



**Institute of
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ROLE OF THE PROJECT COMMISSIONER: CUSTODIAN OF OUTCOME ASSURANCE

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The Role of the Project Commissioner: Custodian of Outcome Assurance

Executive Summary

The Project Commissioner is emerging as a pivotal figure in commissioning-led governance - bridging strategic intent, delivery oversight, and public value assurance. As infrastructure systems grow more complex, fragmented, and outcome-sensitive, this role must evolve from passive funder or contracting authority to active steward of system-wide coherence.

This paper defines the Project Commissioner as a transdisciplinary leader who governs complexity, aligns intent with capability, and ensures that infrastructure delivers what matters. It outlines the core dimensions of the role and its strategic relevance to ICxA's credentialing and governance-driven outcome assurance frameworks.

Defining the Project Commissioner Role

The Project Commissioner is not a passive participant in infrastructure delivery - they are the strategic integrator, governance anchor, and the project sponsor's custodian of public value. The Project Commissioner's role spans the entire lifecycle, ensuring that intent, capability, and outcomes remain aligned – and that the project team remains focused on this outcome through all project phases.

Initiator and Strategic Integrator

For project outcomes to align with initial expectations, there must be an individual or authority to ensure this is the case – the authority to protect the outcome from being degraded into something else, or something lesser than the original intention.

This authority is the Project Commissioner, who holds accountability for aligning all contributing groups toward the intended project outcome. While it may be assumed that this responsibility falls to the Project Manager, historical performance across major programs suggests otherwise. In practice, project management operates within delivery constraints and depends on the Project Commissioner to fulfil the strategic integrator role - ensuring coherence between purpose, capability, and execution.

The Project Commissioner is uniquely positioned to set the strategic direction and anchor the project in public value. They define objectives, socio-technical requirements, and expected benefits, aligning systems and stakeholders to deliver on intent. Acting as the voice of end-users, communities, and institutions, the commissioner ensures the business case is not only approved but aligned with delivery capability and outcome intent. Though these responsibilities are often assumed to lie elsewhere, they frequently become fragmented - leaving no single authority accountable for the project outcome.

Funder and Contracting Authority

The Project Commissioner plays a pivotal role in securing and stewarding funding across the full lifecycle, aligned with the business operating system. Grounded in outcome-focused delivery, the Commissioner shapes procurement methodologies and awards contracts that embed commissioning-led governance and outcome assurance obligations into the project's operational fabric. This ensures procurement structures reflect socio-technical complexity - not merely scope and cost - enabling delivery systems to remain accountable, adaptive, and purpose-aligned.

Governance and Oversight

The Project Commissioner leads commissioning-led governance to actively oversee progress, risk, and quality across all project activities - ensuring that every action contributes to the intended outcome rather than drifting toward delay, cost overrun, or misalignment.



This role is not about creating barriers, but about validating readiness across systems, people, organisations, and stakeholder interfaces - ensuring the project is genuinely prepared to advance to its next stage.

A core responsibility of the Project Commissioner is to authorise major shifts in socio-technical configuration - whether in requirements (scope), cost, or timeline - ensuring agility is exercised with accountability. Strategic redirection is permitted only when it enables a modified outcome that remains coherent with the project's overarching purpose.

By embedding commissioning-led governance from the outset, the project is anchored in compliance with regulatory, environmental, and policy frameworks - reinforcing trust, transparency, and outcome assurance throughout its lifecycle.

Handover and Outcome Assurance

The role of the Project Commissioner is to formally accept the infrastructure into service. They commission it for safe, functional, and compliant operation – and confirm that social, economic, and climate outcomes have been achieved - not just scope delivered.

Clarifying ICxA's Role: What It Means in Practice

The Project Commissioner is not a ceremonial figure—it is a sovereign leadership discipline at the heart of commissioning-led governance. Without it, projects risk fragmentation, missed opportunities and systemic failure – often manifesting as delays, cost overruns, and compromised outcomes, as seen across much of the infrastructure sector. This role demands transdisciplinary competence, institutional legitimacy, and a relentless focus on outcome intent.

ICxA positions the Project Commissioner as:

- A trusted steward of the sponsor's intent - governing systemic performance beyond financial oversight.
- A governance anchor - ensuring infrastructure delivers societal, economic, and ecological outcomes.
- A credentialed professional - formally recognised through structured development pathways and global benchmarking for infrastructure performance.

ICxA is Leading this New Paradigm

As systems theorist Buckminster Fuller observed: *“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”*

Commissioning-led governance is the new model that the project industry has needed for decades - a new business operating system for infrastructure, to disrupt the industry and cause much-needed change. And the Project Commissioner is its steward: not a passive sponsor, but an active agent of alignment, assurance, and public value.

This role doesn't patch over delivery gaps - it reframes how infrastructure is conceived, commissioned, and sustained. It replaces fragmented oversight with integrated leadership, turning complexity into clarity and intent into outcomes. Only the sponsor's commissioner can exercise this level of integrated leadership - bringing the insight and authority needed to align intent, capability, and delivery in pursuit of assured outcomes.



Next Steps

ICxA will continue to define, formalise, and elevate the Project Commissioner as the strategic integrator and anchor of commissioning-led governance - trusted by sponsors, accountable to outcomes, and essential to system-wide coherence, through:

- Credentialing pathways for professionals and organisations, underpinned by the development of PAS–ISO-aligned standards.
- Strategic publications and coalition engagement, to mobilise thought leadership and cross-sector adoption.
- Integration into global infrastructure governance frameworks, ensuring international legitimacy and structural transformation.

If you want to be part of the transformative movement, contact ICxA at info@icxa.net