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Editorial: White, the Forum, and a cosmos "awash" with gravity waves

Robert Marks

Editor

The 2022 Forum

When I became editor of the *Journal & Proceedings* in 2016, there had been one Royal Society Forum. Since then there have been six more. Unfortunately, a pattern has appeared of presenters taking the easy way out by not also writing a paper, for publication in the *Journal*. In 1918 there was a single no-show, but for the 2022 Forum, the number of presenters who did not supply a paper has risen to six of sixteen presenters (including some academics). For this reason, I hope the reader can overlook the necessary informality of transcripts published as papers in this issue. On the other hand, not everyone is an academic. It would be unfortunate if Forum presenters were restricted to those who could (who would) also write a paper. Last year's Forum was definitely enriched by the participation of at least two people who were in no way academics.

The 2022 Forum, "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action," had five sessions. Session 1, Setting the Scene, was addressed by Richard Holden, Alison Frame, Kalinda Griffiths, and James O'Donnell. Session 2, Health and Communities, was addressed by Bernie Shakeshaft, Sally Redman, Elizabeth Elliott, and Maree Teesson. Session 3, Natural and Built Environment, was addressed by Louise Adams, David Schlosberg, Tone Wheeler, and Angelica Kross. Session 4, Education, was addressed by Peter Shergold, Pasi Sahlberg, Kim Beswick, and Lisa Jackson Pulver (who stood in at short notice for Marcia Langton). Session 5, Summary and Solutions comprised a discussion among Julianne Schultz (the Moderator and Rapporteur), Ariadne Vroman, and Lisa Jackson Pulver.

Hugh White

In July last year Hugh White spoke to the Society on the dilemmas raised for Australia by the rising power of China, and the problems faced by an Australia, torn between our defence agreement with the USA and our contacts with our major trading partner, China. All presentations at Ordinary General Meetings are made available on the Royal Society YouTube channel. As well as making these available to those who might have missed the presentation, this allows us to see which talks are most popular. There is no doubt that Hugh White's talk (with over 36,000 views as of a few days ago) has been by far and away the most popular ever. This spurred me to ask Hugh if we could convert the transcript of his 2022 talk into a paper. He agreed, and it is published in this issue.

I had intended to include two more papers on military themes, but the size of the Forum report means that readers will have to await the December issue for them, together with five other accepted papers. These six are listed (with links) on the Accepted Papers web page.[1]

1 https://royalsoc.org.au/council-members-section/561-acceptedpapers

Sadly, this issue contains obituaries of three Fellows who have died recently: past president Ragbir Bhathal FRSN, Christopher Fell AO FRSN, and Jeremy Davis AM FRSN.

"Awash" with gravity waves

Recently the scientific columns have been full of the results published by five national research teams about gravity waves. First predicted by Einstein in 1916, over the past few years we have been able to detect isolated gravity waves reaching Earth as a consequence, we believe, of the collisions of black holes, both in our galaxy and further afield. The new announcements refer to a different sort of gravity wave — not one that occasionally reaches us, but gravity waves that wash over us continuously, with much lower frequencies, or longer wavelengths. These new gravity waves have been deduced from the measurements of signals from pulsars, those stars which appear to be producing extremely regular radio pulses.

In 1967, Cambridge PhD student Jocelyn Bell was analysing data gathered from a bespoke radio telescope she and her supervisor, Antony Hewish, had built at the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory. That summer, she was looking at rolls of chart paper etched with the inked recordings of galactic radio waves, and she spotted a source with repeated pulses against the background noise of the stars. The signal was remarkably regular, pulsing every 1⅓ seconds, and, since it followed sidereal time, it came from the stars, not from Earth.

On 25 November 1967, she discovered a second source, and then a third and fourth, of pulsating signals. In February 1968, Hewish and Bell announced their discoveries in a paper in *Nature*. Soon, other teams of astronomers had reported a regular radio pulse from the heart of the Crab nebula, the remains of the supernova of 1054 AD. This confirmed that the source was probably a neutron star. It caused great interest and a reporter from the London *Daily Telegraph* dubbed these sources "pulsars," for pulsating radio sources.

We now know that a pulsar is a neutron star with intense magnetic fields which accelerate particles into two powerful beams that blast from either magnetic pole of the star. Every time the star spins, the beams sweep the Earth, resulting in a periodic pulse. Hence the pulses are incredibly regular. Over 1000 pulsars are now known.

Just how important this discovery was only became clear in the following decades. The existence of pulsars suggested that the hypothesized black holes — dead stars collapsed to a single point — might also exist. The first black hole was confirmed in 1971 in the constellation Cygnus. On 9 January 1992, the first confirmed exoplanets were discovered orbiting a pulsar in the constellation Virgo.

Another use for pulsars has recently emerged. It became clear to observers that the pulses were fluctuating slightly: For almost two decades, since 2004, groups including the Parkes Pulsar Timing Array (using the Parkes Murriyang Radio Telescope — "the Dish") and other groups (in China, Europe, India, and North America[2]) have been observing pulsars, and measuring the nanosecond delays in the pulses. What could cause such delays?

2 The North American Nanohertz Observatory for Gravitational Waves (NANOGrav) consortium.

It is hypothesized that these fluctuations are being caused by gravity waves, ripples in spacetime, as predicted by Einstein, and so reveal how the space between Earth and each pulsar is stretched and squeezed by the passage of gravitational waves. If the signals come from the combined gravitational waves of thousands of pairs of "supermassive black holes" (SMBHs) believed to lie at the centres of all galaxies across the Universe, it would be the first direct evidence that such binaries exist and that some have orbits tight enough to produce measurable gravitational waves. SMBHs are millions, or billions, times the mass of the Sun, but remain elusive because no light can escape them. The minute fluctuations in the measured regularity of observed pulsars, however, provides us with evidence of their existence, and also a way of indirectly observing them.[3]

On 14 September 2015 the first gravity waves were detected by the LIGO[4] (and later VIRGO, GEO, and TAMA) observations. But the black holes causing these first gravity-wave bursts are orders of magnitude smaller than those associated with SMBHs. And these first gravity waves are relatively high-frequency "chirps," caused by relatively small, star-sized black holes circling each other or colliding, not by SMBHs. These high-frequency waves, with wavelengths of tens or hundreds of kilometres, do not affect the regularity of pulsars' observed pulses; and the newly confirmed low-frequency waves cannot be observed by the LIGO observatories, only revealed by the minute fluctuations in the observed pulsar pulses.

This June, in a coordinated series of papers published in *Astrophysical Journal Letters*, the five national research groups, using their own data sets, announced the observation of low-frequency gravity waves, ripples in spacetime with periods of up to 30 years,[5] travelling at the speed of light. They based their conclusions on decades of observation of about 100 known pulsars. These low-frequency gravity waves have been described as resulting in a cosmos "awash" with gravity waves, if very weak.

How are these ultra-low-frequency "rumbles" produced? It is believed by the interaction of such massive objects as SMBHs binaries. As more data are accumulated, the rumbles are observed to come from different parts of the sky, with slightly different variations in regularity in the pulsars' signals. That is, the signals from pulsars in different places in the cosmos fluctuate slightly differently, perhaps because of different local SMBHs.[6]

The five observation groups recently met at Port Douglas, Queensland, under the auspices of the International Pulsar Timing Array (IPTA), a global consortium. They will combine their separate data sets to increase the sensitivity to these gravity waves many-fold.

3 The likelihood of the latest results being down to chance is close to one in 10,000, making it compelling evidence, although this still falls short of the one-in-a-million "gold standard" in physics for claiming evidence of detection of a new phenomenon. It could also be a remnant of residual gravitational noise from the Big Bang.

4 Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory.

5 A wave travelling at the speed of light with a period of 30 years must have a wavelength of 30 light-years, and a frequency of 1.056 nanohertz (= 1/period).

6 The Hellings-Downs curve predicts how, in the presence of gravitational waves coming from all possible directions, the correlation between pairs of pulsars varies as a function of their separation in the sky.

Astronomers are ecstatic at the results of these decades of observations. For one thing, we know little about the elusive SMBHs,[7] and these low-frequency gravity waves provide a new avenue for observing these elusive objects, that are otherwise obscure. Might we learn more about those enigmatic phenomena — dark matter and dark energy — from studying these? Perhaps.

Housekeeping

Thanks to Jason Antony for his tireless efforts to type-set the *Journal*, both on-line and print versions.

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7 In May 2022, the first image of Sagittarius A* was released, confirming it to be a black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. This was the second confirmed image of a black hole, after Messier 87's SMBH in 2019.

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This is going to be different: learning to live with Chinese power

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Introduction[1]

Judith Wheeldon (Vice President, RSNSW): "This is going to be different — learning to live with Chinese Power." Our speaker is Professor Hugh White AO FASSA, Professor Emeritus of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University. Hugh spent much of his career in the Australian government. He was international relations advisor to Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Deputy Secretary for Strategy and the Department of Defence. As quite a young man, he was the founding director of Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and, from 2004 to 2011, he was head of the ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. He has many publications, including *Power Shift: Australia's Future between Washington and Beijing* 2010, *The China Choice: Why America should Share Power* 2012, *Without America, Australia's Future in the New Asia* 2017, and *How to Defend Australia* 2019. I think we get a glimpse from those book titles and previous positions of what some of the interesting points, challenges, and controversies are going to be. All of it tempered by Hugh's study in the 1970s of philosophy at the Universities of Melbourne and Oxford.

But from the idea that China is rising, and that this is shifting relationships among the countries of the world and challenging us about our attitudes to China as well as to other countries, Hugh is suggesting that there will be changes in the relationships between America and China, and that denial by Americans of their proper role in the world is causing great difficulties. So how does Australia make its way in an Asia no longer dominated by our great and powerful friends? Hughes suggests that how we answer that question will do much to define us as a nation.

Since that was written in mid-2022, maybe there's a new sentence or two. How has Putin changed the calculus and how has the recent Australian election changed that calculus? There will be a Q & A to add spice, if any is needed. And it's going to be led by Emeritus Professor Christina Slade, a long-standing interlocutor of Hugh White from their Oxford days. Christina is the chair of the Society's Programme Committee, which has brought us this event. Have your questions ready for the Q & A. Hugh, it's all yours.

A great new challenge

Hugh White: Well, thank you very much, Judith for that welcome and introduction, and thanks, Christie, for the invitation. Thanks everyone for coming. It is an honour to be here. What a remarkable thing it is that

1 This paper is based on the transcript of a talk that Hugh White gave to the Royal Society on 6 July 2022, at the 1304th Ordinary General Meeting and Open Lecture, in the Gallery Room, State Library of NSW.

this Royal Society has been going now for 200 years. I had to look twice when Christie sent me the notice and it said the 1304th OGM. I thought, that can't be right ... but then on second thoughts, maybe it could be. It is a remarkable achievement, and it seems fitting that we meet in this building — the State Library of NSW — which is, like this Society, a great symbol of the thirst for knowledge and the determination of those first generations who came here after European settlement to use that knowledge to shape the society that has evolved on this continent. They tried to frame the kind of society we have become to fit the unique circumstances we face here in this land in this part of the world. In many ways they — *we* — have succeeded, and the result is the broadly successful society we see around us. In some very important ways we have not yet succeeded. And of course new challenges keep appearing, requiring new responses, so that process has never ended, but continues to this day.

Tonight I'm going to talk about one of those new challenges: the radical change in Australia's international setting as the region around us is transformed by economic growth. That will ultimately require us to rethink the kind of society we have on this continent, in this part of the world, and to explore how it can adapt to the changing circumstances around us. I'm going to try and talk dispassionately about these issues, some of which arouse a fair amount of passion. Well, I say "dispassionately," but actually there are some aspects of my topic about which I'm pretty passionate myself, as you'll see.

My starting point is a very simple observation that obviously something big is changing in the way we Australians see our place in this region. We've just been through an election which was more "khaki" than any election campaign since the "Vietnam" election campaign of 1966. By that I mean that questions of national security — geostrategy, foreign policy and defence policy — weighed more heavily in the election campaign than we have seen in almost sixty years. There are two reasons for that. The first is that our relations with China over the last five years, and especially in the last three years have become as bad as our relations have ever been with any great power since 1945. Indeed our relations have been as bad as we've ever known with a great power as important as China is today to Australia in so many dimensions of our national life. It's our biggest trading partner, a major source of immigrants, and the most powerful country in our region. So the fact that our relationship with China has dived as spectacularly as it has is itself a very significant thing.

But what makes this even more significant is that the collapse of our relations with China is part of something even bigger still. It is bigger chronologically, in the sense that as our political leaders on both sides of politics seek to explain to us what's going on, they compare things today to the 1930s — they reach back to the period before the most cataclysmic strategic crisis the world has ever seen, with a clear implication that the things we are seeing happening today potentially foreshadow a cataclysm of comparable scale. And I think they might be right. I'll come back to that.

But it's also bigger geographically. Last month, our prime minister, newly hatched from the electoral egg, emerged sort of blinking and a bit bewildered, it seemed to me, in Madrid, at a meeting of NATO.

It was an unprecedentedly large meeting of NATO, joined by four countries from the Asia Pacific including ourselves, in which NATO did something quite significant. It declared that China was a "challenge" to NATO's security. So what we are seeing here in Australia in relation to China is seen in similar terms in Europe, and that resonates too with the crisis in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February 2022.

That crisis has added to, amplified, and exacerbated all of the anxieties that we have in our part of the world about what's going on. What I want to do is to explore this, to unpack it, to offer an explanation for what's going on, and talk about how we work through this and what comes out the other side.

I think the best way to understand the big thing that is happening is to see it as a challenge to the global order. And by global order, I don't mean anything very grand, I just mean the set of assumptions and expectations and rules — sometimes informal rules — which frame the way in which countries get on with one another. It's a pretty hard thing to define in more precise terms, but it's a very real thing. International relations don't just happen in a vacuum. They happen within a set of expectations, like all human relationships, and the global order is the set of expectations and assumptions which frame the way in which states get on with one another. One of the most dramatic developments in our lifetimes was the collapse of the bipolar order of the Cold War, which had emerged in the late 1940s with a structural rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union, and framed national relations around the world. After the Soviet Union collapsed, this order was replaced by a US-led unipolar order.

This was, at least for us — and when I say us, I don't just mean Australia, but for the West at large — a very happy moment. We believed that we'd moved into a new global order based on the values and ideals and ideas which had characterised our societies. It appeared to be very broadly supported by America's friends and allies: in Europe, in NATO, and across Europe as NATO enlarged, and in Japan. Arguably in India (I'll come back to that) and in the whole gamut of what we call the West. But it was also a very strong expectation that it was going to spread beyond that — that a unipolar global order, in which the United States was the sole global power and exercised decisive strategic influence everywhere, and would promote the emergence of liberal democratic political systems and market economic systems around the world.

This was what Francis Fukuyama (1992) meant when he talked about the end of history. All of the debates about how to organise society and how to relate society to economics and so on appeared to be resolved by the emergence of this unipolar, US-led order. It promised, amongst other things, not just support for the values that we collectively as societies had developed and had promoted and believed in. It also promised an era of peace because, without the ideological contestation that we'd seen, particularly in the 20th century — witness the First World War, the Second World War, the Cold War — there seemed reason to hope that all the world's major powers would live together harmoniously. The idea was that because they all subscribed to the same basic ideas about the organisation both of their own societies and of the international community, they would find no particular reason to compete with

one another, let alone go to war with one another. Moreover, there was a degree of confidence that if major powers around the world did not willingly accept those ideas, they'd have America to answer to. It was assumed that America's power was going to be so preponderant that even great powers like China and Russia, if they ever contemplated contesting new post-Cold War order, would be deterred, because they would not dare to take the United States on. It is important to remember that from about the middle of the 1990s, people seriously started describing America as "the new Rome," as a country with unparalleled global preponderance in every dimension of national power. That was confidently expected to last throughout the 21st century.

As I said, this vision of a US-led and US-enforced global order was one that I and many others found very congenial. It's not that I love everything about America — I don't — but I prefer to have a US-led global order than many of the alternatives. We are seeing one of those alternatives right now. What we see in today's difficulties with China, and what we are seeing in the crisis in Ukraine right now, is the emergence of a new vision of global order to replace that post-Cold War vision, and that is happening because in several really crucial respects the assumptions underpinning that vision of global order turned out to be plain wrong. US power and the ideas it stands for are not unchallenged, despite the hopes and expectations of the optimists of the 1990s.

Of course those are not the only challenges that face the US-led global order. It faces challenges from within the United States itself, and I think not just from Trump, but I think more broadly from a reluctance of the US electorate to accept the burdens imposed on them. And it also faces challenges elsewhere. It faces challenges in Britain: I think Brexit was, amongst other things, a rejection of some of the ideas and expectations and assumptions that underpinned that 1990s vision of order. The same might be true of some of what we saw in the recent French elections. But the challenges from within "the West," if I can put it that way, pale into insignificance compared to the challenges that are coming from these two powerful states outside the West. The unipolar order is being challenged right now by China and Russia, and how we address that challenge is the great question of international affairs today.

Two possible alternatives sought by Russia and China

I think the best way to start thinking about that is to ask what the alternative order they seek is. If these guys don't like the US-led unipolar order that appeared to emerge at the end of the Cold War, what do they want instead? There are two possibilities.

The first possibility is that they want to replace the US-led unipolar order with a unipolar order of their own — one that that they lead, based not on the principles of liberal democracy and market economics, but on autocracy and "managed" market economics on the Chinese model. This is a widely-held expectation. It's the idea that Scott Morrison, when he was Prime Minister, referred to with the phrase "arc of autocracy." It's the idea that Joe Biden referred to when he spoke in his first State of the Union address about America and China being in "a contest for the 21st century." It's the idea that was expressed at the Madrid NATO summit when NATO said that China is challenging not just NATO's

security, but also its values and philosophy. The fear here is that that, just as a US-led unipolar order was expected to spread liberal democracy and free-market economics around the world, so a global order led by autocracies would spread their ideas around the world, threatening liberal values and political systems in Western societies like ours.

That set of fears and anxieties has become central to the way we in Australia, and those in the United States, Europe and elsewhere, think about China's challenge to the US-led order. There is a view that if that order is not preserved, then our own values and systems are under mortal threat. But that is not necessarily true. There is another way in which the international order could evolve in response to the challenge posed by Russia and China. Instead of moving from a US-led unipolar order to a China/Russia-led unipolar order, we move to a point halfway between these two extremes, with a multipolar order.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time unpacking that idea, but I just want to sketch it to you. Under a multipolar global order, no single power or group of powers — and no single ideology, or set of ideas — predominates. Instead there are a number of "great powers," each of them dominant in their own region or sub-region. The United States would be one, China would be one, India would be another. Russia, I think, is still an interesting question, but I think Russia would definitely be one. And Europe in some strange way — however Europe evolves as a strategic actor — would be one, and there might well be others as well. Each of those regional great powers would seek a sphere of influence, as great powers have always done. And they would seek to achieve predominant influence over the countries in their immediate neighbourhood. How intrusive their predominant influence would be is an interesting question. It might vary from one region to another, but between them there'd be quite a lot of political diversity. Some of those great powers would be authoritarian or autocratic. Some of them would be democratic, some of them would be a mix of different elements. And between them there'd be a fairly constant pattern of contestation and rivalry. Such orders have been quite common in history, especially in Europe. How well they work depends a lot on how the contestation and rivalry between the great powers is managed. If it is well managed, the order can be quite peaceful, as it was in 19th century Europe. If it's ill-managed, the result can be very violent, as it was for much of the 17th and 18th centuries, and for the first half of the 20th century.

The view in Australia

The predominant view in Australia, I think — and elsewhere in the West — is that we are not heading for a new multipolar order of the sort I've just sketched. Instead we are heading for a new unipolar order, the "arc of autocracy" model. Our response, not surprisingly, is very hostile — what I call "aggressively defensive." There's been a spontaneous, not very well-considered, view that the only possible response is to push back as hard as we can to preserve the US-led order, with all the vigour at our command.

I think there are two reasons for our determination to preserve the US-led unipolar order. One is the view that the ideals upon which that order is based are simply better — morally better and perhaps practically better — than the ideals underpinning

the authoritarian alternative. This sense that the old order is morally better has certainly been reinforced by the conduct of Russia in the Ukraine. I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about Russia and Ukraine, but the sense that there's a clear moral difference between "our" side and "the others" has been strengthened by the authoritarian turn in China over the last decade or so — think of events in Hong Kong and Xinjiang — and it has been even further amplified by the way in which Russia has conducted itself in Ukraine.

I want to offer a brief aside here about this, because the moral judgements we make about Ukraine are quite important to the way we weigh the alternative models of global order I have sketched. There is, I think, a distinction between Russia's ambition to assert a sphere of influence over its neighbours, on the one hand, and the way it has done so in Ukraine, on the other. Spheres of influence have a bad name, but it would be very hypocritical to brand them as inherently legitimate or immoral. America after all asserts a sphere of influence over the whole of the Western hemisphere. And we claim a sphere of influence over the Southwest Pacific. Spheres of influence are best seen as a perhaps regrettable but inescapable feature of the international system. What's objectionable about Russia's actions is not the fact that it is asserting a sphere of influence. It is that, firstly, it has tried to do that invading another UN-member county. There are a lot of ways of asserting a sphere of influence other than by invasion. And, secondly, the invasion has been conducted so brutally, with so much deliberate targeting of civilians especially.[2] Both of these factors have rightly earned the harshest criticism, and they have affected the West's response to the invasion, and more broadly to the wider challenge to the post-Cold War order, not just by Russia but also by China. They seem to provide a moral imperative to defending that old order at almost any cost.

But that is not the only thing happening here. The moral imperative to preserve the status quo is underpinned by something more primal and less worthy — the sense that we want to defend what's ours. We in "the West" — especially the "Anglo-Saxon" West — feel that we deserve to lead the global order and frame the ideals on which it is based because we won the First World War, the Second World War and the Cold War. That is how we built the US-led order, and we want to hang onto it.

I don't entirely decry that feeling. I can understand it. But it has consequences. It drives a determination to preserve the old US-led order at any cost. There is no doubt in my mind that the perpetuation of a unipolar order based on US primacy would be best for Australia and may well be, on balance, better for the rest of the world than any probable alternative. But that does not mean it is worth preserving at any cost, which is the belief which I think has been growing in America, and to some extent in Europe, and here in Australia in the last few years, and has been getting a lot stronger recently. Our response to the challenge posed by China and Russia is very emotional, very visceral, and I think that may be especially true here in Australia. And that is because there is perhaps more at stake for us than there is for other parts of the West in this contest, as we can see when

2 See Renwick (2023) The Russia/Ukraine conflict, *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, December (forthcoming). [Ed.]

we narrow our focus from the global level to the regional level, and look at China's challenge to the US-led regional order in Asia.

In Asia the global challenge to the US-led post-Cold War order unfolds as a Chinese challenge to the US-led regional order. That regional order is not something that emerged at the end of the Cold War. It goes much further back, beginning — roughly speaking — in the mid-18th century with Britain's victories in the Seven Years War which established Anglo-Saxon maritime primacy in the Western Pacific. That event, and the long era which it ushered in, is absolutely central to the Australian story, because it established the necessary pre-conditions for British settlement of this continent — and not just the initial intrusions onto the continent, but its subsequent occupation, development, population and defence. What Britain did on this continent — establishing the foundations of the society and the nation as we know it today — fundamentally depended on the fact that Britain was the dominant maritime power in Western Pacific. And the survival and flourishing of the society that flowed from British settlement here has always depended on the maintenance of either British or — after Britain faded — American primacy in the Western Pacific in the 245 years since then. So for us, what's at stake in the contest over the future regional order in Asia is not just a challenge to the global order that emerged thirty-five years ago at the end of the Cold War, but something much more momentous. It is the passing of the Anglo-Saxon regional primacy which we've regarded as necessary and sufficient for our security and the maintenance of this society on this continent ever since British settlement. Because that is what China's challenge to America in Asia portends. Beijing wants to push America out of Asia and bring the long era of Anglo-Saxon maritime primacy to an end. That is why we in Australia find what is happening so threatening.

Our possible response?

So what are we going to do about it? I'll focus here on Asia, though the way forward on Ukraine and Russia is very interesting too. There are two elements to the West's efforts to push back to China's challenge in the Western Pacific. The first is to play to our strengths by talking up our values, our economic and political achievements and our diplomatic weight. That's a matter of essentially asking countries around east Asia and the Western Pacific or the Indo-Pacific: who would you rather be dominated by? Us or them?

That might seem a pretty easy question for them to answer, but it's not that simple, partly because America and its allies no longer have the economic weight to win the economic element of that argument. But it's also not so simple because values are not enough. You need power, and in particular the hard edge of military power. It's important to recognise that, when great powers compete over an issue as big as the issue in question here — that is, which of the world's two stronger states will be the primary power in this part of the world — the contest takes on military connotations, almost from the outset.

That's not to say that it's necessarily going to be decided by a war. War between the US and China as they compete over the future leadership of East Asia is not inevitable by any means. But what is inevitable is that they will test one another's willingness to go to war as a way of measuring their respective

power and resolve. And that's why Taiwan looms so large, because Taiwan is likely to be the issue upon which the US and China end up testing one another's power and resolve. The US will seek to prove that it remains the strongest power in East Asia by either successfully deterring China from seeking to "retake" (as the Chinese would say) Taiwan, or by defeating it militarily if they fail to deter it. The Chinese conversely will seek to prove that they are now the dominant power in East Asia by showing that they can either deter America from intervening if China seeks to take Taiwan, or by defeating America if it does intervene.

This is a classic example of how great power contests unfold, and it doesn't always lead to war. It's perfectly possible that one side or the other will win that contest because the other backs off: that China wins the contest because America decides it's not worth the candle, or that America wins the contest because, as it's done successfully since 1949, it deters China from seeking to retake Taiwan. And that's the Taiwan test. It's not the only focus of their strategic competition — there is a real chance that we're going to see further contests in the South China Sea over things like long-range maritime patrol operations. But Taiwan is, I think, the most poignant, the most pressing, and it's helpful at least to focus on it for the purposes of the discussion.

The US or China?

The key question, then, is who's going to win the battle of wills between the US and China? The assumption from our side that it's going to be us. That assumption is based on the assessments that the West has more power, that the United States is preponderant across that whole range of varieties of national power that I mentioned before, that it is the "new Rome," and also that the United States and its allies have more will: that we are more determined to preserve the order than the Chinese are to overturn it. I think both of those assessments are wrong. That means it is much, much harder to deter China from testing the United States over Taiwan than we in the West understand, and it's much, much harder to win a subsequent war if we fail to deter them.

And that means it is much, much harder for the United States to preserve its primacy in East Asia. The reason for that is really fundamental. It is the rise of China's power. At one level we all know about that, but one of the challenges in understanding the choices we confront is that we've all been living with the rise of China for so long that we've stopped focusing on what a remarkable thing it is. The Australian government has published several of its own estimates of the raw economics. The most recent of them was published just a couple of months ago in a rather obscure publication by DFAT (2022), which didn't get any publicity. It gave Treasury estimates of the relative size of the Chinese and the American economies in purchasing-power-parity terms — which is the more relevant measure for strategic purposes— today and in 2035. Today, China's economy, according to these estimates, is 19% of global GDP and America is a 16%. But that's not the scary bit. The scary bit is in 2035, which in strategic terms is just the day after tomorrow, they're estimating that China's economy will be 24% of global GDP while America's will be 14%.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find that almost impossible to imagine. We all grew up with the idea that America is, almost by definition, the largest economy

in the world. But that just isn't true anymore, and by miles. It's not just that the Chinese snuck ahead by half a metre — they are streets ahead, overtaking America by a wide and ever-growing margin. And these are sophisticated calculations. Treasury are not making any sort of dumb straight-line extrapolations. They take into account the demographic challenges that China faces and the way in which China's economy is changing in composition as it matures. These are not extrapolations that can be brushed aside.

They really matter for the strategic future of Asia because, throughout history, strategic weight — power — derives essentially from economic scale. Why was Britain the world's strongest economy and the strongest power all through the 19th century? Because it had the biggest economy. Why was America the world's strongest power all through the 20th century? Because it had the biggest economy. We should not kid ourselves: those numbers mean that China is going to be, by a long chalk, the most powerful country in the world in the decades ahead. I think we do kid ourselves about that a bit. We somehow think that the laws of economic arithmetic don't apply to the Chinese as they do to us. That would be a very dangerous illusion indeed.

So we in the West can't rely on our economic weight to win the contest with China in Asia, nor on the charm of our diplomacy. It is going to come down to a contest of military power and resolve, deterring China or defeating it. That is made all the harder by the massive resources, including technological resources, that China can bring to bear. Now this is a big subject and I'm going to go over it very quickly.

It would once have been the case that the US would have won a war with China over Taiwan easily and quickly and cheaply. When I say "once" I mean as recently as 2000 or 2005 that would've been the case. By 2010 it was coming a bit harder to be confident of that judgement, and today it is very easy to be confident of the opposite judgment. Today the United States cannot expect to win a war with China over Taiwan because the Chinese have very effectively developed the air and maritime capabilities to deny the United States the capacity to project power to the waters around Taiwan, which they used to take for granted.

To understand what that means, it is important to understand what kind of war we are talking about. A war between the US and China over Taiwan would be the first serious war — not a little border clash but a serious war — between two great powers since 1945. It would be the first major maritime war since 1945. And it would be the first significant war ever between nuclear powers. So we haven't seen anything nearly as serious as this war would be, for a very long time, of ever. It would be a very new, very big, very different war from anything our generation has known.

When I say America cannot win that war, I do not mean necessarily that they will lose it as a conventional — non-nuclear — war. Most likely neither side would "win" that war. China cannot beat America, America cannot beat China. They can each fight one another to a standstill, and they could and would do that quite quickly. I think it would only take a couple of weeks — extremely costly weeks. America would lose lots of aircraft carriers (if they dared to deploy any into the theatre). They would lose lots

of aircraft and ships. China would lose a lot of aircraft and a lot of ships and would have its bases on the mainland of China attacked. So both sides would find themselves, after a couple of weeks, bloody but unbowed and very angry, and both would ask themselves, how can we break this stalemate?

I think it's pretty clear that that two sides both conclude that nuclear weapons provide the only option, and both sides, I think, would be seriously tempted to go nuclear. This may come as a surprise, but it should not. One of the things that's happened in the era of uncontested US primacy is that we've forgotten about nuclear weapons. With the end of the Cold War, the Cold War's nuclear confrontation dissipated, but the nuclear weapons didn't go away. Their numbers reduced, but the arsenals are still easily big enough to cause an unimaginable catastrophe. When it becomes clear to decision makers on both sides that neither side can win a conventional war, there is a very real chance that both sides would feel impelled to go nuclear relatively quickly.

That has big implications. The first and perhaps most important is that, perhaps paradoxically, it is harder to deter China from risking a military attack on Taiwan than many people assume. The probability that a US-China war would approach and perhaps cross the nuclear threshold makes the costs and risks to America of war over Taiwan very high, including the risk of nuclear attack on US cities. That in turn makes it less likely that America would be willing to fight that war, not matter how high the stakes appear to be. And that in turn means the Chinese are more likely to judge that America would decide not to fight over Taiwan after all. It is hard for US policymakers to convince the Chinese that America would start a war with China over Taiwan that it can't win and that might go nuclear.

You might ask whether the same is not equally true of China? Wouldn't the risk of nuclear war deter the Chinese from attacking Taiwan just as much as it would deter the Americans from defending it — thus creating the kind of precarious but durable stability we saw in the Cold War? But there is a key difference here in the deep asymmetry of resolve between the two sides. This is one of the reasons why the present confrontation in East Asia, (and in a different way, the present confrontation in Eastern Europe) is different from the Cold War.

The Cold War was different

What made the Cold War so stable and kept the peace between the superpowers is that the two sides had — and recognised that they had — very equal resolve to prevail on the issues between them. The Soviet Union was absolutely determined not to give an inch to the Americans, and the Americans were absolutely determined not to give an inch to the Soviet Union. They both knew that any attempt, even the smallest, by either of them to disturb the status quo between them on the key fronts — for example, along the Iron Curtain border between East and West running down the middle of Europe — would immediately bring them to the brink of nuclear war. Both sides were convinced that the other would be willing to fight a nuclear war to preserve the status quo on the central front between them, so neither side ever challenged it.

Why was that? World War Two ended with two countries vastly more powerful than any of the others — a bipolar global order. Both sides feared that this bipolar

order might become unipolar if the other side won a decisive advantage. This was a real possibility — either a unipolar order headed by the Soviet Union or a unipolar order headed by the United States — and both sides were determined to prevent that happening. In this the European central front was vital to both sides. One might think that the European central front mattered a great deal more to Moscow than to Washington, because the wide Atlantic Ocean lay between America and Europe. But in the Cold War the United States feared that if the Soviet Union was allowed to dominate Western Europe — which it could quite easily have done if the Americans hadn't been there — it would end up dominating the whole of Eurasia. Early in the Cold War there were no other real great powers that could rival the Soviet Union in Eurasia. In the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, India was very weak, Southeast Asia was very weak, China was in Russia's pocket until the Sino-Soviet split in the late 'fifties or early 'sixties.

So it was a very real fear in the United States that the Soviet Union could have dominated the whole of Eurasia if they dominated Western Europe. And they believed that any country that dominated the whole of Eurasia could threaten the United States at home in the Western Hemisphere — and only a country that dominated Eurasia could do that. Hence, as George Kennan (1947), the architect of US containment policy, said, America's "entire security as a country" is bound up with preventing the emergence of a Eurasian hegemon. Preventing that was really what the Cold War was all about for America, and it gave America a very powerful motive indeed to preserve the status quo on the Central Front — America's own security depended on it, just as much as the Soviet Union's did.

And today?

What does that mean for today? Whether America has the same imperative to defend Taiwan today as it did to defend Berlin and other points on the central fronts in the Cold War depends on whether its own security is at stake as it was in the Cold War. There are really two questions here. The first is whether a Chinese takeover of Taiwan would lead to Chinese hegemony in East Asia. I think the answer is very likely "yes," for reasons I won't elaborate here. The second is whether Chinese hegemony in East Asia would lead to Chinese hegemony over Eurasia, the way Soviet hegemony over Western Europe would have led to Soviet hegemony over Eurasia on the Cold War. If the answer to that is "yes," then America would have an extraordinarily powerful reason to stop China taking Taiwan, and just as America was prepared to "bear any burden and pay any price" to prevent the Soviets dominating Western Europe during the Cold War, including fighting a nuclear war, they would be willing to do the same thing in preventing China from dominating East Asia and the Western Pacific.

But is the answer to that second question "yes"? Could China go on from dominating East Asia to dominate Eurasia? I think the answer is almost certainly "no." The reason for that is there are too many other powerful states in Eurasia to stop it. There is very different from the distribution of power today than there was in the 1940s or 1950s, or even into the 1960s. Back then, India, Western Europe, and China were all very weak. Today a China that dominated East Asia would still face Russia, which remains

powerful despite its failures in Ukraine, and remains determined to preserve its status as an independent great power despite its "alliance" with Beijing. China would face Europe, which is strategically powerful, with a big population, a huge economy, very deep technology, nuclear weapons in the hands of a couple of member countries, and some very strong military traditions. All this makes Europe very formidable. Then there's India, which is increasingly formidable, and it too has nuclear weapons. It has a capacity to disappoint, but it has 1.3 billion people. And it has an economy which, while not growing as fast as China's did in its heyday, is growing fast enough to become to be the third, and soon the second, biggest economy in the world. This is a very different world from the one in which the Soviet Union threatened to dominate Eurasia. So the chances that China can go on from dominating East Asia to dominating Eurasia seems very low.

But what about the much-discussed alliance between Russia and China? I think this is overrated. Today their objectives align. Russia wants to re-emerge as a great power with a sphere of influence in what the Russians call its "near abroad." That's what Ukraine's all about. China wants to re-emerge as a great power with the sphere of influence in East Asia and the Western Pacific. That is what is happening in Asia. Contesting US primacy in their respective regions gives Moscow and Beijing a strong common purpose today. But once that's done, all the evidence of history and the laws of strategic geography tell you that these two countries are destined to be rivals. China is much more powerful than Russia on economic and demographic grounds, but Russia is determined not to be dominated by China, and is strong enough to resist it. We should be careful not to make again the old mistake of underestimating Russia, and we can be confident that Russia's power will help to balance and contain China's.

And so I think that by far and away the most likely outcome is that, if or when China wins the contest with America in the Western Pacific and comes to dominate East Asia, it will not be able dominate Eurasia, and will not therefore be able to go on to dominate the world in a unipolar China-led order. It will find itself running up against Russia, against India — which is determined to be a great power in its own right in South Asia and the Indian Ocean — and against united Europe. Plus there will still be the United States there as a backstop. This takes us back to the point I made earlier, about the relative probability that the old unipolar US-led global order will be replaced by a new unipolar China-led global order or a multipolar global order. The relatively even distribution of power globally between a number of great powers — China, America, Europe, India and Russia — makes multipolarity much, much more likely.

Implications for the USA

This has very important implications for America's position in Asia. If Chinese hegemony in East Asia and the Western Pacific is very unlikely to lead to Chinese hegemony over Eurasia and thence threatening to spread its dominion over the whole globe including America itself, then America does not have an overwhelming imperative to stop it dominating East Asia and the Western Pacific. It does not have the kind of imperative that drove it to being willing to fight a full-scale nuclear war to defend Berlin in the Cold War. It does not have the same imperative to fight a nuclear

war over Taiwan, because America's own security is not at stake the way it was in the Cold War. America can remain very secure in a multipolar global order, so what is really at stake for America over Taiwan is not America's security, but the dream of global leadership — the idea that America can preserve indefinitely the pinnacle of unipolar power that it seemed to have achieved after the Soviet Union collapsed. And how important is that really for Americans?

Of course it has great appeal for the policy elites in Washington. Being the global leader is a kind of neat thing for them and lots of people in Washington want to hang onto it. But once you get outside Washington into the "real" America, so to speak, it is very far from clear that many folks think that way. We know this because they voted for Donald Trump, who amazed the policy elites by winning office as president on a platform which simply repudiated US global leadership. The guys in the think tanks on Massachusetts Avenue still believe in all that stuff, but out there where the voters are, where the taxes have to be collected and the votes have to be counted, they don't buy it. They seem to be happy with the idea that America remains being an equal player in a multipolar order, not dominated by any other great power, secure in its own hemisphere and still dominating that hemisphere as it has done under the Monroe Doctrine since 1824. And it is not just Trump voters who think this way. Democrat voters do too. Joe Biden ran for office in 2020 on a slogan of "a foreign policy for the middle class." He said "Everything I do in foreign policy will be directed and will be shaped by asking the question, 'what does this matter to ordinary American families?'" That is Trump's "America First" with a different label. Are these people willing to fight a nuclear war and risk nuclear attacks on US cites to defend Taiwan for the sake of US global leadership? I do not think so.

And not just me. On reason for the significance of the argument I have just been presenting is that this must all be clear to policymakers in Beijing. They too must understand that America's imperatives to defend Taiwan are not strong enough to justify a nuclear war, which means they may well judge that if and when the time comes, America will not fight. That makes the world very dangerous for two reasons. The first is they might be right — America might well back off, allow China to take Taiwan, and then we will end up then in an East Asia dominated by China. But the even scarier possibility is that Beijing might get that wrong. Despite the power of the argument I've offered you, it might still happen that at three o'clock in the morning, which is when these decisions always seem to be made, Joe Biden finds himself deciding to fight for Taiwan anyway. In fact Biden himself, in his muddled way, has repeatedly said that he would defend Taiwan, so we can't rule out the possibility that he means what he says.

Two very dangerous possibilities

That is why we face *two* very dangerous possibilities. One is that the US, confronted with a direct military challenge from China, steps back and in effect abandons East Asia and the Western Pacific, leaving it to China. The second is that it doesn't step back, but throws itself into a catastrophic war it can't win, and its leadership in Asia is destroyed anyway. The implications of this are profound. It means that the US-led global order that I started talking described earlier, and which remains the lodestar of Australian

policy, will most probably not survive not matter what we do. America does not have the power or the resolve to sustain that order, because the global power distribution has turned out to be very different from the image people had of it when that order was conceived in the 1990s. Instead of America remaining unchallengedly preponderant in every dimension of national power indefinitely, we have seen in the decades since the end of the Cold War the biggest and fastest and most significant shift in the distribution of wealth and power in human history — bigger and faster even than the industrial revolution in the late 18th and 19th centuries. So we are living in a very different world than the one we expected.

And for Australia?

So let me now return run to the question of what this very different world means for Australia. The decline and probable collapse of US power in Asia comes as a profound shock, but not perhaps a complete surprise. For a long time, until quite recently, we immigrants to this continent have sensed that the Anglo-Saxon primacy on which we have depended for our security and identity here on the edge of Asia couldn't and wouldn't last forever. We at least half-understood, even as early as the late 19th century, that eventually Asia's power potential would be realised and we'd find ourselves in an Asia dominated by Asians. We always thought this was a long way off, beyond our lifetimes, but we understood that it must happen eventually.

But that understanding faded from the mid-1990s. That was partly both a cause and effect of the long prime ministership of John Howard, for reasons I won't dwell on here. But more fundamentally it faded because the idea emerged of a perpetual, unipolar US-led order. We started to believe that American power would last forever. Now we've been taken by surprise to wake up twenty years later and discover that's not true, and we are very ill prepared for this. We still cannot shake our belief in American omnipotence, and we retain a deep confidence that America can defeat China, despite all the points I've made. As a result many of us believe that China is going to be easy to deter. Some of us think that if we just talk tough — I'm talking about you, Peter Dutton — the Chinese will back off and go back to accepting the US-led order the way they used to. And what's more, there's a belief that if the deterrence doesn't work, then Australia should support the United States in going to war with China with the aim of preserving the US-led order in this region and globally. I think that's wrong because it is not a war we can win.

This is a very important question that we have to think about very carefully. Most of us do not really recognise where our national debate on these questions is heading. Our political leaders on both sides of politics agree in saying that our strategic circumstances have deteriorated sharply. They agree in comparing our situation today with the late 1930s, and they invoke the "lessons of Munich"[3] to explain how we should react. They are, I think, telling us that they believe we should go to war with China if necessary to preserve the old US-led order, and most of us seem willing to go along with that idea without seriously examining what that war would mean, and what the alternatives are.

3 When Hitler was appeased at the Munich Conference in September 1938. [Ed.]

There are questions here that we need to think about much more carefully, given the points I have made about a war with China. It is a war we cannot expect to win, it could well be the worst war in history, and there is very little chance that it would lead to the outcome we want — preserving the US-led order in Asia.

