has led to increasing scrutiny of their role and influence in traditional Westminster advisory systems.

This lecture will trace the rise in the power and significance of Australian ministerial advisers. It will show the fundamental shift of the locus of power from the neutral public service to highly political and partisan ministerial advisers. The lecture will address the issue of whether there are any constitutional conventions that regulate the appearances of ministerial advisers before parliamentary committees. This lecture draws on material from interviews with prominent Australian ministers and members of parliament from all political persuasions. Interviewees include former senior ministers Peter Costello, Lindsay Tanner, Kim Carr, Peter Reith, Philip Ruddock, and David Kemp. Several former state premiers were also interviewed, including John Brumby, Steve Bracks, John Cain, and Geoff Gallop.

**Dr Yee-Fui Ng** is a Lecturer in the Graduate School of Business and Law at RMIT University. She researches in the area of public law and politics, focusing on the influences on the contemporary Executive, such as ministerial advisers and lobby groups. Her book, *Ministerial Advisers in Australia: The Modern Legal Context* (Federation Press, 2016) was a finalist for the Holt Prize. Yee-Fui has practised as a solicitor in top-tier law firms in Melbourne, London, and Canberra. She has worked as a Policy Adviser at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, a Senior Legal Adviser at the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, as well as a Manager at the Victorian Department of Justice.

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