Going to war with China would be an act of utter desperation. Under what circumstances might it be justified?That depends on what kind of future we'd face if the US-led order is not preserved. One could argue that it would be justified if the alternative was a China-led global autocratic order of the kind Scott Morrison conjured with his talk of an "Arc of Autocracy," which imposed China's political values and system on Australia. Then you might make an argument — though it wouldn't be an easy one — that the horrendous kind of war I'm talking about would be worth fighting, even when the chances of victory are so low. But I think you really can't make that argument if the alternative to the old status quo is not a China-led autocratic global order, but a multipolar order. Because in a multipolar order like that, there would be lots of space for countries like ours to make our own way and preserve our own system and values. It would be harder for us than living under US primacy, because US primacy has been a dream for Australia. That is one of the reasons we don't take foreign policy seriously enough — we have had no need to, because the world has worked so well for us. But can we survive and flourish in the kind of multipolar order which, I have argued, is far more likely than autocratic unipolarity? Of course we can.

A multipolar order

What would that kind of order rally be like? Of course there is a lot we do not and cannot know, but there are some parameters we can sketch. The first and most important is that we will not find ourselves living under the shadow of one great power but of two, with China on one side and India on the other. We will be able to sit between them and play them off against one another to maximise our freedom to manoeuvre with them both, which is what smaller and middle powers do in multipolar systems. We are very well placed to do that because we sit right on the dividing line between their two natural spheres of influence — India's in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and China's in East Asia and the Western Pacific.

The second parameter relates to the kind of great powers we will be dealing with. We need not assume that either China or India, as they exercise their prerogatives of great powers, are necessarily going to be territorially aggressive or highly intrusive in our domestic political affairs. Great powers are not all the same. Some have been very intrusive, like Stalin's Soviet Union in Eastern Europe in the 1940s and '50s. But other great powers haven't been like that, like America in the Western hemisphere. We have no real reason to fear that either China or India would be especially politically intrusive in their dealings with Australia, or other countries for that matter. We should assume we will face a "silent invasion." Or to put it another way, it will not be that hard for us to defend our way of life and our way of organising our society even in an Asia which is dominated by China and India.

The third point is that we would not be alone. There are lots of other smaller and middle powers in Asia with interests very like ours. They too are going to be living between India and China. They too are going to be trying to maximise their freedom to manoeuvre between them. There is going to be plenty of opportunity to cooperate with them. Some of them are going to be quite big and significant players — like Indonesia, which will be the fourth biggest economy in the world well before the middle of the century. There's a lot we can do with our neighbours collectively to manage the impact of Asia's great powers upon us when we can no longer rely on America to do so. Focusing on that is a much more promising way to build our future in Asia than continuing to sleepwalking our way into war with China.

Our foolish, risky strategy

But our current politics and policies are heading in the other direction. Our two political parties have complete bipartisanship on this, and that has become more clear since the election. They both have very deep faith in America's capacity to solve our China problem for us by deterring or defeating China militarily. That is a very foolish, risky strategy. I therefore think we need to stop and rethink very deeply, and that is going to be hard for us to do. Not only do our own predilections and presumptions nudge us towards unthinking commitment to perpetuating the US-led order in Asia. The West as a whole, with which we still identify so strongly, are increasingly seeing things that way — as NATO is doing now, thanks to the crisis in Ukraine. We should not follow NATO's lead on this, or Washington's. We need to understand our own situation better, and that is going to require better political leadership on this issue than we've seen for a long time. The need for that leadership could not be more urgent. We are living through the biggest shift in Australia's international setting since European settlement. It's going to profoundly change the way we live in Asia. And if we get it wrong, it will be devastating for our future. Thank you.

Discussion

Christina Slade (Councillor, RSNSW): Look, thank you very much, Hugh, that's been an extraordinary *tour de force* of talking. It fills in some of this. You say, instead of helping America to manage the strategic transition in Asia wisely, we are encouraging Washington to confront Beijing in a test it cannot win. Well, you've made that very clear. We've had Anthony Albanese supporting that and saying on the sidelines of NATO that China is a danger. We've had Richard Marles talking about Taiwan. We've had Penny Wong pushing Australia's role in the Pacific. What should they be doing differently now?

Hugh White: Good. Yes. What should they doing differently? Well, that's a very big subject, don't get me started, but the absolute first essential is this: our political leaders should start explaining to Australians the actual situation we face. The foundation of Australian policy on both sides of politics at the moment is that America is powerful enough to defeat China's challenge to the US-led order in Asia. But they must know that's not true. I mean, they publish those figures, 24% to 14%. I mean it's near as dammit to twice the size. It just defies the laws of strategic gravity that the United States could prevail over China in an issue in

which America's own most vital interests are not engaged in China's own backyard when China is inherently a much more powerful country. And until we start having a conversation about that fundamental shift in the distribution of wealth and power, which drives everything else, then we're not going to get anywhere. So that's the first thing we have to do.

The second thing we have to do is to start talking to America very differently, because at the moment we are encouraging America to think that we'll support them in trying to deter China, if that fails then trying to defeat China militarily. I think we underestimate how much that promise of support increases the danger of war by encouraging America to follow this path. Can we change the way America thinks by changing our position? I think we can. We tend to look at the US political and strategic system as a huge edifice, which is completely impenetrable, but it's not, actually. The number of people who actually make decisions in Washington DC on these issues is probably about a hundred, give or take. And Australia, believe it or not, actually looms quite large for them, partly because we're so bloody noisy on this issue. And, you know, we think that's great because they all nod and agree and slap us on the back and call us mates, because we absolutely support what they're talking about. But by doing that we are encouraging them to think that they're on the right track in trying to confront China.

And our enthusiasm — Peter Dutton's enthusiasm — for going to war with China will make it more likely that at three o'clock in the morning an American president will do that. And I think that is potentially very disastrous for us. So we have to go to America and say something very bold. Because, if I'm right, my argument would be that we should be absolutely crystal clear that whatever else we do, we are not going to go to war with China to try and preserve US primacy, because it's a war they can't win.

The third thing we need to do is to go and talk to the Chinese and talk to them a bit differently. Not by saying, "oh, okay, you can have what you like" — that's the last thing you want to say — but you do want to go and start talking to them on the basis that we accept that, and recognise that, as the world's most powerful state, they are going to be much more influential in Asia than they have been in the past. And to start talking them through that.

And the last thing we need to do is to talk very differently to our neighbours because both sides of politics have made a big thing about regional diplomacy, talking to India, talking to Japan, talking to the Southeast Asians. But the way we have framed that is that we go to them and try to persuade them that they should agree with us about how to deal with China. In other words, our diplomacy in the region is to go and read America's talking points to our neighbours. And the fact is they don't believe it. I mean they just don't buy it. And so that undermines our credibility.

What we should do is do something a little bit different: to go to the region and start listening, because the Indonesians, the Singaporeans, the New Zealanders — interestingly, although it'd be interesting to see what just Jacinda Ardern says down there at the Lowy Institute tomorrow — are handling all the issues that we are dealing with, have the anxieties that we have, and sometimes more anxieties because they're closer to China. And yet they don't seem

to be digging themselves into the same hole that we are digging ourselves into. So I think we have a lot to learn from them.

Peter Baume: You held up the *Quarterly Essay* a few minutes ago. It's the most significant, important powerful *Quarterly Essay* I've read in years. Oh, thank you. And, I encourage everyone to read it. You talk about a multipolar world and you say we need a strong Russia as part of that multipolar world. How do we get a strong Russia?

Hugh White: Well, Peter, I'm not sure that's the problem. I think we've got a strong Russia, we just need to work out how to live with it. And that's not easy. This is because, as I say, the way in which Russia has sought to establish its sphere of influence over Ukraine is literally inexcusable. Both because it's invaded, which it didn't need to do. And because it's invaded in such a brutal manner. There's a lot we don't understand about what's happened in Ukraine since February 2022. But the extent to which the Russians have deliberately targeted civilians makes no military sense to me at all. I mean, why waste the resources blowing up people's apartment blocks? There's something very odd about that.

But the proposition that Russia is going to have — and we can't stop them having — a sphere of influence in their "near abroad," I think that's something we have to learn to live with. So let me give you a really scary analogy. The last time the world tried to build a multipolar order was in 1945 when, at the end of the Second World War, nobody thought there was going to be a unipolar or, for that matter, even a bipolar order. What they thought was going to happen was that there was going to be a multipolar order with five great powers — there's still the Permanent Five (P5) in the Security Council — and they were clearly going to be at the top table. They were clearly going to be the ones who decided how the world was run. The rest of us smaller and middle powers just had to sort of fit in round the edges.

Luckily, thanks to H. V. "Doc" Evatt amongst others, there was an institutional structure to do that in the UN. But it was clear that those five great powers were going to be the ones that really counted. And in order to make that work, Roosevelt in particular had to make some real concessions to Moscow. That's what happened at Yalta in January 1945. And the heart of the deal was, "okay, you can have Eastern Europe as long as you are prepared to accept this multipolar structure," and Stalin said "yes." Two ways of reading that: one is that it did actually work in the sense that it established those two very rigid spheres of influence, which the Cold War never violated. It was a terrible outcome for the Poles, and if you go to Poland and talk about Yalta you'll get a lot of very strong views expressed. And I understand that. But if you actually look at the choice that Roosevelt faced, with the Red Army on the outskirts of Berlin — by far and away the most powerful army the world had ever seen — Roosevelt had to ask himself, "well, am I going to go to war, once we've defeated the Nazis, have another war with the Red Army?" And we know how the Red Army would've beaten the rest of us cold. Because they beat the Germans. The Wehrmacht was really powerful, a very strong army. But they were no match for the Red Army, and neither was the West at that time. So would we fight a war to defend Poland, which we wouldn't win and which would've devastated Poland? Would the Poles have been better off? No.

We face the same kind of choice today actually. I think the problem we have in Ukraine is that Russia has behaved repugnantly. But the idea that we can push Russia out of Ukraine and humiliate it and push it back and turn it into a middle-sized power is not going happen. So we're going to have to learn to live with a powerful Russia, and that's going to require us to make some compromises we really badly don't want to make, just as learning to live with a powerful China is going to require us to make some compromises in Asia that we really don't want to make, including concessions — I think compromises is a too glamorous a word for it — about the future of Taiwan. And you know, if that feels icky and horrible and morally compromised, well, welcome to power politics, because remember what's on the other side is nuclear war and, you know, peace is value too. Sorry, long answer, but good question.

Steven Burns?: Russia's economy is just slightly bigger than Australia's. This Ukrainian development was essentially the last European imperialist war. So Russia is trying to expand its territory. I don't believe Russia will still be a great power because its economy is nothing like China's, which is a multi-trillion dollars. My two questions are: one, we talk about China as being an integral bulwark — the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), et cetera. How long do you think the current president will be in power? Because he's made lots of enemies internally in China, and I think one of his first major mistakes is the fact that he's made Zero COVID as the policy, which shows he's not omnipotent and all-seeing. It starts to raise questions in the Chinese population and also in the CCP. The second question is, would the attempt to invade Taiwan even with minimal US support be far too expensive for China? It's a big strait of water and Taiwan is armed to the teeth with missiles and all sorts of munitions and will just make it too expensive for China to invade Taiwan.

Hugh White: I'll be as quick as I can. Look, you're absolutely right about Russia economically, and I'm conscious that I'm going to say will contradict what I said before about the economy being the foundation of national power. But there's something odd about Russia, and part of it is its sheer geography. One of the things that Russia has going for is that it's so big that it's a local power in four completely different parts of the world at once. And that does seem to make a big difference. The second is that, of course, there are an awful lot of things that Russia can't do because it doesn't have a big economy, but it does have 1500 active-service nuclear weapons and probably another six or seven thousand back in the warehouse. And if you'll forgive this technical, strategic term, when the shit hits the fan, that really counts for something.

So Russia is a very strong defensive power. It has a great capacity to resist other countries intruding onto it, but that is not all. Russia at the time of Napoleon was economically relatively weak. All it had was a very big population. But it's worth remembering that after Napoleon retreated from Moscow in 1812, the Russians advanced, and by 1814 they'd occupied Paris. There's something creepy about Russia. I think you've got to be very careful of it, and I do think it's strong enough to resist Chinese hegemony, whatever its other weaknesses are.

Your second question was about Xi Jinping. I don't speak Chinese. I'm no sort of a sinologist. A lot of my colleagues at ANU

are, and I spend quite a lot of my time sitting at their feet asking dumb questions and trying to understand the answers. So I'm not going to do more than reflect other people's views on Xi Jinping's predicament. Of course, it's always possible, in a highly autocratic structured system, that he gets thrown out. I wouldn't disagree with that for a moment. But the CCP is a remarkable institution and the instruments of control that Xi seems to be in charge of look very robust. So I wouldn't bet anything on the proposition that he goes quickly.

But I also don't believe his going would make much difference. Xi's personality, his manner, his political persona obviously have done something to affect the tone of things over the last decade. But whoever was leading China at the point at which China's economy overtook America's the way it has would be seeking to do exactly what Xi Jinping's trying to do. I find it very hard to imagine that an alternative would necessarily be much easier for us to deal with. The point about COVID Zero is a very interesting one because I've developed the working hypothesis that most of the time the CCP in their own lights gets things right. They proved to be remarkably effective at managing to deliver what they want. And I look at the Zero COVID policy, I think that just looks dumb. So maybe they're just screwing it up. But whether that undermines the whole credibility of the Party and endangers Xi Jinping's position, I'm just not sure. It could be, but I think in the end that's not going to be a game changer.

On Taiwan, here are two points. The first is that the Chinese don't have to invade Taiwan in order to subjugate it. They can blockade it. Blockade, most of the time, particularly against continental powers, is a pretty useless strategy But against a very trade-dependent island economy, situated a stone's throw from the Chinese coast — if you wanted to set up an abstract model for the perfect blockade scenario, Taiwan is it.

And the second point is that the Taiwanese are not armed to the teeth. Consider their strategic situation. They spend the same proportion of GDP on defence as we do. They spend 2%. Now, if they spent 5% the way the Singaporeans do, then I'd start to take them seriously. I don't actually think the Taiwanese are very serious about their own defence, and I don't think it's very hard for the Chinese to overcome the defences that the Taiwanese have. It wouldn't be easy in the sense that there'd be lots of casualties, but I don't see anyone in Beijing worrying much about that. I think they could do it. The slightly stronger question is how hard would it be for them to suppress opposition in Taiwan once they had controlled the territory? Controlling the territory is one thing. Controlling the population is another. All I can say is that the Chinese seem very confident that they can do it, and, if anybody can do it, they can, because they are very experienced at political oppression. So I think it'd be very ugly. I think it'd be tragedy. I have a lot of admiration for what Taiwan's achieved, particularly since the mid-'90s, economically and technologically, but also politically, and culturally. But I wouldn't want to bet that they would stand up in front of Beijing.

Des Griffin: Thank you for your talk. I was concerned that the frame of reference seemed to be one of conflict. One could ask what happened to the United Nations. The other point is that the context really seemed to be 800 years ago in Italy, the time of Machiavelli and the Prince. Now,

you remember in the film *The Third Man* where Harry Lime in that amazing scene in the elevator was asked about that and the matter of peace. And he just said, "In Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, and they had 500 years of democracy and peace. And what did that produce? The cuckoo clock."[4] Now, I mean, I don't understand if we can afford this contestation and all the rest of it. Think of the difficulties and challenges we really face. We've seen some of them in the last few months: climate change, water, energy, pandemics, even getting on with one another. I mean, are we really going to carry on the same way as we did 800 years ago? Because that is how far we've come.

Hugh White: Well, two points to make. The first is you're absolutely right. One of the many reasons why it's so important to avoid a conflict over the future order in Asia and globally is precisely that that gets so badly in the way of dealing with all sorts of other problems, including climate change. And I think there are other reasons like nuclear war. But, you know, the fact that there are so many other things to be dealt with just amplifies the point. The reality is that states still behave very much the way states always did because people still behave very much the way people always did. It might be surprising and disappointing to discover that we haven't learned much. But what strikes me is that our political leaders — and not just in Australia — are sailing into a confrontation which has a very high risk of conflict with all the same ideas and indeed with less historical consciousness than we sailed into the First World War and the Second World War. And so I join you in deploring it, but that doesn't mean it's not going to happen. And, given that's a looming risk is something we need to manage rather than just pretending that it's something we should consign to history.

Christina Slade: As Judith said, it's nearly half a century ago we were young philosophers. What you brought, I think, Hugh, is the analytic skills and the clarity of language from the philosophical background of that half a century working on strategic defence issues. That's been really illuminating. But what's also important to me is the even-tempered approach. This is not an area, as you say, where emotions go. I think that the lesson that you are telling us is that we can't any longer rely on the US as a global power. And that we need to be thinking seriously about whether the US would come and bail us out as the Brits failed to in Singapore. That said, giving up being a global power is really hard.

And we see that looking at what's happening in Russia and Ukraine right now. To my mind we've seen it in some of the kerfuffles in the United Kingdom: coming to terms with not being a global power. And I wonder whether, to some extent, what we are seeing with China is compensating for the loss of their global power two centuries ago. And it's going to be very hard for us all to go through this. I think it's pretty hard for us as well, because we'll have to negotiate. What I want to say is if there's anything that philosophers should be committed to,

4 Graham Greene was the script writer, but said that Orson Welles himself wrote this line. Welles recalled, "When the picture came out, the Swiss very nicely pointed out to me that they've never made any cuckoo clocks — they all come from the Schwarzwald in Bavaria!" [Ed.]

it's reasoned and calm debate, and to the Society's own motto, *omnia quaerite*. We have to keep questioning, we have to keep having these debates and we have to do it in a good-tempered, reasoned and evidence-based fashion.

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2022 Royal Society of NSW and the Learned Academies Forum: "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action"

Official Opening

Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC

Dr. Pond, President, RSNSW: As President of the Royal Society of New South Wales, I'm delighted to welcome you to the 2022 Royal Society of New South Wales and Learned Academies Forum. The Society has convened this forum every year for several years, and it's always a highlight of the calendar. The Academies with which we partner are focused on health and medical sciences, humanities, science, social sciences, and technology and engineering. And the Forum epitomises the Society itself, which has been a nexus of ideas and discovery for 200 years. Always challenging the population to think differently, always reporting on the latest research and facilitating solutions to some of the major challenges confronting humanity.

Celebrating, as we have this year, a 200-year milestone of our existence pales into insignificance compared to the long history of Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In paying our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging of the Gadigal and the indigenous nations across New South Wales, we recognise their deep knowledge, care, and custodianship of land, seas, and waterways. I'm delighted to invite Her Excellency, the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, Patron of the Royal Society of New South Wales, and host of the Forum today at Government House to open proceedings. Her Excellency is an eminent Australian jurist, currently 39th Governor of New South Wales. Immediately before this appointment, she was President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal, the first woman to hold that office. Her Excellency was made Companion of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List in January, 2020, for her eminent service to the people of New South Wales, particularly through leadership roles in the judiciary and as a mentor for young women lawyers.

The Governor, Hon. Margaret Beazley: Thank you, Dr Pond.

Bujari gamarruwa
Diyn Babana Gamarada Gadigal Ngura

As I welcome you to Government House Sydney in the language of the Gadigal, the traditional owners of these lands on which we meet, I pay my respects to Elders, past, present and emerging, and thank them for their custodianship of this land and nearby waters.

Research in Western countries over the last decade indicates a diminishing trust in institutions, and sometimes seriously so. The causes for this are manifold, complex, and, more often than not, inter-related. Whilst survey results provide a sound enough working guide, deeper analysis is required. Hence, the 2022 Forum topic, "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action," is timely and will be thought-provoking.

Having at the outset cautioned about the limitations of survey results, I have nonetheless found it instructive, as an introduction to your Forum, to have brief regard to the results of the Scanlon Foundation Research

Institute's figures for the years 2018 to 2021.[1] I have used this source as it has wide credibility and is a reference point for many institutions, including Government. In response to the question: "What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?", it will come as no surprise that in 2020 and 2021 the response that was far and above any other issue was "COVID-19." During those two years, Australians were faced with an existential health crisis that left many feeling uncertain, fearful and isolated. It was a time when, due to governmental regulation of association and movement, communities were missing in action.

In the years immediately prior to the pandemic, "economy/unemployment/poverty" were identified in the Scanlon Foundation's research surveys, as the most important problems facing Australia. For the 18-month period from January 2020 to July 2021, the economy, and its related features of employment and poverty, has tracked as the second most important issue. In July 2021, the environment began to track on the same level of importance as the economy. "Quality of Government/politicians" always scores well in the sense that it sits third, equally with "social issues," as the most important problem facing Australia, and has done so throughout the five-year period from 2018. During that five-year period, "immigration and population" has not been rated of significant concern.

There is one other statistic which I will mention, namely the extent to which there is trust in Government. The specific survey question is the extent to which "the Government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people." Interestingly, in the years since 2007, the results for 2020 and 2021 were the highest of the whole period. Having said that, trust never rose above 50%. Like the other statistics to which I have referred, these figures are indicative of issues affecting people, mostly on a daily basis; reactions to — and the effect of — governmental decision making and, more broadly, a current "mood" in the community.

This raises the question of the extent to which perception and reality are running along parallel paths or are diverging. It also raises the question of where government and communities sit in relation to each other and what that means in terms of how we are governed and how we might be best governed. Increasingly, Government policy is to outsource significant areas of care, allowing communities to identify the areas of most need.

Government then becomes a source of funding for those areas of need, although, as we know, there are always funding constraints and, again, the community becomes a necessary and vital funding resource.

Another emerging trend is the extent to which specific communities are taking control of issues that affect them directly or affect society more widely. I have encountered recent examples of the former coming out of the flood disasters, especially in the Northern Rivers. As the representative of one Indigenous business organisation said, as she worked long hours in a Recovery Centre that the organisation had set up: "we know who our people are; where they are; and how they are. We can and need to look after ourselves." In her words, it was all about "self-determination." That vision was neither short-term nor merely reactive to the immediate needs of the community. A strategic

1 https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2021/

picture was in the frame. There were similar stories in the little towns scattered across the regions amongst different communities with different constituencies and differing needs.

In many ways, those responses to the disaster captured the core meaning of community, which derives from the Latin root word, *communitas* or "public spirit." However, and as I suspect you are thinking, no group in community lives in isolation. How do these smaller pockets of community, in particular, fit into the bigger societal questions of education, health, transport and employment, much of which, out of necessity, involves government?

The other trend, of specific groups in communities driving larger societal agendas, is particularly apparent in the corporate field with the focus on ESG principles: environment, sustainability and governance. Much of this has been a response to shareholder and consumer pressure as well as to legal advice. But its impact is unquestioned both on communities and on government.

My remarks thus far have been essentially observational. Whether we are talking about how community organises itself, how government works, or how both work together, the topic needs good data. What we saw and heard in Lismore was a community responding to a crisis in a community already in great need, obvious from the existing data. According to the NSW Council of Social Services, in 2019, 21 per cent of Lismore residents were living in poverty and the Northern Rivers communities, in general, have higher rates of poverty than both the state and national averages.[2]

Moving away from Lismore and community responses to disasters, the Australian Council of Social Service's *2022 Poverty in Australia Snapshot* report[3] found that 3.3 million people in Australia (13.4% of the population or more than one in 8)[4], and 16.6% (one in 6) children live below the poverty line.[5]

Communities and community needs are not only about poverty, although that we have any poverty, let alone to the extent revealed in the figures I have mentioned, is sobering. Community is about the greater good for everyone. Improvements, collaboration, research, met needs in any one sector, should — and, I would suggest, must — trickle both down and up, including to Government.

The words of a postdoctoral student come to mind, who wrote: "Social change requires that we rewrite our communal narratives."[6]

This year's Forum raises some challenging issues which affect us all.

Congratulations to the Royal Society and Learned Academies for taking on the challenge and for the contributors today who are instrumental in analysing the problems and directing us towards a solution for the betterment of all.

2 NSW Council of Social Services: https://www.echo.net.au/2019/11/quarter-kids-ballina-bruns-ocean-shores-poverty/

3 https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/a-snapshot-of-poverty-in-australia-2022/

4 Defined as 50% of median income: https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/a-snapshot-of-poverty-in-australia-2022/

5 ibid

6 https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/what-is-community-and-why-is-it-important

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2022 Royal Society of NSW and the Learned Academies Forum: "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action"

Welcome and Acknowledgements

Susan Pond

President, Royal Society of New South Wales, AM FRSN FTSE FAHMS

Thank you, Your Excellency, for your insightful remarks, which clearly reflect the experience you are gaining across the community as governor of New South Wales. It's very good to have the personal reflections of what you are seeing across the state.

I need to present some thanks at the beginning of the day and not having the opportunity later. I'd like to thank the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer and each of the five Learned Academies for their sponsorship and support again for this forum. Without them, we could not hold this important conversation about Reshaping Australia Communities in Action. Welcome to the hundred of you in the in-person audience today. In addition to our speakers, our in-person audience is made up by representatives of the Society, each of the five Academies, the Office of the New South Wales, Chief Scientist and Engineer. We are also joined by 16 undergraduate students, who should be easy to identify, from seven universities extending as far as Wollongong and Newcastle, and some members of the public. Welcome, one and all. Welcome also to the online audience which is watching the forum across Australia via our live streaming, and also to those who watch it later on our YouTube channel.

Days like this are not conjured up by magic. They do require the sustained and dedicated input by a band of volunteers. I take this opportunity to thank the members of our program committee so ably chaired by Professor Steven Garton, our moderator; Julianne Schultz and members of the planning committee; our webmaster Professor Lindsay Botten; and Robert Marks, Editor of the *Journal & Proceedings*. We will have several mechanisms to make the proceedings of today available to you: in person; live stream on the YouTube channel; and later in the written word, which may be what survives longest and will be available for people to read in a 100 years' time. Stephen Garton and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales, the Australian Academy of Humanities and the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. He is Professor of history and former Provost and Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of Sydney. He has written extensively on many subjects, including the history of mental illness, social policy on a range of its issues. And, interestingly, the History of Harlem in New York between World Wars I and II. Stephen will take the stage in a few minutes.

The aim of today is to bring together learned societies, government, and communities — all necessary, as Her Excellency said, to work together to help tackle some of the urgent relevant problems that we face nationally and internationally. By listening to communities, learned societies can find out what the communities need and appreciate the work they need to do at the

front line and at the cutting edge to address the most pressing problems and the shared problems. Communities engaging with learned societies and government enables them to gain access to information that is otherwise somewhat hidden from them, in particular in the minds of the scholars, but on a more operational sense, behind paywalls, on technical websites, or written in language that needs to be deciphered. We welcome the convergence of communities, government and learned societies today. To add to Her Excellency's and my own welcome, I now invite the Honourable Andrew Leigh MP, a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, and Federal Member for Fenner in the ACT, to say a few words via video.

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2022 Royal Society of NSW and the Learned Academies Forum: "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action"

Introduction to the Program and Moderator

Stephen Garton

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As Susan mentioned, I was the chair of the program committee and I have a few people to thank. But before I do that, I want to acknowledge that we're on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to Elders past and present, and also say that it is humbling to understand that research and teaching has been occurring on these lands for tens of thousands of years. I also have a few thanks before we begin. Governor, we are very grateful for your continuing support of the Society and for hosting this Forum yet again. Susan, the Society President, is a bundle of energy and forcefulness and her commitment and enthusiasm made sure that the Program Committee delivered on its brief. The representatives of the Learned Academies who were on the program committee were a fantastic group of people to work with — Philippa Patterson, Hala Zreiqat, Bridget Griffin-Foley, Tony Cunningham, Annabelle Duncan — it was a great team.

One sad note for the Program Committee was that Robin King FRSN, an integral member of the Committee and a great contributor, died in a tragic family holiday accident just as we were in the final stages. I also want to acknowledge Lisa Jackson Pulver, who at the very last minute agreed to substitute for Marcia Langton, who unfortunately was too ill to come down. Lisa is stepping into the breach at very short notice.

The committee came together in the wake of fire, flood and pandemic, where the resilience of Australian communities came to the fore. Our thinking was that the issue of community resilience needed to be seen in the longer and larger context of the profound transformations in Australian society over recent decades. One member of the committee pointed us to a recently published book, *The Idea of Australia*,[1] written by Julianne Schultz, which shaped our thinking as we planned the Forum. We joked that if nothing else we might be able "sell some more copies" of this insightful book.

Given this inspiration we were very pleased when we were able to secure Julianne, distinguished academic and social commentator, Emeritus Professor at Griffith University and former editor of *Griffith Review*, as moderator for the day. *The Idea of Australia* is a thoughtful, beautifully written reflection on issues in our public culture; historical, sociological, cultural in its analysis. It prompted us to think more critically about issues in our broader public culture and the evidence of growing disparity of outcomes and growing disparities

1 Schultz, Julianne (2022) *The Idea of Australia: A Search for the Soul of the Nation*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

in access and equity. While there is much written on these themes we wanted to shift the focus away from what is going wrong to issues of resilience and cohesion rather than disparity. If we look at elements of our public culture, particularly the media and particularly social media, it's too often a culture that looks more interested in declaring and defaming rather than listening and collaborating. We were determined to make our focus more about listening and partnerships to find solutions.

If we take our lens into the broader culture and look at what's happening at local levels, we can see extraordinary innovation and contribution. The Minister is rightly concerned about the decline in volunteerism, and I think this is a genuine issue that hopefully will come out in some of the themes. But if we look at what's happening in the community sector, we have over 50,000 not-for-profits. We have over a million Australians working in the not-for-profit sector. We have 3 million Australians who are volunteers. This is an extraordinary resource doing so much for our community. Some of it is about plugging gaps in broader services. Some of it is about addressing the specificities of local issues and local aspirations. While some commentators conceptualise this as governments outsourcing to the community sector, it is equally communities taking charge of their circumstances.

This is an opportunity for us to think through the innovation that happens at the local level. We know that in the past, some academics have claimed to speak for communities, but we are moving into a culture now where we better understand the need to listen to communities. We need to listen to the voice of indigenous Australians; we need to listen to the voices about what's happening at that local level. One of the things we want to do in today's Forum is explore some illuminating case studies, where academics are working with local communities, helping drive innovation, learning from those communities for their own research, and through partnerships contributing back to those communities. Communities themselves are also coming up with innovative solutions to endemic social problems at the local level. There are green shoots in the community.

One of the things we want to do is look at some of these green shoots and create an environment where we can think through the issues of how we harness local innovation and support it, so we can build greater community cohesion, greater equity in our society, and a political culture of community collaboration: listening rather than declaring. I think there are many papers and contributors today that will give you insights into some of the key areas that are important around climate, indigenous access, health and education. We're not covering everything. It is about highlighting green shoots from researchers working with communities and communities themselves coming forward. I hope you enjoy the day. Thank you.

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2022 Royal Society of NSW and the Learned Academies Forum: "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action"

Moderator and Rapporteur

Julianne Schultz[1]

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Thank you, Your Excellency. Thank you, Stephen, and thank you Susan, and thanks to the Minister. I'm Julianne Schultz. Stephen, thank you for talking about my book, *The Idea of Australia: The Search for the Soul of the Nation* and explaining why I'm here. That gives the reason for why I'm going to be in this chair for the day trying to facilitate this discussion. One of the things that I was very conscious of and was trying to grapple with when I was writing that book, was to try and figure out how change happens and why it happens. I was trying to tease out the tendrils of cultural practice, history and institutional design that may enable us to adapt and respond, but also keep us trapped in ways of seeing and doing that make it difficult to move on. Indeed, that process of change, I think, is really one of the important things that we are grappling with. We are starting to think about not only reshaping, but also the important way in which communities are engaged in the sort of public life of the nation.

One of the scholars that I read during that time was the Anglo-American historian Linda Colley, who's a very great historian. She had written a lot about the British Empire and the process of constitution-making in nation formation. One of her observations, was that change generally takes three-score years and ten — that is, a lifetime. Occasionally she argues that there are things which hurry it up, or turn old behaviours on their head: a war or a pandemic or some other major crisis. But that's the exception. Generally, change takes a long time to emerge and become consolidated in a society. That is a really on one level a sobering insight because it seems to be an awfully long time.

But the other part of it is that it suggests that change is an iterative process, it's happening all the time. I think there are two really strong examples of that which we have just experienced today. One is the welcome we have just heard. I'm always amazed and terribly impressed when the Governor speaks in this place in the language of the Eora people. One of the languages that the new arrivals over a century or more tried to criminalise and eradicate. When you think that what Government House represents in the history of Australia — the tangible embodiment of the link to the Crown — to have a governor who is able to speak so fluently and so genuinely in the language of the First Nations people of this land, really says something enormously important. It is something which I think we should hang onto as a source of the sort of change that is possible.

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

The other is in our social relations, and this ties back into the community focus that we are discussing today. The campaign to enable same-sex marriage was a long time coming, but when it happened, it happened overwhelmingly, and then people picked up as though life had always been thus. There's been some pushback at the margins in some religious communities, but all those bakers who thought they were going to go out of business for cooking cakes that said "she and she" actually seem to be doing okay. Our capacity to absorb change in our most intimate relations seems to me a good sign that we can do it in other spheres as well. It's a pattern of slow adaptation and change. But bitterly resisted by those who fear they have something to lose. One of the things that we have been very conscious of, especially in the academies over the last 25 years or so, has been the viciousness of the culture wars and how unexpectedly hard and nasty this fight has been. I don't generally like to talk "culture wars" because I think the label pushes more important issues into a box where complex issues are reduced to winners and losers. But we've seen the process by which experts in all sorts of areas have been marginalised and demonised, have been made to feel that they've got something to hide, that they can't really be trusted, that they have a vested interest, that they shouldn't be contributing to a public discussion. It's been a very concerted activity, and it's weakened people and institutions. It's made many academics feel nervous about engaging in the public domain. One of the really important things, one of the unintended consequences, that's come out of that is that the hostile public environment sent many scholars back into their studies to do more, harder edged historical research. This and the other research that has been done over the past twenty-five years has thrown up different ways of understanding this place and the world in which we are. It is also contrary to what the Minister said, that people are retreating from community and public engagement, and I know his numbers are right, but I think that on the ground at a deeper there's something else happening. We saw that in the election where the community organising model upended the old orthodoxy in some of what had long been considered the safest Liberal Party electorates in Australia.

One of the unexpected impacts of COVID, where people were forced to stay in their neighbourhoods in a way they had never done before, was the emergence of a strong sense of people being forced to find their own community of interest with which they engage. This happened in person — remember those suburban Anzac Day street parties — and online. That may not be in the traditional forms of joining a club or going to a church, but it's through other forms of social activity that is enabled by the digital environment. What I think is interesting is that community activity that is around, that is digitally enabled, is really a counterbalance to the narrowing that we've been having to live through. I think now we're obviously at a flash point: people have talked about the challenge of climate change, globalisation, geopolitical uncertainty, and the economic and security impacts that that's having on us all. Institutions that we used once to trust, to navigate our way through this, have imploded. Partly through their own shortcomings, as we saw in the royal commissions into institutional

abuse, for instance. Partly through just the changes that have happened as a result of technology and other economic factors.

The media, which once acted as a sort of unifying platform, no longer operates in the same way; under intense economic pressure the media is demonstrably less committed to its fourth-estate and nation-building role. Unions have obviously become a much less potent force than they once were, although they may be coming back. Political parties' numbers have fallen. Membership of political parties has fallen dramatically — that they still have control of much of the electoral process is a minor miracle. On the one hand, big old institutions have crumbled, but on the other we're becoming more connected through the digital processes. There's an interesting tension there.

As the Governor and others have said, trust is waning in government. But it's a two-way thing, trust. People's trust in government has weakened, but what I'd like to see, and I guess this goes to what the Governor was talking about, I'd like to see more evidence of government's trust in people. In trusting communities to actually do the things that they set themselves the challenges to do and respect the solutions that they come up with.

The old model, the mass media model of the post-war years and big political parties, was very hierarchical. What we are now seeing is something which is tipping that order upside down. The process of trust must work both ways. And so, getting governments to learn how to trust people, and public servants and academics and others to learn how to trust people, is a very big part of the challenge that we face in this reshaping.

Before I introduce the first panel, let me point out that the political change of the last election, without my being partisan about it, showed that more than half the population voted for what would loosely be described a progressive party of one form or another — whether it was the Labor Party, the Greens, the Teals, the other community independents. There's a whole range of people who were being voted for, who had a different agenda than the one that has been around for a long time. I think that that is a sign that the community and the public are looking for these ways of moving forward.

My feeling is that we are at one of those phases of the "three-score years and ten" where a whole raft of change that has been building may get to a point where it tips over and becomes manifest. I'm interested to see how that plays out in looking at the case studies that we'll be hearing about today, and the examples and the great leadership that our speakers will be bringing to this discussion. Two final things: Robert Putnam, whom the Minister talks about very enthusiastically, for whom he was a research assistant, wrote a very famous book called *Bowling Alone*, which was about the collapse of community in America. In 2020 he wrote a new book which is called *The Upswing*, which was about how things were starting to change and how things could change through moving from a period of cynicism and detachment, to one of on-the-ground activism and a desire to rebuild communities, cities, and states. It's not in the meta narrative of presidential politics that we hear here. The data and cases on the ground is quite something. James Fallows from *The Atlantic* found the same thing when he and his wife returned to the US after years abroad and we excited to see

a revitalisation of civic and economic life in some of the most unlikely places. Their book, *Our Towns: A 100000-Mile Journey into the Heart of America*, and the accompanying film, are a powerful testament to this change.

What Putnam was doing in his most recent book was looking historically at the good and bad over the last century 125 years. His starting point was 125 years ago in America, a time known as the Gilded Age. It was the age of individualism. It was age of corporate excess. It was an age not unlike our own in many ways. The process by which the society went from being about "me" to about "we," to use that horrible jargon, is one that he found very instructive. He sees in the green shoots the United States moving back to a "we" society through the activism that's happening on the ground in community areas. Now we shall see what that produces. It's a much more complex world than it was even 120 years ago. I'd like to hear the Minister's reflection in a way on where Putnam is getting to now, because he's much more optimistic about the possibilities of change.

I'll just say, finally, that anyone listening to the ABC News coming here today would have heard that the lead items were ones about community activism. The lead story was about the big rallies that have been held in every capital city protesting about the death of Cassius Turvey, a young Noongar schoolboy, in WA a couple of weeks ago. Big rallies all around the country were making it clear that this is just not acceptable in this country. The next story was about floods and the way the communities in Western and Central New South Wales were rallying to support each other as they faced yet another environmental catastrophe. There are green shoots around, they might be under a lot of water, but there are green shoots around and that's what we will be discussing today.

I'd like to invite our first panel members, Richard Holden, Allison Frame, Kalinda Griffith and James O'Donnell, to join me on the stage.

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2022 Royal Society of NSW and the Learned Academies Forum: "Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action"

Ministerial Address

The Hon. Andrew Leigh MP FASSA[1]

Assistant Federal Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury

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Good day. My name's Andrew Leigh, the Assistant Minister for Competition Charities and Treasury. I'm speaking to you today from the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people. Let me begin by acknowledging Elders past and present. The theme of your discussion today — Reshaping Australia Communities in Action — is a topic that is close to my heart. This is an issue which is fundamental to the trajectory of our nation. Over recent years, Australia has become increasingly disconnected. We've seen a fall in the number of volunteers and a decline in the share of Australians playing a team sport. We've seen a drop in the number of Australians who have joined a local community group or a social club or a political organisation. The number of churchgoers and attendees of other religious services has declined.

The union membership rate is down. Compared to the mid-1980s, Australians know half as many of their neighbours and have half as many friends, but we can work together to turn that around. What I love about your discussion, just opened by the distinguished Margaret Beazley, and including my friend Richard Holden, is that it will focus on some of the big questions as to how we fix our democracy. This has got to do not only with institutional changes, but policy reforms too. Making sure that every school is a great school, that there are opportunities for people to engage through a workplace that allows work-life balance. That we ensure that we have an Australia that is providing prosperity for all. And so people aren't so time-crunched and money-poor that they can't engage with their communities. The attempt to get there will involve pushing on many different levers, but the end goal is an exciting one.

A reconnected Australia will be a healthier place because people with more friends tend to have better physical and mental health. It will be a happier place because we know that wellbeing and spending time with friends and family are so closely intertwined, and it will be a more economically productive place because we know that markets work best in high-trust environments.

I wish I could be with you today for these important conversations. There are always topics that have been roiling around in my head since I worked as a research assistant for Robert Putnam in 2000. They are topics that are fundamental to the future of our nation, and I thank you for convening this important discussion today.

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

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Session I: Setting the Scene

Reshaping Australia: some economic observations

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Introduction

Since the 2008 financial crisis there has been growing political momentum in advanced economies for a movement away from what has become known as "neoliberalism." Exemplars of this movement include Senator Bernie Sanders' candidacies for the United States Democratic Party's presidential nomination, and the rise of New York congressional representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. These self-proclaimed Democratic Socialists advocate not only a rejection of the worst excesses of "neoliberalism," but a wholesale rejection of markets as a means of resource allocation.

Australia has not been immune from this political shift. The Australian Greens have a platform resonant of Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez. Indeed, it is almost a facsimile of that platform. And while the Albanese Labor government campaigned on promises of a return to the Hawke-Keating era, their first six months in government have revealed the new prime minister to be more of a "Bernie Bro" than a Hawke Hologram.

Yet reports of the death of Australia's "fair go" are greatly exaggerated. Far from the last four decades marking a decline into a neoliberal Hobbesian jungle, Australia has remained a high-income and comparatively egalitarian country. Income inequality has not risen; furthermore, our healthcare system remains arguably the best in the world in terms both access, health outcomes, and expenditure. Yet our educational outcomes — at least as measured by standardized test score — have fallen in both absolute and relative terms. This troubling phenomenon threatens both equality of opportunity and egalitarianism, and also the economic growth that, not only drives prosperity and opportunity, but pays for our social safety net.

Indeed, Australia is the country perhaps closest to what Dixon & Holden (2022) call "democratic liberalism:" a philosophy that emphasizes liberal democratic commitments to dignity and equality, but also to freedom and autonomy. Democratic liberalism requires that all citizens receive a "generous social minimum," that externalities should be internalized, and that monopoly power (both economic and political) should be curbed, but that beyond that market-based solutions should be given primacy. As Dixon & Holden note:

> Australia is not fully democratically liberal, nor is democratic liberalism unique to Australia … [but] the "Australian model" is often closer to our conception of the democratic-liberal ideal than

1 UNSW Business School and President of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. I am grateful to participants at the Royal Society of NSW and learned academies forum in November 2022, for helpful comments.

either the democratic-socialist model that predominates in much of Europe or the laissez-faire capitalist model that prevails in the US.

Australia's minimum wage is north of US$15 per hour, and unions have strong legal protections, but the employment system retains a significant degree of flexibility for employers. Australians are entitled to unemployment benefits without any hard end-date or time-limit, and without having made any tax-based contribution to the system. But they are increasingly required to satisfy quite demanding work requirements in order to receive these benefits and encouraged to return to work wherever possible. Australia has universal healthcare, but not a single-payer system. Australia has privatized many formerly state-owned enterprises, but control of water and prisons remains in government hands. Childcare in Australia is heavily subsidized, but largely privately provided. The tax and transfer system is strongly progressive, reducing pre-tax income inequality substantially, but the tax-to-GDP ratio is 27.8% compared to the OECD average of 34.0%.

In this paper I document these facts and argue that while there is important work to be done, Australia is in need of more evolutionary change than revolutionary change. Even in education there are clear paths to improving student outcomes that are well documented and understood from international experience (and social science), and have often been implemented in individual primary or secondary schools within Australia. The tertiary education sector in Australia is in need of more transformational reform, as I outline below.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents evidence about Australia's living standards, while Section 3 discusses inequality. Section 4 focuses on education. Section 5 contains some brief concluding remarks, and discusses some political challenges.

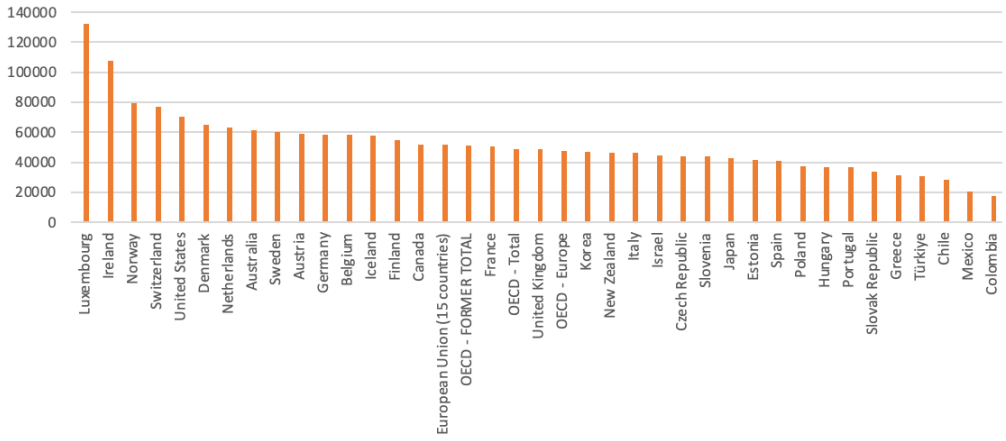

Figure 1: GDP per Capita — OECD Countries. Source: OECD.

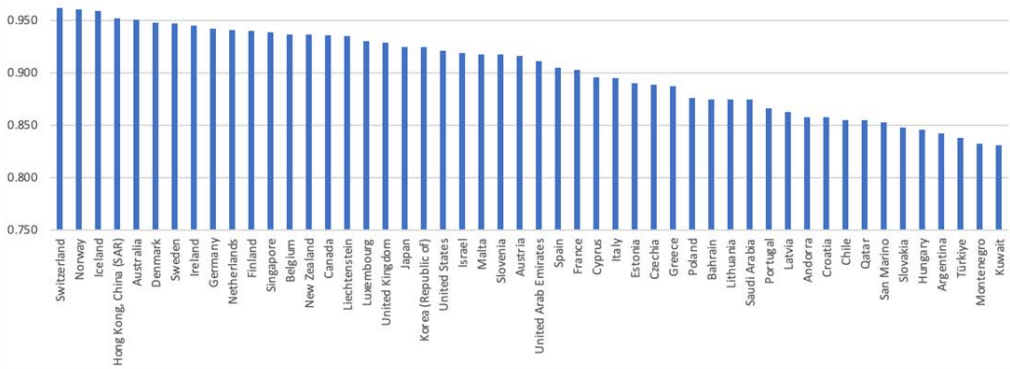

Figure 2: United National Human Development Index. Source: United Nations.

Living standards in Australia

Australia has had a very high living standard relative to other countries since official measures were first constructed. As Figure 1 shows, Australia's GDP per capita was 8th among advanced economies in 2021. Moreover, four of the countries ranking above Australia have highly skewed GDP (Luxembourg and Switzerland due to international banking, Ireland due to its peculiar corporate income tax regime, and Norway because of natural resources).

Of course, there is a long tradition of recognizing that GDP is not a completely satisfactory measure of living standards. This was perhaps put most eloquently by Robert Kennedy (1968), when he said:

> gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

The United Nations Human Development Index is a commonly accepted measure that seeks to extend GDP to be a more meaningful measure of living standards, by taking into account measures of health, education, and income.[2] Here Australia ranks 3rd as a country (or 4th globally if one includes Hong Kong as a standalone jurisdiction).

In short, Australia is a prosperous country, not only in terms of material wealth, but also factoring in health and education. Indeed, there is a reasonable argument to be made that Australia has the second-highest human development index when one discounts the skewed incomes per capita of Switzerland and Norway (discussed

2 Specifically, "The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. The standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita. The HDI uses the logarithm of income, to reflect the diminishing importance of income with increasing GNI. The scores for the three HDI dimension indices are then aggregated into a composite index using geometric mean." https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

above). This, naturally, raises the question of how equally that prosperity is distributed throughout the Australian community.

Inequality in Australia

According to the most commonly-used measure of income inequality, the Gini coefficient, income inequality has remained unchanged — indeed fallen slightly — since 2001. Figure 3 shows the trend from 2001 to 2016. This runs counter to popular narratives about a large recent increase in income inequality. Other measures that are sometimes used include the share of (pre-tax) income of the highest income-earners. The share of (pre-tax) income going to the top 1% has barely increased from 10.6% in 2000 to 11.3% in 2021. Similarly, the share of (pre-tax) income going to the top 10% moved little over the same period — from 30.7% to 32.6%.

There is even less reason to be concerned with recent trends in income inequality once taxes and transfer are taken into account. Australia has one of the most progressive income tax systems in the world, and the transfer system including measure such as the family tax benefit, Medicare, the aged pension, and others are highly progressive.[3]

Figure 3: Inequality in Australia before taxes and transfers. Source: Wilkins & Lass (2018)

There is increasing discussion of wealth inequality, as distinct from income inequality. On one level this is rather misguided in the sense that wealth is simply an aggregate of lifetime income, conditional on a consumption-savings profile. Having said that, there are a variety of government policies that can tilt the playing field of that consumption-savings profile systematically in favour of some population subgroups over others.

Of particular concern in Australia is the intergenerational impact of a number of government policies, particularly housing. There is a raft of implicit and explicit government subsidies for home ownership that, while arguably having some positive effects, have significant distributional consequences that make them, on balance, negative. Those are in additional to the negative allocative efficiency consequences of privileging one asset class over others, as Australian housing policy clearly does.

In particular, the fact that there is a primary-residence exemption from capital gains tax means that housing becomes a significantly more attractive investment than would otherwise be the case. Exempting the primary residence from the aged pension asset test is another such policy. Furthermore, negative gearing (where losses on property investments can be deducted against labour income) is both internationally anomalous and substantially distorting (Holden, 2015). All of these factors amplify the fact that individuals can leverage housing investments (though 10–20% down payment requirements on mortgages) dramatically more than other investments such as equities.

3 See, for instance, https://www.austaxpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/tf20_upload.pdf

Even policies such as so-called "first homeowner grants" — either direct grants or reductions in stamp duty — simply fuel demand and benefit sellers rather than purchasers. It's fair to say that Australian housing policy has, for decades, failed to focus on supply-side remedies such as land releases and zoning regulations, while fuelling the housing market through large subsidies to demand. This has not only led to a housing affordability crisis, but an effective transfer of wealth from younger Australians to older Australians.

Our educational outcomes in context

There has been a long-lamented decline in Australia's absolute and relative performance on international measures of student performance, as Figure 4 (documenting scores in 3 categories of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)) shows. In fact, 16 countries have overtaken Australia in mathematics PISA scores since 2000 — namely Canada, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, Norway, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Latvia, and Portugal.

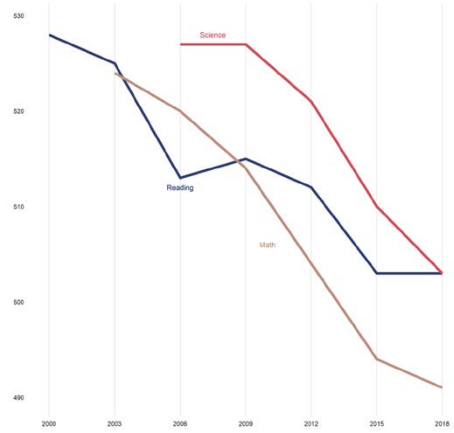

Figure 4: Australian PISA Scores 2000–2018. Source: ACARA and Holden et al. (2022).

In fact, as Holden et al. (2022) highlight, Australia's decline in student outcomes is long-run and broad-based. In the last two decades of PISA Australia's proportion of low performers has increased. Our proportion of high performers has decreased in all three areas. And the proportion of students who attained the National Proficient Standard (i.e. satisfied a minimum skill level) has declined in each category.

There is almost surely no single reason for this decline. There is a real question regarding how much teacher time is spent

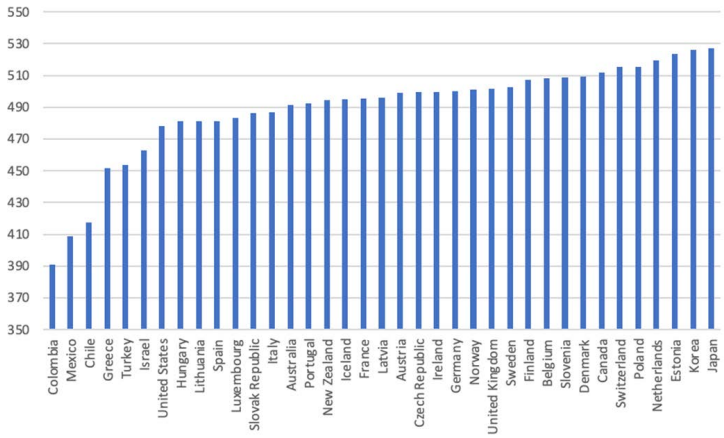

Figure 5: OECD Mathematics PISA Scores 2018. Source: OECD.

actually teaching students rather than on administration. As Holden et al. (2022) observe "According to the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey, Australian teachers spend the 3rd highest number of hours on management and administration in the OECD."

Changes in...	Reading Literacy (2000-2018)	Mathematical Literacy (2000-2018)	Scientific Literacy (2000-2018)
Average performance	▼ 26 points	▼ 33 points	▼ 24 points
Proportion of low performers	7 per centage ▲ points	8 per centage ▲ points	6 per centage ▲ points
Proportion of high performers	4 per centage ▼ points	9 per centage ▼ points	5 per centage ▼ points
Proportion of students who attained the National Proficient Standard	10 per centage ▼ points	13 per centage ▼ points	9 per centage ▼ points

Figure 6: Australia's Educational Performance. Source: OECD and Holden et al (2022).

Perhaps more important that uncovering the cause of the decline is understanding what can reverse it and improve educational outcomes in Australia. Fortunately, there is a substantial body of overseas evidence from randomized controlled trials that points to a range of educational interventions that can materially improve student outcome in Australia. Holden et al. (2022) summarize this evidence and translate it into PISA-score equivalents and calculate the cost per student of these interventions. This allows policy makers to think about the rate of return on a variety of educational investments.

Of course, there is the perennial question of external validity with experimental evidence (RCTs or quasi-experimental variation) from other jurisdictions. To that end, more RCTs on educational interventions should be conducted in Australia. A first step in that direction is Dobrescu et al. (2021), studying cultural context in standardized tests (NAPLAN years 5 and 7) in Dubbo, NSW.

Our health outcomes in context[4]

The Australian healthcare system certainly fits with the notion of democratic liberalism discussed in the introduction to this paper. And, as Dixon & Holden (2020) note, Australians, like Europeans, view health care as a right, not a privilege. This is in stark contrast to the United States (at least in practice) prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act during the presidency of Barack Obama. For Australian policy makers, the operative question is the scope of this right — what components of health care are included — and how to pay for it.

The Australian health care system involves a free *baseline* plan that covers all Australians: Medicare. This system provides all Australians with a baseline level of medical coverage for all core (rather than merely essential) health care needs. This includes emergency room visits and acute care, non-elective surgery, and general practitioner (sometimes known as "primary-care physician") coverage. And, of course, coverage for a wide array of prescription drugs is provided through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

This baseline plan guarantees, in the parlance of democratic liberalism, a "social minimum" — a minimum level of dignity for all. For health services beyond that minimum, however, such as priority elective surgery, dental and optical, or a private room in a hospital, private insurance is more or less required though a range of incentives and requirements.

4 This section follows closely and is based heavily on Dixon & Holden (2020).

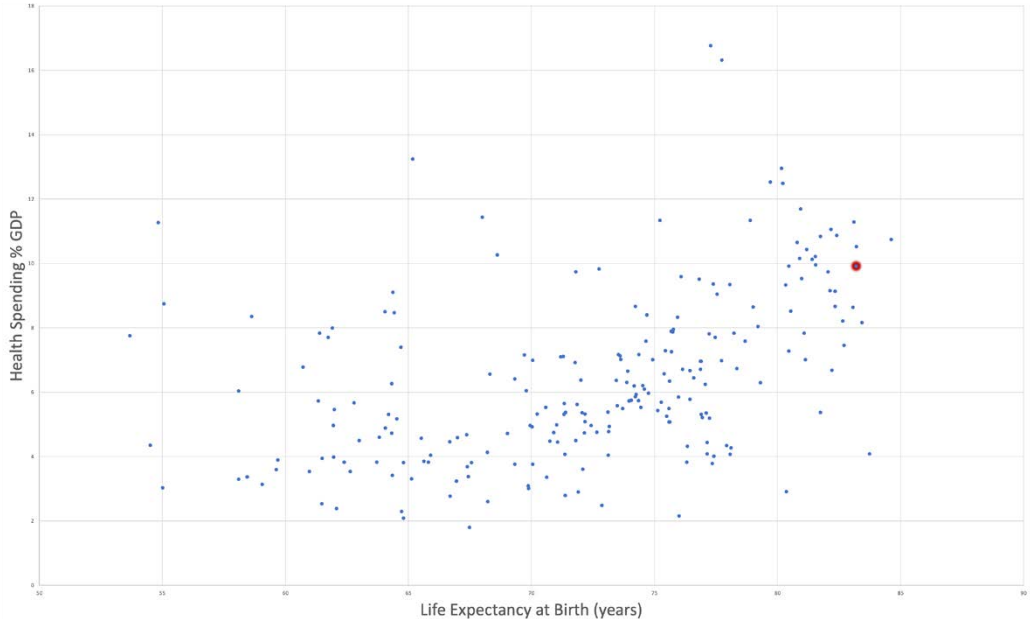

Figure 7: Health Spending and Life Expectancy around the World. Source: "Our World in Data" https://ourworldindata.org

To this end, the Australian federal government encourages higher-income earners to buy private health insurance that pays for above-baseline care, and effectively takes the burden off Medicare for these and other services used by the privately insured, through a mix of carrots and sticks. Those buying insurance do indeed get something extra, beyond Medicare, for the money they pay. And they are encouraged to buy-in early, by regulations that effectively require prices to increase for those who buy insurance later — or when they are at higher risk. This is known as "lifetime community rating."

But the system also involves various sticks, chief among which is a tax penalty of an additional 1 per cent marginal tax rate for not purchasing private health insurance if family income is above $180,000, scaling up to 1.5 per cent for family incomes above $280,000.

In this sense, the Australian model is more of a *public baseline* than a *public option* (that is often discussed in the context of United States healthcare debates) — and it gives higher income earners strong incentives to buy private insurance, as a top up, rather than alternative, to public coverage.

And it works. Total health care expenditures (public and private) in Australia are around 10 per cent of GDP, compared to 18 per cent in the United States. And the Australian system works well — contributing to a life expectancy of 82.8 years, the fourth highest in the world.

Indeed, as Figure 7 highlights, Australian life expectancy is among the highest in the world, while total healthcare spending as a proportion of GDP is lower than numerous other countries with significantly worse health outcomes in terms of life expectancy. If one drew a naïve line of best fit through

the data points in Figure 7, it is clear that Australia would lie well below that line, indicating that the "bang for the buck" of our health expenditures is high by international standards.

It would be remiss not to comment briefly on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Although not part of the Medicare budget, and applying to only about half a million Australians, the NDIS is both a large and important program. There are also pressing questions about the fiscal sustainability of the scheme. Although the NDIS is a relatively new program (it was enacted by the Gillard government), it has already grown well beyond what was initially envisaged. Gillard initially suggested that in steady state the NDIS would cost no more than $25 billion per annum. By 2022 it already cost more than $30 billion at was growing at 10.6 per cent per annum.

Although the NDIS plays an important role in providing dignity to a large number of Australians, its cost growth is patently unsustainable. In fact, it already costs more than Medicare. More concerning is that, given its growth rate, expenditure on the NDIS will be double that on Medicare in a relatively short period of time. This cannot be allowed to happen but, as Holden (2023) observes, it "raises difficult, perhaps wrenching questions about eligibility, the benefits provided, and the efficiency with which they are provided."

Some challenges

It would be foolish to think of Australia as some kind of ideal society, devoid of the need for meaningful changes and improvements. But Australia does come closer to a democratic liberal ideal of providing a generous social minimum while also allowing markets to provide opportunity and efficiency.

Yet Australian politics has been characterized by a failure to address obvious and important policy issues over the last 15 years. Lack of action on the environment is perhaps the standout issue, leading to the downfall of multiple prime ministers with little actual progress in decarbonization. Tax reform is another. Australia still gets far too high a proportion of its revenues from income taxes compared to consumption taxes like the GST — dramatically higher than other OECD countries. Superannuation is subsidized to the tune of more than $40 billion a year, forces people to save 10 per cent of their own income, yet delivers substandard returns. There is a $50 billion structural budget deficit with no plan from either side of politics to repair the budget.

And, as we have outlined above, primary and secondary education in Australia is substandard. Educational outcomes are in decline in both absolute and relative terms. Failure to solve our educational issues will undermine intergenerational mobility, make Australia less internationally attractive as a destination for investment, and undermine the funding base to provide for the generous social minimum Australians have rightly come to expect. There is much to be done.

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Session I: Setting the Scene

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Thanks for the invitation. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and pay respects to Elders past and present. Also, to affirm my commitment and the commitment of the team in PM&C to practically applying that recognition to the work that we do on a daily basis. I feel affirmed by some of the things that Richard has mentioned, and that aligns with what I will talk about here today. I want to acknowledge that, despite decades of economic success in Australia, many Australians continue to face entrenched and complex disadvantage. Disadvantage can significantly affect an individual's social and economic engagement. There's growing evidence that growing up in disadvantage can significantly impact a child's neurological development in ways we had not contemplated before.

With increasing geographic concentration of disadvantage, it can lead to deep-seated social impacts and threatened social cohesion: something we often take for granted here in Australia. To acknowledge, from the government's perspective, that existing approaches to address disadvantage have not often worked, habitually resulting in fact in the entrenchment of disadvantage. After briefly reviewing our progress towards addressing entrenched disadvantage, I will give my take on past approaches and how they might be better directed. We clearly need to rethink the way we develop and implement policy. I think there are good reasons the current government might place a greater focus on placed-based initiatives, community-driven initiatives, policy co-designed with the people it affects most, and greater use of monitoring and evaluation to support continual learning and ensure policy is directed to where it's most effective. But, at its heart, government, communities, providers, and individuals all need to work better together and differently together as partners.

Inequality

Some degree of inequality we know in society is inevitable. Arising due to differences in ability, opportunity, effort, and luck. But policy has the power to increase or reduce inequality. Inequality is typically best addressed through an efficient, progressive tax and highly targeted transfer system, as Richard has referred to. Prior to the pandemic, Australia experienced almost three decades of continuous economic growth, which led to significant improvements in living standards. Over these 30 years, income inequality in Australia rose only slightly. As highlighted by the Productivity Commission, unlike the US and UK over the period from the 1980s to the mid-2010s, Australia enjoyed high income growth across all income deciles with notably stronger growth in the bottom decile. In large part,

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

this is due to Australia's progressive tax and highly targeted transfer system, which substantially reduces the degree of income inequality. Consumption inequality can also be a better measure, as it more directly relates to an individual's welfare.

In Australia, consumption inequality is around 30 per cent lower than income inequality when in-kind government transfers such as education, health, and public housing are included in people's consumption.

Income is not the only relevant measure of wellbeing. Others include wealth and life expectancy, but I won't go into those ones today.

Entrenched disadvantage

I want to talk bit more about entrenched disadvantage. Many Australians experience economic disadvantage at some stage in their lives, but for some — and for most, in fact — it's temporary. Traditional measures of income-minus-consumption inequality provide a snapshot at a point in time. However, arguably most important is the extent to which individuals move across the distribution over their lifetimes. What is often termed economic mobility.

Economic mobility is high in Australia. Almost everyone moves across the income distribution over the course of their lives. But some Australians experience entrenched disadvantage.

In 2018, the Productivity Commission found that around 9 per cent of Australians — that's 2.2 million people — experienced relative income poverty in 2015 and 2016. That is income below 50 per cent of the median. This aggregate figure has fluctuated since 1998 and 1999 but has not declined. Persistent and recurrent poverty affects a small but significant proportion of the population. About 3 per cent of Australians — roughly 700,000 people — have been living in income poverty continuously. People living in single-parent families, unemployed people, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Australians are particularly likely to experience income poverty deprivation and social exclusion. Living in poverty can constrain a child's development and life prospects, and lead to a higher likelihood of entrenched disadvantage.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to suffer as a result of disrupted schooling. That has occurred through COVID-19. As we know from the lockdowns, extended lockdowns, and in different states, the effects have differed. The effects on children from disadvantaged backgrounds are amplified by limited access to equipment and support, while home schooling and research examining school closures in the Netherlands found education losses were up to 60 per cent larger for disadvantaged students. These educational losses are no doubt compounded by impacts on mental health, and you will see and hear continuing work in that regard.

How can policy address entrenched disadvantage?

I want to pause here to look at past approaches and how they could be better directed in the future. Well-intentioned but poorly targeted policy can not only miss an opportunity to ameliorate disadvantage but can actually contribute to it. This can include where policies create adverse incentives, are overly complex or hard to engage with, overreach the role of government, or lead to uncertainty and responsibility. People who experience entrenched disad-

vantage are likely to face multiple barriers and require help in building capabilities. Current policy and fiscal frameworks, which tend to focus on short-term outputs — even worse inputs — within a single portfolio are unlikely to support good policy.

Too often policy focuses on trends and averages, which can often mask important details. For example, while the challenges facing many people experiencing entrenched disadvantage may be similar, lived experiences and social and cultural factors vary widely.

As a consequence, much policy does not directly target those most in need or tackle the underlying causes of disadvantage, let alone provide the wraparound support that is needed to make a difference. Worse still, blame for the failure of misguided policy is often transferred to individuals and communities, compounding the stigma of disadvantage. Hillary Cottam, author of *Radical Help* (2018), highlights that support systems and the ways we do policy fail to cope with today's challenges because they weren't set up to do so in the first place. On top of the outdated design features of our siloed programmatic approaches to complex and multifaceted disadvantage, Australia also faces an additional challenge to ensure our policy institutions recognise the complex split of responsibilities across Australian governments in our federation.

Having attended almost 50 National Cabinet meetings at this stage in my life, I see those daily complexities frequently. At the same time, these very same governments have emerged from the COVID pandemic with a changed fiscal reality that demands more efficient and effective spending going forward. Clearly, we need to work better together. Our approaches need to be grounded in this imperative, recognise and learn from past failures, and elevate the role of communities in shaping the support they consider will be most effective for them. This inversion of the policy-making process through community-driven approaches is also what is clearly envisaged and agreed to in the Closing the Gap agreement in 2020 between Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks. The priority reform set out in that agreement enshrines an aspiration for policy for First Nations communities that originates with them and with which governments work to deliver and implement.

How can we help ensure policy is more effective at tackling entrenched disadvantage? We need to get the fundamentals right. Policy needs to have a long-term clear strategic focus. It needs to be relevant. That includes policy co-designed with the people and communities who are directly impacted, with stewardship and accountability for outcomes and impact shared. It needs to support people's capabilities instead of fixing their problems. It needs to be informed by rigorous evidence. It needs to build local capability as well as delivering services. It needs to support continual learning through credible and transparent monitoring and evaluation. Policies and actions to address entrenched disadvantage chop and change frequently, and implementation has been inconsistent. We too often persist with policies that are not effective or delivering. No single policy, government department, organisation, or program can solve the complex problems facing most children and families living in communities where disadvantage is concentrated. We need to better understand the multiple factors that influence and drive

entrenched disadvantage, evaluating the impact of policy that may contribute to it. This includes greater focus on the development and use of linked longitudinal data, better data-sharing and improved data capability, particularly by government and service providers, and improve monitoring and evaluation systems to be more robust and transparent.

I will close with some examples of some good place-based approaches that have been implemented by the Australian Government and which we would like to build on in time. These place-based or community-driven approaches to policy can support real change. For place-based approaches to be effective, they require an investment in building community capacity and governance and leadership.

A partnership between the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to gather learnings from community-led governance, noted the importance of building capability, including to address power imbalances. Greater use of co-designed place-based approaches to policy, including implementation, is producing positive results. There are great examples of success: Stronger Places, Stronger People is a community-led collective impact initiative stewarded by the Commonwealth in partnership with state and territory governments. At its heart, the initiative draws on data and evidence to inform where we need to invest.

Working with communities, facilitating more inclusive engagement, joint decision making, governance and local action. Earlier this year, I was fortunate to meet the passionate backbone team behind Burnie Works. For over seven years, Burnie Works has been facilitating a place-based system to create the conditions for positive change in Burnie in northwest Tasmania. Burnie Works is jointly funded by the Tasmanian and Australian governments through the Stronger Places, Stronger People program to invest in collective impact in the area. It facilitates community engagement over issues and priorities, service system issues and opportunities for the community to mobilise on new reforms and investment. Through the Stronger Places, Stronger People program, the Tasmanian Government has engaged Burnie Works on the implementation of the, It takes a Tasmanian Village child and youth wellbeing strategy, and both have recently partnered with Seer Data and Analytics to provide a data-sharing platform.

This collaboration will assist to build on an informed approach to community building through sharing state and other data. With the Burnie Child and Family Learning Centre, Burnie Works has mobilised community interest and is now working to implement a suite of measures to help with connection, nutrition, caring and moving to support baby and infant physical activity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, disadvantage affects how individuals and their children participate in society. Disadvantage affects an individual's self-esteem and self-confidence, which in turn impacts individual performance.

Existing measures to address disadvantage have failed, resulting in the entrenchment of disadvantage for many. If we are to break the cycle and create greater opportunities for social and economic participation, we all need to change the way we think about policy and how it is developed. This will require governments, communities, provid-

ers, and individuals to work in partnership. It will require place-based approaches, and community-driven approaches built around genuine partnerships with initiatives co-designed and supported with careful monitoring and evaluation. Early interventions to tackle disadvantage can prevent entrenchment, not only providing opportunities for individuals, but reducing costs on health and welfare expenditure and build greater community cohesion. Thank you.

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Visibility, power and equity: using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data to drive equity in Australia

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Abstract

This paper arises from a presentation in the Setting the Scene session from the Royal Society of NSW and Learned Academy Forum — Reshaping Australia: Communities in Action. It describes some of the issues and challenges surrounding the collection and reporting of official data on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia. It emphasizes the importance of accurate and appropriate data for policy planning and decision-making processes highlighting that despite efforts to understand and address the gaps and disparities experienced by these communities, significant challenges persist.

It describes the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation, which have led to tensions between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and some of the effects this has on the data and reporting that pertain to them. It argues for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights to govern their own affairs and shape their own futures. To achieve this, the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be respected and included in the governance structures of the nation.

The state of reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing is also discussed, noting the delayed and fragmented approach to data collection and the resulting health and wellbeing reporting. It argues the need for consistent and sustained efforts in this area to bridge the gaps and promote equity. By addressing these issues, policymakers can better understand and address the specific needs and aspirations of these communities, ultimately promoting their health, wellbeing, and self-determination.

Introduction

Official data plays an imperative role in policy planning for health and wellbeing as it provides valuable insights into various aspects of society, including health, economics, and social development. It serves as a foundation for decision-making processes by offering comprehensive understandings of the needs and gaps within communities and populations. However, when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' health and wellbeing, there continues to be issues in official data collections and reporting that require consideration in order to ensure accuracy and appropriateness (Griffiths et al. 2019).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, official data often falls short of being wholly representative. This is in part attributed to historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation whereby Australia's First Nations Peoples continue to advocate for

constitutional recognition and the right to govern their own affairs (McNicol & Haughton 2023). This requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to be heard and to have their voices recognised and respected within the governance structures of the nation. Importantly, this requires recognising the inherent rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to govern their own affairs, determine their own priorities, and to shape their own futures. Despite significant investments in understanding the health, social, and economic gaps experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, disparities persist, with the gap, in many instances, getting wider (Commonwealth of Australia 2022).

Accurate and appropriate reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing is necessary for assessing progress and enabling governments to meet the citizenship rights and needs of these communities. It is a part of the government's responsibility to both identify and address ongoing disparities within society and to ensure routine reporting that reflects the current needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

When discussing data in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, two major points need consideration. The first is the research and reporting efforts dedicated to understanding and documenting the health and wellbeing of this population. These endeavours aim to identify the specific needs and optimize systems, services, and policies accordingly.

The second point revolves around the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance in national administration and research data collections. Involving and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the collection, management, and interpretation of data concerning their health and wellbeing is critical. This ensures that data reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, priorities, and aspirations, ultimately contributing to more accurate and relevant policy planning.

The historical and contemporary events that have shaped the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples also have a significant impact on data collection and governance. Recognising and addressing this impact is vital for moving towards reconciliation within Australia. By acknowledging the historical context and involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities in data used for official reporting, the nation can take a step forward in bridging the gaps and promoting equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

State of events with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing reporting

Significant investment has been made in recent years to improve our understanding of, and address, the health, social, and economic gaps experienced by Australia's First Nations Peoples. However, the historical context reveals a delayed and fragmented approach to data collection and reporting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

The first regular collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data dates back to 1957 when the Northern Territory Administration started collecting information on infant mortality (Thompson 1997, Smith

1978). However, it took another 16 years until 1973 for the Commonwealth and state and territory health ministers to endorse a policy on collecting national Aboriginal health statistics (Ring & Griffiths 2021). This delayed response reflects a lack of recognition and prioritisation of the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Despite the 1967 referendum that recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution, there was still a lack of active data collections on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births and deaths until the mid-1980s (Ring & Griffiths 2021). There continue to be challenges, with the under-reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births (Endo 2014, Gibberd et al. 2016). This not only impacts national reporting, but can, at the individual level, impact one's ability to obtain identification and further result in barriers to accessing basic services and programs. Additionally, "semi-national" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths data continues to be provided for five of the eight Australian mainland states and territories. This has ongoing implications for measurement and particularly mortality and life expectancy estimates (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). This further highlights the need for issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data and reporting to be considered and redressed.

Part of the challenge in reporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing has been the patchy and reactive nature of the efforts. Developments in this area have lacked consistency over time, resulting in gaps and limitations in understanding the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Ring & Griffiths 2021).

Efforts have been made to improve data collection and reporting, such as the establishment of the Joint Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Unit, the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics, in Darwin in 1996 (Thompson 1997). This unit was tasked with producing biannual publications on the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. However, it was disbanded after only seven years, indicating a lack of sustained commitment to data collection in this area (Ring & Griffiths 2021).

In 1987, Recommendation 49 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) called for a special national survey to be conducted, covering various social, demographic, health, and economic aspects of the Aboriginal population (Nagle & Summerrell 2002). The ABS responded to this recommendation by developing the first national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey. The purpose of the survey was to provide governments with an information base for planning and measuring progress in meeting the objectives, aspirations, and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

However, limited information exists on how the initial purpose of these surveys has empowered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. While various government departments, committees, and groups have incorporated a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data and its measurement over the years, there has been limited support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance. This lack of involve-

ment and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been a recurring issue that results in a lack of policy relevant data (Kukutai & Walter 2015).

For instance, the development of the 2008 National Indigenous Reform Agreement and the initial Closing the Gap targets faced criticism for being developed without proper consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Dept of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2019). There has also been criticism that the focus of these targets has been on the needs of governments rather than the priorities and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory 2018).

Developments in international and national Indigenous data capabilities

The International Group for Indigenous Health Measurement has played a significant role in highlighting important considerations in data, information, and reporting pertaining to Indigenous Peoples worldwide. This group brings together Indigenous data and measurement experts from around the globe to engage in discussions with official statistics bodies, governments, and international agencies like the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

One of the key rights recognized for Indigenous Peoples is the right to be counted and have their values reflected in the data and information that pertains to them (United Nations General Assembly 2008). The known invisibility of Indigenous Peoples in official data collections, stemming from historical marginalisation and exclusion, had led to a call for national statistical agencies globally to improve efforts in collecting Indigenous data and ensure the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in official statistics (Madden et al. 2016). The discussions have also highlighted the importance of human rights in relation to the right to be counted as Indigenous Peoples and emphasized the need for high-quality information to accurately report on Indigenous populations at the international and national levels (Kukutai & Walter 2015, Madden et al. 2016, Griffiths et al. 2019).

Within the Australian context, three overarching issues have particular significance. Firstly, there is the question of who is counted, which involves considerations regarding the definitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and how these definitions are operationalised (Griffiths et al. 2019). Australia has made progress in this area, with the development of the Commonwealth definition in 1978 and the subsequent implementation of a standard indigenous question in 1996. However, capturing the heterogeneity of indigeneity remains a challenge, as demonstrated by the significant increase in Indigenous identification during the 2016 Census, particularly on the east and south coasts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023a). This increase indicates that individuals are embracing their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identities, but it also highlights the diversity of lived realities within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, including those who have recently identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This diversity needs to be considered when measuring outcomes, such as mortality or life expectancy estimates.

Census changes can also have an impact upon funding allocation and service provision. For example, the distribution of

Commonwealth funds to state, territory and local governments including the Goods and Services Tax (GST) entitlements is based on census counts (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022). Any changes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification patterns will have implications regarding where these funds go (Biddle 2014).

The second issue relates to how many people are counted and encompasses concerns about the completeness and accuracy of enumeration (Griffiths et al. 2019). National statistical agencies must address undercounts and overcounts and employ appropriate methodologies to ensure the accuracy of the data. The ABS uses post-enumeration surveys to address undercounts and overcounts in the census. Other enhancement methods such as data linkage are employed to improve Indigenous status in other datasets, such as hospitalisations and deaths data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023b). However, the sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data also raises legal and ethical considerations that require careful attention (Griffiths 2019).

The third issue pertains to what is counted and measured, involving the development of indicators and measures that encompass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' states of events, values, and understandings (Griffiths, 2019). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are to lead in the development of these measures. Furthermore, to enable policy relevance within colonial systems, processes that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing, and doing are required to be valued. In recent years, there have been significant advancements in measuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. Projects such as the What Matters study (Howard et al. 2020) and the Mayi Kuwayu study (Jones et al. 2018), led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have provided culturally relevant and evidence-based approaches to better support and address the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. However, these initiatives currently rely on research funding rather than being fully supported as government programs, posing challenges to their continuity and sustainability.

There has been significant investment in Australia regarding whole-of-population data that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and reporting. This includes the establishment of the Office of the National Data Commissioner to build and support the legislation and infrastructure for the sharing and use of official data collections (Office of the National Data Commissioner 2023). There is also a range of emerging developments and initiatives within the Australian Public Service and official statistical agencies. This includes the development of the Data and Digital Government Strategy to support insightful data-driven policies and to deliver easy, accessible and secure services for people and businesses (Australian Government 2023); the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (Department of Education 2022); and the historical Health Services Principle Committee and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Health Information Strategy (National Rural Health Alliance 2020) to make better use of research and health data.

These advancements have an important role in enabling and implementing health equity approaches within Australia. Fur-

thermore, to ensure the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are met, there is an explicit requirement for governments and organisations to be led and guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples regarding the collection, storage and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' data.

Towards appropriate and accurate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reporting

The enduring effects of colonisation on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to reverberate throughout society, impacting both individuals and communities. These extend far beyond immediate health outcomes into the intricate dynamics between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and governing bodies. To truly understand and address these impacts, it is essential to recognize and rectify the issues surrounding data collection and representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Accurate and comprehensive data collections play a pivotal role in informing policies, resource allocation, and healthcare interventions. However, the identification of individuals, the accuracy of population counts, and the metrics used for assessment have historically been plagued by limitations and challenges in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and the diverse nature of these communities often pose difficulties when applying conventional data collection methodologies. These issues currently contribute to inaccurate and incomplete representations of the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Actively involving, consulting, and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in shaping and building data collections can also support reflective reporting that pertain to them. By doing so, data collections can align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations and goals. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities, knowledge systems and practices provide valuable insights into the determinants of health and holistic wellbeing. It must be acknowledged that these may not be captured adequately by the existing health measures currently reported.

By addressing the limitations of official data collection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, this will ensure more accurate and empowering representation. This requires ongoing efforts to enhance data collection methodologies, develop culturally relevant frameworks, and establish robust quality assurance mechanisms. This must also be addressed jointly with any legal or ethical issues that may arise. Collaborative partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, researchers, policymakers, and data custodians are instrumental in co-designing data collection processes that respect Indigenous rights, privacy, and sovereignty.

Moreover, supporting the development of Indigenous data governance is vital for achieving better policy outcomes and effectively allocating resources. Indigenous data governance recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to control and manage their data, ensuring that data collection processes are conducted ethically and in alignment with

community values (Kukutai & Taylor 2016). By empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to govern their data, decision-makers can gain insights into the specific needs, strengths, and aspirations of these communities. This, in turn, enables the formulation of policies and interventions that are tailored to address the priorities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ultimately contributing to improved health, wellbeing, and self-determination.

To address these impacts comprehensively, it is critical to actively involve and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in shaping official data collection and reporting processes. By striving for more accurate and inclusive representation, while also supporting Indigenous data governance, we can advance policy outcomes, allocate resources more effectively, and ultimately promote the health, wellbeing, and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples throughout Australia.

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Social cohesion, diversity and inequalities in Australian communities

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Abstract

Social cohesion, in reflecting the peace, harmony and connectedness of society, is an issue of growing significance around the world. While recent global events have been marked by a degree of conflict, division and polarisation, social cohesion in Australia has been reasonably resilient, and remarkably so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the fears of some academics and policy makers, the cohesiveness of Australian society has coincided with world-leading levels of immigration and ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, social and economic inequalities are a substantial weight on social cohesion, not least for the way in which they impact migrant communities. In the following analyses, I draw on a combination of data sources to explore the relationships between diversity, inequality and social cohesion in Australia. Findings suggest that diversity and particularly public support for multiculturalism has been a great source of strength for Australian society. However, financial stress, economic inequality and the inequitable personal, social, economic and health outcomes of COVID-19 in migrant communities pose a substantial threat to social cohesion. Addressing the sources of inequality and alleviating their effects ought to be an urgent priority for governments and the community in protecting the harmony and collective well-being of Australian society.

A cohesive nation?

Is Australia a cohesive nation? On some measures, and in the aggregate, Australia has a high level of social cohesion. Social cohesion here refers to the peace, harmony and connectedness of society and is most commonly indicated by the degree of trust people have in one another and in government, their sense of belonging and their participation in their communities (Chan et al. 2006). Internationally, Australia scores reasonably highly on the degree to which people trust others and the feel pride in their nationality — at least compared with other developed countries (EVS/WVS 2022). Perhaps most encouragingly, Australia seems to have avoided, to this point, the deep social and political divisions and polarisation seen around the world (Carothers & O'Donohue 2019). Indeed, evidence suggests that social cohesion in Australia sharply increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and remains high in 2022 on several indicators (O'Donnell 2022).

The cohesiveness of Australian society comes despite, or perhaps because of, high levels of immigration and ethnic diversity. Australia has one of the largest foreign-born populations in the world and one of the highest levels of net migration relative to its total population (UN 2022). This is notable in the context of social cohesion, in that for some time, immigration and diversity has been theorised to be detrimental to cohesion (Putnam 2007). While the evidence for such an effect in Australia is mixed (Leigh 2006, McKenna et al. 2018), immigration and diversity is embedded within processes of population growth and change (O'Donnell & Evans 2021) that require consistent renewal of social bonds

and connections. The fact that Australia has maintained its relative degree of unity as ethnic diversity has grown is remarkable and cause for deeper enquiry, particularly given the tumultuous global geopolitical context and deep divisions elsewhere in the world.

Social division and inequality, however, remain as powerful threats to social cohesion. Economic disadvantage and deprivation have been shown to be the strongest predictors of individuals' social support networks, their levels of trust, sense of belonging and engagement in their communities (Markus 2021). More broadly, absolute deprivation is a direct symptom of societal malfunction that leads one to question whether such deprivation can truly co-exist with social cohesion. Can Australia be considered cohesive where, for example:

- Australia's First Nations people are expected to live, on average, 8 years less than non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2018)?
- 2.5 million Australians have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives (ABS 2015)?
- One-in-three people from non-English speaking backgrounds feel discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion over just a one-year period (O'Donnell 2022)?
- Overseas-born Australians have been 62 per cent more likely to die of COVID-19 than the Australian-born population (ABS 2022a)?
- People in the most economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods have been three times more likely to die of COVID-19 than people in the least disadvantaged neighbourhoods (ABS 2022a)?

The degree to which social cohesion in Australia coincides with demographic change, immigration, diversity and social inequality is the subject of the following analyses. Elaborating on the above points, I describe recent population trends in Australia, particularly in relation to immigration and diversity, and analyse their relationship to social cohesion. Potential threats to social cohesion are examined, particularly arising from social and economic inequalities before and since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Population growth and change

Recent demographic history provides the critical context for the way in which social cohesion has developed in Australia. Population growth and change are intricately linked to the maintenance of social cohesion at local and national levels, in that the bonds and connectedness between people must be continually renewed and updated as new people enter the population. In communities that experience low population growth and change, social cohesion can derive from the accumulated connections and interactions people have made with the same set of neighbours over a period of years and perhaps decades. In high-growth communities, by contrast, bonds and connections must be re-created with new sets of neighbours to maintain overall levels of cohesion.

At least prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the Australian population grew rapidly. Over the last 50 years, the Australian population has doubled (ABS 2022b). Over the last 20 years, almost 6.4 million people have been added to the population at an average of 322,000 per year (ABS 2022b). The rate of population growth over the last 20 years

makes Australia one of the fastest growing developed countries, behind only the likes of Singapore and Luxembourg (UN, 2022a).

Whether the level of population growth has been good or bad is a matter of perspective. Growth has though unmistakeably changed the characteristic of many communities. In Sydney, the proportion of people living in apartments increased from 15 per cent in 2001 to 26 per cent in 2021 (ABS 2022c). Other towns and cities have not experienced this level of apartment growth, even Melbourne. Melbourne though, like many fast-growing cities and towns in Australia, continues to grow outwards. A major emerging concern for communities popping up on the outskirts of our cities is access to services, to jobs and to the social, community and economic infrastructure that will allow new communities to grow, thrive and be connected within and across their cities and regions. Thus, social cohesion must be continually renewed in some communities where their social and built environments change, while in newly established communities, cohesion must be constructed almost from the ground up.

Immigration and diversity

Immigration has been the most substantial driver of population growth in Australia. Between 2007 and 2019, net overseas migration to Australia averaged 228,000 people per year, accounting for around 60 per cent of Australia's total population growth (ABS 2021a). The proportion of people born overseas increased from 11 per cent in 1947 to 30 per cent today (ABS 1947, 2022c). This is one of the largest shares in the world, behind only some of the Gulf States and Singapore, all of whom have large guest worker programs (UN 2022).

Particularly striking is the way in which shifting migration flows over time have created a mosaic of migrant, ethnic and cultural diversity in Australia. As the source countries for Australia's immigration flows have gradually shifted in the post-WWII period from western Europe to south and eastern Europe, the Middle East and increasingly to south and east Asia (Raymer & Baffour 2018), new arrivals to Australia have added to the cumulative stock of migrants drawn from all corners of the world. As new arrivals bring with them aspects of their cultures and languages and pass these and their ancestries to future generations, increasing migrant diversity also gives rise to growing ancestral, cultural and language diversity. If two Australians were selected at random today, there would be an approximately 50 per cent chance they were born in different countries, a two-in-three chance that their mothers were born in two different countries and a two-in-five chance that they speak different languages at home (ABS 2022c).

Ethnic diversity is increasingly widespread. While diversity remains highest in the majority cities — in Sydney, for example, there is around a 70 per cent chance that two randomly selected people will speak different languages (ABS 2022c) — the largest increases in diversity over the last 15 years have been in regional centres, towns like Melton, Armidale, Alice Springs, Shepparton, Tamworth, Dubbo, Toowoomba, Wagga Wagga and Mildura (ABS 2007, 2022c). Between 2006 and 2021, the proportion of the population born overseas in these nine towns combined increased from 16 per cent to 26 per cent, while the proportion who speak a language other than English at home increased from 6 per cent to 24 per cent (ABS 2022c).

Nevertheless, the most immigrant-rich communities remain concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne. These communities are truly diverse. Some would even call them "super-diverse" (Vertovec 2007). In Fairfield in western Sydney, for example, residents were born in more than 120 countries and speak more than 100 languages at home (ABS 2022c). In these communities, people may choose to live near others from similar backgrounds and form new ethnic and cultural enclaves in Australia. However, the wider geographic communities in which they live comprise people from many different backgrounds, and there is little sense in which immigrant groups in Australia could be said to be residentially segmented or segregated from the rest of society (O'Donnell & Evans 2021).

Diversity and social cohesion

Immigrant-rich and ethnically diverse communities are cohesive and resilient places and have a unique sense of vibrancy. However, this is not always well captured in academic theory and quantitative data. Putnam's (2007) "hunkering down" or constrict hypothesis theorises that people withdraw from community and civic life in the face of ethnic diversity, resulting in lower levels of community-level social capital (near synonymous with social cohesion) in diverse communities. While the hypothesis has received mixed overall support in empirical research, reasonably strong cross-national evidence indicates that ethnic diversity is negatively associated with the level of trust people have in one another and with the sense of cohesion and co-operation people have within their neighbourhoods (Dinesen et al. 2020).

Encouragingly, evidence for a detrimental impact of diversity in Australia is weak. Recent research suggests that while ethnic diversity is associated with lower levels of volunteering in Australia, there is no relationship between diversity and interpersonal trust, neighbourhood cohesion or the sense of belonging people have in Australia (McKenna et al. 2018). Foreign-born populations in Australia, for their part, have reasonably similar levels of trust in other people and in government as the Australian-born population (Markus 2021). However, with relatively shallow roots in Australia, recently arrived immigrants typically express a weaker sense of belonging in Australia and in their communities and lower engagement in social, community and civic activities (ABS 2015, Markus 2021). Belonging and engagement, though, typically increase the longer that foreign-born populations have lived in Australia (O'Donnell 2022).

Public support for multiculturalism and ethnic diversity is likely to be an important asset to Australia in maintaining social cohesion in the face of continued immigration and ever growing diversity. In the 2022 Mapping Social Cohesion survey, 88 per cent of people agree that multiculturalism has been good for Australia and 77 per cent agree that accepting immigrants from many different countries has made Australia stronger (O'Donnell 2022). This sentiment has become stronger over time and likely contributes positively to social cohesion in Australia.

Remarkably, social cohesion in Australia and support for multiculturalism appear to have strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, Australians reported a greater sense of national belonging and personal worth, increased acceptance of people from

different backgrounds, and a greater sense of social inclusion and justice in Australia (Markus 2021). Reflecting support for governments' health and economic measures during 2020, there was a sharp increase in the proportion of adults who believe the Federal Government can be trusted to do the right thing all or most of the time, and a decrease in the proportion who think the gap in incomes between rich and poor is too large. At local levels, people were more likely to believe their neighbours are willing to help and get along with each other, more likely to believe that people generally can be trusted, and more likely to believe that multiculturalism has been good for Australia, and that immigrants benefit Australia's economy and society (O'Donnell 2022).

The spike in social cohesion during the pandemic speaks volumes for the capacity of Australians to rally around and support each other through difficult times. This galvanising response, particularly at neighbourhood and community levels, provided powerful support for individual well-being, with research showing that neighbourhood social cohesion was strongly protective of mental health, particularly against depression, during Melbourne's long, second lockdown in 2020 (O'Donnell et al. 2022). A galvanising response to crises is not without precedent, and academic theories and research suggest people develop stronger social and psychological ties to people in response to adversity (Mancini 2019). It is striking, though, that social cohesion strengthened in Australia, alongside growing support for multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, and amidst global unrest, protest and sharply polarised views with respect to the pandemic, immigration and a range of other social and political issues.

Social and economic inequalities

National-level trends in social cohesion, however, mask substantial inequalities. Substantial variation exists across individuals and communities in the extent to which people trust one another, feel a sense of belonging and social inclusion in their communities and in Australia and the ability to engage and participate in community life (O'Donnell 2022). These reflect critical social inequalities that weigh down national-level cohesion.

Economic inequalities are a key driver of social inequalities and a substantial drag on social cohesion. Household finances, in particular, are the single most important predictor of how people perceive cohesion in Australia (Markus 2021). People who are struggling to pay bills or who describe themselves as poor or "just getting along" are much less likely to say they have a great sense of belonging in Australia, have a much lower sense of happiness and self-worth, perceive substantially weaker social inclusion and justice in Australia, are less likely to trust other people or the government and are more likely to disagree that multiculturalism has been good for Australia (O'Donnell 2022).

Financial stress appears to have become more common over the last 15 years. Between 2006 and 2020, the proportion of people who could not raise $2,000 in an emergency increased from 13 per cent to 19 per cent (ABS 2021b). Meanwhile the proportion of adults who say they are poor, struggling to pay bills or just getting along increased from 30 per cent in 2009 to 37 per cent in 2019 (Markus 2021). While the government's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. through the JobKeeper job subsidy scheme and increased

income support payments) interrupted this trend for the better, the withdrawal of support and the emergence of cost-of-living and inflation pressures in 2022 means this was a temporary reprieve. Between July 2021 and July 2022, the proportion of adults describing themselves as poor, struggling or just getting along increased from 31 per cent to 37 per cent (O'Donnell 2022).

Housing costs contribute substantially to financial stress, particularly in the tight housing markets of the major cities. One of the most widely used measures of housing affordability stress is the 30/40 rule, which refers to the proportion of households in the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution who pay more than 30 per cent of their income in housing costs. Based on the ABS (2022d) Survey of Income and Housing, 42 per cent of renting households were in housing stress by this measure in 2019–20, an increase from 35 per cent in 2007–08. In Sydney, the proportion increased from 44 per cent in 2007–08 to 59 per cent in 2013–14 and 54 per cent in 2019–20, while in Melbourne, it increased from 42 per cent in 2007–08 to 48 per cent in 2013–14 and 48 per cent in 2019–20. Housing stress is strongly related to broader financial stress, with households experiencing housing stress under the 30/40 rule being approximately twice as likely to report not being able to raise $2,000 in an emergency than households not experiencing housing stress (ABS 2022d). While we wait on more data, it appears likely that the current economic climate is exacerbating housing and financial pressures and straining individual and collective wellbeing (Biddle & Gray 2022).

Social inequalities and diverse communities

Economic disadvantage impacts on foreign-born populations and diverse communities and adds to other forms of disadvantage. While the foreign-born population is increasingly widespread across Australia, the most immigrant-rich and ethnically diverse communities remain located in relatively disadvantaged parts of the major cities particularly Sydney and Melbourne (O'Donnell & Evans, 2021), and areas where housing and financial pressures are likely greatest. Diverse communities in the major cities also experience high rates of population change, with new immigration flows from a diverse set of source countries contributing to high rates of population change and turnover (O'Donnell & Evans 2021), and potentially making it more difficult to establish and maintain lasting interpersonal connections. Meanwhile, discrimination reported by people from non-English speaking backgrounds remains common, alongside prejudicial attitudes among the wider population to immigrants from non-European countries (O'Donnell 2022).

Ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged communities were also disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Up until the outbreak of the Omicron variant in December 2021, people in the most diverse local communities in Sydney were almost five times more likely to have contracted COVID-19 than those in the least diverse communities (NSW Health 2022), and more than twice as likely to be issued a fine or court attendance notice for breaching public health orders, despite disproportionately high self-described compliance with lockdown rules (Rahman 2021). Unemployment rates increased by an

average of 2.1 percentage points in the first year of the pandemic in the most diverse communities, twice as large as the increase in the least diverse parts of Sydney (National Skills Commission 2022). While vaccination rates rapidly caught up, the roll-out of the vaccines was more than one-third slower in the most diverse communities (Department of Health and Aged Care 2022). As previously mentioned, overseas-born populations have been 62 per cent more likely to die of COVID-19 than the Australian-born population, after controlling for their relatively young age profile (ABS 2022a). These outcomes likely reflect pre-existing inequities, combined with a failure to plan and mitigate against vulnerabilities and the lack of access to government programs like JobKeeper (Shergold et al. 2022)[1].

Emerging evidence suggests that such disproportionate outcomes had damaging effects on the personal, material and social well-being of overseas-born Australians. On the Mapping Social Cohesion survey (O'Donnell 2022), the proportion of adults who have a great sense of belonging in Australia declined from 53 per cent in 2019 to 35 per cent in 2022 among overseas-born Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds, an 18 percentage-point decline. This compares with a 9 percentage-point decline for people born in Australia. Over the same period, the proportion of overseas-born Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds who report being happy declined 13 percentage points (no change for the Australian-born population), while the proportion who report being satisfied with their finances declined 8 percentage points (compared with a 2-point increase in satisfaction for the Australian-born population). Meanwhile, average increases in the levels of trust in other people and in the Federal Government during the pandemic were significantly higher for the Australian-born population. Through these impacts, the disproportionate health, social and economic outcomes of COVID-19 pose a distinct threat to social cohesion in Australia.

Conclusion

Australia is in several respects a cohesive nation. Australians report reasonably high levels of trust and national pride, have very strong support for multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, have supported each other through the COVID-19 pandemic, and have responded positively to government efforts to protect health and economic well-being. However, beneath the surface lie inequalities that weigh down current social cohesion and threaten its future. Several inequalities are longstanding, borne out by forms of deprivation, including housing and financial stress, poverty, homelessness, discrimination and the Indigenous life expectancy gap. While the response to COVID-19 was positive overall, the pandemic also exposed and exacerbated disadvantage, particularly in ethnically diverse and migrant-rich communities. Such outcomes are critically important to social cohesion, as the experience of disadvantage is strongly tied to a person's sense of belonging in society, their personal and social well-being, their sense of fairness and social justice, the quality of their interpersonal connections and social networks and their involvement within communities.

1 See a summary of their findings: Shergold, P. (2022) Lessons from a pandemic, *Journal & Proceedings of the RSNSW* 155(2): 189–192. https://royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/journal/155-2-Shergold.pdf [Ed.]

The experience of disadvantage and its deleterious personal and social outcomes warrants a strong community and policy response. In designing such a response, a great deal can be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic — both in terms of what was done well and what was done poorly. Australians responded positively to state and federal government measures and placed their trust in government to a substantially greater extent than prior to the pandemic. However, the vulnerabilities of diverse and disadvantaged communities to COVID-19 and associated lockdowns were foreseeable and greater steps ought to have been taken to minimise and prevent the health, economic and social harm. The roll-out of vaccines was belated but ultimately successful, demonstrating what can be achieved with adequate policy focus and commitment. Unfortunately, much of the damage was done by the time of the vaccine program's success, underscoring the need to address social inequalities and vulnerabilities far in advance of the next crisis.

Efforts to address inequalities and strengthen social cohesion will go some way to ensuring individual and collective well-being, maintaining peace and harmony and strengthening the social fabric that holds society together. While the long-term effects of the pandemic on social cohesion remain to be seen, individual and communities are resilient and looking forward to a return to normal life. Mounting health, social and particularly economic challenges in the current period though are likely to take their toll, potentially laying the seeds for societal discord. Active and considered approaches to addressing these challenges and alleviating their inequitable effects is an important first step in maintaining and growing the cohesion of Australian society.

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Session I: Setting the Scene
Discussion and Questions

Julianne Schultz: Thank you, James. That was terrific. I can well understand why you've been chosen to lead that Scanlon Report. I'm sure you'll do an excellent job in the coming years. What I'd quite like to do now, if I've got the capacity to do that, is to draw in some questions from the audience. There's been a lot of talk from up here, so if anyone's got any questions, this would be a good opportunity.

Louise Edwards: Thanks very much. I'm Louise Edwards from UNSW and also the Academy of Humanities. I've got a question for Professor Holden. I was really interested in the discussion about the economics of wellbeing and the costs that are often invisible to economic modelling. For example, you mentioned the relative cheapness of curriculum reforms compared to intensive tutoring for school changes. I'm wondering whether that actually is because the labour of the teachers doing the curriculum reform is invisible to economists and it's one of the reasons people are leaving teaching in droves. Even with the universities, we see that a great idea at the department level becomes a cascade of work by the time it's rolled out as to the classroom, so people have to invent new scaffolding for their classes.

They have to introduce new activities, they have to actually prepare all their classes, and teachers are actually just spending all of this time because somebody in policy had a great idea, and lots of teachers are now kind of keen to actually become the department rather than be at the coalface. I think it's really important, for those teachers already employed, that the time they spend is actually factored into economic models and not just part of this invisible labour. And as a side anecdote, I have a friend who is surprised that people had to clean bathrooms. He said, "We don't clean our bathroom. It's always clean." He literally never saw his wife cleaning the bathroom; therefore, it did not count. We need to be careful that we don't do this to our teachers because there will be no one left teaching.

Richard Holden: Thanks for that. That's an incredibly important point that the piece of research, which is not my work, but some scholars overseas (those we're referring to) did in fact take account on a fully costed of basis of teacher time. I think the general point that you raise about making sure that we count all the contributions that people make and making sure that those contributions aren't invisible and aren't undervalued is incredibly important. I think on the specific question of teaching, one of the emerging and unfortunate trends, is the amount of time that teachers have to do (and this has been well documented) in compliance and administration and reporting and other things, which take them away from what many of them got into the teaching profession to do, which is to spend time as educators. What many of us as parents want for our children is for those teachers to be doing what they do best, rather than filling in forms. I think it's really important to think about what people do, measure it correctly and make sure we basically keep people doing what they want to do and what's most effective.

Julianne Schultz: Alison, I'm interested in your response to that as a policy person on the panel, not necessarily in the specifics of the teaching, but of just what's counted and what's not in terms of the clever ideas that work their way through the system. That was referenced in an earlier presentation: that when you factored in public housing and public education, that meant that people were less disadvantaged.

Alison Frame: Yes, that's right.

Julianne Schultz: If they can't get access to public housing and the public education's not as good as it might be, it's not actually offsetting to the same degree as it needs to be to make a real difference.

Alison Frame: Yes, that's right. Definitely. That's what I was referring to — consumption inequality —and demonstrating that there are in-kind services that are publicly available and that ameliorate in some way the effect of income inequality. Certainly, from the Government's recent announcements and policies over the last six months, there's been a huge acknowledgement and redirection of funding towards social and affordable housing and the recognition of housing as a fundamental need to address inequality, and to provide the foundation there for opportunity and engagement, economic and social participation. That's a significant aspect of that, which has become more pronounced in the last few months. I'm happy to take any other questions on where the Government's focusing at the moment.

Julianne Schultz: Yes, sure. We'll come back to that.

Kwan Lee: Thank you very much panellists. My name is Kwan Lee from the University of New South Wales. My question here is around social cohesion, so maybe to James. When I look at social cohesion, I look at example of Norway, I look at the example of Singapore, fantastic policies ensuring that the disadvantaged are not disadvantaged in terms of housing, a very basic need for all human beings. In Australia, it seems to be very expensive. You can't participate in volunteer work if you are struggling with living costs. Then, on top of that, you are disadvantaged because you don't have resources. You can't access private tutoring for education. Therefore, you can't participate competitively in the social structures. What is Australia doing wrong that Singapore and Norway are doing right? Something that comes to mind is the sovereignty fund. We have a sovereignty debt of a trillion dollars. If we switch it the other way around, what could we do to invest in social cohesion, which is an economic pathway? Participation and trust will eventually flow from that. I welcome your thoughts on that.

Julianne Schultz: James, I'm interested in your thoughts, but Kalinda, I'm interested in your thoughts too, in terms of the sort of transfer discussion that you were raising, as well. So, James first.

James O'Donnell: I thought that was very well put. I agree with everything that was said. Housing is emerging — has been over the last couple of years — as one of the big issues in our discussions with communities and is likely an important part of that nexus between financial stress and financial wellbeing and economic disadvantage and their perceived social cohesion, as I was talking about in my address. It's having a real effect on social cohesion, even just things like housing policy and some of the housing affordability stress that is experienced, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

There are lots of things that we can do about it. I don't think we've done particularly badly, but it's something that's emerged in the last couple of years as a big issue around housing affordability and addressing some of those issues around financial stress more generally. We saw a big response during the pandemic to some of the financial support measures, and that had a flow-through effect to people's perceptions of social cohesion in Australia. We know a bit about what we can do and how we can address some of those issues. I think they're going to become increasingly urgent over the next couple of years. Hopefully we can have a strong policy response.

Kalinda Griffiths: There's been limited work on social cohesion in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. One of the main reasons for this is that it doesn't fit nicely in regard to communities working together to do what they need to do, and the extreme disadvantage that people may experience, particularly in regional and remote communities. There's a lot of work that I think we need to do in terms of how we measure that social cohesion. There have been discussions across a couple of universities where we want to adopt a model of social cohesion. But ultimately, it's not transferable at this point. You might have a really strong community and culture and understanding, but they're still experiencing rheumatic heart disease, which is a disease of extreme poverty, only ever seen in nations that don't have access to healthcare. We still see it in Australia in remote communities, as an example. There's still a lot of work to do in terms of how we better understand and address this within the complex environment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Roger Kerr: Thank you. My name's Roger Kerr from UNSW. Lots of discussion about inequality from panel, which is great, I think. One issue which wasn't mentioned but perhaps alluded to by James was the issue of unemployed people who tend to be coming from a socially disadvantaged group. People are long-term unemployed. Again, a select group of that same group and people who have repeat spells of unemployment and that's an issue which affects maybe a small group of people, but they're come from the same socially disadvantaged groups. Comments, thoughts? Thank you.

Alison Frame: It's a really good point and certainly a recognition that we need to do more. With the level of unemployment at the moment as well, we recognise that there's an enormous challenge, an enormous opportunity to incentivise employment for people who have been unemployed for some time. But that's just not, "Here's the job, go and take it." It requires some quite active support to assist people to participate in those opportunities. We've had reference to housing and other things that are foundational and would be necessary for someone to actively engage in that employment opportunity. You also mentioned the disadvantage associated with unemployment, but what we also know, from Peter Butterworth's studies at ANU and a range of other research, is that if you don't have anxiety or depression when you go into income support and become unemployed, you may likely have that — or you would more be likely have that — one or two years after.

And there's this increased prevalence of mental health deterioration associated with longer-term income support when people don't receive the opportunities that we need to make available to them. There is a deep

recognition in government programs about the need to provide wraparound support to recognise the complexity and comorbidities of disadvantage, and to ensure that it's not a single programmatic service offer, "Here's the job, why aren't you taking it?" The recognition of what other barriers might exist and a comprehensive service offer to genuinely assist people to engage with that.

Richard Holden: Just to add very briefly from a top-down level to those important points that Alison made. We've come to recognise, I think in the last five or six years or so, that the speed limit of the economy in terms of unemployment isn't 5%, it's closer to 4%. And that if the kind of reforms that have led us to that view can continue, we ought to be able to get that speed limit down to closer to 3½ or 3%. That doesn't solve all those problems, but if you think about literally hundreds of thousands of people who on average in steady state are not unemployed, the best way for people to not suffer from long-term unemployment is to be employed. More often than not be out of spells that tend to have a hysteresis effect to them and tend to perpetuate. Those reforms are incredibly important for us to be able to provide those employment opportunities.

Kalinda Griffiths: I just want to speak to some of the work that we are doing in the Northern Territory. In the NT, about 50% of students don't complete high school and about 64% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aren't employed. We figured out that this was a pathway issue. Because of that, we developed a program — Menzies-Ramaciotti Training Centre[1] — where we engage with students across a range of different mechanisms. The systems are there to support people in regional remote areas, but we want students to engage in that program. It's been running for about two years. We've had over 70 people come through and they start at school-age or they can be undergrad and move into higher education as they progress with us as well. We've been able to touch about 2,800 students so far, through engaging them in outsourcing.

We've got a Health Lab that goes out to communities, and they know what options and availability there is for them in terms of training and education. We are trying to gain support from government at this point in time. What we realised is that this isn't necessarily just we need to get people into jobs. We need to have those systems that can work in those environments to grow people on the ground to support them in those communities. And so working with distance education as part of the Department of Education to make sure that people are able to access those services that are there for them. It's really very simple, but at the same time it's quite a complicated process to be able to engage all of those partners. But that's just one way in which we can address some of these issues, particularly in regional and remote areas.

James O'Donnell: It's difficult to pick up in surveys the impact of long-term unemployment and cyclical unemployment. It's something that we need more research on, but I agree with all the points made.

Julianne Schultz: Did anyone want to say something else? Okay. I'm going to end this session now because we're going to have lots

1 https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Centres_initiatives_and_projects/The_Ramaciotti_Regional_and_Remote_Health_Sciences_Training_Centre/

of times for lots of more questions. I'd like to thank our panellists. I think what we've managed to do in this session is to go from a very big picture down to a granularity, which is, with no disrespect to your work, Richard, much more complex and nuanced when you get beyond the big picture pattern and see how these competing factors play out on the ground and in people's lives.

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Session II: Health and Communities

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Julianne Schultz: This session is on health and communities. Our speakers are Bernie Shakeshaft, who is the founder of BackTrack Youth Works in Armidale; Sally Redman, who's the CEO of the Sax Institute; Elizabeth Elliott, who's a distinguished professor of paediatrics at the University of Sydney; and Maree Teesson, who's professor and director of the Matilda Centre for Mental Health, also at the University of Sydney.

Bernie Shakeshaft: Look, I bet I'm the only one here today who had to Google what a lounge suit is. I was pretty disappointed to see that I couldn't find cowboy hat, work boots and jeans. But, anyway, here I am wearing my tie with the paw prints. I'm Bernie Shakeshaft, and come from a loving family, big Catholic family. School was probably the toughest patch of my life. It didn't work out. If I went to school today with what I know about the education system, they would say you got that ADHD thing. Can't sit still, dyslexic, oppositional behavioural defiance disorder for sure and Tourette's probably. Wouldn't make a lot of sense to my mum. I think my final year at school, I spent that much bloody time in the principal's office. I was starting to think I might be the principal, had my own desk there. I go, if I couldn't make it through that system, then the kids that we work with now — we've heard that word disadvantage a bit today — how the hell are they going to get through it?

Probably going to be a little bit controversial, some of the things, my opinions. But this is just my lived experience. I look at technology 150 years ago and I look at where it's up to today and I go, worlds apart. If I look at transport 150 years ago, where it's up today, worlds apart. If I look at education 150 years ago and where it is today, sorry, I'm not a scholar, but I don't see a whole lot of difference: 20, 30 kids sit in a classroom. Sure, there might be a computer screen and do things different ways, but everyone's going to learn the same way. If it's not working, Einstein's definition of insanity, keep doing the same thing, expecting a different result.

I find that pretty disappointing. I think regardless of where you grew up, your level of education, your chosen career path, you might agree that as big people, one of the most important jobs that we have is to raise happy, healthy little people. I reckon that children are the most honest barometer of how we're going as a society. Mental health: 1 in 3 kids in Australia have a diagnosed mental health condition; 1 in 3, meaning 40,000, homeless kids tonight. I was going to say a million people living in poverty, but then I heard Her Excellency say it's actually 3.3 million. I'll stand corrected there. How about suicide being the leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds in Australia? In 2014, the Dusseldorp Forum put out a report, in 2014. The federal law says you must be at school until you're 17, or you have to be in a job.

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

In 2014, they estimated 1 in 5 kids under the age of 17 didn't go to school, were not involved in training and certainly didn't have a bloody job. When we started in 2006, we were dealing with 16- and 17-year-olds in and out of jail, certainly not going to school. All our referrals now are coming at 10, 11, and 12. We are seeing kids not make the transition from primary school to high school. Where does that end up? We value education, but we have to do it a different way. Have we got a different way? Hell, yes. Going to have a look at that in a minute. How about locking people up? 2013 to 2018, the UN data, looked at every country around the world and measured growth in incarceration rates. Columbia coming first, Turkey hot on their heels coming second. Guess who's coming third? The lucky country, Australia? Righto.

On average, 956 kids are locked up each night nationally in Australia. There are another 5,000 on community service, supervision orders. Do you know how much it costs to keep one kid in incarceration in Australia? $700,000 a year. That's the average. Bit more in some states, little bit higher in the Territory. When we start to do the numbers on that, pretty straightforward: 2 grand a day, 956 kids, 2 million bucks a day we're spending because that's the best damn solution we can come up for finding a 10-year-old. That's what age we lock kids up in Australia. 10 years of age, we start locking kids up and we're prepared to pay 2000 bucks a day to create a problem that you know is going to come again. There's the stats on it: 80% of kids reoffend within 12 months.

What are we doing, Australia? The lucky country? I don't know. Look, if this stuff was working, I'd say, well and good, but if it isn't, then what are we doing? For me, I go: first world country that I live in, I think, feels like a national shame in many parts of it. We're tipping so much money into things, but it's not working. So easy to define the problems. It's probably the easiest part to do. We can go on about that all day, but what's the damn solution? In 2006, I made a decision in my life, I go, "Either stop complaining about what this problem is or go and do something about it." I chose to go and do something about it. We started BackTrack Youth Works,[2] with no business plan, no funding, just a busted shed and some busted kids.

How did we get that busted shed? The community, council Reshaping Australia Communities in Action. Day one is where it started. Our council gave us a shed (at a peppercorn rent) and we started grinding away with the kids most risk in our society. I didn't know all that fancy stuff was there. It's good to have good people in it. Who are the kids? Almost 100% of the kids are already removed from the education system. They start at 10 years of age. They're often kicked out of home. They have substantial contact with the legal system. Some already been locked up. Mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, multi-generational unemployment. 75% of the kids are indigenous, all come with severe psychological distress. These are the kids society has let down. They've fallen through the cracks; they're being kicked out of everywhere.

What is BackTrack? There are three components to it. The first one is where we work with the young kids. It takes us about 12 months usually just to sort out legal issues. We've got our own school teacher. We provide a different level of education. We start

2 https://backtrack.org.au

doing practical hands-on training. Stuff that we know will make these kids employable down the track. How do I know that? Tell you what our data says. 87% of the kids that we start with — these are the kids that no one else in society will work with — 87% of them end up in jobs or back in full-time education and training.

The very first kid that was referred to us, an indigenous kid. He's the eighth kid in his family, so the youngest: all brothers above him, single mum. School principal gives me a ring, would I come and have a chat with this kid. "We're about to kick him out of school." Expel him out of school. Once you're expelled from school, things get really tough. I said, "Yes, happy to come and have a talk with him. But what are you expelling him for?" She said, "Well, he was trying to throw a chair out the window of the third storey building." I went, "It seems pretty savage. You're going to expel a kid for trying to throw a chair at a window?" She said, "Well, Bernie, the teacher was still in the chair."

"Let me go and have a yarn with this lad. I know the family." I go in there and I go, "Champ, what's your dream?" I watched him squirm for two or three minutes and he went, "You know what? I want to be the first kid in my family to finish year 10 and not have been locked up." Can we help with that dream? The quicker they kick him out of school and he comes and walks alongside us and the quicker we'll do something about that. That kid went on to finish year 10. He then went on to finish year 12. He's the first BackTrack kid to ever go to university. Lasted about three and a half minutes, but he got there.

He's now in employment. None of his brothers have ever had a job. He works for us. He's one of our supervisors and he gets what we're doing on the ground. That's the first bit. BackTrack just keeps filling holes in the thing. We get these kids into jobs. A lot of them get sacked after a month or two months. They're back with us. We're on this revolving door. Hey, what are we going to do about that? There's plenty of employment agencies, I think 10 of them in town. These kids don't go there and they're not helping those kids out to get a job. I tell you what we'll do, we'll start a for-profit business, but we're only going to employ unemployable kids. How's that for a business model? Lunatics only. Since then, we've had 56 kids employed and they stay with us for as long as it takes, till we move them on into full-time employment that they can hang on to.

Of the 35 young people we have employed at the moment, I think 90% of them are indigenous. You want to talk about closing the gap? Come down, visit us in Armidale, but you can't find a gap. 35 kids, 26 of them are on trainee ships and we have an 88% completion rate. Do you know what the state average is? Low forties. Is it easy? Hell, no, but we're hanging in for the long haul and it works. The last bit: is this stuff replicable? Can you scale it or is it just because it works in Armidale for some crazy reason? Well, when we start involving communities, I can tell you in Dubbo, Lake Cargelligo, Broken Hill, Moree, Hawkesbury, Macksville, Tenterfield, and now Toowoomba are the towns that we are working in. And guess what? All get the same results in a really short period of time.

Only two local government areas in New South Wales with long-term juvenile crime stats going down. Six of the universities that are in this room did this research. This is not me making stuff up. You can read it.

It's all published. I think it's Tweed Heads, Toowoomba — not Toowoomba, up on the border somewhere — is down 2.2%. Armidale down almost 50% long term. Ten years before we started, they looked at, everyone went, "Ah, it's because we've got extra cops and extra cameras in the mall." The beauty of research is they checked that with 20 other towns and went, "You know what? They've all got extra cops and extra mall cameras. How come these guys' crime rates are down?" We know how to do it. We take them out of town Friday and Saturday nights, times of high risk.

Same stats right around the countryside. 80% of the damage will be done by 20% of the kids. Concentrate on that 20% of the kids. And, hey presto, guess what happens? We don't need Einstein to work this one out. Lucky enough, in 2014, that kid that didn't finish school, the university actually just recently gave me an honorary doctorate. When they rang me, they said, "It's an honorary doctorate." Don't clap. Just throwing money. Gave me an honorary doctorate in lettuce and I went in lettuce. This is good timing because those iceberg things are 12 bucks each. Not lettuce, you idiot. Letters, whatever that means.

In 2014, I was lucky enough to get a Churchill Scholarship, travelled right around the world, wanted to look at organisations punching above their weight and what are the similarities. Seven simple things:

- *First*, long term. We're not doing a 26-week program. Must be long term. And you've got to do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes.
- *Second*, holistic in nature. Don't just concentrate on mental health. Don't just concentrate on education. You've got to look at the whole big picture of what's going on in these young people's lives.
- *Third*, multiple funding sources. What's our budget this year? Just short of $7 million, Less than 5% government funding. 7 million bucks a year. If one of those funders leaves us, we don't sink.
- *Fourth*, must fill a gap in the system. Don't replicate what somebody else is doing: come up with some fresh ideas.
- *Fifth*, interesting one, didn't matter how much the self-generated income was, but they all had self-generated income.
- *Sixth*, embedded in the community. Takes a village to raise a child. Want to travel fast, travel alone; want to travel far, travel together, all embedded in the community.
- *Seventh*, an effective evaluation.

I skipped through this because we're running out of time, but have a quick squizz, first year at BackTrack. All legal stuff, mental health's all over the place. General stability. Are they interested in education? Are they interested in employment in the first year? Not one little bit. But have a look in the third year and now we're not going to court anymore, the mental health stuff's good stability. Are they're interested in education? So long as we bring a different style of education to the table. And then employment, they want a job. This is the 5% of kids society's given up on that cost us — what do they call them? — the million-dollar kids. We turn it around with about 150 grand a year. What does the research say?

Good engagement strategies. We call it circle work. It must be real. It must be meaningful. We talk about the hard stuff out there in the paddocks. If I ask most of the people in this room, they'll get pretty squirmy. If you listen to the conversations

we have, what happens when you die? What's your dream? Do you know how to fix this piece of shit in your life? And then we start making real traction. Case management: I'm not a big fan of it. Our kids go, you go over to that office, that's where they sort the hard shit out you. Yes. We call that the sorting-the-shit-out office. Diversionary activities, Friday, Saturday nights. Get those kids out of town. We use dogs. Doesn't matter what you do, but get them out of town. It must be a personal development. The Hunter Medical Research Institute says the return on investment over is over $2 for every $1 invested, all published journals.

I'm going to leave you quickly with one simple notion that we've used and we've taken that from Canada. It's called the Circle of Courage.[3] They say, whether it's your personal life, whether it's your organisation, whether it's your whole town, you get these four simple things in balance and everything will be going well. First one — I've heard it here many times this morning — *belonging*. You must feel connected to something. The second one — *independence*. You have to have a say in your life. The kids at the shed go, "We call that owning your own shit." Pretty good concept. The third one — *mastery*. Doesn't matter what you're learning, so long as you are learning something. The last one — *generosity* — you must give something back. That's what our kids do so beautifully.

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3 https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/cardev/gr9_found/courage_poster.pdf

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Session II: Health and Communities

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Thanks so much to Susan and Stephen for the opportunity to speak. It's terrible to have to speak after Bernie. I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we're meeting on today, the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, and to pay my respects to Elders past and present and to the Aboriginal people who are here today.

I wanted to talk this morning about co-production, sometimes also referred to co-creation or co-design. I wanted to give one long-term example of my experience in being part of a co-design project. In co-design, it's often quite different from how researchers think about running a research project. They often talk about collaboration, but, in co-design, the stakeholders such as communities are integrally involved in all aspects of the research: generating the ideas, undertaking the research, and interpreting the findings. It's a much closer and a different way of working. I think it has the potential to draw on the expertise of communities about their lived experiences such as we've heard already today. And, really importantly, to mobilise partnerships for action.

I think that at the centre of co-production is a sharing of power: a recognition that everybody is bringing different but equal expertise to the table. That can often be challenging for us as researchers. It's not the usual way of doing business. It's not easy, it requires time, resources, commitment and not all research is amenable to a co-production approach.

I want to talk today about some work we've undertaken with urban Aboriginal communities. It's been going on for the last 20 years in New South Wales, a long-term historical look at some of the things that can be done using this approach. I think many people today have recognised the importance about long-term commitment in working with communities. I don't want to suggest that we are the only people who have done this.

The indigenous leadership of this work was really important. I'm slightly embarrassed to be the person who's up here talking about this today. I particularly wanted to talk about Sandra Bailey, who at the time we started this was the CEO of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. For those of you who are not in health, this is the peak body for Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations in New South Wales and plays a really important role. Those health services are really critical: they're often the hub in their community; they have a governance board elected by local community members; and they provide really holistic care. Particularly

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

2 Sally Redman AO is a New Zealand-born Australian public health researcher and was chief executive officer of the Sax Institute in Sydney, where she led the 45 and Up Study, a NSW-wide project with over 260,000 participants responding to questionnaires on healthy ageing.

in urban areas, they're really important components of the Aboriginal communities.

I also wanted to recognise Professor Sandy Bailey,[3] who'd be known to many of you as an indigenous research leader. She was the initial study director for this work. And the CEOs and the staff of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) were really fundamental and wonderful leaders. I learned so much during the course of this project, going back 20 years. At the beginning of this work, relationships between researchers and Aboriginal communities in New South Wales could only be described as poor. The feeling of many Aboriginal people that we spoke to at the outset is nicely summarised by what I think is a really powerful quote from Pat Anderson. She talks about the fact that research was done *to* Aboriginal people — we probably even used terms like subjects, for example. Although obviously that wasn't limited to Aboriginal people. We didn't talk about doing it *with* Aboriginal people and certainly not the research being done *by* Aboriginal people.

I think the most important part of this quote for me is that despite the fact that there was research happening, it wasn't resulting in any improvements in health or services. I think other people have reflected on that today as well. At the beginning, about 20 years ago, in discussions with Sandra Bailey, it was really evident that the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council wanted to do things in a different way. They wanted to see Aboriginal people playing a leadership role. They wanted real outcomes, and they wanted something that built capacity. Sandra was really way ahead of her time in describing an approach that we now refer to as co-design or co-production. Through her leadership, a collaboration was formed with a group of really committed researchers and four ACCHS. We asked them what they wanted to know, how could they see research being useful.

I'd imagine we'd start on something quite simple, but they wanted a long-term study of child health that would help identify opportunities to improve health and particularly to prevent health problems developing. We got started, and Sandy Bailey was really important in helping us attract funds for this work. But we spent a long time at the outset establishing a governance framework, remembering that this was quite early days. It was important to ensure that the ways that the researchers and the health services were going to work together was concretised, if you like. It was cemented that there was strong governance around it and that they were clear that they had the opportunity to lead decisions and all aspects of the study. I think, really importantly — then and now — is the agreement about how data will be managed.

Kalinda made some very important points about that. But I think importantly ACCHS wanted ownership of the data and to ensure that nobody could publish it without the ACCHS having signed off. This is quite timeless, is quite radical and possibly threatening for some of the researchers, but it's a really important principle. Moreover, the study staff were employed by the Abo-

3 Sandra Bailey is Chairperson of the Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation. She is a Yorta Yorta woman and former CEO of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW, a position she held for 25 years. Ms Bailey has worked as a Solicitor for the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, and served as Head of the Aboriginal Issues Unit of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

riginal Health Services. Again, that was really important. We set to work: we built a cohort of 1600 urban Aboriginal children. In New South Wales there's a very high rate of urbanisation of Aboriginal kids and most of the previous research at that time was focused on rural and remote Aboriginal communities. We followed the cohort over time and were able to provide some of the first data about housing, ear health, mental health, physical activity, many aspects of health and wellbeing and its causes among urban Aboriginal children.

The interesting part for me was that although the health services were interested in the data, they were much more concerned about how we could use them to bring about change. As researchers we often talk about that, but, for the Aboriginal Health Services, that's why they were in the research process to start with. We were just getting started really, once we saw the data emerge. Together we were able to use our networks to attract better services for participating Aboriginal Health Services across many areas, including mental health and housing. In particular, we had a lot of success in trying to improve services for ear health. A lot of these children also had the same kind of hearing losses that we see in rural and remote communities. Obviously, that leads to speech development and speech delays, which impedes progress in education and reduces employment opportunities later on.

Because the data from the study were powerful, we were able to attract funds for about 8,000 speech pathology sessions and we were able to encourage and support additional surgery — ENT surgery — to ensure that all Aboriginal children who were part of this larger in the urban area were offered ear surgery if they needed it and completely cleared the waiting list for those areas. But, perhaps even more importantly, the Aboriginal Health Services, which are so important in their communities, were able to use the data to improve their own programs. In one service, for example, they attracted funds for an audiologist because they could demonstrate that hearing loss was an issue for them. They also had the most fabulous state-of-the-art room for testing hearing. They also use it to lobby the local schools and preschools to help them understand why children weren't able to perform, and they were able to establish better programs for those children, acknowledging the hearing loss and speech delays.

Based on the data of this, AMS began delivering fresh food boxes, set up a community garden, and banned sausages at the community barbecues, which was really I think probably one of the harder things that emerged from the study. What about the co-production effort? I just want to end by talking a little bit about this, remembering that this was going back some time ago when we talked to the staff of the Aboriginal Health Services (AHS) about how it'd been to be part of this project. They talked about how important it was that we'd focused on outcomes, not on the research. They wanted to know how we could use data to change things, not just to study them. They talked about the fact that there'd been a genuine respect and valuing of different expertise. Almost everybody not indigenous associated with this project really learns so much from being part of it, and that we put in place and adhere to strong governance and shared decision-making processes. It was interesting that the staff at the AHS valued the fact that the team came back, that we chatted over coffee, that we came

to barbecues — even when the sausages were stopped — and participated in other community events. It struck me that these are the same kind of processes that I would use to build relationships with any people whom I valued and who are my colleagues. That was the fundamentally most important thing, I think.

Another important part of this is that two decades later we were still working together, and I thought, Bernie's comments about the long term were really important. You can't do this overnight because at the heart of it lies the concept of trust, which isn't something that you can earn quickly. Indeed, our collaboration has grown and now nine ACCHS are part of this work. We're working together on a much broader range of issues.

It's easy to talk about co-design and co-production. We really all recognise the importance of it. Doing it has to be a long-term endeavour. It's hard work but I think the benefits are absolutely huge. Thanks very much.

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Communities committed to championing child health

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Abstract

Child health is an important aspiration of parents, families, communities, and health professionals. Australia's healthcare system and the quality of our clinical training are the envy of many internationally, and we have made great gains in preventing and eradicating many infectious diseases of childhood, neonatal care, paediatric surgery, and the treatment of malignant and chronic diseases. Challenges remain however. Specifically, gaps in access to healthcare are greater and health outcomes are notably worse for some of our most vulnerable children, whose health is impacted by a range of social and economic determinants. Below I provide examples of community-led initiatives that address some of Australia's challenges in achieving equity in child health and identify the supporting role of academics and clinicians. Collectively we must continue to advocate both for ways of working that will empower communities for self-determination and the resources to ensure good health for all of Australia's children.

Introduction

When Australia signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 (UNICEF 2023) we made a commitment to the future of our country. We agreed to promote and protect children's right to survive, thrive and prosper — regardless of race, religion, or ability. We acknowledged that all children have the right to good health and quality healthcare. As a paediatrician, I know the importance of a healthy start to life — not only for child health, but for adult health and well-being and, ultimately, national prosperity.

In referring to "health," I concur with the World Health Organisation that health is "more than the absence of disease or infirmity" and with Australia's National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, that health is "not just the physical well-being of an individual but … their social, emotional and cultural well-being" (NACCHO 2022). This emphasises that the health of the individual also requires that their community is healthy and, in adopting this definition, NACCHO acknowledges the importance of the social and economic determinants of health.

Challenges for child health in Australia

You might think that Australia has achieved its goal of universal child health, and indeed child health has never been better. We have highly trained paediatricians, slick new paediatric hospitals — which fortunately most children never use — and research institutes dedicated to paediatrics. We ventilate preterm babies, cure leukaemia, and transplant tiny livers and hearts. We have a low child mortality rate and death rates for

infants and children have halved over the last 20 years. Most (95%) of 5-year-olds are vaccinated (AIHW 2020).

But challenges remain. In 2022, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that more than 60,000 children are hospitalised each year with an injury, many preventable, and that nearly one in 10 (or 356,000 children) has a disability (AIHW 2020). Some disabilities are underpinned by genetic disorders, but others are due to preventable injuries or exposures, including non-accidental injury and prenatal alcohol exposure.

Also, in Australia one in four (or 746,000 children) aged between 5 and 14 years is overweight or obese, putting them at later risk of diabetes, hypertension, arthritis and other chronic "lifestyle" diseases (AIHW 2020). Perhaps then it is not surprising to know that fewer than 5% of children meet nutritional guideline recommendations for daily vegetable consumption, only 1 in 4 (23%) take the recommended 60 minutes exercise each day, and half (45%) consume sugar-sweetened drinks at least once a week.

In addition, approximately 17% of Australian children under the age of 15 years live in poverty, and the number of children in out-of-home care has increased by 18% over the last five years. Furthermore, between the periods of 2012–13 and 2016–17, there was a 27% increase in substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect (AIHW 2020).

Child mental health is also emerging as a major challenge in Australia: anxiety now ranks second and depression fifth amongst the contributors to disease burden in children aged 5–14 years (AIHW 2020). Overall, 14% of children aged 4–11 years have a mental health disorder, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, conduct disorder and major depressive disorder.

To add to this burden, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health problems in children, in whom we observed rising rates of anxiety, depression, self-injury, use of alcohol and other drugs, and eating disorders. Parents report that many of their children experienced psychological distress during the pandemic and response and about 40% children aged 13–17 years report negative impacts on their social connectedness and well-being (AIHW 2021, AHRC 2022a).

Children falling between the cracks

Most perplexing, however, in this "wealthy" country, is that so many children have been left behind. It is not difficult to guess who they are. They include children in rural and remote locations, juvenile justice, and immigration detention and children living in poverty, or in families with domestic violence, substance use, or mental health issues. They include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with rare diseases or from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families, children in out-of-home care, and refugees (Woolfenden et al. 2000). Climate change is creating new communities of vulnerable children, the victims of flood, fire and emerging infectious diseases. Months after the 2022 Lismore floods, families remain displaced.

Many infectious diseases differentially impact the life chances of children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For example, trachoma is an eye disease caused by a bacterial infection which may result in blindness (AIHW 2008). Australia is the only OECD country where this infection persists — mostly in indigenous

people — yet it is preventable and treatable. We also have one of the highest rates of acute rheumatic fever in the world. Untreated, it may lead to chronic heart failure, and 95% of those affected are Aboriginal children (AIHW 2023). In some communities we see high rates of complex early life trauma, self-harm, substance use and suicide. Yet, there is limited access to the health professionals needed, including paediatricians, child psychologists, or psychiatrists. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are over-represented in our criminal justice system. The age of criminal responsibility in Australia is 10 years — well below that recommended by the United Nations. On average there were 818 children in youth detention each night in 2022, some of primary school-age, the majority male, and 56% Indigenous (AIHW 2022). Many detained children have unrecognized intellectual and other disabilities (Bower et al. 2018).

The sombre facts revealed about our children in recent Commissions and Inquiries have sent shock waves through our society — Royal Commissions into: *Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (RCIRCSA 2017); the *Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* (RCPDCNT 2017); and *Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (RCVANEPD 2023). Parliamentary Inquiries into: *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence* (PoA 2021) and *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder* (The Senate 2021), and the *Australian Human Rights Commission's Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention* (AHRC 2014). These leave us in no doubt that we have a long road to travel to achieve universal child health and wellbeing. Above all, governments must urgently fund, and implement, action based on often-repeated recommendations from these inquiries, rather than defer a response by initiating more inquiries!

Regardless of whether recommendations from these commissions and inquiries have been implemented, they have sparked powerful community-led initiatives that have influenced government, driven legislation, or garnered public support to tip the balance for action on wicked problems. Academics and clinicians have often had an important role as partners, and below I highlight some examples in which I have been involved, where the community's response has led to action.

Aboriginal women leading the way to community self-determination

For over a decade, I've been privileged to work with Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley's very remote Fitzroy Valley in the north-west of Western Australia — where health "gaps" and the factors that underpin them are laid bare. I suspect few of you have visited the communities of Wangkajunka, Yakanarra or Noonkenbah, or heard the languages of the *Walimijarri*, *Guniyandi* and *Bunuba* people, and that few could imagine that life for Australians there could be so different. These communities are isolated and disadvantaged, with limited infrastructure and health services. Many of the problems associated with poor health and wellbeing are a legacy of the historic trauma that resulted from colonisation and are perpetuated by lack of socio-economic opportunity. In January 2023, Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding communities faced a crisis as many were engulfed by the Fitzroy River during "the worst floods in history" in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Ellie. This disaster will add to high levels of stress in the community with long-term consequences.

But this is a place with strong culture, strong leadership, strong communities, strong women. In 2008, courageous Aboriginal women were so worried about alcohol-related harms that they lobbied for community-led alcohol restrictions. In 2009, they became concerned that alcohol use in pregnancy was damaging the next generation and developed the *Marulu* strategy to identify and prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and support families living with FASD. *Marulu* is a word in the Bunuba language that means "precious, worth nurturing." They invited our team from the University of Sydney and George Institute to partner with them in the *Lililwan* project to establish the prevalence of alcohol use in pregnancy and FASD. *Lililwan* is a word in the Kimberley Kriol language that means "all the little ones." Together we documented that half of all children then aged 7–9 years had been exposed to high levels of alcohol *in utero*, and that 1 in 5 had fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, with severe learning, behavioural and developmental problems (Kirby 2012, Fitzpatrick et al. 2017).

Aboriginal women shared these difficult truths with their community, with governments, with the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, and with parliamentary inquiries — and lobbied for funding and services. Ten years on, rates of alcohol use in pregnancy have decreased. Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (a community-controlled Aboriginal organisation led by CEO Emily Carter) now has a child and family centre integrating early education and maternal and child healthcare, a support unit for families with FASD, a parenting program, a domestic violence shelter, legal aid, and a social art enterprise. It leads ongoing partnerships with academics and clinicians to develop optimal models for "wrap-around" health and mental health care for children and a model for youth engagement and support (Elliott & Bower 2022). This is a community in action — yet they lack long-term infrastructure funding!

June Oscar (formerly CEO of the Women's Resource Centre and now Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission) praised the community for its achievements and highlighted the value of partnerships with academics and clinicians. She said, "We live in the best country in the world and if we want to address our most challenging problems, we must learn to embrace diversity and work together. In the Marulu strategy, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people achieved great things by working together. And in the process, we came to understand each other's worlds." She said, "Our journey has taught us that Aboriginal people must take control. We can change what is happening in our communities. So, when you read the next media piece of the suffering in communities like ours, don't think of us as victims. Rather, support us to be the architects of our future — a future in which every child has the right to be born healthy and fulfil their potential."

Elsewhere, in remote communities that continue to struggle with inadequate health services, Aboriginal leaders are tackling preventable conditions — dental caries, scabies, acute rheumatic fever, and trachoma — through practical approaches to provide healthier housing, access to clean and fluoridated water, non-leaded petrol, washing machines, dental programs, fresh fruit, and maternal health literacy.

The forgotten children in immigration detention

In another example of the power of data to empower communities, the 2014 National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention (AHRC 2014), conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission, brought the plight of children and families in detention to the attention of the nation. As a paediatric consultant for the Commission, I met and interviewed many asylum-seeking families with children on Christmas Island (and from Nauru) in Wickham Point Detention Centre, and was shocked by what I found (Elliott & Gunasakara 2015).

These young asylum seekers who had been living in offshore detention were amongst the most traumatized children I have ever encountered. The detention environment was hostile and harmful. They were mentally crushed under layers of trauma — a missing father, a capsized boat, a hostile and punitive detention centre, a mother so profoundly depressed she was unable to care for her children. Children described these centres as "jails," not surprisingly, considering their high barbed-wire fences, security guards, and use of boat numbers for names, and had little hope for the future.

One third of children had moderate to severe mental health problems and self-harm was commonly recorded by the authorities (AHRC 2014). I vividly recall one traumatized 12-year-old girl who had spent 14 months in offshore detention. Her mother had self-harmed, her brother was depressed and electively mute. She had stopped talking, eating, and drinking — a condition called "resignation syndrome." In a note to us she wrote "my life here is really deth. If I go back (home) I know they will kell me. Better I kell my self." Yet, there was no paediatrician, no child psychologist, no child psychiatrist available locally, and specialist consultations 3000 km away on the mainland were often delayed for months with long-term health consequences. A father of three teenage boys said "I didn't bring my children here to learn how to commit suicide," and a 17-year-old boy said "when they use my boat number (not my name) it makes me feel like a criminal."

Similarly, children with physical ill-health did not have timely access to "reasonable" health care, including the dental, ear-nose-and-throat, and allied health services that are critical in early childhood. Children requiring care on the mainland were "batched" and sent on a hired jet when all the seats were full.

The 2014 AHRC report, *The Forgotten Children*, though initially dismissed by government as exaggerated and fabricated, confirmed that detention causes harm. It gave these invisible children — previously out of sight and out of mind — a voice. That voice was amplified by the public, by community advocates, health professionals, and the media. Do you recall the health professionals' campaign "Detention harms children"?, or the Australian coalition to "End Immigration Detention of Children"? The actions of these communities set in train a process that would eventually lead to the closure of offshore detention centres and the release of children seeking asylum into the community. Sadly, many asylum seekers and refugees remained in limbo in Australia — waiting assessment for refugee status or floundering on temporary protection visas (AHRC 2019).

Arbitrary detention is illegal. As stated in the Convention on the Rights of the

Child, "the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time" (UNICEF 2023). Australia must reconsider how we will more humanely treat future waves of children seeking asylum.

Non-government Organisations (NGO) also have an important role in coordinating coalitions of community voices for change. Let me give you some examples.

Pregnancy Warning — alcohol use may cause lifelong harm

For many years, Food Standards Australia and New Zealand, clinicians, and public health physicians have advocated for mandatory, evidence-based, warning labels on alcoholic beverages to highlight the harms of alcohol use in pregnancy (FSANZ 2020). On 20 March 2020, the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation acceded to pressure from the alcohol industry and voted against the proposed labels. They requested that FSANZ review the colour requirements and the signal wording of the label within three months, noting that these would "place an unreasonable cost burden on industry" (ANZMFFR 2020). Between March and July 2020 the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education led a community push to advocate for ministerial support and harness the media. Academics provided their support (Smith et al. 2020). An open letter that backed the proposed labels was signed by more than 1,500 public health and clinical experts and people with lived experience of alcohol use in pregnancy and FASD. More than 150 organisations were signatories, including the National Organisation for FASD (NOFASD) Australia, National Closing the Gap Committee, Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Health Promotion Association, Public Health Association of Australia, and the Australian Medical Association. Despite strong ongoing opposition from the alcohol industry, this drive was successful, the vote was positive, and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code was amended to mandate specific pregnancy warning labels for all alcohol products and packaging in Australia from 31 July 2023. All will carry a legible label in red, black and white, with the words "Pregnancy Warning. Alcohol can cause lifelong harm to your baby."

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder — a public health emergency

Through national, collaborative research and work with the National Organisation for FASD of Australia, researchers and clinicians identified FASD as a public health emergency. FASD research (Elliott & Bower 2022) has informed Senate Inquiries into FASD (The Senate 2021) and a National Strategic Action Plan for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (2018–28) (CoA 2018). The plan is currently being implemented with substantial Australian government funding directed to: assessment services, prevention, screening and diagnosis, treatment, and support, including in high-risk groups. It is being evaluated.

Rare diseases — need for action

In a clear demonstration of the power of community to influence health policy, the parent-led group Rare Voices Australia in 2020 achieved what clinicians, academics and clinicians had sought for over a decade — a National Strategic Action Plan for Rare Diseases — endorsed and sup-

ported by the Australian Department of Health (NSAPRD 2020).

Increasing the age of criminal responsibility

Communities have responded to international precedent and local pressure for Australia to raise the age of criminal responsibility. For example, the *#Raise the Age Campaign*, launched in 2020, is a coalition of more than 100 organisations that builds on long-term efforts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, human rights supporters, paediatricians and others, and aims to convince politicians to raise the age of criminal responsibility (hence incarceration) from 10 to at least 14 years of age in line with UN recommendations (Davis 2022). The *#Raise the Age Campaign* has recently gained traction: in October 2022 the Northern Territory government announced it would be the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce new legislation to raise the age from 10 to 12 years. This remains below the minimum age recommended by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, but is an important first step. In 2022 the Australian Capital Territory, and in 2023 Victoria, committed to raise the age to 14 years.

Kids COVID Catchup Campaign

Communities of health professionals are also active in advocating for change. For example, in 2018 paediatricians from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians developed a policy to highlight the Inequities in Child Health in Australia and alert government to disadvantaged groups (Woolfenden et al. 2000). The 2021 Kids COVID Catchup Campaign advocates for a focus on children with health and mental-health harms stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic (RACP 2022).

Wiyi Jandi-U Thangani (Women's Voices)

Communities of women have also been influential in shaping policy. As the first female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission, June Oscar AO undertook a national listening tour called *Wiyi Jandi-U Thangani (Women's Voices)*. In her 2020 report (AHRC 2022b), she said, "I am committed … to elevate our women's voices to the spaces of decision-making, because their knowledge matters for forming meaningful and effective policy and legislation … and ensuring the health and wellbeing of our children, families, and communities." The Commission's 2022 implementation plan is guided by these voices.

Closing the Gap

In the 2022 *Closing the Gap Report*, the Lowitja Institute reiterated that "to address the extreme but preventable inequalities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience, we must first draw on their knowledge and expertise. Initiatives that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, provide genuine opportunities for decision making, and strengthen and embed cultures, do and will lead to positive sustainable improvements in health and wellbeing." After 10 years with little progress on the Closing the Gap strategy, the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are finally being heard (Lowitja Institute 2022).

Throughout Australia, communities are standing up for equity in child health and promoting change that will reshape

our country. Now, we need action from government. We must urgently act on the recommendations of the recent and relevant government inquiries and Royal Commissions, rather than call for more inquiries. We should push for a consistent rise in the age of incarceration nationally and call out racism. We must address the social determinants of health and the barriers to accessing health care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Above all, we must recognize our First People, hear the truths of their past, and support them to have a collective "Voice" to inform a better future for our children.

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A mentally healthy future for all Australians

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Abstract

A mentally healthy future is one in which Australians thrive, especially young Australians. Mental health is seen as everybody's business, with industry, research, community, and government working together to strive towards greater population wellbeing. In a mentally healthy future, there is improved equity across the social determinants of health. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of social and emotional wellbeing are recognised and supported, under Aboriginal leadership and guidance. The Australian public are well informed and policymakers have access to the best available evidence. Young people are empowered to influence the decisions that impact their wellbeing, and decision-makers work alongside young people to ensure the best outcomes. We have a long way to go before we achieve this, but we have begun the groundwork.

Young people (aged 12–25) form a core segment of the global human population. Generation Z (born 1996–2010: 12–25 years) are the largest generation ever, comprising around 20% of Australia's population and almost 30% of the world's population. Globally there are almost 2 billion of them. Safeguarding the wellbeing of this generation and future generations is a global human rights and economic imperative. Yet future generations are under significant pressure. Rates of mental disorders in young people have increased rapidly around the world and in Australia (AIHW, 2020; Keyes et al., 2019). In 2020–21, 2 in 5 Australians aged 16–24 had a 12-month mental disorder (a mental disorder for which they had experienced sufficient symptoms in the prior 12 months). This is substantially higher than any other age group and a dramatic jump from 1 in 4 in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Suicide rates among young people are currently at their highest of the past decade, accounting for over one-third of all deaths in young Australians (AIHW, 2023). While growing mental health concerns in young people are a world-wide trend, Australian young people are doing it particularly tough. Australia ranks 35th out of 38 OECD countries for child wellbeing (OECD, 2021).

The imperative to act is both economic and social. Every year mental disorders conservatively cost the Australian community over $40 billion (Mindgardens Neuroscience Network, 2019). When the full impact of productivity loss, reduced life expectancy, and the social and emotional toll of mental illness and suicide are considered, costs are estimated to be as high as $200–220 billion each year (Whiteford, 2022). Costs are significant because mental health hits young people hardest. The Australian labour market has rebounded strongly from the initial shock of the COVID pandemic, yet youth unemployment remains double that of the adult rate and the youth labour market is vulnerable to, and demonstrating, the long-term "scarring" or negative effects of the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, all young people — but particularly those

with mental illness — have become more vulnerable to skills-based barriers to effective employment (barriers that make it difficult to develop skills that are relevant to work) and opportunity-based barriers (barriers that exclude people from job opportunities due to employer perceptions or discrimination). Of serious concern for our future, pre-pandemic evidence showed that children with a mental illness fall behind in school, and these effects are likely to have been compounded among the current generation of young Australians, due to two years of school disruptions. This impacts future employment and productivity. Half of people who will develop a mental disorder over the course of their lifetime experience an onset of disorder before they leave school, and three-quarters before the age of 25 (Solmi et al., 2022). This clearly demonstrates the importance of supporting young people to avoid skills-based barriers to employment; more important than ever as we continue to see the impacts of COVID-19.

The trends in increasing mental illness have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted young Australians (Bower et al., 2021a; Bower et al., 2022b; Bower et al., 2021b). The pandemic impacted known social determinants of poor mental health, further entrenching mental health inequalities that existed prior to the pandemic. Indeed, Santomauro, Whiteford and colleagues (2021) have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a large and uneven impact on mental health globally and nationally.

Investing in mental health has significant long-term returns. The Australian Productivity Commission concluded that reform of the mental health system would produce large benefits (APC, 2020). The main benefits were expected in improvements in people's quality of life — valued at up to $18 billion annually. They also argued that an additional annual benefit of up to $1.3 billion could be achieved through increased economic participation.

In recognition of the significant shortfalls of the mental health system in Australia, there has been a proliferation of commissions, inquiries, reports and plans to interrogate the issue and provide recommendations. None of these plans have been implemented with the scale required for meaningful improvements in Australians' mental health (Francis, Johnson & Wilson, 2022). One such report is the landmark Productivity Commission into Mental Health (APC, 2019).

Three of the significant driving issues behind the lack of implementation of these reports are:

1. A lack of independent advocacy: The reports are often produced by a government department or government-funded organisations, without sufficient buy-in from stakeholders across the mental health ecosystem. Without this buy-in, there are few organisations to advocate long term for reform recommendations to be implemented
2. A lack of investment in implementation: There is substantial investment in the production of each of these plans, yet there is no allocated budget to invest in the implementation of the plans' recommendations
3. Inaccessibility: These reports are notoriously lengthy (e.g. the Productivity Commission Report consists of three

volumes and over 1,600 pages). It is not feasible for most time poor policymakers and other stakeholders to utilise a document of this size.

In addition to the many plans and reports that go un-implemented, much high-quality evidence is generated, only to remain hidden within a journal, not achieving the impacts it could if it were translated into policy. Indeed, one study identified a 17-year gap between research findings and implementation into policy and practice (Morris, Wooding & Grant, 2011).

Morris and colleagues argue "there have been no less than 55 high-profile public inquiries relevant to mental health have been held over the last 30 years, involving more than 55,000 public submissions and 9,000 witnesses, among other contributions made by the community. A significant proportion of these include contributions made by people who use mental health services, who share their personal stories in a process that is acknowledged as being potentially traumatic."(Morris, Wooding & Grant, 2011).

In 2020, the potential mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were emerging nationally and internationally, yet there was no voice bringing together Australian experts and lived experience to address this. The BHP Foundation responded quickly and provided catalytic funding to establish Australia's Mental Health Think Tank. It was recognised that the complexity of the mental health system required a system-wide approach. For the first time in Australia, a group of 14 leaders and researchers from across the mental health sector were brought together to form a mental health Think Tank. The Think Tank brings together Australia's leading advocates in mental health reform, blending the expertise of academics, politics, Indigenous leadership and living experience.

The Think Tank functions to build alliances within the sector to drive system change through evidence review, shared agenda-setting, and shared decision-making. A collaborative advocacy model is used to guide the Think Tank's work. The project team presents the Think Tank members with synthesised evidence inputs and facilitates pathways for the voices of lived experience to inform discussion. The Think Tank members then participate in facilitated meetings where they are guided through theory-based processes to engage in collaborative idea generation and strategy formation. The project team then synthesises the outcomes of these meetings and conducts any required additional research to produce an appropriate output (e.g., a policy paper, communiqué, evidence review). This output is then reviewed by the Think Tank members and relevant stakeholders before being released publicly with an accompanying communication strategy.

The Think Tank works to actively not contribute to the "plandemic" of inaction. From the beginning, the group have prioritised evidence synthesis and knowledge brokering, only generating new evidence or recommendations where there was a clear gap. Using state of the art evidence synthesis methods including systematic reviews, data visualisation, meta-analysis and a purpose-designed longitudinal survey (The Alone Together Study) (Bower et al., 2022a).

Through centring evidence and the voices of lived experience Australia's Mental Health Think Tank has secured over 55 national media stories, covering all of the

major news platforms in Australia (with examples including: ABC, *The Guardian*, SBS, *The Age* and associated press, Channel 7, Channel 9, including a national major print/radio news story around the impact of housing inequality on COVID-19 mental health).

Despite the significant number of reports and reviews, action and implementation has continued to be limited. Building platforms and mechanisms to synthesise the evolving evidence base and create action is critical. The demand for this is strong. All outputs are disseminated via the Think Tank's website[1] as well as the Analysis and Policy Observatory (APO).[2] The APO has a large nation-wide reach in a highly relevant stakeholder audience for The Think Tank (3M page views annually, 52% of audience work in Government, 22% work in not-for-profits). Australia's Mental Health Think Tank's major review synthesis on COVID-19 and mental health has been named in the APO's Top 10 Australian Health Policy documents of 2021,[3] despite only being published in November of 2021. It has been viewed 5000+ times across APO, the Think Tank's website and the University of Sydney's Research Repository.

This broad national reach and positive reception evidenced by the media and policy successes outlined above reveals the desire and need for high-quality syntheses of evidence. It highlights that before now there was a gap for more voices like the Think Tank in Australia.

As identified by Australia's Mental Health Think Tank, mental health policy needs to be reimagined; recognising that the broader determinants of mental health (education, welfare, urban design amongst others) are just as integral to wellbeing as service sector reform.

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Session II: Health and Communities

Discussion and Questions

Julianne Schultz: Thank you. What an inspiring panel. Thank you very much. That observation about the failure to implement the recommendations of Royal Commissions goes to the heart of the many of the issues that we are discussing here today. It happens in area after area, and I guess its flip side, or its corollary, is that there are endless trials which get funded and then fall over and the lessons don't get applied. How do we move from the knowledge to the action which needs to make it real. I'm interested in each of your responses to that, but then we'll go to questions from the audience as well. Maree, do you want to pick up on that? What needs to be done? What might be done through your thinktank or some other means to see that action coming rather than it just being all the talk?

Maree Teesson: I think communities and connections are going to be critical to that. I was really interested also listening to Bernie say that only 5% of your budget comes from government. I'm really interested in how we can mobilise other forces. In Australia we do not have those independent forces that then work towards to implementation. Sometimes it's funding, sometimes it's partnerships. It's the first time, for example, the BHP Foundation had lots of different challenges that has built those partnerships around mental health. I think that is really telling, Bernie, that so little of your funding comes from government, but it might also be the enabler for us to work to create the change that we need.

Elizabeth Elliott: Well, I think to get research into practice at the community level really involves co-design. It involves people to say at the outset what the important outcomes are. What we try to do is action research so that we are getting outcomes along the way. We're not just collecting data — it's a real partnership with regard to the hospital system and the implementation of findings from, say, randomised control trials. We need a real shift in the attitudes of the hospitals and the health systems to really allowing research to be embedded in the system. I know the Academy of Health and Medical Science has done a big piece of work on that. Of course, to get any research into practice, you need to have the clinicians on board, the people who are going to use it and really get their opinion and get their ownership. Otherwise, no clinical guidelines are ever going to be implemented.

Sally Redman: Sorry, it's not my strong point. Perhaps one that surprised you. Did I say this? I think we have to be in it for the long haul and I think that that requires an honest conversation. We're talking about really complex and endemic sort of problems, things that can't easily or quickly be fixed. I think we need to be clear about that and to select the most important actions that need to be done about the 9,000 recommendations. That's really challenging to get your head around. I think we need to start asking what the most important thing to do is. I've been really impressed with discussions recently about systems thinking and how we can best apply that, because

it recognises the complex intertwining of many of these factors. Then it starts to let you think about where the critical points for change are. What would be the most important thing? I think that's what Bernie was talking about, actually. I think that we could do well as a community to have some dialogue around that.

Julianne Schultz: Bernie, your insights? I think one of the big things of yours was breaking down those silos, wasn't it? That was really crucial.

Bernie Shakeshaft: We heard Alison talk about it. We're pretty good at defining these things. You've got 9,000 recommendations of which we can't put one in place? I think we get stuck in the big complex, "Can't do it, it's just too hard." Sit in the corner and have a cry, "Uh, we don't do it like that." This isn't a question of why can't you, how can't you, it's a question of *how can you*? When I look at the eight other communities we're in, you want to talk about a complex problem? Try and replicate what we did. Want to talk about a complex problem? Ask the six universities when they first bounced into Armidale and went, "Hey, I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to write this paper; we want to get some runs on the board. We're just going to define what it is BackTrack does, should take us a month."

Six academics, professors, all the smart guys: 12 months later each tearing each other apart, going: "What do you mean? It's just the kids that are 12 to 24." I go, "Yes, but if there's a kid that comes in at 11, we'll sort that out." We're constantly going, *how can we*? Not, how can't we? I think when you start doing that, one of my favourite sayings in the world, "After action comes clarity." Jump off the damn cliff. I scare the be-Jesus out of people going, "Oh, no, here he goes again. What new crazy idea?" But if you don't just jump sometimes and do stuff, then you're going to sit around defining the damn problem, worrying about how you can't do it. We've got 9,000 recommendations to implement. Which one are we going to implement? Tell you what, implement one. Just start with one damn step. That's my opinion.

Renae Ryan: Hi, I'm Renae Ryan from the University of Sydney. It was an amazing session. Thank you to you all. My questions for you, Bernie, you talked a lot about boys and young men: are girls involved in the program and do they have different issues? How do you deal with that? Or is it specifically for boys, the program?

Bernie Shakeshaft: I spent a lot of years in Central Australia, Tennant Creek, Warumungu. I saw what beautiful things were going on in Central Australia with the men and how they started taking care of the kids. I know there's lots of dysfunction and tough stuff, but when you see the beauty of it, when you go to Fitzroy and go, "Man, when you look for the gold, you don't have to look very hard to see it." When I came back to New South Wales, it was kind of designed on that. I spent years and years in remote communities and knocking around with the countrymen and deepest of respect. They taught me stuff that I went, "You know what, how simple is this? How simple is this? Those people deal with grief and loss better than anyone in the damn world." When you start to feel some of that stuff, you go, "Boy, that's what it is."

When I came back and we started, it was all very manly, but that was the drive, and the passion was to do something with these kids. At the time it was all about these young fellows running amuck, what do you do? Felt like a good swim lane for us. It was mostly blokes that were down there volunteering when we were starting. We really designed it and went on just specifically for boys. We've had a couple of goes with the girls. We have definitely had girls through, some of the girls work in the BackTrack work side of it, it's always around people: when you get the right people. I don't want to be running girls' program as a bloke, but when we've had really good female, strong female staff that go, "You know what, we got to do this." Then I go, "Happy to get out of the way. I'll find the funding, you do it." We've had different areas of it. You asked me does it get hard? Holy smokes. I don't know if it's the same in Sydney, man, but when you put the boys and the girls together, something weird happens. It all changes. It gets very tricky. Will we go there again at some stage? Sure. I'd like to see it on a different side though, because and it drives me mental.

John Myburgh: Thank you. I'm John Myburgh. I'm a Professor of Intensive Care Medicine in Sydney and I run a research institute to do large-scale clinical trials, particularly in intensive care. This has been a fantastic session and it resonates across the whole spectrum of healthcare. A couple of things I wanted us to highlight, ask a question: Was the access to funding for national priorities? Because the current funding model, to use Bernie's phrase, is broken. I could be stronger than that. We are living in a bottom-up competitive-funding model where the attrition rate of researchers and questions just gets lost every single year. I sit on research panels, and I weep when I see the projects that get cancelled and people lost in translation. One of the successes of the pandemic came out of the UK, where the national portfolio of research design targeted areas for the community to address and got the researchers to tender for those jobs. It's a reverse model.

Surely it is time in this country that we did the same thing. We've now got community engagement, we've got Indigenous people engaging in questions, the mental health issue that you've raised, Maree, at the forefront. Shortest time now as part of all these academies: to get a nationally funded body to identify areas of research and key clinical questions based on the innumerable inquiries and put out one or two issues, as Bernie outlines, and get the institutes to tender for those jobs and then produce an output as soon as possible rather than the bottom-up approach. I think it's high time that we did this in this country.

Maree Teesson: Point incredibly well made, John. Because where will the innovation come from in this country if we keep losing the creativity, particularly in the research base? That's an incredibly important point. I just shared the Million Minds mission for the Medical Research Future Fund, which was $60 million over the next five years. It costs more to put the sign up out the front here. I 100% agree with you, but we have to start creating those models also within an Australian environment. What is the business case for putting those models up? It'll be very different here from the UK. The UK has a lot more philanthropy and a lot bigger tradition and a better way of funding their researchers within universities. They just laugh at our system. It's like a house of cards. It's all just falling over.

The MRFF (Medical Research Future Fund, for those people who are not living in medical research) is an amazing $900 million a year fund. That's what it's supposed to grow to, but it doesn't fund people, it funds projects. We just keep lumping projects on. I 100% agree we need new models and I'd really like us seeing, putting up, I'm literally working on one at the moment for a business case for these types of institutes that you're talking about, or a network of institutes, because we could. I'd really love to talk to you about that. I've got one right now on mental health but we need a network of them, not just one. That was my answer. I 100% agree, yes, let's do it. Any academies want to talk to us, let's get that happening.

Sally Redman: Just to add to it, I would say I 100% agree as well, but if we think about co-production work, then we really need to recognise the fact that it's resource-intensive. You need to have resources to be able to set up communication. Governance models takes longer. The value is as much in the relationship that you build. As long as we keep having three-yearly or five-yearly injections of funds, then we're never going to be able to work effectively with communities.

Julianne Schultz: Yes. I think that the point that several of you have made is it's about that capacity-building, it's about the leadership capacity-building as well. The part of the thing with the research model that we have at the moment is, as you say, it's very competitive: an enormous amount of effort goes into writing applications, but a very small percentage get funded. And so you're missing out on that capacity that you're building. As you said, if you follow the person through to build that capacity that they can then have that impact. That applies in academia, it applies in communities. If people get churned through and don't get that support, then you don't get the chance to grow, as you've done, Bernie, in your job.

Bernie Shakeshaft: Could I just add a comment to that? I'm just listening to what you say: I go, "I'm not afraid of copying things that work." In fact, happy to do a quick bit of plagiarism — if it works, why not pinch it and use it? If there is a better model, whether it's in the UK or wherever, why aren't we just copying some of that stuff? If we know what we've got is busted and we've got something across the fence that you go, "Oh yeah, that kind of works," why aren't we doing that with incarceration? Just trot over and have a look at Finland and Sweden and go, "Man, they're working out what to do with these big buildings now that they've closed them down because there's only two or three kids in a whole freaking nation that are locked up?" I go, "Why aren't we just trotting over there and having a little bit of a look at what they do?" Heaven's sakes. Our funding model from Canada, in 2014 went over there, when trotting around it was the Gillard government first helped us out, going, "Oh, you come over here with this model that we've looked at where we just go, 49% government funding, 51% private funding, let's get on and do the job together." I go, "Why don't we just copy some of that stuff?" Seems to work.

Tony Cunningham: Tony Cunningham. I just want to comment on just what was raised here with the UK. Israel is another example of a country that moved really quickly in COVID. We did some good things, there's no doubt about it, but Israel moved incredibly quickly and was able to

link its best academic institutions from the Weizmann through to government in order to get their advice to the politicians as quickly as possible, with a COVID czar and implementation. That moved really fast. I was lucky enough to be one of a group of 19 people in a mission to Israel recently, which included two of our State Chief Health Officers. I think this concept of leanness between academia and government and a very short number of people linked in that chain is really important. They also put their findings out immediately. They weren't subject to politician control, or government control, so that the community could actually see what the advice was and would hold the government to account. We can learn certainly from overseas.

Julianne Schultz: Thank you. Yes, being adaptive I think should be one of our strengths and it has been from time to time.

Jen: Thank you. I'm Jen from UTS, so I also run ActivateUTS, which is a student organisation not-for-profit that serves all the clubs and run all the programs. Listening to all the conversations, for the past two years as a student, what I see is there's increasing challenging mental health, obviously. This is the issue that I face and most of my friends face. I did some stakeholder communication and I figured out that we didn't have a Mental Health First Aid program. So we started a Mental Health First Aid program. It's like a CPR but it's on mental health. But if you consider CPR, the statistic I learned is 99% of people learn CPR but never use it in their life. Which is a good thing.

But for mental health, even in my few years of experience, you encounter a lot of emotion, run high-stakes conversation with a lot of people, especially in the student community. In the past few years, student reaching out to student, each other's peer-to-peer connection, where you have challenges, but I have nothing to say to them. I don't know what to say when they ask me, I find this challenging in life. All I can say to them is, "Things will get better." But back in the days when looking at the COVID number of all things it's not getting better. Then we started this program. I was wondering: I know the conversation here is very high level, but through your research and everything you've done, is there something that I can implement? This is Tuesday so I can take it back and implement this on Friday. That doesn't cost much money, but it's effective and useful to students, as useful as, let's say, a mental health first aid training for students. Is something that we can do? Thank you.

Maree Teesson: Yes, and yes. Talk to me at lunch. 100%. Mental health first aid, it's great, but we are also a country of asking everyone, "Are you okay?" And then not having anything to follow up with it afterwards. I think that's great and I'd really like to talk to you about what you can do after you start that conversation. But it also does require a lot more investment than we put into this space. We heard that amazing story about teachers, our health workers. They are under incredible pressure at the moment, with the pandemic. I do think we have to do a reality check about it. It isn't just asking — it's about what we need to scaffold to help. How do we upscale all of these amazing projects? Anyway, yes.

Bernie Shakeshaft: Could I just make one quick comment before lunch? My brother's also a university professor. We're always arguing about stuff. That's how we got the

research going. When I'm with the kids at the shed, I go, "You got any questions?" And they go, "Yoh, where you been, man?" I get that. When my brother says, "Can I ask you a question?" I go, "Right, you've got 25 minutes and I better understand what you're talking about."

Maree Teesson: And I gave your brother his first academic job.

Julianne Schultz: Well, that's one of many lunchtime conversations. I would like to ask you to join me in thanking our panels for sharing their insights and experiences and pointing to some ways of improving this in future.

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Session III: Natural and Built Environment

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It's an absolute pleasure to be here today to talk about the natural and built environment and what we can do to unlock community participation to drive for more resilient and sustainable outcomes. I've really enjoyed listening to the conversations this morning, a mixture of inspiring, but some quite interesting information in there that I wasn't entirely aware of. But what I'm going to talk about today is a little bit more skewed toward the world that I'm familiar with — the world of infrastructure and the journey that we need to go on to transition our economy to net zero in this space. You'll also probably pick up on a slight bias towards engineering, which I'll admit now I'm proudly unapologetic about. One thing is clear. We all know that the action we take as a planet over the next decade will determine the world's climate for the next century.

How to decarbonise

Each of us in our own field and our own way needs to help to make sure the actions that we take are smart ones, not necessarily the easy ones. The health of our people, our communities, and our planet depend on us getting this right and leaning into the conversation with all stakeholders. In Australia, as in every country around the world, decarbonising our economy and creating a more resilient future for our natural and built environment to combat the negative impacts of climate change is a complex journey. We need to navigate away from how we operate today industrially to a different model, one focused on net zero emissions, sustainable solutions, and a more circular approach to the impact we have. That means questioning every aspect of our energy process, material and mobility decisions across every industry that we operate in. It's a monstrous task by any measure.

But before we can talk about action, before our communities can come together and strive for better outcomes, before we can begin beating on the drums of progress, we must first understand and address three significant challenges that I believe risk derailing all our efforts. It's these broad, overarching challenges that I wanted to touch on today to set the scene. This is where I spend a lot of my time advocating and driving for change.

Critical skills shortages

The first of these challenges is the critical skills shortages we're currently experiencing across industries key to the development of better outcomes for our natural and built environment. In 2021, Infrastructure Australia released a report on workforce and skills supply, which stated that by 2023 — that's next year — there would be a shortage of over a hundred thousand workers to deliver on the country's current infrastructure pipeline. Whilst this might

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

seem already dire, if you overlay that with some of the unknown pipelines of work required to transition the nation's economy to net zero, then these numbers spiral exponentially.

Then consider that specialist skills around STEM and engineering, in particular, the demand for the skills in this space is at an all-time high. STEM occupations are increasing twice as fast as non-STEM occupations, with projections show that they'll continue to grow by 13% p.a. over the next five years. Australia already has a critical engineering pipeline shortage, but we continue to see a general decline in participation by domestic students in engineering. Couple this with a sudden reduction in international students and skilled migration off the back of the COVID pandemic and you have what can only be described as a perfect storm. When it comes to the action required to create a more resilient and sustainable natural and built environment, even if we assume we had all the necessary technological solutions, all the required land space and an endless stream of funding and investment, at the current rate, Australia may still fall alarmingly short of the one essential ingredient to success. We simply might not have enough people to get the job done.

We have work to do, but, even if we acted immediately and prioritised all the various solutions which have been identified, it won't be enough. This skills gap is so large, we're still going to be tens of thousands of people short for many years to come. Which means we really have to look at the problem through another lens. This is a supply and demand issue. The solution can't just be increasing the supply, it's also got to be about reducing the demand.

Critical industries

That brings me to the second challenge, that key industries critical to reshaping our nation's natural and built environments — such as the construction industry — have traditionally been laggards when it comes to the uptake of technology and innovation. Now, the reasons for this are complex and many, but if we are to achieve the overarching goal of a more sustainable, natural, and built environment, then we must include the sustainability of these industries in the mix.

In the same way we are challenging what infrastructure we need to develop, we must at the same time challenge how this infrastructure is being developed. We must seek to deliver infrastructure in an environment that incentivises shared knowledge and innovation and drives improved efficiency and productivity as a default position. In my view, we are left with absolutely no choice. We must make these sectors more productive because we don't have enough people to push them forward otherwise. When businesses are capacity-constrained, then innovation suffers because the mindset that we likely fall back on will be that tried-and-tested is the safest option. I could stand here for the rest of the day really, and list the numerous initiatives that are being delivered to attempt to address the aforementioned challenges. I could discuss the numerous forums that I've been involved in around the STEM skills shortage and what short-, medium-, and long-term solutions can be implemented.

I could talk about the various conferences and workshops I've attended where we've debated issues around productivity, looking at what can be done around procurement,

risk allocation, scope setting, investment, et cetera. I could even talk about the immense passion that exists in each and every discussion I've had around creating space for more sustainable solutions to infrastructure. This is driven from a genuine belief that great infrastructure built around the needs of a community can provide for vastly improved environmental, social and economic outcomes for that community.

The big picture view

Now let me touch on the last challenge, and that is the big picture view. As we've already touched on and discussed today, short termism engendered by partisan politics has taken Australia to the point where I believe climate action has seemingly left government behind. It is business leaders rather than political leaders who are setting the pace on climate change policy and emissions reductions in our country.

In part this may be positive because it does represent an increasing appreciation for more than just the bottom line. But do we really want to count on individual entities to solve these most complex challenges whilst all individually keeping one eye on their own business model objectives? Our government must lead with a clear narrative on this topic.

Conclusion

These three challenges could derail our efforts to really turn the dial on how we as a country face into this narrow opportunity we have to do better. As we consider how great community participation might drive long-term policy development for the benefit of all Australians, we cannot lose sight of the big picture. And that we can't forget the human factor in all of this. We need to not only be smarter about the impact we have on the planet, but also the impact we have on each other. Put simply, we need to work smarter, not harder to create a more sustainable future. Thank you.

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Communities in action: grounded imaginaries in practice

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Summary

Thanks to the RSNSW for the opportunity to contribute to the crucial Forum theme of communities as the seedbed or source for responses to social and environmental challenges. As a Professor of Environmental Politics, this really has been my focus for the last 30 years or so — not on the construction of ideal environmental policies, but on the ways that impacted communities respond to environmental crises — in their actions, their demands, and their own theorising about environment, power, capital, race, and necessary transformations (Schlosberg 1999, 2007, 2013; Schlosberg and Craven 2019). I want to talk about both conceptual and practical contributions such impacted communities make — both in understanding the reality of environmental crises and disadvantage and in designing sustainable and equitable ways forward. I'll do that by discussing what my colleague Dany Celermajer and I are calling "grounded imaginaries:" designs and practices being imagined and implemented in impacted communities (Celermajer 2021).

Community action in response to climate change

First, when it comes to responses to climate change, what community action often illustrates is a counter to the common narratives or imaginaries. The usual imaginaries include the business-as-usual approach: coal is good for you, there's nothing to see here, the denialism of "everything will be right." Then we have the other side, the doomist imaginary, that collapse of everything is coming, inevitably, no matter what we do — and we should just focus on protecting our own patch. Third, of course, we have the techno-fix approach, that the billionaires and their capital will fix our climate problems.

These dominant imaginaries don't come *from* communities, from community knowledges and experiences, they come at the *expense* of local communities, and in particular those disadvantaged and made vulnerable. These top-down imaginaries ignore, disempower, and do harm. Crucially, what they ignore is what many communities are *already doing*, on the ground, to respond to climate change: creating community energy grids, local food systems, sustainable supply chains, coordinating emergency response. How people eat, how they produce, acquire and consume food and energy, how they respond to climate emergencies, how they live in relation to the natural world can challenge existing imaginaries and engender new ones.

We are working with community partners in Australia and India to examine these grounded and transformational practices, from new approaches to farming and water management in the Himalayas, to local food production on the NSW south coast. "Imaginaries" might be the wrong term, because we're talking about actual practices; this is not just about some utopian set of ideas without real impact, but praxis, action.

A counter or grounded imaginary

Second, I want to just offer a historical example of a counter or grounded imaginary that comes from the environmental justice movement, because that movement illustrates the broad normative and pragmatic contribution impacted and disadvantaged communities have actually made to environmental discourse, policy, and practice.

The idea of environmental justice focuses on the reality that some communities are inequitably exposed to environmental risks; that some communities are routinely disrespected and disparaged — that is, somehow deserving of pollution and toxins; that some communities have no real political input or say on issues that affect them everyday; that some communities simply have their basic needs and functioning undermined (Schlosberg 2007, Pellow 2018, Sze 2020).

This idea of environmental justice comes from that everyday lived experience of multifaceted injustice, from African-American communities in the US to Aboriginal communities here in Australia. Such impacted communities developed a thorough, grounded, material analysis of the impacts on everyday life. Lead poisoning, childhood asthma rates, cancer clusters, contamination of rivers and aquifers, climate anxiety, the decimation of sacred places and cultural practices — those experiences have all led to this analysis of the reality of environmental injustice and the structures of power, capital, and racism that create it, maintain it, profit from it.

Just as important as that grounded critical analysis of the reality of injustice is what communities demand governments to *do* in response. The idea of environmental justice is now regularly used to frame and ground many environmental and climate policies. Climate justice was key in the preamble to the Paris Agreement. All of the recent US climate legislation, including the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, embrace and implement elements of community environmental justice demands.

What this community-driven environmental justice focus illustrates is that environmental and climate policy is not just about emissions reduction, but also about deconstructing the relationship between environmental damage, climate change, and unjust impacts on everyday life (Mendez 2020).

So mitigation policy in the US now addresses air pollution and the broad range of health problems that come with burning fossil fuels. It makes clean energy more affordable and more accessible. It supports more energy-efficient housing that cuts energy bills. Just energy transition policies mean communities will share in the benefits of such transitions. It means changes in everyday life.

This is a great story about communities as a seedbed for ideas. Environmental justice, originating from grounded community experience and response, is now a normative framework for both understanding environmental crises and developing just, equitable, transformative practices and policies in response.

A future-focussed project

Third, and finally, I want to give an example of a more future-focused project dedicated to communities as the origin of necessary imaginaries and change — communities as the source of climate change adaptation.

The recently released Future Earth of Australia and Academy of Science-supported strategy for *Just Adaptation*

(2022) illustrates exactly this theme of communities in action — or listening to and putting communities into action to develop transformative, just adaptation plans in the face of climate change. What's crucial about this *Just Adaptation* strategy is that it is *not* just about addressing climate hazards and potential disasters, but also takes on the converging crises of climate change, inequity, and vulnerability. It aims to address climate and systems of injustice simultaneously.

Adaptation to climate change is a necessity, and it should be informed by diverse community knowledges, needs, capabilities, and aspirations. The strategy calls for such processes to engage the voices and experiences of those made marginalised and disadvantaged. The strategy insists, in particular, on recognition of the knowledges embedded in Australian Indigenous communities.

Australia is immensely privileged to have First Nations that are not only connected to country, but who have actually lived through climate change before, with oral histories and substantive, applied advice to about shifting ecological systems and processes (Williamson and Weir 2021). Grounded, lived experience and imaginaries. The just adaptation strategy suggests how taking voice seriously — actual, authentic, engaged listening — is crucial to our responses to climate impacts.

Climate change is unsettling, and there is an opportunity here to change the focus of a settler nation through that unsettling experience, and to better understand and live *with* country and First Nations. Just adaptation requires it.

Conclusion

These are just three examples — grounded imaginaries, environmental justice, just adaptation — that illustrate the crucial nature of community knowledge and practice in thinking about, responding to, and designing transformation in the face of environmental and climate challenges. These examples should show just how rich such community thinking and action is, and how applied and impactful it can be.

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Inequality in housing and community solutions

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Abstract

Inequality is the major issue facing Australian society today. We are the most urbanised country in the world, and our cities are driven by market economics, not societal well-being, creating inequality in public services health, education, retail and transport. Our cities are predominantly suburbs driven by property investment that has distorted housing supply, particularly individual suburban houses, exacerbating inequality. There are three types of dwelling ownership: owners, purchasers, and renters. The first have several dwellings whilst the third have none at all. The public sector, funded by taxes, is needed to redress these inequalities, but Australia now has such a low tax-to-GDP ratio that public housing, once quite strong, is now underfunded and failing. There is no comprehensive federal or state program for social housing, but the demand for social rental housing has dramatically increased. Social and affordable housing will increasingly rely on community developers, using a mixture of philanthropy and commercial approaches to provide "build-to-rent" housing. These include "Community Housing Providers," "faith-based housing" and "self-build" indigenous projects.

Introduction

Inequality is the major issue facing Australian society today. Its quantitative and qualitative discrimination affects every part of our lives, easing it for some and impoverishing many. It is detrimentally impacting our cities and housing, and makes climate change mitigation and adaptation much more difficult to address. Inequality is often measured by both income and wealth in "quintile analysis." Income inequality creates unequal access to opportunities generally, and particularly to public services such health, education, transport and commercial activities like retail and entertainment.

Wealth inequality has a far greater differential between the richest and poorest. This is because Australia, more than any other developed country, has an economy where wealth is accumulated in speculative property development, particularly housing. Its effect on the quality of our cities, our suburbs, and particularly housing is brutal. Some make great fortunes, one third of households own multiple dwellings, one third never own one. As a developed western nation, we also have unconscionable numbers in housing stress and homelessness. Our obsession with property development has made us world leaders in social disadvantage.

Inequality

To understand this widening inequality in housing we must first look at the how our planning policies encourage inequality in our cities, particularly through the promotion of suburbia, how a property development culture has perverted the supply of housing, and how it affects the

quality of our cities and environment. We need new policies in all sectors of housing, particularly for the poorest where public housing has failed. A radical rethink of this area is needed. Community-based housing offers a positive solution to levelling up the vital provision of shelter for all households in the nation.

Cities

In folklore we think of ourselves as a rugged "bush nation," inventively living off the land. Yet we are the most urbanised of all the OECD nations with over 40% of the population in two extended cities, 70% in ten. Whilst the population is concentrated in just a few cities, the housing in each of those is spread through extensive suburbia. More accurately we are the most suburbanised of OECD nations.

Whilst city centres have visual prominence through tall buildings and gravitas as the centre of politics and culture, the CBD built area is tiny in comparison to the broadacre suburbs which begin barely three kilometres from the GPO (or CPO In Melbourne). Australian cities are largely planned around those suburbs, driven by market economics, not by societal well-being and efficacy. Key services are located in the city centre (or in major suburban centres), and the dwellings closer to those centres are more valuable, whilst the land further away is cheaper, as are dwellings. This creates distortions which gives rise to "spatial inequality." Those closest to those city centres have better access to better options: public spaces (civic buildings public squares and parks); health facilities (public and private hospitals and more GP clinics), education (public and private schools), retail (vibrant inner city high streets vs enervating suburban shopping malls) and commercial facilities and transport (public transport and motorways).

All of this is seen by planners (and the media) through the prism of economics, of *quantity*, whereas the lived experience is one of social and environmental *quality*. In response, social commentators like Eva Cox hold to the mantra: "We live in a society, not an economy" or as Jack Lang, France's Minister for Culture says: "*économie et culture, même combat*" (economy and culture, same fight).

Suburbs

Modern suburbs are a political decision. In 1942 the future PM Robert Menzies staked his claim for political success on the middle class, whom he called the "forgotten generation." Home ownership thus became a core tenet of the Liberal party, and all Federal governments thereafter. The post-WW2 baby boom and sponsored immigration created a high demand for development, particularly housing. The majority approach was to subdivide city fringe land into multiple separate titles, on which a freestanding house could be built. Australia's "Torrens Title" legislation that enabled this easy land subdivision is regarded as world's "best practice."

Almost all political activity was concentrated on having a "home of your own" — home ownership — in those suburbs, with public housing lagging well behind. In 1945 a Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) was established for the Commonwealth to fund public housing via loans to the States. When the first CSHA was concluded in 1956, the Menzies government, together with some states that had been agitating for home

sales not rentals, redirected 30% of Commonwealth funds to building societies and state banks to subsidise home ownership finance. Public housing, then at its height of almost 10%, has lost support and fallen ever since (see below).

Since WW2, the population of our cities has more than trebled, Sydney grew from less than 1.5 to more than 5 million. Dwellings were concentrated in suburbia and the areas of cities trebled as well, leading to the distortions in the provision of services. Existing inner suburbs were well catered for, often improved, whilst services always lagged the opening up of fringe suburbs. The quality of suburbia, and the dwellings, changed dramatically with increased population.

Suburban housing

In sixty years, every critical characteristic of individual suburban houses changed by a factor of two: sometimes doubled, sometimes halved, but the net effect was the loss of most of the good qualities of interwar suburbia. Call it 2 × 2 × 2 × 2 × 2 × 2 × 2 — it had a disastrous effect on sustainability, and thereafter inequality.

Land subdivisions are now *half* the size of the post-WW2 quarter acre (1000 m^2), often as small as 350–400 m^2. The sites are narrow to minimise the street length, and so small that the houses are oriented to the boundaries, not the sun. In contrast, the average house area more than *doubled* from less than 120 to 240 m^2, prompted by both a reduction in the quality of construction materials and the demand by purchasers for houses as large as possible. Children once shared a bedroom and single bathroom, now they have a bedroom and ensuite each; once one living room sufficed for the whole family, now houses have multiple living, family, study, play areas and so on.

When a house, *twice* the size, goes on a block *half* the size, it can no longer be a bungalow. It *doubles* to two storeys, with limited areas for landscape, gardens, or trees. The two storeys are built to the boundaries, overshadowing the neighbours, and invading their privacy. Passive solar is not possible, and cross ventilation breeds a loss of privacy, so air conditioning is the norm. The increased bulk and absence of trees creates dominant forms in the street where once street trees masked the single-storey bungalows.

The *double* garage doors dominating the narrow fronts tells of another *doubling*. In 1960s the family had one car, now the family has two or more cars, bought as soon as you can drive. Parked on the front driveway, the front lawn, the nature strip (weird term), cars are necessitated by the lack of public transport in the outer suburbs: no trams, no trains, and privatised bus services that are hopelessly inadequate.

Houses now have *double* the glazing area (windows and doors). Project homes in the '60s had glass areas about 12–15% of the floor area, dictated by costs and the requirements of Ordinance 70 (the NSW Building Code then). Not only has the floor area *doubled*, but the glazing ratio has also increased to 20 to 35%. It should be double-glazed to pass NatHERS (the thermal comfort measuring tool), but often isn't.

One modest refrigerator was sufficient in the '60s, now there are *two* or more refrigerators, not only a large 3- or 4-door in the kitchen, but also one in the family room for drinks, or in the garage for frozen food, bait and fish. The *second* fridge is often older, less efficient, with polluting refrigerants.

Refrigerators are the biggest consumer of energy after hot water and their doubling in number and size increases electricity demand.

Where one TV in the house once sufficed, now it's one in every room. Many other appliances have *doubled* or proliferated: ovens, microwaves, blenders, computers, heated tower rails, hair dryers, fish tanks, and so on, along with many more lights. All *doubling* electricity usage in the house.

Hot water is one area where energy improvements were once made; the power-hungry single electric storage heater gave way to instantaneous gas and, in 5% of cases, roof-top solar. Now that fossil fuels are on the outer, gas heaters need to be replaced with heat-pump storage, run by photovoltaic (PV) solar panels, or pumped solar panels. A homeowner can buy multiple refrigerators or appliances from big-box stores, but sadly, not good water heaters or PV panels. We are encouraging consumer behaviour to increase energy demand, not to raise sustainability and lower bills.

The last, most dramatic change is the number of people in houses. In the '60s, average occupancy was more than five persons. Now it's less than *half* at 2.5. In the '60s, suburbia was for families, parents and children, sometimes multi-generational, and often board and lodging for non-family. Now singles and couples outnumber family households, and even allowing for the lower occupancies in apartments, suburbia now has many big houses on small blocks with only a couple in them.

This change didn't take place overnight; it took 60 years to destroy the high quality of the original suburbs, and along the way to decrease sustainability and increase inequality. Inner-city suburbia of the '50s and '60s, with its infrastructure and services complete, is now so valuable that only the richer middle class who bought in decades ago can afford to live there. The first home buyers and poorer middle class are pushed out to the vast, dark-roofed, treeless overheated suburbs that have recently been built at the edges of our cities. Minimal public transport and less local services (that trail the developments in rollout) have bred a high car dependency, exacerbating inequality.

Property development

Suburbia has been the principal location for property investment. Huge numbers of single houses on individual plots creates a vast industry, made up of many individual small-scale players. Numerous individual contractors and sub-contractors proliferate, realtors and banks multiply, and the media takes to home design with many glossy magazines. The big corporates concentrate on constructing commercial, civic and a few flats buildings. The tradition of individual houses spawns the multitude of homebuilders we have today.

Construction of infrastructure and buildings boomed, and fortunes were made, both continuing today. As an economic activity, construction is the largest single sector of GDP and employs more people than mining. Eight of the twenty richest people in Australia derived their wealth from property development.

The success of property development has skewed the physical, social and economic shape of our cities, exacerbating inequality. Suburban houses still dominate demand and sales, creating poorly serviced, highly transport-dependent sprawl at the edge of our cities. It fails unsustainability on almost

every metric. Even now, when individual houses and apartments are built in about equal in numbers, suburban expansion continues.

The financial success of property developers encourages the populace to follow their lead, to see housing as *property*, not *shelter*, to be amongst the most highly leveraged in the world. The sector is spoken of as a "housing market," one which sees cities through the prism of the economic wealth, not societal or cultural value. We have become a nation in love with property development, whilst suburban homeowners revile property developers. Some irony, some social failing.

Home ownership

There are now three types of dwelling ownership, with approximately the same number of households in each: owning the dwelling outright, purchasing the dwelling on a mortgage or loan, and renting as they do not "own" a home. Let's call each of those a "housing sector."

In the first sector, outright *owners* benefitted from rising values over time and long-term loans, often at low interest rates, and so can leverage their ownership equity to buy additional dwellings. 18% of households own (or are purchasing) a second house. 5% of households own three or more houses. Additional dwellings total a third of all dwellings, and are the primary source of rental properties (see below).

In the second sector, one third of households are *purchasers*, most commonly through a mortgage to one of the "big five" banks. The mortgage gives the bank title to the dwelling, or at least that portion of it that remains to be repaid, giving them great economic leverage. The owners' ability to afford the mortgage payments is often referred to, by politicians particularly, as "housing affordability" — can you afford to buy a house?

The third sector is households who are *renters* with no ownership at all. The renters' dwellings are owned in a variety of ways: privately (that is, by the first third), by the state in public housing, by housing providers (commercially or community run) and a small number of other ownership models. In all cases the renters are paying for the costs of the housing provision, benefiting the owners.

Different policies are needed for each of the three sectors, *owners*, *purchasers* and *renters*. Just as the sectors are divided, so are the current housing policies, disconnected into silos, but all contributing to housing inequality. All these housing policies must be addressed if we are to improve equality in housing opportunity, particularly for the third sector where housing stress is increasing.

Housing policies for owners

Australians have been obsessed with home ownership for 120 years, but we've gone from world's best to near worst. At Federation, 50% of homes were owner occupied, the world's highest rate at that time. As high as 70% in the 1970s, it has fallen to 66%, and is falling further. We are 42nd out of 52 industrialised countries, behind the USA, UK, most of Europe, Scandinavia, and many Eastern bloc countries.

Nevertheless, owners and purchasers, being two thirds of households, are overwhelmingly seen as vitally important by the two main political parties. At 66% it's a greater majority than has been achieved by either modern political party or in a referendum. So federal and state housing

policies are almost exclusively aimed at "home ownership," and politicians are vocal about "housing affordability" for purchasers and owners, at the expense of the forgotten third who seek "affordable rental housing."

Owner households have been encouraged to develop a "property portfolio" for the last 40 years. Those owning a house are encouraged to own several, in three related ways: favourable banking regulations with low interest rates on secondary properties, tax deductions on rental properties through negative gearing and discounted capital gains on sale.

Negative gearing and capital gains tax

The most effective, yet pernicious, promoter of secondary dwellings is "negative gearing," introduced in Australia in 1985 by the ALP Hawke/Keating government. Although it was used elsewhere at that time, Australia is now unique in allowing people tax deductions on multiple houses rather than on their own individual dwelling. The intervening years have seen housing become the most popular and profitable form of investment in Australia.

These investment houses make up most of the houses rented in the "third sector." The houses are leased from a "private landlord," rather than through a co-operative or housing society, as is common in Europe. There are no rent controls; rental laws favour owners over renters; and there is little deterrent to extorting a profit, which is offset by negative gearing. The net effect is that the renters are financially supporting the owners, furthering inequality.

Arithmetically there is plenty of housing supply, as there are more houses in Australia (almost 11 million) than households (9.8 million). Renters should have choices at reasonable prices but that is not the case. Many of the secondary dwellings are holiday homes with no permanent residents. Availability became far worse with the rise of short-term rentals (Airbnb, Stayz etc), which has skewed the market in the owners' favour even more, with a short-term nightly rent now equally a weekly long-stay rent.

Renting a privately-owned dwelling at a reasonable rate was possible five or so years ago, but conditions for renters have deteriorated markedly, as the profits for owners have soared. The recent federal budget papers accurately diagnosed: "that renters are experiencing deteriorating conditions with rents increasing and vacancies low," but they fail to identify the reasons for this.

Equality solutions for owners

Changing tax policy is the best way to support long-term rentals and discourage short-term holiday lettings (at least until the housing supply improves dramatically). And that could be achieved with the stroke of a pen, or more accurately an inversion of current taxation. Instead of tax relief on investments, there should be tax concessions on the primary residence (as is the case in most of the OECD) that would benefit all owners/purchasers.

We need a tax policy on un-earned capital gains. Profiting from rise in dwelling prices, when no value has been added, is unfair when it puts one third of Australians further into housing stress. The only way to discourage this "speculation without value" is to re-introduce a substantial capital gains tax. Not on the primary home, but a tax on profit gained, outside dwelling improvements and the rate of the inflation, could be taxed at rates as high as 80% to immediately halt the rise in dwelling prices.

These changes would create a much-needed correction in the rental market, at least in the short term, but the problems for renters are more endemic and longer-term solutions for renters will be needed. Further economic benefit could be derived by re-directing tax concessions in housing to investments in manufacturing or rent-controlled social housing by community groups (see below).

Removing the incentive to profit from home speculation would have two benefits: it would cool the current spiralling dwelling prices; and it could redirect investment wealth into more economically productive activities: encouraging research and development and promoting industries, particularly those with the triple bottom line. Stripping negative gearing and capital-gains concessions from investment houses opens the way to tax the rental profits, particularly from short-term rentals, but changing negative gearing (and capital-gains concessions) is political poison at present and the total tax levied may have to be made revenue-neutral in deference to the politically incendiary issue of property taxes.

At the 2019 federal election the ALP promised to abolish negative gearing and further reduce capital gains tax concessions from 50% to 25%. Sound policies if you want to rein in multiple home ownership for short-term rentals. The LNP and Clive Palmer viscously attacked those ideas (often with lies such as a "death duties tax"). Labor was so chastened by its loss that it withdrew these policies, which were eminently sensible then, and urgently needed now. Talk of tax reform is now considered so evil that no party has any policy to effectively address the spectacular rise in dwelling prices, further entrenching inequality.

Nevertheless, most housing commentators on social and affordable housing are calling for changes to negative gearing and capital-gains tax as the societal impact is so profound. Roger Cook, Labor deputy premier of WA said recently: "As health minister and mental health minister I learnt that housing is not a supply issue, it's a social issue."

Housing policies for purchasers

Households who are purchasing their dwellings through a mortgage are always characterised by politicians and the media as "families," cruelly subject to interest rate fluctuations. Politicians focus disproportionately on them, or those who want to join them, as in "can they afford to buy a house?" or "housing affordability."

To provide relief for existing borrowers, the government would need to alter bank rates and charges by discounting rates for first homes and raising rates for secondary homes. This would recalibrate the "playing field" towards greater equality. We cannot continue to have five of the world's most profitable banks if they are the major cause of housing inequality in Australia.

A further change to benefit purchasers over owners would be the reversal of negative gearing from secondary properties to primary residences, which would create incentives to improve the sustainability of the dwellings if the tax relief was targeted at energy- and water-saving measures.

A more extreme proposal for more equitable housing is to strive for every household to own their own dwelling. 100% home ownership would be a step too far as there will always be some households who rent, either out of convenience or necessity. Nevertheless, it is an interesting theory to pursue as it

will show the changes that are needed today to expand the current third of households who are purchasers.

If the amount a household should pay for shelter is 30% of after-tax income, then either incomes need to increase (unlikely) or repayments need to fall. The latter is achieved by lowering repayments, which in turn could be achieved with banks lowering interest payments (again unlikely) or by housing options allowing for cheaper dwellings.

Current State and Local Council planning regulations are geared to a middle-class suburban ideal from fifty years ago. They discriminate against small houses and particularly apartments, having demands that continue Australia's excessive space expectancy. A further impediment is the intransigence of banks to lend on apartments under 50 square metres.

Housing policies for renters

There was always a divide between owners and renters, but the policies favouring owners and purchasers has made it a gulf. There is now a diverse range of owners from whom dwellings are rented. Essentially they divide into three: private owners, who are the first third, 22%; public authorities, mostly state public housing, 3%; community-run housing providers, 3% and increasing; and lastly by some other ownership models such as commercial build-to-rent, 3%, also increasing.

Reducing profiteering by private owners has been canvassed above: it requires a change to the taxation system to preference the household's first dwelling, and disincentivise the secondary dwellings such that short-term rentals become long-term, at least from the near term. Although this is by far the largest rental market, there is little more that can be done for equality other than changing the property development settings for negative gearing and capital gains tax.

Public housing

Traditionally the states provided housing for the poorest, generically called "public housing" as in provided *by* the public — through taxes — *for* the public, and has done so for 120 years. After every major war and depression there has been a worldwide push to address the resulting housing crisis. Unfortunately, Australia has missed, or misused, many of those those opportunities, so a history of public housing is instrumental in understanding why it is now failing so badly, how to avoid repeating past mistakes, and why current proposals to rectify the situation are misdirected.

Early public housing

Housing in Victorian times was either large freestanding houses for the owner-occupier gentry, or row housing which were rented. Often called terraces, these were groups of mostly two-storey houses which were built and owned by the developers of the day, naming them after their wife or daughter, and rented out to families, with 3 generations and 10 or more people in a house.

There were some households too poor to rent in that private market, who need "subsidised" housing. In the 19th century in Australia this this was primarily supplied by churches, in modest houses around a church, called a "glebe," as in the Sydney suburb. The state governments were busy building schools and hospitals, but not housing.

By the end of the last century, 50% of houses were owner occupied, 45% were pri-

vately rented, and the remaining 5% were owned by churches and a few local councils. The Sydney Harbour Trust, which acquired houses in The Rocks and Millers Point in 1900, when there was an outbreak of bubonic plague, let those houses to waterside workers; it was our first "publicly owned housing."

At the turn of the last century, there was an international movement to reform housing from a social point of view, but that was not of interest to the newly formed Federal government, which considered it a state matter, which it has remained ever since. Also, at that time some local councils, concerned about areas of slums (privately owned by absentee landlords), followed a lead from the UK with purpose-built housing for the increasing working class in the inner city.

The NSW government was the first to address public housing, with the Housing Act of 1912, and the NSW Housing Board planned the first public housing estates in Australia. State treasurer Roland Dacey proclaimed: "We propose to establish a garden city and to offer people healthy conditions for living … will yield big dividends to the nation … that has how Australia builds its garden cities." Sadly, the visionary Dacey died soon after, and his vision was not built until after WW1, but his name is commemorated in the first of those garden city public housing estates, Daceyville, near UNSW, south of the Sydney CBD.

At the same time as the Housing Act of 1912 was passed, the NSW government also passed legislation to advance the control of deposits and mortgage financing so that workers could own their own homes. Dacey's nascent social liberal reform ran second to encouraging housing in the private market.

Following the Great War, the states increasingly took over that role of subsidised rental housing from councils. The loss of men in the war left many widows, who supported themselves by subdividing their houses into "board and lodging rooms," which were later regularised as "boarding houses." These were key to accommodating the working class through the Depression.

In 1919 the Federal Government established the War Service Homes Commission, which offered low-interest loans to return servicemen to construct or buy a house, promoting private home ownership, and to avoid housing being dependent on the old private rental model. The NSW Housing Board was disbanded in the late 'twenties, both instances where the government promoted home ownership over the public supply of rental housing.

The provision of all housing was seriously delayed by the Great Depression, but it was followed by a number of public housing initiatives by various States in a desire to provide housing for those who were poor. Many of the old private and church housing estates fell into disrepair, and a Methodist social reformer, Frederick Oswald Barnett, drew attention to them as "slums," and was instrumental in forming the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board in Victoria in 1936. A similar housing slums investigations committee was formed in NSW, leading to a Housing Improvement Board established from 1936 to 1942.

A building act inquiry committee in South Australia led to the creation of the SA Housing Trust in 1937; the Victorian Housing Commission was created in 1938 and the NSW Housing Commission in 1942; and in Tasmania public housing provision

was promoted through a housing division in the Agricultural Bank in 1935.

Mid-century public housing

In 1943, the Commonwealth Housing Commission (CHC) was established by a board of inquiry appointed by Ben Chifley, minister for post-war reconstruction. It concluded: "We consider that a dwelling of good standard and equipment is not only the need, but the right of every citizen, whether the dwelling is to be rented or purchased, no tenant or purchaser should be exploited for excessive profits."

Thus, the CHC promoted housing as a right for all Australians, targeted to low-income workers: " ... it has been apparent for many years, that private enterprise, the world over has not adequately and hygienically being housing, the low-income group."

The CHC report of 1944 made detailed proposals and recommendations to the Federal Government, most of which were ignored, and instead the 1945 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) was established for the Commonwealth to fund public housing via loans to the States, a system which has continued in various forms to this day.

Immediately after the Second World War, the states operated public housing schemes in varying ways. In NSW and Victoria, the public housing focus was on slum clearance to rehouse those in poverty, preference being given to large families and those recently returned from service.

In 10 years after WW2, state housing authorities built almost 100,000 dwellings for public rental, one in every seven dwellings built in Australia. The NSW Housing Commission built almost 38,000 of those dwellings, 18% of all dwellings built in NSW. The majority of the housing built was detached houses in "garden city" plans in middle and outer suburban areas, such as Green Valley and Mount Druitt in Sydney.

Fewer in number, but more visually prominent, were the flats — initially walk-up blocks of 3 to 4 levels but later high-rise towers of 20 to 30 storeys in Sydney and Melbourne. In 1946 the Victorian Housing Commission repurposed a Commonwealth Tank Factory as the "Housing Factory" for the production of concrete panels for prefabricated houses and flats. Eventually 27 towers using those precast concrete panels were built across 19 suburbs in Melbourne. Housing towers were vilified in Melbourne and Sydney for their stark visual presence, but moreover for gathering too many people of the same socio-economic status in one place, typified by violence, drugs and suicides. The irony is there were far more tenants in suburban houses, largely indistinguishable from everyone else's housing.

As mentioned above, when the first CSHA was concluded, the Menzies government redirected 30% of Commonwealth funds to building societies and state banks to subsidize finance for home ownership. Public housing completions declined to about 9% of all dwellings, and the state authorities sold off much the public housing; sometimes more was sold than was built in a year. By 1969, the NSW Housing Commission had sold almost 100,000 dwellings, one third of all the dwellings it had built. The conservative governments turned against public housing, reducing the size of public housing sectors and shifted the public housing's clientele away from workers and their families to people on a social wage or those who were unemployed.

Australian Labor Party reforms

The Whitlam government had big intentions for housing and urban renewal. Through the Department for Urban and Regional Development (DURD) the minister (and sometime deputy PM) Tom Uren brokered deals with State and Local Governments for the provision of public housing in Glebe and Woolloomooloo, guided by the "Green Bans," promoted by the Builders' Labourers Federation and Jack Mundey.

The Hawke Labor government of 1983 negotiated building more public housing as part of the deal to encourage wage restraint. And Brian Howe, again deputy PM, took a particular interest in developing a joint program with the States called the Local Government and Community Housing Program, referred to as "Logchop." The idea within the program was to provide public housing to those at the margins who were not normally housed publicly — artists, students and refugees — in cooperatives and local groups.

The program was never able to effectively take off before the government changed to the Howard coalition, which made further cuts to funding social housing under the CHSA. Each return to conservative government saw a continuing fall in public housing: the share of dwelling completions fell from an average of 16% from 1945 to 1972, to 9% over the 1980s, and fell again to 5% over the 1990s.

Public housing today

By the millennium, almost no public housing estates were being built, and state governments were being encouraged to sell off the most valuable stock to build new housing. The Berejiklian government in NSW did so with alacrity, selling off the buildings in Miller's Point that had been public housing for 120 years, together with the purpose-built Sirius apartments.

This approach was combined with privatisation; existing low-scale public housing was sold to private developers who could build at a greater density, if a fixed percentage of the new housing, usually around 20%, was set aside for "social and affordable housing," managed by Community Housing Providers rather than the state. Sometimes, this did not match or increase the amount of public housing lost.

With falling home ownership and wage disparity, the demand for rental housing has increased, dramatically so for social and affordable housing, with demand reaching 10% of all households. But support for public housing by NSW and Victoria governments declined, with Housing Commissions almost entirely disappearing.

Public housing declines

Social democracies redress inequalities in society in general, and housing in particular, through the "public sector," funded by taxes. The size of the "public sector" is measured by the tax-to-GDP ratio, or Tax/GDP. In most OECD countries the Tax/GDP is in the range of 30–40%, with an average of 33%. Australia has a very low Tax/GDP of 27%, (only the USA is lower, at 24%). Therefore, the Australian government cannot fund social programs like those in Europe and Scandinavia, and so must choose which areas to underfund.

Currently social welfare programs and support for social housing are not prioritised, as is evident in the Federal Government's very low targets for public housing (10,000 over 10 years), which is dependent on profits from an investment fund, whose prospects

of economic success has been roundly criticised. This in turn increases dependence on philanthropy (more common in the USA). Recently it has been suggested that superannuation savings be used as a form of national savings for investment. This has been contested by the Federal Government. In summary, all governments have insufficient funds allocated to address rental housing for the poor, and so other methods of supply must be instigated.

Social and affordable housing

More than 6% of all housing was state owned in the 1960s, but has substantially waned since then, to where it is now at less than 3% (for twice the population). If we are to reach a desirable level of 10% of households in social housing, we must examine ways to increase the supply, but there is no agreed comprehensive federal or state program for public housing now.

Traditional modes of public housing cannot address the problem at all. It is being rebranded as "social and affordable housing" (or social housing) and is being outsourced to public-private partnerships (PPP), or not-for-profits, such as "Community Housing Providers." Essentially, public housing as we have known it for 120 years is dead, and new methods of delivery, such as PPPs and CHPs and community housing, are needed. This requires an understanding of three issues: what lessons can be learnt from the typologies of former public housing; how funding approaches can learn from commercial housing developments; and, critically, how "wrap around support services," so essential for people who are in the greatest housing stress, can be incorporated. Only then can we see a viable way forward for housing the poorest 10%.

Lessons from public housing

There are several lessons to be learnt from the public housing of the past. Housing post-WW1 was almost solely concentrated on single-family homes in suburbia, the perceived need at the time. But this often meant the housing was far from essential services. Current requirements are for far fewer "family" homes and more singles and doubles accommodation. That will require an increase in better located individual houses, and more modest apartment complexes.

The public housing post-WW2 was high in numbers, but the 20+ storey towers in Sydney's Waterloo and South Melbourne were a very poor typology, creating "ghettos" of similar distressed residents. High-rise living is often targeted to wealthier occupants, whereas as the poor, with especially those with complex social and mental problems, prefer to be closer to the ground. The other major issue for the "towers" was being in one area without support services. Not only did it create the stigma of "housos," but many residents have family or friend connections elsewhere, and being grouped together created dislocation. Public housing needs to be more dispersed throughout the city.

Many of the public housing schemes of the '70s and '80s were silly experiments by architects. It is insulting for the poor to be further stigmatised as being apart from the rest of society by being given a "different" design aesthetic. Post-modernism was rampant in the polychrome brickwork of Carlton semis, and the fatuous curves, oriole windows, and brick bands of Woolloomooloo and public housing elsewhere.

In summary, we may say that good social housing for the future has five characteristics:

low-scale; modest-and-robust; interspersed; indistinguishable; and everywhere.

It should be *low-scale*, no more than four storeys where practicable, to ensure residents have good contact with the ground and, in a related consideration, it should be *modest-and-robust* in design, eschewing experimentation and relying on well trusted robust construction methods, capable of hard wear and minimising maintenance.

It needs to be *interspersed* throughout the local community, and *indistinguishable* from the surrounding housing, so as not to be highlighted or differentiated. It must cease stigmatising social housing and not stand out. And last, but not least, we need social housing in *every* suburb, town, and village as we seek to house people within their communities and avoid any "ghettoization."

Lessons from commercial housing

If there is no public subsidy for social housing, the process of housing procurement will have to be framed on a more commercial basis to deliver housing at a lower cost. Commercial housing is mostly based on the one-third rule where the final *sale* price is based on three roughly equal parts: the cost of land, the cost of construction, and the profit (revenue less financing costs).

Social and affordable housing can cut costs in two of those three parts: land costs can be discounted (or better still nil) if it is supplied by the government, a not-for-profit, or other philanthropic organisation. And, secondly, the profit on sale is eliminated if the project is "build to rent." Conversely, the cost of construction will increase as the project needs to be "more robust" than the usual standards for dwellings for sale. As a "built-to-hold-for-rent" project, the considerations of durability and costs of maintenance for a period of 25 to 50 years must be factored in, requiring a much higher standard of build. The poor standards of "built-for-sale" units are currently the subject of actions of the NSW Building Commissioner.

Wrap-around services

One of the failings of public housing was an absence of consultative support for residents. The poor are far more likely to have social- and mental-health issues, and the provision of housing is only one service they need. Future social housing will have to be developed by organisations that have "wrap-around" social services such as welfare groups or church outreach organisations.

New social housing models

There are several nascent ways in which social housing is being delivered in new ways. All are exclusively "build-to-rent," but on a semi-commercial basis to cover their costs, and to allow them to grow. All strive to meet the five principles outlined above, assisted by being small organisations tied to local communities, rather than a large, state-based bureaucracy.

Community housing

The best known — and largest social-housing — developers are Community Housing Providers (CHPs). These not-for-profits gained impetus in NSW some ten years ago when public housing stock was passed into their ownership, forming a quasi-PPP. They are not-for-profits run by boards with responsibility to manage and expand the portfolio from rental income. Effectively, they have the benefit of discounted land and construction that gives them a financial

starter to run a "commercial" organisation that rents properties at a discount or affordable rate to socially qualified tenants. But they must make a profit from existing stock to build more. Some will draw on philanthropy, and possibly investments from superannuation (if rules change), to expand their portfolios. CHPs are in their infancy, and some appear to be struggling, so it may be too early to judge their success.

Parallel to CHPs, there is a rise in commercial build-to-rent proposals which are both commercial and sometimes not-for-profit, and many of these have taken advantage of the "boarding house" or "co-living" provisions of the former Affordable Housing SEPP, rebadged as The Housing SEPP. These boarding houses have been vital in providing lower-cost accommodation for the last 7 years, but their poor design quality and ubiquity in inner Sydney has seen locals protesting their proliferation.

Government social housing

As outlined above, as the NSW Department of Housing wound down, the government sold public housing to developers in exchange for some social housing being included in the replacement development. All those dwellings are managed by a CHP, not the government, but there has been much debate about the disappointing yield of social housing from that approach.

Both major parties in NSW politics are now investigating how government land can be developed in a socially progressive manner, rather than being sold off to developers at a profit. Most of these untested proposals will hopefully include a greater proportion of social housing, all to be managed by CHPs.

Faith-based housing

One community housing initiative that is just starting is the repurposing of church land as housing, being championed by the NSW Faith Housing Alliance. This involves existing church buildings, which have no congregation or where church use has lapsed, being demolished and replaced by housing. These are intended for those in extreme housing stress and use the Housing SEPP co-living provisions. The churches describe this change in direction as moving from "worship to mission." These proposals are ideal for the new model of community housing: church land is in ideal locations, well dispersed through all communities. Churches often have independent funding are already registered as CHPs, often with strong welfare capabilities. By contributing land at nil cost and removing the sales profit, they are forecasting that they can offer housing rents at a range of 25–50% of market rates, meeting the affordability criteria, and provide the possibility of housing for a *variety* of low-waged occupants within a single project. We can expect that this will become a more common — but controversial — development as church buildings are often held in higher regard as heritage items by the local community than the churches themselves.

Indigenous self-help housing

One area of social housing that has been intractable has been that of indigenous housing. A key lack has been agency for the indigenous themselves. This problem is greater than can be canvassed here, except to outline a recent project that had great traction, if not funding. Working with the

Wunan Trust and people in Kununurra, a program was developed to build a factory to produce steel frames (floor, wall and roof) for houses that could be assembled to any design. The infrastructure was to be funded by the Federal Government and run by the local indigenous people, who would be trained in factory work, and in site assembly and maintenance.

The houses could be adapted to any site or program and would become a business supplying housing for indigenous and whites. Unfortunately, the funding was refused under the Building Better Regions Fund program, but the program remains to be activated at a future time.

Summary

The short, sad story is those who don't own a house now are unlikely to ever own one, renting from a private owner forever. For the lowest income 10% that option is not viable, and social housing is the only option, but federal and state governments have stepped away from public housing, and a new form of housing is needed, one that is funded and run by the community, for the community.

Notes on terminology

Dwelling refers to all forms of houses, including freestanding houses (x%), duplexes (x%), townhouses (x%), and all forms of flats/apartments (x%). *Dwelling* is widely used in statistical measurements and used here to describe all forms of housing.

Homes is used in populist literature, such as realty advertisements, sometimes taken to mean all forms of dwellings, but sometimes not. Hence *dwellings*, not *homes* or *house*.

Household is the occupants of a dwelling as a single economic entity. It may have several owners or none, be a family with dependents or none, couples, singles.

Families often taken to be the household, particularly politicly. *Families* are no longer the majority of households, with more than 50% of households singles and couples.

Townhouses are houses conjoined by party walls in a repetitive sequence, also called row houses.

Terraces are Victorian-era townhouses as they step in plan or down a street, a typical typology in Sydney and Melbourne.

Flats are dwellings above one other horizontally, for *rent*, often a pejorative for public housing.

Apartments are dwellings above one other horizontally, for *private ownership*, divided by *strata*.

Units is a common term for *flats* and *apartments* but is seen pejoratively.

Apartments here refers to all types of buildings and all forms of occupancy.

Note, in the USA *apartments* refers to rentals, *condominiums* to ownership.

Strata ownership started in 1961, in response to individually owned *apartments*, the earlier *Company title* for rental flats was too cumbersome for the lending banks.

Low rise apartments are 2–3 storeys, considered walkable without a lift, no sprinklers.

Medium rise apartments are 4–8 storeys, max 25 m to the top floor, single lifts and stairs and lower fire protection requirements.

High rise apartments are 9–20 storeys, requiring multiple lifts, added fire protection such as twin stairs with pressurisation and additional sprinkler requirements.

Super rise apartments are rarer, requiring additional structural considerations, and often without traditional balconies above 30–40 storeys given the wind pressures.

There are fewer than 10 super rise buildings of 70+ floors in Australia.

Public housing is any form of housing built or owned by the state and rented to low-income households.

Boarding house/Co-living are buildings with several small *units*, with one owner that are permanently *build-to rent*.

Social and affordable housing, superfluous usage for *social housing*, originally rental accommodation by anyone other than the state, now including *public housing* to avoid the latter term.

Community housing, social housing by Community Housing Provider (CHP) or the like.

Triple bottom line, consideration given to social, environmental and financial matters in a project.

Build to rent, any building that is intended to be held by one entity, and rented in perpetuity, or for a fixed term.

SEPP, State Environmental Policy, particularly the *Housing SEPP*, formerly the *Affordable Housing SEPP*.

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A Western Sydney activist's presentation

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Western Sydney has many contradictions bound up in its vast area and the incredible diversity of people who inhabit it. The issue that often unites us is the unholy trinity of housing and infrastructure and environmentalism, and how it plays out in Western Sydney. There is a perception that the people who are activists and environmentalists don't live in Western Sydney. Rightly or wrongly — I'm not game enough to say — there are significant pockets of progressive politics in inner city Sydney. And often that is where the stereotype of the latte-sipping environmentalist emerges. A good or bad thing, again not really my place to say. It does often disregard the large communities that don't live in those areas but who do care about policies and politics of environmentalism, to say nothing of people who live in regional and rural areas.

The only problem is, people from Western Sydney often don't speak about it in terms of "environmentalism," but they might talk about the lack of green space and mature trees, the sticky issue of growth corridors and the infrastructure that needs to operate in order to operate.

Because built into these discussions are environmentalism — the green space and lack of mature trees are result of decades of policies that focused on the growth of housing and the desire to leverage ownership of property as a mark of "making it." Because one of those contradictions is that often there is no form of security more relevant to a significant proportion of its population than the ownership of house(s), especially if your family comes from disenfranchised or vulnerable communities.

The fact that the sticky question of growth corridors — places where new housing is now emerging — is the result of an understanding that there needs to be continuous sprawl. And this sprawl encourages the destruction of diverse habitats, and if there is some community intervention, only small percentages of the original ecosystems. Thus, the problem of being an environmentalist in a world that focuses on the necessity of human security (an important thing) with the necessity of preserving important ecosystems. Environmentalism in this context is a preserve of those people who already have sufficient resources — traditionally those who come from the inner city and don't have to come up against these sticky issues on the ground because the area they live in has been developed almost from the beginning of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

This doesn't reflect the entirety of the Western Suburbs: even a cursory glance at the concerns of Western Sydney shows that the number of people who consider themselves environmentalists is growing. It is routinely one of the most common issues that resonates with large sectors of the population in nationwide polls and discussions, because Western Sydney often has to deal with the brunt of climate change through higher temperatures. The majority working-class populations are effectively considered pawns in ever-changing shifts in climate. This trend is replicated in regional and rural communities.

One way that government support for adapting and building resilience to this is through the provision of useful public transport that works. Currently public transport in Western Sydney is patchy, often marked by a lack of availability, or coverage which reduces its usefulness. The removal of services after certain times means that some working-class people are reduced to walking for kilometres or going home early on a night when they could be having fun. Reducing energy usage of private vehicles is a relatively effective way to demonstrate their commitment to adaptation, both current and future populations. However, the sticky issues of housing sprawl and lower density mean that governments often don't think that is "feasible" and the costs are blown out often due to beneficial deals with corporate partners to build this infrastructure.

The experiences of both others — and me — help make them the starting point for these observations. When I talk about working-class people walking because of a lack of public transport, it is because I often must walk home four kilometres from the station because there is no option other than ride sharing after midnight. It is my reality that I have had to move around before returning to my parents' small three-bedroom house because there is no security in housing, and that is replicated across every age bracket, and makes me more sympathetic to the concept that housing is assured with security of home ownership.

My engagement as an activist is marked by the need to understand these issues, and in some way the wider observations I have made are because I have engaged with people across a large swathe of communities. Realising that my concerns are reflected across a diversity of people reinforces my activism and participation across a range of environments, including the Royal Society of NSW, where I was invited to speak about some of these challenges.

The reality is that my invitation to speak and produce this article is good but it is rather useless without further action that continues to advocate for a fairer and more equitable approach to the root causes in my community — namely the destruction of ecosystems in order to house working-class people, and the lack of effective infrastructure, despite the colossal economic, social and cultural benefits they provide to NSW and Australia.

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Session III: Natural and Built Environment

Discussion and Questions

Julianne Schultz: David, I was interested in your response to Angelica because the imaginaries that you're engaging with your communities and then tried to pull back into a policy — or rather a legislative framework — seem to me that there's a connection there, which is quite interesting.

David Schlosberg: That's exactly it. There's the creativity, there's the energy, there's the drive, there are the ideas, and they're grounded. To hear that kind of frustration in young people — that they're not heard, they're ignored, they're being preached to — this has been repeated again and again. This is the problem of not actually engaging in communities that are disadvantaged communities or vulnerable communities. These are communities that are made disadvantaged and communities who are made vulnerable. There are actions there. That kind of disempowering language and action is one way that that's illustrated. Thanks for the work, is what I'd say.

Tone Wheeler: Moving back with your parents is a problem because of the way in which we've run our society for the last 100 years: on the basis that the moment you become independent, you leave home. Whereas a very large number of the people who've settled this country: the one third of migrants are used to what we would now call, in academic jargon, multi-family homes. You have grandparents, parents, and children. The idea the grandparents are looking after children while the couples are working, we're adopting it in this country because it's now so hard to make the money that both parents have to work. Problem is we are not designing houses to make this possible. One of the programs that one of my colleagues is working on is a way of converting what are called mansions into multiple flats. You take a house which is designed essentially for children at a very young age so that they're open-plan and you make it so that it is comfortable for you, your partner, whoever it is, children, whatever, can live in the one house. And it's passed on from family to family. It's a design change for social need.

Leyland Fisher: Leyland Fisher from Oxford. There's an elephant in the room and it was a wonderful session and people started to point to the elephant. Louise pointed to it when she started to talk about the need for the big-picture view. David certainly referred to it when he talked about adaptive strategies and converging multiple threats, but it's something that we're not really facing up to: the consequences. We talk a lot about, say, global warming, sometimes about the refugee crisis, sometimes about income disparity. The World Economic Forum put out a report listing 21 major global threats,[1] and all of them are connected to all of the others. Until we start dealing with that network as a whole, we're in real trouble. I don't want to go on, but this is called a "complex adaptive network." One of the features of a complex adaptive network is it can suddenly change without warning. You can get the crash you had with the network of banks. You can

1 World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2023*, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf

get all sorts of sudden changes, which you have to be ready for. There's only one way of governance that lets you handle that. That's the way of governance which is flexible and fast.[2] That doesn't work with any of our current systems where a government is based on dogma of the left or the right or whatever. They're based on a set of rules and things have to fit. How do we deal with this need for flexibility and for sudden change, covering of a sudden change?

Louise Adams: Yes. It's a complex question. I think you're absolutely right. The bigger picture — and that's why I made the comment about in Australia, certainly in the past, we're starting to see a bit of it now, — but the lack of government leadership in what this journey looks like, because we need to bring all these different pictures together. If we do leave it up to private businesses — and there's some credit in those private businesses doing what they're doing, but they will do it down their individual lens and in the silo? — they may do it with good intent, but the unintended consequences — because they're doing it for what's good for their business — will flow through. Somebody earlier spoke about system thinking, and I think we are going to see more and more system-thinking approaches put to some of this, because I don't see any other way that you can break through the complexity of it and get action.

I do think the complexity in part is what leads to the experience that we heard in the last panel, which is 55 different inquiries with 9,000 different actions and not really anything moving forward. You get that "plandemic" that was referenced. I think there is a role to play in systems thinking and to start to see that play out more. But I can't see how we can take these steps forward without a very clear overarching narrative at a government level. We could talk all night about the complexities of how that trickles down through the federal state and local governments.

David Schlosberg: I think the other way of responding to that is by talking about complex systems and something like collapse or an emergency — just look at the floods, look at the fires, and then look at the community response to that. The Governor talked about an Aboriginal woman saying she knows where people are, knows what their needs are. There are folks in communities who completely understand those complex systems, and those are the folks who are organising spontaneously in the midst of disasters, in the midst of flooding, in the midst of fires, to save each other, to save animals, to support communities, and to clean up and to rebuild and all of those things. That complex knowledge is there. What I was talking about before and what adaptation is looking for is just a recognition of the validity of that knowledge. The recognition that that complex knowledge and response to emergency is already there, if we just pay attention.

Questioner 1: You're talking about response. What we're talking about is doing something before the event. That's a very different matter.

David Schlosberg: This is another thing that we're working on now, a number of people are. Looking at the way that communities

2 See Len Fisher and Anders Sandberg (1922). A safe governance space for humanity: necessary conditions for the governance of Global Catastrophic Risks. *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 155: 48–71. https://royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/journal/155-1-FisherSandberg.pdf [Ed.]

self-organised in response to disasters so that we can formalise that knowledge so that we can incorporate that knowledge and risk reduction going forward. The problem with a lot of those events is that, after they're over, nobody talks to residents, nobody tries to get an understanding. But when we go in and do focus groups after disasters, the first thing people say is, "I'm so glad you're here. I'm so glad someone is listening to us. Nobody has come to us and asked us about our experience." So, yes, there is the potential of using that system knowledge to lower risk going forward. It's just a matter of paying attention to it.

Tone Wheeler: I take the point that we've reached 1.5 degrees C already and we're heading for 2.5 and it's not going backwards. I've got very little confidence that the way the world is at the moment. I've written about the way in which we try and address those threats by having a ready reaction to them. One of the things is that what you're describing in a way — the cynic in me would say — is "Well, the Rural Fire Service and the SES and so on are volunteers. It's a form of philanthropy." It should be governments funding it and funding it properly so that you don't have to beg and have a cake stall in order to get another rural fire engine. We're going to see more fires, we're going to see more floods, we're going to see more cyclones, more damage being done, and we're going to call on volunteers to fix it up? I don't deny the knowledge. I just think the knowledge should be codified, paid for by the government because it is a way of maintaining communities. Otherwise, the communities like Lismore are going to eventually get exhausted by it. I think you have to address the effects of climate change. Can I ask you a question? In reference to the very, very good thing that was asked, most of your activities: are they to do with climate change or the effects of climate change?

Angelica Kross: We've been very reactive. It has been there's an amount of climate change. We can see it through these crises. What are we doing now to mitigate and adapt? We put our heads together and we chat to people and we say, "Well, this is potentially an option." I think our reactive work in a community is usually reactive because we're often not given the resources to start doing it before it happens.

Questioner 2: Hi. I work in Youth Mental Health activism and, Angelica, I really resonated with a lot of your opinions that you said about having youth voices and also on the ground voices at the forefront. Given the crowd here, I was just wondering what you think is the best way for institutions and for the government to be working with young people and people on the ground with lived experience when looking at environmental issues or just societal issues in general.

Angelica Kross: It's a hard answer, but I think I did talk a little bit about how it's ground-up. It's a flat structure where grassroots activists are treated with respect in the rooms and they're invited to the table. Often, they aren't, often just an academic speaks for the grassroots activists. I really appreciate the Royal Society for bringing me to the table because that represents a great change. Even though I'm not trained in a tertiary sense, I'm a teaching student, guys. Really not any way related to climate or infrastructure. I think the way that institutions should is to invite them to the table and they should — when they say something — write it down. Look, it seems really boring. I haven't got much. Really, it's a hard question.

Questioner 3: This is also a question for you, Angelica, and it follows on from that. Thank you for being a community activist first of all. But, also, I just wonder what, as a young person, are the top three things that really worry you and your friends? There's obviously climate change, but I'm interested, I guess in the other two.

Angelica Kross: The gentleman next to me has just laughed. Can you do it for three? I'm like, "I think it's inequality. It's vastly just inequality." We've talked about how economic and health and Indigenous and climate are all built into qualifiers of inequality, right? It means sometimes that housing, the right for your property not to increase might be a thing. You buy a house and that's it. You live in it. There's a shelter, it's a human right, it's yours, potentially. You lease essentially to our First Nations and then you don't have a right for your property to increase. Right? That drastically changes the way that we use policy to incentivise. It's also like writing legislation so that rental properties have to have solar panels, because rental properties don't. A person who owns a house can make changes and modifications to make it more climate- and environmentally-sustainable, but a renter doesn't have that choice. They can't install something because then it's the rental property's installation. It's changing legislation to make that a standard. I don't know, I'm not a lawyer. I don't want to be a lawyer, either.

Questioner 4: Tone, I was just wondering, on the question of inequalities — the have and have nots — that's extending quite large in society from a younger generation to the older generation. I suppose this is something that links with Louise, we have a shortage of workers in this country, and we have a million properties on Airbnb or stays for short-term rental. We have a crisis that the number of homeless people is rising, flooding across the east coast. If we are going to bring in more people that need to be developed for our next generation of decarbonisation — the engineers and workforce — where are we going to house these people? And how are we going to help the Australians inside the country who don't have shelter? How do we address this complex system where we want to maximise the opportunity of economic prosperity, but that prosperity needs to trickle down to people like Angela who can participate in all aspects of and fabrics of society? Because I think that's an important question that policy setting is not giving representation effectively to make sure that the different voices are heard in order to address what would be a good outcome for all Australians.

Tone Wheeler: Thank you for that. I think the biggest issue that threatens Australia and the world at the moment is climate change. But the way in which it's felt is unequal and it exacerbates inequality. It's really interesting that Angelica's answer to that question diverted to housing. Because I used to think that it was just because I'm an urban designer and architect that I'm obsessed about housing and that that's where the inequality is, and I see it. But most of what I heard today actually reinforces my idea that I'm right. The biggest source of inequality is in housing, because, if you don't have safe shelter, it affects your health, it affects your mental health, it affects your relationships with your community. Therefore, I think housing should have been a major focus in the budget rather than a series of what I described in my article as "Morrison on steroids."

You can see that I'm not without some partisan belief in this. You read it, the three page, read it. It's terrible and it gives me no hope. The answer to your question, I think, is forget the federal government, they have no idea. State governments do. West Australia has got fantastic programs for homelessness. They have a minister for homelessness in the title. I think that's important. Queensland and Victoria have much, much better programs for social housing, but I think the answer to your question is a million small developments. What we were looking for was the grand plant. The Frenchman Jack Lang, whom I referred to earlier on, was the inventor of the *Grands Travaux*, The Great Works. I don't think it's that anymore. I think every house that possibly could, should have what's colloquially called a "granny flat" — I'd rather call it a garden studio. But every house gets one. What happened after the First World War and then after Second World War is that bed-and-breakfasts were very common, and the widows who still owned the house would subdivide the house into a boarding house.

I don't think that's such a bad thing. I think the aspiration that you actually own your own house on a big piece of land will give way to a million small developments happening throughout Sydney. We have got big blocks of land, some of them with very small houses. You put a different house and you put a granny flat on it. If you did do that it undermines the economy of there only being one kind of house to rent. Then you can start to look at the way in which you can buy things, which you can't currently buy. You can't buy anything less than 50 square metres in New South Wales as a home. But we are making lots of — thank you, Frank, for calling them — boarding houses. We are making boarding houses with small rooms in them, which are awful.

The most popular investment at the moment in my business is with clients wanting to build boarding houses. Why? Because it's a form of diversity of housing. I don't think there's one big fix. I think there's four or five. I think there's changing what you have on the suburban blocks of land, I think it's changing what you build in the cities. I think it's changing rental agreements, but overall, I think its community groups getting in there and doing things that really shake it up. That's why I think the Faith Housing Alliance[3] is really interesting.

Louise Adams: I think I'll leave Tone to talk about the housing. If we talk about where the workers are coming from: typically, when we bring them in from overseas, we tend to bring in skilled workers who don't necessarily have those issues. But when I talk about the skills shortages, I do think there's a lot of work to do within inside Australia already. We've got a lot of skilled workers sitting on the bench, a lot of migrants who have qualifications who can't access work. We need to ensure that there are pathways to find out who they are and get them gainfully employed in this movement, in this pipeline of work that we've got. There's a lot of women who have qualifications who left to have children and who can't, again, re-enter: how do we get them back in?

I also think that we need to go almost a step back in time and go back to apprenticeships and those sorts of models where we can give people on-the-job training to enter

3 https://fha.org.au

the professions and start to really tap into communities. That gives us a pathway to reach into those communities where there is that generational underemployment, where if, as a professional services organisation, I go to them and say, "Go to university. There's a gap that you've already created there, but if you can invest some time, it's a substantive investment." The government should put some money into this to help organisations create those apprenticeship models and similar pathways to build up those where businesses can engage with those communities to build up the skill sets and get them into employment. There's plenty of capacity yet to tap within Australia. But, as I said, there are numerous different levers that we have to pull for that problem.

Judith Wheeldon: I'm Judith Wheeldon, vice president of the Royal Society of New South Wales. I'm an educator. I've taken extreme interest in everything that's been said today. Right now it's at a very interesting point where the rubber meets the road, what do we do about it? I'd like to just start by remembering what Tone has just told us about all these many, many little projects, because it sounds remarkably like being community activists with each one taking responsibility. I'd like to say to Angelica, you should be very proud to be a community activist. You stand in big shoes. Barack Obama started there and was very proud of it. If we're now being challenged to all be community activists, I think we need to think about what that means.

I'd like to point out that we have seen some sign of that in Bernie Shakeshaft, for example, with his BackTrack, where he just set off and did something, took personal responsibility and did it. But Angelica has told us — and I am coming to a question — that what she wants is for people to be treated as if they are smart people. That really is the key to the whole show. I think that people should be treated with respect, treated as if they're smart, because, when that happens, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy and it's the basis of all education. Education is what we really need in order to change society and in order to change the whole political system. I promised you a question. I'd just like to hear more about what panel members feel it means to be an activist and how that can be effective overall in actually getting something done and changing society.

Angelica Kross: It comes down to a concept, a question of democracy, right? I often say we don't *have* a democracy, we *do* a democracy, we *do* it. It's an active thing that we do all the time. It's about turning up to boring meetings. It's about writing down things. It's about listening to different people who you don't agree with and also electing people, but then getting rid of them if they do not respect your behaviour. It's about being active and also the outcomes that you might not like. You come to a conclusion that being a community activist is actually reminding yourself that democracy is an action word and it's uncomfortable. That's it.

Tone Wheeler: Great question. My sense of my professional life is that I am in contact with all those smaller groups. My bigger activist cap would be to try and get some way in which you can convince the Federal Government to change negative gearing, so it applies to your own personal house, not your investments. I've been lobbying for that and I've worn out paths trying to do that because that, along with capital gains tax, that's what happens in the United States. It would radically transform how we see our

housing that we put regard into your own house and not into property development. I'd have a path, I'm not going to declare where it is, but I think there is a very green path.

David Schlosberg: This question of respect is absolutely key. One of the things in the history of environmental activism and environmental movements is that governments and corporations are afraid to talk to activists because they're afraid of what they're going to hear. They think by ignoring them, they'll just go away. And, of course, they don't go away, they make bigger trouble, which is great, right? But there's plenty of evidence that — and the Environmental Justice Movement is a good example of this — folks just want to be heard and respected, right? If you hear and respect people, you may actually be able to negotiate with them. There are numerous more examples of that. I think that idea of respect for people's knowledge and input is key.

Louise Adams: As a person from big corporate here — I might couch it in that space because I think it needs to — there's a lot that corporates could do in this. I think for me it is about being active, which is the opposite of being passive. I sat down recently with our Australian Leadership Team, and we went back to the early 1900s and we picked out some of the top 10 things that happened in the world in the early 1900s. We had a reflection of what we thought about what happened. It's amazing when you do that, how much you sit there and you go, "How did society tolerate that happening? How did the world let that happen? How did political leaders, how did leaders let this go on?" Some of it you think's good, but there's a whole lot of it that you sort of sit there in hindsight and say, how was that tolerated?

We challenged ourselves to go forward 100 years and reflect on the legacy we think we are leaving through the lens of what our future generations might think of us. I think when you do that and you look at things like climate inaction and you look at things like inequality that we've discussed today, you don't necessarily paint yourself a pretty picture of what our future generations might think of us as leaders. That's a really powerful way to then get up and look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Right, it is time to get more active rather than passive."

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Session IV: Education

Reshaping Australian education

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Australia faces a significant problem. It relates to how the concept of a "Knowledge Nation" has permeated our popular imagination, in a manner which has tended to distort our perspective on educational success.

The challenge goes beyond the way in which we teach students at our schools, TAFEs and universities. We have come to mistake what knowledge means or how it relates to contemporary society. Traditionally, the concept implies both theoretical and practical understanding of how to access and interpret information and mastery of skills. It can be gained through formal education, a structured apprenticeship or experience gained from life. That's why people of my generation used to talk of wisdom being gained through the "school of hard knocks." We extolled "common sense."

The world is changing. Today, knowledge is often narrowly perceived in terms of an academic prowess that prepares those students who are most able scholastically with the capacity to forge professional or managerial careers. Whilst preparing government reports (*Looking to the Future*, 2020 and *In the Same Sentence*, 2021) I talked at length to groups of senior secondary students. I was disturbed by how many of them associated knowledge acquisition exclusively with the half of them who aspired to higher education.

This unconscious bias is subverting educational purpose. The ATAR is no more than a university ranking tool, designed for administrative convenience. Yet too often it has been portrayed as the dominant measure of school success, not just by teachers and their pupils, but even more so by parents. It privileges academic pathways. Indeed, the ATAR score is often seen as more indicative of educational prowess than the Higher School Certificate. Unlike ATAR, the HSC can include measures of student performance in a wide range of subjects that are vocationally oriented. Unfortunately, the ATAR score, more narrowly calculated, has come to define success in the mastery of knowledge at school.

Such simplistic perceptions of educational achievement harm the decision-making of young Australians. They undermine the foundations of a "fair go" society in which all contributions to the labour market are valued. They fail to recognise the diversity of skills and attributes that are necessary to lift Australia's productivity and sustain economic growth.

We need to counter these narrow assumptions in four ways.

First, we need to convey to students from an early age that the most important educational motive is to allow them to live richer lives as adults — whether it's attending "Hamlet" or stripping down a Harley

1 Peter Shergold AC FRSN FASSA was for 5 years Secretary of the Department of Prime Mininster and Cabinet.

Davidson. That is the intrinsic value of education. We must not lose sight of it.

Second, we need to recognise that, whilst education has an instrumentalist purpose, it is broader than generally understood. I am fully persuaded that we need to prepare people for an uncertain future in which the knowledge required in the paid workforce is likely to change rapidly. It's now more likely to be professional and administrative skills that are progressively eroded by cognitive technologies, digital communication, robotic processing and artificial intelligence — unlike 50 years ago, when it was predominantly trade and factory skills that were destroyed by automation. We need to emphasise in our teaching the virtue of being adaptable to change.

But there's an equally profound utilitarian goal of education. In a world in which the "end of history" now seems a distant memory of failed hopes — and in which the liberal values of individual and collective freedom are under increasing attack from authoritarianism, autocracy, populism and xenophobic nationalism — we need to instil in our young people the significance of civic participation and active citizenship. The future of democratic governance depends on it.

For both of these reasons, as well as for personal fulfillment, we need our educational system to inculcate the desire to keep on learning. In preparing young Australians for adulthood, we need to ensure that they are confident enough to continuously acquire new skills and change employment direction during their long working lives. That means that our pervasive rhetoric of "life-long learning" needs to be accompanied by the public provision of life-long career advice. The ever-present danger is that we will have a growing body of workers whose relationship to the labour market becomes casualised and precarious.

Third, we need to forsake an increasingly outmoded demarcation between higher and vocational education. It is an artificial distinction presented to students at secondary school. The fact is that an increasing number of students now enter higher-education institutions with vocational intent. Moreover, an increasing number of pathways now allow them to move relatively easily between modes of education when they leave school. Access to a growing array of micro-credentials is weakening the rigidities of the Australian Qualifications Framework. That's a good thing.

We should stop suggesting to school students that they have to choose between demarcated "dual" sectors — between higher or vocational education, between academic study or skills development, between university or TAFE. Rather, we need to re-imagine a single-sector tertiary education which fully integrates theoretical and practical perspectives.

That is the thinking behind the decision to pilot new Institutes of Advanced Technology in NSW. Two have already been established: one in digital technology at Meadowbank, one in modern construction at Penrith. The goal is to provide students with the opportunities to progressively stack credentials in the same area of study, by undertaking industry-focused tertiary education that incorporates workplace learning … but, of course, only for those students who are attracted to such a course of study.

Finally, we need to help young people develop the underlying life skills that they require for their future employment, civil engagement, and purposeful lives. Without wishing to be overly prescriptive, these

include the ability to think through and solve problems, to plan ahead, to communicate clearly (and with civility), to work collaboratively, to be creative and to make decisions ethically.

Young people need to be taught to recognise their skills and behaviours. Equally important, they need to be imbued with a sense of agency and control, so that they can fully appreciate the extent to which they are developing these attributes — not just those they learn in the school classroom, sports field, workshop, or auditorium, but also those they acquire volunteering for the Red Cross, advocating for the WWF or working shifts at Hungry Jacks.

Conclusion

If we can instil that broader sense of learning, then we will be able to stop seeing educational inequities simply through the lens of social disadvantage. By taking a strengths-based approach to learning, we can help young people to recognise the skills that they have acquired in overcoming challenges. The Aboriginal boy in remote Australia who takes time out to learn men's business; the young migrant girl who has to interpret for her non-English-speaking mum at the doctor's surgery; the child of a low-income family, forced to learn online, working at the kitchen table during pandemic — these experiences of anxiety or adversity, with the help of teachers and mentors, can be recognised as an opportunity to display the same underlying schools-based skills that they acquire in studying English or Maths.

This is the underlying purpose of the Learning Profiles being trialled in NSW. They provide an opportunity to convey the powerful message that paths to knowledge are varied; that, if one has *learned to learn*, there will be plenty of opportunities to enhance education and skills development throughout life; and that vocational choice should reflect personal interest and ability, not just misplaced assumptions of social status.

We require an education system that recognises that knowledge can be acquired in many ways, for many purposes, for many years. We need to design our structures so that students recognise that skills of the head need to be complemented by skills of the heart and of the hand. Young Australians should be assured that the learning paths that they take are ones that should reflect their personal choices throughout their lives and not be limited by unwarranted, school-driven structures that privilege academic forms of education.

Australian education needs to be reshaped.

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Achieving equity in education is contingent on clearly defining it

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Introduction

When I arrived in Australia four years ago from Finland, I was inspired by this question: How can we make Australian school education more equitable? At the time of my arrival, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and several domestic reviews and research had pointed out the poor state of equity of Australian education. It was not that policies and strategies would have been blind to see these inequalities that had jeopardised learning and opportunities for better lives of millions young Australians. It was more about lack of clarity of what equity in education means, why it matters for the nation, and who should be held accountable for improving equity.

One of the first questions I had in mind was this: What do Australian adults think about educational equity? Do they think our school education is fair for all students? Is school education inclusive in a sense that it would offer opportunities to succeed to all kinds of learners? What does equity in education mean? Do they care about this issue at all?

Academics normally think about systematic ways to answers basic questions like those above. So did we. A national survey[1] that included more than 2,000 NSW adults explored people's beliefs and attitudes about educational equity. The results were unexpected, at least to me. By using a scale from 1 to 10, the importance of achieving educational equity in Australia was rated 9, on average. These same people rated the NSW school systems a 6.3 on a 10-point scale evaluating their performance on educational equity. Nine of ten respondents thought equity should be either a single or dual priority in Australian education. They expected equity and excellence from school policymakers.

My takeaway was that NSW parents that constituted most of our survey respondents want more equitable education in Australia. Many of them see it as a moral imperative, some even as a human rights issue. The survey also showed that people have a wide range of beliefs regarding what equity is all about. Often educational equity was seen as a synonym of equality of educational opportunity. Sometimes it meant fairness in education outcomes. People clearly have a wide range of meanings to explain what equity in education is about.

Equity in education policies

"I'll guarantee, if you walk into any pet shop in Australia, the resident galah will be talking about educational equity." This expectation is borrowed and adapted to this context from former Prime Minister Paul Keating who pointed out the fashionable

1 https://www.gie.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/Equity%20Paper%20-%20Long%20Version%20Final%20V13.pdf

role that microeconomics had in public debates in the 1990s.

Equity in education has become a key national goal for schooling during the past decade or so. The OECD[2] coordinates the well-known PISA survey, and advises governments to give equity similar high priority in education policies as they give to excellence. Equity is also one of the main goals in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (AGDE 2020). "Our vision is for a world-class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be," the Alice Springs Declaration states, "no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face." The first goal of the declaration is to promote excellence and equity.

In short, it is becoming clear that a world-class education system is hard to achieve without smarter investments in equity of education. It is difficult to think of a stronger commitment to making education fairer and more inclusive than the promise made to all Australian children by every minister of education in this country.

Australia is by no means a forerunner in having equity at the centre of national education policies. Around the world, equity is frequently mentioned in national education policies, often by assuming that strengthening equity will contribute to better performing education systems in general. All Nordic countries have designed their education policies on the basic values of equality, fairness, and inclusion. Scotland, Wales, Ireland, New Zealand, many Canadian provinces, and some US states (especially California) have made significant progress recently in addressing inequalities in school education through new policies and legislations.

But equity remains a complicated and multifaceted concept. Therefore, it has not been clearly defined in education policy documents, either elsewhere or here in Australia. This has resulted in different interpretations, inadequate targets, inappropriate monitoring, and the sad fact that at the end of the day no one is held responsible for increasing inequities in our education systems. If we want to move away from repeating the fashionable policy rhetoric aiming at "excellence and equity" and start to build more equitable and sustainable education for all our children, we need a commonly agreed definition for "equity in education."

Australia has a long and proud tradition of egalitarianism. The idea of "a fair go for all" is part of the national ethos. It is the foundation for a whole raft of social policies, including education, to support the less privileged in society. As our survey showed, most of us want education to be equitable. It is prominent in successive statements of the national goals of schooling, in major education policy documents, and in public discussion of education policy and funding. Education ministers and their officials around the country espouse equity as a policy priority in stronger ways than before.

Equity remains undefined

However, equity in education is an elusive concept. It is interpreted in public policies and reviews in a variety of ways. Fairness, inclusion, social justice, non-discrimination, and equal opportunity are examples of terms used variously in the context of equity.

2 https://www.oecd.org/education/equity-in-education-9789264073234-en.htm

Despite being laudable principles, they do not provide an operational guide for what equity means for the practice of education policy, how it is assessed, and how progress in improving equity can be measured.

For example, take the goal of equality of educational opportunity. It has widespread community support for good reason as it expresses the desire for a more egalitarian education system. It is adopted in the Commitment to Action of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration. (AGDE 2020) However, equality of educational opportunity is indeterminate as it is difficult to compare education opportunities across individuals or social groups, unlike height, income, or age. This difficulty has resulted in a range of interpretations, most notably equal access to education, equal instruction for all students, equal resources for all students, and equal outcomes for all students — none of which provides effective guidance to education policy development and school funding.

Other national public policy documents also fail to clearly define equity. The National School Reform Agreement,[3] currently being reviewed by the Productivity Commission, sets the objective that Australian schooling provides a high quality and equitable education for all students. The Productivity Commission's Interim Review (APC 2022) of the current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) didn't define what is an equitable education for every child in Australia. The Final Review (APC 2023a) of the NSRA provides much more comprehensive definition for equity in education and how it could be included in new education policies and reforms.

It is important to untangle this elusiveness in the next National School Reform Agreements. Achieving more equitable education should start by making clear what educational equity means.

First, if we don't clearly define what we are trying to achieve, no path will take us there. Instead, we continue to implement new education reforms at the same time as many students are denied an adequate education, and achievement gaps between privileged and less privileged students continue to grow.

Second, the lack of a clear goal allows governments to avoid accountability and to scapegoat schools, teachers, and parents for the lack of progress in improving learning for all. Just recall the slandering of public school teachers (Karp 2022) by the former Commonwealth Acting Minister for Education, Stuart Robert, and the abominable insult of low socio-economic status parents by former NSW Minister, Pru Goward (Anon 2021).

Third, it also allows governments of all kinds to misdirect large funding increases to the more privileged private schools and deny adequate funding for most of the low socio-economic status, Indigenous, remote area, and disability students who attend public schools. This has been the story of government funding policies for decades. Absence of a clear equity goal has been a contributing factor to that inconvenient truth. It has thereby also contributed to the failure to address the large achievement gaps between rich and poor.

Clearly, there is a pressing need to clarify what we mean by equity in education. We need to answer the following three ques-

3 https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/national-school-reform-agreement

tions: What is equity in education? Why does equity in education matter for all of us? How can we monitor the progress in equitable education?

What is equity in education?

It is easy to criticise the state of the current situation; it is much harder to suggest improvements. Recently my colleague Trevor Cobbold, an economist who serves as a National Convenor of Save Our Schools, and I have devised a unique definition of equity in education that resolves the current lack of clarity as well as provide a way to measure progress on equity.

We have proposed a dual equity objective focussed on education outcomes: Individual and Social (Sahlberg & Cobbold 2021). It has regard for both the minimum levels of achievement expected for all students and the education achievements of students from different social groups. Equity in education means that:

- All children achieve a minimum standard of education that enables them to fully participate in adult society in ways of their choosing;
- Children from different social groups achieve a similar level and range of outcomes.

We call the first objective an *adequate* education. This means that all students should achieve at least a minimum level of education that gives them the capacity to function as independent adults and to participate effectively in society. It also means that all children have the right to high quality education that equips them with the knowledge, understandings, and skills to create their own meaning in the world, to choose their own path in society as adults and to take an active part in shaping the development of society. This is a matter of human right and justice for all individuals. Today, this requires all children to at least complete Year 12 or its equivalent.

However, even if all students achieved the minimum education threshold (i.e., 12 years of school education, or national minimum standard in literacy and numeracy) it would not be enough to achieve full equity. Average outcomes of students from high socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds could still be much higher than minority and low SES students — for example, even if all students in the latter groups achieved the minimum standard. Minority and low-SES students could be clustered just above the minimum standard while high-SES students are clustered well above the standard. Student outcomes would still not be free of differences arising from different backgrounds and outcomes for minority and low-SES students would not necessarily match the outcomes of other students.

The second objective is necessary to achieve better equity in education. We call this objective *social equity*. It means equality of outcomes by gender, class, race, ethnicity, and domicile. These groups of students should achieve similar average outcomes and a similar range of outcomes above the minimum standard as shown in Figure 1.

It is not reasonable or realistic to expect that education policy should aim to ensure that all children achieve the same education outcomes because, as individuals, they have a range of abilities and talents which lead to different choices in schooling. However, it is reasonable to expect that these different abilities and talents are distributed similarly across different social, ethnic and gender groups in society.

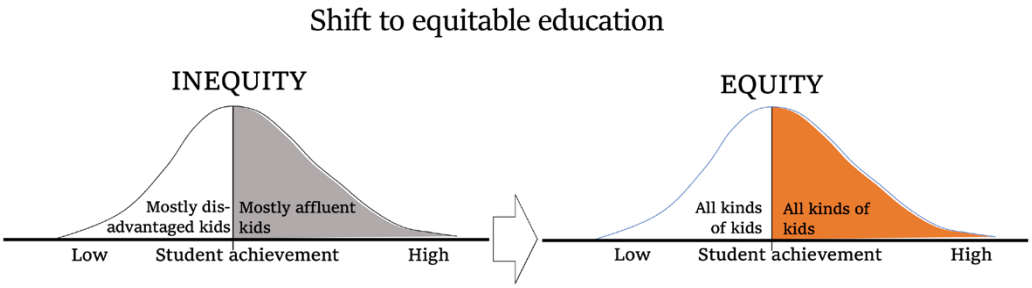

Figure 1. Towards social equity of education outcomes

There is no reason to consider, for example, that some groups of students are innately less intelligent or capable of learning than their peers from well-off privileged families. Females are not innately less intelligent than males, Indigenous students are capable of succeeding in school as well as white students, and low-SES students are not innately worse students than high-SES students. Therefore, we should expect that students in different social, cultural, and socioeconomic groups all achieve similar education outcomes as do affluent students.

Why does equity in education matter for all of us?

Some think that equity is only about those who have less, or need special support to succeed. Consequently, equity is seen as something that only benefits some at the expense of the rest. But it is wrong to believe that.

Educators and economists alike know that equity in education matters for us all. It not only matters for individual lives or for communities, but it also benefits the economy and strengthens our democratic system. It is a widely accepted premise that equity in education is fundamental to an egalitarian, democratic nation. It is therefore in society's deep interest to ensure that all children receive an adequate education. Every time children do not achieve adequate education, individual harm is done and social waste is incurred. This means that human talents that could contribute to society are not recognised or fostered.

By failing to recognise and develop those talents through an adequate education, society incurs lost opportunities for its own advancement and human development that, in turn, are often associated with growing inequalities in societies. These costs include higher youth unemployment, lower earnings, lower productivity and economic growth, higher health care and crime costs, reduced tax revenues, and higher welfare expenditure.

Social equity in education is fundamental to an egalitarian society, too. Large disparities in education outcomes mean that the social group into which individuals are born strongly affects their life opportunities and happiness. Large disparities in school outcomes according to different social backgrounds entrench inequality and discrimination in society. Students from more privileged backgrounds have greater access to higher incomes, higher status occupations and positions of wealth, influence, and power in society than do students from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

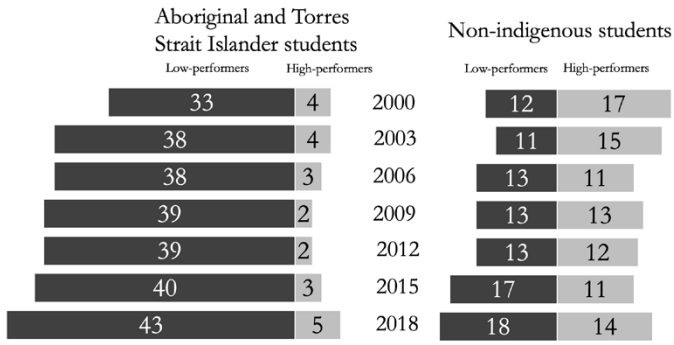

Figure 2. Percentage of low- and high-achieving 15-year-old students on the reading literacy proficiency PISA scale since 2000 (data source: Australian Council for Educational Research)

How can we monitor the progress in equitable education?

The definition of educational equity offered here provides a clear guide for monitoring progress towards achieving equity in Australian education. It requires more precise information about progress made towards adequate education and social equity simultaneously. The benchmark for educational equity is the achievement and attainment of the most successful social group of students. International and national test results together with Year 12 results show this benchmark is students from higher-SES families.

Now, Australia has an inequitable school system. This conclusion is based on both national and international data. Evidence from various sources suggest that we are currently failing to provide an adequate education for all, and that school outcomes by students' gender, class, race, ethnicity, and domicile vary greatly. In other words, we struggle with having social equity in education. According to the Report on Government Services (APC 2023b), only about three-quarters of the estimated Year 12 population complete Year 12 in 2020. Both the OECD's PISA and the NAPLAN results for 2022 (ACARA 2022) show very large achievement gaps of three to four years of learning between Year 9 high-SES students and low-SES and Indigenous students (Figure 2). The PISA 2018 results[4] showed that students from highest SES quartile were nearly three years ahead of students from the lowest SES quartile in reading, about four years ahead of Indigenous students and about three and a half years ahead of remote-area students. In many areas these achievement gaps have worsened rather than narrowed over time.

There is room to improve reporting on progress towards equity in education. As we pointed out in our submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry on the National School Reform Agreement (Sahlberg & Cobbold 2022), there are significant gaps in reporting on outcomes by equity group. For example, government reporting on targets set in the Agreement are deficient in reporting outcomes for all equity groups. Reporting of Year 12 outcomes are similarly deficient. Similarly, data collected during NAPLAN tests about students' life circum-

4 https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Combined_Executive_Summaries_PISA_2018.pdf

stances including their family backgrounds is not rich enough to make more accurate conclusions about social equity. Data collections need to be upgraded to adequately assess the effectiveness of policy initiatives and progress in improving equity in education.

Defining equity is the first step to achieving it

Ten years ago the Gonski Report on school funding adopted the equity goal that "differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions" (AGDE 2011). Clearly defining equity is the first step towards achieving it. The definition of equity offered above gives operational effect to this principle. It provides the first step in achieving equity in education.

I believe that a dual goal of equity in education is eminently justifiable. It guarantees a threshold level of education for everyone and a fair or equitable distribution of the benefits of education for all social groups. It should be a key national goal of schooling. It would provide the framework for policy making and a clear measurable approach to assessing progress towards achieving equity in education.

No doubt these are challenging goals. Differential access to education blights a democratic society. There is no society of equals where members of a minority monopolise high-education outcomes by virtue of their wealth, position, or power in the society. In a democracy, education outcomes should not depend on students' family background and their parents, power, position, or wealth. The continuing absence of a clearer definition of educational equity means we will continue to make little, or no, progress in keeping the promise of high-quality school education for every Australian child.

The next step forward is to set equity and excellence in education as a national goal. The next National School Reform Agreement could offer to the states and territories a clear, practical definition of equity in education that would better guide education policy and school funding, and monitor progress in improving equity and quality of Australian education.

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Segregating students in NSW is exacerbating inequities and damaging achievement: We need to change the public discourse

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Introduction

When I arrived in NSW at the start of 2019 I was astonished by the depth of commitment to and acceptance of selective schooling and opportunity classes among academic colleagues across disciplines, teachers, and system personnel. I needed to look up the meaning of Opportunity Classes as it was not something I had heard of before in 40 years of working in education in Australia, but not in NSW. The name, opportunity class, is anachronistic, dating back to 1932. Education research has progressed enormously since then but without impact on the use of this term in NSW and the concept it embodies. When I questioned these things or wondered out loud that perhaps all students deserved opportunities I was met with horrified looks and exclamations such as, "Are you against aspiration?" Segregation as a way to meet the needs of higher ability/potential students appears to be engrained in the NSW education system and in the public imagination in NSW.

Experiences like this helped me to make sense of what I had observed before in interactions with mathematics teachers from across Australia in my role as President of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers and Mathematics, 2012–2014, and in facilitating consultations with teachers in preparation for the Australian Academy of Science's National Committee for the Mathematical Science's Decadal Plan for the Mathematical Sciences (2016–2025). Mathematics teachers seem more convinced of the need to segregate students according to their prior attainment than are teachers of other subjects, and teachers generally in NSW are more convinced than teachers in other Australian jurisdictions of the need for such streaming.[1] Many NSW mathematics teachers thus appear to believe that streaming is not only necessary for their subject, but that it needs to happen earlier and more stringently than their colleagues in other jurisdictions would consider reasonable. This belief is not confined to teachers of mathematics.

We will not be able to reduce segregation in meaningful ways without educating parents and the general public, without changing the public discourse around segregating students based on prior attainment or a selection test. In this paper I set out the problem of declining mathematics performance of students in Australia and particularly in NSW and briefly argue that equity is crucial to addressing the problem. I then discuss the impacts of streaming on low attainers and on high attainers, before discussing some ways in which streaming interacts with between school segregation. I focus on mathematics because it is my

1 Streaming is the within school practice of sorting students into classes based on their prior mathematics attainment.

primary area of expertise and because mathematics is frequently used as a proxy for general achievement (Beswick et al., 2019) and intelligence (Gutiérrez, 2017). In addition, mathematics achievement, more than achievement in any other school subject, is believed by teachers and students to be a consequence of innate ability (Jonsson et al., 2012). Such a belief makes logical grouping students according to ability and teaching to meet students' ability, rather than to enhance it.

Declining mathematics achievement of Australian students

The performance of Australian 15-year-olds in mathematical literacy[2] has been declining in the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment, PISA, since it was first measured in 2003. The decline has occurred across all school sectors.

In 2018 for the first time Australian students did not achieve above the OECD average for a regularly assessed domain. For the first time, the performance of Australian 15-year-olds in mathematical literacy was similar to, rather than above, the OECD average (Thomson et al., 2020). Australia performed the equivalent of more than 3½ years of schooling lower than the highest performing economy, (China, represented by four provinces: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang), and around 3 years lower than the highest performing country, Singapore (Thomson et al., 2020). In 2018, 54% of Australian students attained the National Proficient Standard, 22% were low performers and only 10% were high performers. In that year, a gender gap in favour of boys also re-emerged (Thomson et al., 2020).

Almost 30% of the variation in students' achievement in NSW is associated with between-school factors. This is higher than in other Australian jurisdictions, a difference that has been attributed to the relative prevalence of selective schools in NSW. Nevertheless, most variance in Australia's PISA results (~70%) is within-schools. That is, differences in achievement can mainly be attributed to differences located inside schools.

NAPLAN

Analysis by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority showed that for all NAPLAN domains (reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy) in 2021 Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students in NSW did as well as or better than their peers in other states and territories. There is a general pattern, however, of increasingly achieving similar rather than better results than other jurisdictions as students progress through school. By Year 9, for example, NSW students performed better in reading than the Northern Territory and similarly to all other jurisdictions. In numeracy NSW Year 9 students outperformed their peers in Queensland, Tasmania, and NT, and performed similarly to those in the ACT, Victoria, WA, and SA. This is in spite of the fact that NSW has arguably the most specified curriculum and syllabus documents, the most onerous processes for

2 For PISA the OECD defines mathematical literacy is as follows: "Mathematical literacy is an individual's capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics plays in the world, to make well-founded judgments and to use and engage with mathematics in ways that meet the needs of the individual's life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen." (OECD, 2003). The PISA 2003 assessment framework: Mathematics, reading, science and problem-solving knowledge and skills. https://www.oecd.org/education/school/programmeforinternationalstudentassessmentpisa/33707192.pdf

obtaining approval to teach, and the most demanding accreditation standards for initial teacher education programs, and for teachers of all Australian states and territories. It also has the greatest commitment to student segregation based on "ability" both between and within schools, and between and within school sectors — all measures aimed at achieving educational excellence, but clearly not doing so at statewide level.

Equity as the key to addressing the decline

Marks et al. (2006) showed that educational segregation, both between and within schools, mediates the relationship between SES and student achievement. It is only by lifting the long tail of attainment, without reducing attainment at the high end, that Australia will raise its overall achievement. That is, achieving educational equity is key to raising overall performance (Schleicher, 2019).

> Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, *socio-economic status*, *migrant background*, age, special needs, or place of residence, do not hinder the achievement of one's educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a minimum level of *skills* (inclusion). (OECD, 2023)

It should be noted that the OECD's definition does not say that all students should achieve identically, nor that they should all be taught in the same way. It says nothing about the grouping of students according to the schools they attend or the class arrangements within schools. Rather, by whatever means, *every student* should be able to achieve their educational potential regardless of the circumstances of their birth, and that *all students* should reach at least a minimum level. This means that students described as gifted or having high potential should be able to realise that potential, but not in ways that impede other students from achieving their potential.

In-school impacts on achievement

We often hear that the most important influence on students' learning is the teacher which is a within-school variable (Ainley et al., 2022). This is true. Teachers really do matter. There are, however, structural issues within schools that impact equity. These include within-school segregation or streaming typically based on perceived or assumed ability inferred from prior attainment. These arrangements influence the assignment of teachers to classes and constrain what is taught and how teachers instruct particular classes.

Impacts of streaming on low attainers

In mathematics, students designated low attainers are usually grouped together and are typically offered an impoverished curriculum (Beswick, 2017) that is based more firmly on widely held beliefs about the nature of mathematics as hierarchical and fixed, than on an analysis of the conceptual difficulty of the ideas or the capabilities of the students (Hunter et al., 2020). The lowest-attaining students often struggle to recall basic facts and may never achieve automatic recall — things that arguably are not mathematics (Beswick, 2017). As useful as these skills are, insisting that students continue to work on very basic material typically covered in the first half of primary school achieves little other convincing them that (1) they are stupid, and (2) mathematics is pointless, and, too often, (3) that school is

not for them. It does nothing to help them either to learn maths or to want to engage with the subject.

Streaming students also impacts staffing choices. "Top" classes studying — or thought likely eventually to study — the most demanding senior secondary subjects must have teachers who know the mathematics thoroughly and have experience of teaching it successfully. This means that other (younger, and lower attaining) groups are typically taught by relatively inexperienced teachers, who are less mathematically qualified (Schleicher, 2019). These teachers are often out-of-field.[3]

Other research has shown that teachers interact differently with lower-attaining students, have lower expectations, are less happy with the work and behaviour of those students, and describe difficulties with teaching them (Archambault et al., 2012, cite several studies). Students receive these negative messages, further lowering their confidence that they can succeed, making them less likely to engage and expend effort and hence their teacher's belief that they have low ability is reinforced. There is a double downward spiral involving teacher and students.

In summary, the students who have the greatest difficulty with mathematics and arguably have the greatest need for highly skilled teachers are the least likely to have such teachers (Hill & Dalton, 2013), and experience curricula and pedagogies focused on low-level skills rather than on the development of understanding (Beswick, 2017).

Impacts of streaming on high attainers

There are also downsides of streaming for high attainers. In any class someone is necessarily finding things harder than most others, so some very capable students in classes for high attainers can come to see themselves as not very good at maths. Students in relatively high-attaining classes are also less likely to be given problems involving applications of mathematics, or to in other ways have the uses of the mathematics they are learning pointed out. Rather, the focus tends to be on preparing for exams. Many very capable students end up disliking the subject and choosing not to pursue it at the more demanding levels in senior secondary grades (Hine, 2019) and hence beyond school.

Boaler and Staples (2008) and Boaler (2008) found in separate studies conducted in the USA and England that students in schools using mixed-ability groups for mathematics (i.e. not streaming) achieved higher overall results than students in schools using streaming. Follow-up studies found negative impacts on job prospects, including likelihood of being in a professional job, of having been taught in streamed context (Boaler, 2005; 2012).

Interactions between within-school segregation (streaming) and between-school segregation

Out-of-field teaching

Within-school segregation by perceived ability interacts with the between-school segregation that occurs largely along socio-economic lines. Teacher shortages that are

3 In Weldon (2016), "out-of-field teaching is defined as a secondary teacher teaching a subject for which they have not studied above first year at university, *and* for which they have not studied teaching methodology."

being felt everywhere are more acute in disadvantaged schools and have been a problem in these contexts for many years. In 2016 approximately 26% of Year 7–10 class groups in remote locations were taught by an out-of-field teacher compared with 14% in metropolitan locations. In the same year, of class groups in schools in low-SES locations, 19% had an out-of-field teacher compared with 13% in schools in high-SES locations (Weldon, 2016). Further compounding the problem, out-of-field teaching was more commonly done by inexperienced teachers: 37% of Year 7–10 teachers with one to two years of experience teaching a subject out-of-field compared with 25% of teachers with more than 5 years of experience (Weldon, 2016).

We know the situation has deteriorated since then. In 2018, just two years later, the Australian Mathematical Science Institute estimated that "there is a 76% chance of at least one out-of-field mathematics teacher, 35% for at least two and 8% for at least three years of out-of-field teaching. Fewer than one in four Year 7 to 10 students have an in-field maths teacher every year" (Prince & O'Conner, 2018). These figures are averaged across all schools and hence are much worse in remote, rural, and regional schools, and schools serving low SES communities. The misfortune of being born in the "wrong" postcode or to parents with limited resources is compounded by in-school practices that further segregate those designated low-attaining from peers deemed relatively more capable, likely to be more motivated and to be taught by teachers with higher academic expectations.

Out-of-field teaching has been identified as a major threat to educational equity (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It negatively impacts student achievement and motivation (Shah et al., 2020). Out-of-field teachers are less able than well qualified teachers to demonstrate the relevance of content, convey enthusiasm for the subject (Porsch & Wilden, 2022), and are less able to analyse students' thinking and respond appropriately (Watson et al., 2006).

Between-school segregation

Segregation both within and between schools can strengthen the association between SES and student achievement primarily because of the differing curriculum offered to students perceived as more and less capable (Marks et al., 2006). Perry and McConney (2010) cited evidence of the concentration of rigorous academic curricula in independent schools and schools serving higher SES communities and found that school SES is associated with student achievement regardless of the individual SES background of the student. Individual student achievement is also affected by the peer group with which they learn. That is, a student learning in a classroom with high-attaining peers is likely to have higher achievement than if that student was in class with lower-attaining peers. Bäckström (2021) found that these peer effects appear to operate primarily through the impacts of class composition on teaching.

There is no evidence that teachers in schools serving lower SES communities are less knowledgeable or capable than those in schools serving more advantaged school communities (Gore et al., 2022). There is evidence, however, that teachers in lower SES schools perceive the educational aspirations of students and parents to be lower than do their colleagues in higher SES schools (Beswick et al., 2019). This may be

a consequence of the greater prevalence among students from low SES backgrounds of behaviours considered problematic (McGrath & Elgar, 2015), combined with the tendency of teachers to conflate behaviours such as disorganisation and unwillingness to work with lower ability (Beswick, 2017). In addition, teachers who have taught only in disadvantaged contexts have no reference point for what is possible in terms of student achievement.

Shifting the public discourse

As is the case with all aspects of educational segregation, reducing or eliminating streaming will only be achieved if the public are brought along with or drive the change. There is a conundrum, however, faced by parents committed to educational equity when deciding on a school, especially a secondary school, for their child: Should they enrol their child in the nearest government school or consider alternatives? Rather than relying on evidence of school effectiveness, there is evidence that parents with the capacity to choose their child's school do so largely based on the SES and demographic characteristics of schools, including the presence of other parents perceived to be of high status (Rowe & Lubienski, 2016). Instinctively, it seems, parents recognise the power of peer effects. It is unreasonable to expect parents to make choices that they believe are not in the best interests of their children even if those choices add to educational inequity.

For this reason we need a major shift in the public discourse. We need to look beyond NSW for alternative ways to achieve the objectives that between- and within-school segregation are currently purported to address, trialling and scaling these models. We need to change beliefs about the relative effectiveness of schools by making findings — such as that of Larsen et al. (2023) — that once SES is controlled for there are no differences between school sectors in any NAPLAN domain at any year level. We need to change teachers' and parents' beliefs about the need to segregate students by assumed ability, and to support schools and teachers to ensure that all students regardless of the classroom in which they learn are offered an academically challenging and rigorous curriculum.

To date, many of the efforts to "fix" teachers and schools have made things worse and have almost certainly exacerbated teacher shortages by making teaching a less attractive career, and feeding the public discourse that drives inequity. Education in NSW is of a scale that can be nationally influential. We can lead a national conversation and change. What needs to happen? I suggest the following:

- De-politicisation of education so that every negative report about schooling and every prospective election is not met with calls for improved teacher quality or better teacher education
- Ensuring all schools have their full Schooling Resource Standard
- A major shift in the social discourse, led by politicians, to focus the community's attention on the importance of educational equity — it matters for individual prospects, social cohesion, and overall education attainment, and hence prosperity for everyone. Education is a social good
- Looking beyond NSW for alternative ways to achieve the objectives that between- and within-school segregation is currently purported to address, trialling and scaling

these models and making sure that parents know selective schools are not the only or best option for their child — this will feed into the public discourse around education

- Recognise in concrete and resourcing terms the different, more complex and greater demands of leading or teaching in disadvantaged schools
- Support schools to build strong academic cultures in addition to catering for the pastoral needs of their students
- Pushing back against stereotypes about the capacities and aspirations of rural and low-SES students and ensuring that policies do not, even inadvertently, feed into and reinforce them
- Progressing the phase out of fee-charging if schools accept government funds, perhaps starting with primary schools, because between school segregation is less at his level.

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Session IV: Education

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Good afternoon, everybody. It's a lovely afternoon and this is the last panel session until the wrap up. My name is Lisa. My people come from Wagga Wagga in southwestern New South Wales. I'm a Koori woman and I pay respects to the people of this land, the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, and recognise that the land that we're on has always been known, loved and nurtured. No matter where you are from across Australia, there's not a place that's not called Country and not called loved. I was asked at the last minute to not be Marcia, but I could be. I reckon the next session I'll have a go at channelling a bit of Marcia because she's got a lot to say, and I do too. But I was asked to talk about the transformative power of education, our investment as a nation in education, and take stock of that investment and how it builds a better society.

I work at a large university, my background's in public health epidemiology and everyone knows what that means nowadays. It's no longer necessary to explain. I now work as one of the Deputy Vice Chancellors at the University of Sydney. I look after the Indigenous Strategy and Services Portfolio, although I do manage to get myself involved in other significant things across the university. I want to talk specifically about one of the major levers that I've had the privilege and pleasure of being able to use in how we change the sector for good. For many, many years, decades and decades and decades, you talk about reports, oh my god, we have got reports that are miles high that are tons worth of effort.

We write reports and then we promptly do absolutely nothing about it. We've got tomes that act as really great bricks to hold doors open. When we start looking in my own background in health, for example, in the 1970s, we had one of the best reports ever called the National Aboriginal Health Strategy. If you pulled this out today and changed the date to 2022, there would be very little difference. One of the things that I've learned since I became a health professional in the 'seventies was that the best way of making change is to get engaged and involved in the accreditation bodies. The body I'm going to talk about today is a body called Universities Australia. I know many of you know them, but I'm hoping to give you a slightly different perspective, as an Aboriginal academic, in what happens with them in my world.

It's been an evolution about how indigenous scholarship occurs in Australia. We've got more Aboriginal students than ever in tertiary education in the university sector and certainly more Aboriginal scholars, academics, researchers and workers in the sector. This has been evolving significantly since around about 2011, when there was a huge push towards this magic thing called "indigenization of curricula." For many people, indigenization of curricula was very

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

much about putting on a selective piece of work that students could enrol in and, "be careful, we're not going to evaluate it or do any sort of critique. But you need to enrol in this to complete your degree and off you go." We found, quick sticks, that that didn't really make much of a difference in people's practice of whatever it was that they were learning in their degree.

Universities Australia provided a helpful guide called Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities (2011)[2], thinking that that might help people do the trick. It recommended sector-wide commitments to the individualization of curriculum using sound pedagogical frameworks. That makes total sense, right? Why would you implement curricula without anything sound that framed it up pedagogically, just saying. Anyhow, they had this really marvellous quote and I'll read it out to you: "Student and staff knowledge is an understanding of indigenous Australian cultures histories and contemporary realities and awareness of indigenous protocols combined with a proficiency to engage and work effectively indigenous contexts congruent to the expectations of indigenous Australian people." Can someone please tell me what that really means?

No, seriously, I'm not trying to take the mickey, but it's really hard to understand what that means and what you can do practically to implement it. I know it was a long time ago. It was 11 years ago. But at the time they were also saying: one of the ways that you can do this is to embed indigenous knowledges and perspectives in your curriculum. You can include indigenous cultural competency and create formal graduate attributes or formal graduate qualities, which is helpful. You can incorporate indigenous Australian knowledges and perspectives into programs. You can train teaching staff in indigenous pedagogy for teaching indigenous studies and help them feel confident in so doing and, of course, create reporting mechanisms, because we're really good at that in the academy, aren't we? Writing reports, and standardizing and applying some sort of process of quality assurance and accountability across that curriculum. Question: who was therefore responsible for doing this?

Do you want to have a guess? Yes, absolutely, that fell on the already burdened workload of the fairly junior staff Aboriginal: to do something that in some of our universities we've got entire departments to do with highly qualified people that have spent half of their lives learning how to do that. Subsequent to that, Universities Australia looked at the outcomes of the sector and recognised "we need to do a little bit more." Strategies are always evolving, especially when you're doing something new. They went off and created some new work, and again I quote, "Universities will differ in how they approach this." Okay, so that's good. We've recognised that all of our universities are different from each other and that's a good thing. But, more importantly, that the Aboriginal communities across the nation are different from each other and that in fact each of us have quite different circumstances.

There are some very helpful graphs on the differences between urban people and rural people and regional people, and people

2 https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Guiding-Principles-for-Developing-Indigenous-Cultural-Competency-in-Australian-Universities.pdf

who finished school at 14 versus those who finished school later and where they went to school. What they wanted to do is to make sure that we were able to develop formal graduate attributes, discrete units of study, campus and off-campus experience and other activities. The key thing that they underlined strongly was that this was to be done with local communities, "with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities." We were to look at our respective communities for advice and guidance on how to start operationalizing the complexity of what Universities Australia wanted us to do. This is not really a session on begging them, but this is really a session about how sometimes good will can collide with the practical realities of what we need to do and how we need to do it.

Realizing that this particular advice was somewhat insufficient, Universities Australia very kindly released a good practice paper in 2019; it's well worth the read and I would advise you to do that. One of the stated intentions of the document was to function as a resource for universities to consider in their efforts when they went about indigenizing curricula; they added a very helpful reading list of academic papers, mostly done by Aboriginal scholars, along with a nine-point list because we all love lists, right? A nine-point roadmap, if you like. It included that the university should have an indigenous graduate attribute or similar and that the course accreditation process should ensure that all courses are aligned to the achievement of this attribute. That makes total sense, right? Then they said that indigenous curricula should be coherently integrated into the degrees.

That's not something that stands outside on its own as a special thing that people can skip if it's too early on a Friday morning. The appreciation or sensitivity to indigenous knowledges and that these knowledges or application of these knowledges should be assessed. We all know that assessment drives learning, right? It's one of the most magical characteristics of my world. Teaching staff should also be sensitive to and appropriately prepared and experienced in indigenous content that they teach. This is really helpful because ultimately there are not that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about at a sufficient level or who are qualified sufficiently to be able to teach. We've just learned a beautiful example of math teaching. We just don't have enough math teachers to go around. We certainly don't have enough Aboriginal people to implement this sort of really strong and important aspiration.

The fifth thing they wanted was that courses should include formal recognition of indigenous knowledges. And that explicitly that knowledge is relevant and endorsed by the indigenous bodies of the place where this is being taught. This is also something which is quite useful, but when you've got content and you've got course materials that can go across … and some of our universities are very big and have multiple campuses. Sometimes what's taught here in the city of Sydney, for example, will not work in Wagga Wagga or Orange or Broken Hill or in another jurisdiction. The guidance is helpful, but the application and implementation of that can come awry very, very quickly when, again, high intentions just cannot be met. Courses should use language which reflects the diversity in multilingual practices of indigenous Australians where possible. I'm very pleased to report that many of our tertiary institutions are now gripping up

language and starting to call courses by their right names in accordance with the local communities.

Another is: indigenous graduate attributes or other course learning outcomes may be supported and enhanced by extracurricular or co-curricular activities, but they themselves are not a substitute for formal indigenous curriculum development. We just can't be let off the hook by having someone come in and talk about culture. The course accreditation process should demonstrate that indigenous Australian stakeholders have been authentically consulted as a part of course-development processes. Now, you all know about consultation mechanisms, don't you? It's a pretty hard thing to do and it's a pretty hard thing to do authentically, and it's very, very hard to do it in a way where you actually get all of the views that you really need to have at the same table.

Then, the final one of their nine was indigenous and non-indigenous academic staff engagement in academic governance bodies and decision-making process in the universities. And it's critical that this occurs at a senior level to enhance successful indigenous curriculum development. Like I said before, this is a fantastic ideal. This is a fantastic expectation, but many of our universities and our sector as a whole have fallen absolutely short.

I'll share some data I've got with you and I don't have a beautiful slide:

- 46% of universities reported that indigenous viewpoints are considered and incorporated when designing education at their institutions. When you tease that out, the majority of that content is designed primarily by non-Aboriginal people with advice from indigenous people
- 43% of universities reported having an indigenous-specific graduate attribute. That's good
- 33% of universities describe general indigenous engagement as a process for embedding indigenous views in course content
- 31% of universities reported having indigenous content only in indigenous courses, and
- only 15% of universities reported having processes for indigenous content in both indigenous and non-indigenous courses.

The point here is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up just over 3% of the population, or we might be generous and say less than 5% of the population. The majority of our universities do not have anywhere near that number of Aboriginal students and nowhere near that number of Aboriginal staff. We are utterly and completely reliant upon the 95% of Australia's population to help us do this work. I recognise that this might sound a little bit hard and harsh because we're a fantastic sector. We're a sector that changes people's lives. We're a sector that can within a generation make a massive difference.

There were three additional points of good practice that Universities Australia did recommend at the time. They said co-design and co-creation needs to be articulated in teaching and learning plans. An introduction of a template for individualization of curriculum and indigenous content pedagogies and methodologies are to be incorporated into all non-indigenous specific courses. The current strategy has worked out and recognised that some of these aspirations are in fact not achievable at this point. Sometimes there is some

scepticism, isn't there? When you are going for a particular aim, you're going for a particular strategy and you know that chatter in your head is like, "We're never going to get there, we're not going to get 3% of our entire cohort of staff in the next four years. If we did that, then what happens to all the other organisations that are trying to get more staff?"

There is just this pragmatic realistic reason why sometimes people will go ahead and put a stamp on something and say, "Yes, let's all go for it." But in their heads, they're saying, "Eh, it's not going to happen." It's a terrible incongruence and it's absolutely palpable. If someone was saying something to you and they were, really got a dialogue going in their heads, I know that most of you would see that a mile away, right? Well, same with us. Universities Australia has now asked us to have a close look at six commitments. We keep going from nine to three to six. Here we are, with six. We're sort of in the middle of the nine to three, three to nine.

Universities have indigenous content and curricula that's meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced. This is one of the first times they've really said that we need to have resourcing behind all of this, and that makes a major difference to how it is we can go ahead with our work. Universities ensure students graduate with an awareness of indigenous values and knowledges. The benefits of indigenous-led research is recognised and promoted by the universities, that there's a robust ethics process in indigenous research with AIATSIS guidelines and the other helpful guidelines to help us. That the value of indigenous leadership is recognised by being appropriately structured and supported and that the role of Elders and local communities be appropriately recognised and valued. These are really important and this is central to the guidance that we are receiving from our sector leads. That universities have indigenous content that is meaningful, appropriately developed and resourced. Yet the strategy is fairly silent on many of those contexts and of course it's up to us to make it happen.

The three things that I'm told that I was asked to leave with people, firstly, is to read what is expected of you. Whether you are in the tertiary education sector, whether you're in the vocational sector or another, there are these documents that are absolutely everywhere. We're running out of time to be able to do something sensible in this area. We've pushed forward the needs to be equitable in our education system, in our housing system, and in all of our structures of governance for decades and decades and decades. It was only a couple hundred years ago that the modern Australia became what it is today. But for 60,000 years people have been learning and teaching on this land and, quite frankly, we have a lot to share. One of the things that I would invite you to do is to work out how in your local world you can make sure that that can happen for us all. Uni is transformative, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make the joint better. Thank you.

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Session IV: Education

Question and Discussion

Julia Horne: I'm Julia Horne from the University of Sydney. I actually wanted to go back to the first panel session and Alison Frame's point about entrenched disadvantage and also Richard Holden's point about education actually being key to creating human capital. This is for the whole panel, but in particular Pasi and Kim. I'm not sure if you've read the most recent Productivity Commission review, which is on education.[1] It actually focuses not only on higher education, but also primary and secondary education and the link to tertiary education. It has very disturbing figures about funding and where that funding is going. It points out that the majority of funding goes to the Catholic Schools sector, and even more goes to the Independent sector, with a national average being 20%.

The Catholic and Independent sectors are about 36 and 40%, I think, yet government schools are only 18% and it doesn't then break down, the sort of inequities, Kim, which you were talking about between segregated schools. But anyway, just to wind that up, their point is that all this extra funding's gone in. It's been distributed inequitably, and it actually hasn't produced better results in terms of however you measure educational outcomes: people actually getting trained into being productive citizens. I just wonder, can we expand that notion of entrenched disadvantage and is there a way where in fact we should be concentrating on, in essence, putting money into that part. It might be only a small part of the population, but if you get that right, is there then the beginning of addressing that question of equity in education because it seems to have been a long-time sort of being successful?

Julianne Schultz: Thanks, Julia. Can I just add something to Julia's question, which is just a little bit more data, which is that we have 54% of kids now in high schools in fee-paying schools. A rising percentage of primary school children in fee-paying schools. The segregation is not just brainy kids and the rest, in New South Wales it's single-sex schools, it's religious schools, it's socioeconomic. There's a whole range of different forms of segregation in the education system, which adds into the picture. I'm just interested, given that you're both interested and so expert in the question of equity, can that be fixed without the system being fundamentally reshaped? It's not a leading question. They might say yes.

Kim Beswick: The short answer is no, it can't without a major shift in the system. Australia really does need to seriously look at the funding of education and we know how to do that as well. We've had reports. It's not just the political will, as I was trying to say, it's the community demand for it because the current situation is partly so well entrenched because the graduates, the alumni, of those very most well-off and advantaged schools end up in very power-

1 Australian Productivity Commission, *National School Reform Agreement* (2022) https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/school-agreement/report/school-agreement-overview.pdf

ful positions with very vested interests and much interest in maintaining the status quo. It's going to take a major shake-up to change that. I don't think we can wait for that to happen, though.

Even when we fix that funding and we get a level playing field in terms of funding, there are still barriers to choice about schools that you go to because of geography. We need to fix those things as well. Some of that goes to changing the way that all of us — teachers included because teachers are simply part of the community — think about the capacities of students. And move away from a deficit view of because you're Indigenous, because you're in a rural school, because of whatever, that you are not as capable as a child from a wealthy suburb in Sydney.

I've done research that shows that teachers do teach differently and have different expectations of kids depending on their family background. We must shift that. Some of the in-school segregation just reinforces that kind of thing. It's not really the teacher's fault because if you are sent to one of those disadvantaged rural schools, and that's the only place you've ever taught, you don't know what a really well-resourced, well-backed 15-year-old can do. You never get to see it. The kids in the class never get to see that either. We've got to attack this problem at every level.

Peter Shergold: Just very quickly, I don't want us to get too down here. I am agreed, to make systemic change takes a lot, especially the sort of change I'm talking about. But, yes, you can do things instantly. Angelica said something from the 2021 census: that people in Western Sydney now have a higher proportion of people with degrees than the rest of Sydney. Just think about that. If I had told you, even 10 years ago, that would be, you wouldn't believe. Some things can be possible, but it's no use waiting for government. This is happened in part because you've had waves of migrants coming through, their children coming into the Catholic schools, the public schools, the Independent schools, most of low-income Christian and Islamic schools. Coming in with big ambitions for their children. And those ambitions have then raised the ambitions of all the children in there. You've had a university that has run a very significant program starting at year nine, now starting at primary schools with over 92 schools in that area. That too raises expectations. You provide large numbers of scholarships and grants and support for people to come into university. So Western Sydney University — this is extraordinary — now has 907 students who came to this country on humanitarian visas or are still here on bridging visas. You can do it, but sometimes you have to do it at the university and the community level, not wait for the big reforms to come out of government.

Pasi Sahlberg: I don't have too much to add, other than people probably need to know that there's no other country in the world that funds schools like we do. That the money's coming from all over the place and everybody pays. If you ask me after four years here, I can tell you that we don't have public schools, we don't have private schools either, because everybody pays. On average, parents whose children go to public schools, pay about $800 a year. That could be a major violation in most other countries, against the constitution or wherever the right to education is deployed. But here, it's a kind

of a normal thing. If your kids go to Sydney Boys High, you pay more than $3,000, maybe $4,000, which is a kind of a private school fee.

We need to think not only rethink this whole thing, and ask these hard questions: that is this the way to go? Basically, we should be able to redesign the whole thing so that at least all the public schools — government schools — should be funded up to the school-resourcing standard, which is a minimum thing. But I also want to say that funding alone will not fix these inequalities. That's a misbelief if you say that just give us enough money and we'll fix these things. It doesn't happen. We need to go beyond that, but that's a minimum starting point.

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Session V: Summary and Solutions

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Julianne Schultz: What we want to do in this final session is to talk about some of the pathways to activating this sort of energy, which is on the ground, and trying to find ways that that might resonate and give us some pathways forward. Some optimism about change. In coming to this point, at the end of the day when we've heard so many grim stories as well as inspiring ones, I am reminded of the process that I went through when I was writing my book, *The Idea of Australia*. I was doing a lot of historical research and thinking of how the tendrils of the past played through into the present.

I was writing it during the period of COVID and I took to regarding COVID as an X-ray that showed where the strengths and weaknesses of society were. At times I got quite depressed. I thought, "Goodness, I've got to write this in a way which isn't like, this is all hopeless and we've always opted for the less optimistic and outward-looking, engaged and generous response." There were plenty of signs of that but it's hard to hold onto that optimism a lot of the time when you look at the detail of the history of this country and the way that we've behaved. In the end, where I got to with that, which is a bit where we are coming to today, was that I looked at the things that were happening on the ground.

There's been some talk today about the strengthening of neighbourhood links. For instance, during the COVID period when people were connecting, I know there was a lot of bad, but there were some good things. That people were connecting in their local communities quite often in a way that they hadn't done before. We saw that in the movement of the independents campaign, then during the election campaign, which was very much a locally based set of political actions. We saw it in the activity around women advocating for their rights during that 2021 year, with Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins and the others really saying we are not going to be shamed for past stuff that we've been made to feel victims for. We saw it very much in the beginning of the truth-telling process as a result of the Uluru Statement, that people are deeply curious about First Nations history of the areas in which they live. They really want to know, and they're trying to find that out.

That was where I landed in the book. I said, "Okay, there is a movement on the ground which is happening, which may be transformative and marshalling that energy to be a bit bold about what the future might be is a really important step to be taken." The good examples we've heard today are all about that energy. The bad examples are, "Oh, gosh, it's so complex, we can't do

1 This is an edited version of a transcript of the presentation.

anything about it. Let's write another report and put it on a shelf." I think in many ways the big examples — and this is why I want to draw you both into this conversation — the big examples are around a different form of engagement. The Uluru Statement is a spectacular example of deliberative democracy in action. Because what came out of that process was not what the people who were sent out to do it expected was going to come back.

They came back with a different, very much more considered and layered response. I'm interested in teasing that out. Ariadne, in your work, you've written so much about the way the digital tools and the forms of networked engagement actually change how things get done. It's a free conversation. It's up to you. I'm just interested in how you think about whether this energy and this possibility of things moving in a way that maybe they've felt stalled for a long time.

Ariadne Vromen: Okay, I must admit — and I can say it because he's not in the room — when we started the day with Andrew Leigh on the screen telling us that there was no community anymore and there was no volunteering anymore, I was a bit despondent and I thought, "Well, I don't agree with that." There's lots of evidence to counter that and it really depends on the way that you look. Today's been a fascinating day. It's hard to come to the end of the day and we've all had lots of data thrown at us and lots of big ideas. But where I was left with was thinking about what the big ideas are we need to be taking away and thinking about. We've talked a lot about material difference and material inequity today.

That speaks to my heart that we are talking about core issues, about equity and health, education, housing, the different experience of climate change, but I think we need to get bigger than that. We need to talk about what kind of society do we want to live in. How do we start a conversation about what the common good is? What do we want Australia to look like? How do we create the language? I do think — and Lisa, I hope we'll talk more about this — we have that opportunity right now to be talking about the kind of country we want. But it's also some of the other points that were being made. Peter Shergold made this point quite strongly: that we need to move away from discourses that are based on deficit and disadvantage and how do we focus more on capabilities and how we want to see the world.

But then there was another interesting contradiction: we can't criticise some of the big egalitarian Australian myths around wealth creation and multiple home ownership, as was being pointed out by Tone. We can't really focus on — one thing that I don't think we've talked about today — the vast varieties and experiences of the workplace and of work and growing precarity and so on. We just need to question some of these big myths of Australian society. To come up with beyond Andrew Leigh's story of what community looks like right now, where people find it in moments of political expression and political togetherness and that kind of solidarity as well.

Lisa Jackson: I've got a lot to say. The fact is that almost 50% of Australia's population today is first- or second-generation Australians. That means nearly half of us either weren't born here or one of our parents weren't born here. It's a very different nation today than it was in 1901 when the Australian Constitution was formed. For those of you who are historians — and this

is an important piece of work that was done right — it was primarily white Anglo-Saxon guys who put together the foundation document of this land. It didn't start on the 26th of January. It was something that commenced on the 1st of January, 1901. When you look at the Constitution then it basically excluded Aboriginal people from it as being here or with all of the stuff around missing links, Terra Nullius, et cetera.

And we look at our proud dynamic Australian population today and the extraordinary diversity of us, to interrogate this kind of problem, this kind of issue, and still not have a treaty and still be one of the richest nations in the world. I don't know about you, but I feel deeply ashamed of my nation. At the same time, I'm incredibly proud of it because of all of the possibilities. I'll just do a quick dance through history.

1901 was the Constitution of Australia. In the years subsequent to that, by the 1930s there was a very strong Aboriginal movement where people were wanting to have rights to be able to get education, people wanting to have rights, to have health, they want to have rights of freedom of movement. Yet many of our capital cities had a night-time curfew for Aboriginal people. At the same time, my grandmother was part a domestic servant just around the corner in the Hyde Park Barracks.

We had this extraordinary situation that many non-Aboriginal Australians of the day just didn't know, didn't understand, turned a blind eye. There were children being removed *en masse*. There were people who were constructing railway trains to be able to take them from Central Station in Sydney to all parts across the state in the New South Wales experience. Yet people didn't know. It was only in recent decades, in the 1990s that people — Henry Reynolds and a few other people — started writing these documents that really brought that stuff to the fore. Sir Ronald Wilson, of course, did his absolutely landmark piece of work *Bringing Them Home*.[2] And still people were shocked and surprised and felt unable to put a language to how they felt and their grief as good Australians about how could this possibly happen to others in our nation. Of course, we know the 1967 referendum was a huge thing and we're going through all of that debate again and hopefully getting a successful referendum for the next question that gets posed.

In the 1970s, we saw the construction of the Aboriginal Medical Services, 52 years ago. Because people would rather die on the steps of a church than go off to the RPA hospital or to the St. Vincent's Hospital of the day. And these are urban people. We had the start of the Aboriginal Legal Services, real community movement, real community of partnership where non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people got together and made something profound happen. Both of those services are still existing and very, very strong across Australia. Both of those services are best-practice exemplars to other places in the world. Then, of course, by the time we got to 1990s, there was the people's movement of reconciliation. We were talking about Treaty. Yothu Yindi was singing it, and I bet you could even remember half the words.

But something happened by the time we got to 1995, we then started to go down practical reconciliation "because we can't

2 Australian Human Rights Commission (1997), *Bringing Them Home*, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-report-1997

go off and privilege Aboriginal people over others." This was some of the language that was being used. Aboriginal people were then continued to be vilified, continued to be the victim, continued to be blamed for their own circumstances. These were terrible times. A very, very dark part of our recent history, which most of us from the look of you — except for our gorgeous young lady over there — were alive and responsible in those times. Then of course, by the time we got to the 2000s, the world changed significantly through circumstances overseas. But we still have not been able to have a discussion about Treaty. We still haven't been able to have a discussion that was pragmatic and real about how on earth can we conclude the unfinished business of this land.

When you look at us as an Australian nation with our demographic shift of nearly 50% of us being first- or second-generation, but also many of us being quite a lot older, we are pushing onto a smaller proportion of younger people problems that we haven't wanted to deal with. We haven't been courageous. We haven't been brave, we haven't been consultative, we've gone off and stuck so much stuff in the too-hard basket. But Angelica's generation, they're going to be dealing with the climate, they're going to be dealing with housing, they're going to be dealing with food insufficiency, water, they're going to be — things that are changing our world forever and we can't even get our acts together and talk about the Voice and get that across. We just have to think about what we can deal with now because there's going to be a lot for the future.

I feel confident in our youth, especially when I see deadly young ladies — like you up here, talking from your heart with strength, courage, and passion. But where's our voice? How can we be more like her and be brave enough to use our incredibly strong learned voices to make the changes that many of us have been in conversation about for a long, long time. That's what I'd really love to leave with you fellas today. We've got a lot to do, and we cannot conscionably leave it to the next generation to do because it'll be far too late and it'll be on us.

Julianne Schultz: You're absolutely right. One of the things that I think is so important and that we really need to break this log-jam — I said at the beginning that the day that I use that Linda Colley line about three-score years and ten being the period that it generally takes for change to be embedded. In relation to First Nations people, we have Jeremy Bentham in 1803 saying in a rhetorical flourish that failure to come to a treaty with the people who were here would be an "incurable flaw" on this land.[3] He was no supporter of the people who had always been on this land. But here we are 2022 and it's looking pretty incurable. Bentham was right. But one of the things that I think is particularly important in your recap of that historical frame is so powerful, is that at every point along the way, it has been contested. At every point, there has been argument.

You talk about some of those examples of First Nations activism. But go back and look at the foundation, the debates around the creation of the Federation. There were people arguing for a very different federation. Not

3 There is some debate about what Bentham meant. [Ed.]

just in terms of there being 17 states and not six, but in terms of a different body politic, which was very much more locally grounded, that was engaged, included a statement of rights, included different electoral systems. There were debates that were held at the time and the people with ideas that we would probably now regard as pretty mainstream were the ones who were marginalised. Critics would say it was just as well there wasn't a rights bill that was built into the Australian constitution because it would've been pretty ghastly — excluding people by "race" in the constitution, rather than just by legislation. But, nonetheless, I think that one of the really important things that we need to hang onto in these conversations is that the debates have always been there. It is now time for the other side in a sense that's been sitting there, having that discussion to get a chance to assert its confidence and not to be. I think that when you talk about the grief of Australians in thinking about the history, I think it's a sort of grief.

That is not a bad word. There is also a scarcely articulated sense of shame. It's not so much guilt, it's shame. That's been the big controlling emotion that's been used very powerfully. That's part of the reason why the movement around the Voice and the movement of those young women especially was saying, "We cannot be shamed anymore. It's not our fault." That is something which connects in the way that people engage more directly and intimately in a sense, through their online activism. Because those things which were barriers, which forced silence, actually don't work in this new space.

Ariadne Vromen: Thanks for throwing to me on that one. We're in a moment and have been at least for 10 years or so in where we are reimagining the idea of what collective action really looks like. We could talk about it as the culmination of the networks that we have in our everyday lives, and that social media is an intrinsic part of that for bringing those connections between people. Part of it is reimagining what that looks like. When I walked in here today, I walked past the Harbour Bridge. I noted that the Aboriginal flag now flies permanently atop the Bridge. That happened not because of some benevolent government, it happened because of a long-term petition campaign that started on the website change.org that then became a broader media campaign. It was very much from the local. If we want to know how people participate and want to have their voices heard these days, it's through online petitions.

It is the act beyond voting that most people have engaged in. Two-thirds of us are likely to have signed an online petition — to have that kind of expression of what we want to see changed. It's not always aimed at government, it can be aimed at local government, state, or federal government, it can be aimed at a corporation, it can be aimed at a school. It's how we imagine how we have our voices heard and it builds on those networks that we have that are predominantly digital. Our discussion today about the importance of local and place-based services is really important, but it's a limited imagination of what community looks like now. People have shared senses of community in different spaces. They'll often find the people who are more like them online. Disability activists congregate online. That's where they find people that they organise with to create policy-oriented campaigns and political change.

Young people — when they think of how they're going to get active or how they're going to make a statement about something — will start online. An anecdote: When I was binge-watching the new TV series of "Heartbreak High" two weeks ago — it tells you something about education in schools as well — there was a particular moment where one of their favourite teachers was sacked because of a rumour and smear campaign that went around. The students decided to get active to get that teacher reinstated. Again, the campaign started, aimed purely at the school, to a lesser degree at the New South Wales Department of Education. First thing they do is they start an online petition. Second, they start their social media campaign, they prepare their memes that they're going to share around. The third thing they do is organise a sit-in in the school.

I just thought this was a lovely little bit of the kind of normalisation of particular forms of how you get voice, how you express yourself, and how you ensure that you're actually heard. Also nicely, their parents support them in this act as well. They're standing in the school yard while they're doing their sit-in overnight. I just think we need to think more about those ad hoc moments of political collectivity or community and meaning making more than the long-term movements for change and the 70-years process are really important, but let's celebrate those smaller wins too.

Julianne Schultz: Yes, it's interesting. That process of the immediate engagement around those issues and how they can galvanise people and give them confidence. One of the things that came through in the research of yours that I was reading, Ariadne, was that sense that people didn't want to engage with politicians because they felt that politicians didn't listen. That they'd go and do a consultation, but they knew what they wanted to take away from it. They didn't want to actually hear anything. This environment we're in now, it's still possible that still happens, but people expect to be heard in a way which is much different from the way it used to be.

Ariadne Vromen: Yes, totally. Governments need to catch up and they need to learn from people. They need to learn how to actively listen to people, not within the sort of constraints of their consultation exercise, and governments also need how to actually demonstrate that they've acted based on that listening. It's not enough to just give people a space for voice or to appear that you've listened. Something needs to change as well. And you need to give people a sense of hope or belief or trust in that process. That change is really possible. We're a long way from that. We can encourage voice in the small sense or encourage that engagement, but they haven't figured out that process. There was even talk this morning around government collaboration and co-design. I just think we need to unpick that more and more and demonstrate where that is genuine processes of co-design, collaboration, co-governance that actually leads to change that does change those entrenched inequities that we've been talking about as well.

Lisa Jackson: But there is a caution, I think.

Julianne Schultz: Yes, sure.

Lisa Jackson: A lot of the dependence on the internet is by having smart technology but some people just can't afford it. There's a degree of literacy and there's all of that

sort of stuff. That being said, there are a lot of things that we can do to make sure that people are able to be heard. In our world, we call lots of things "yarning circles" or "yarning." It's really good sometimes to put the technology away and look at someone and be with them physically and not be distracted by the many things that we do. A lot of people that I get to work with find it uncomfortable to have a recording device or to be photographed in a particular context.

Rather, they want you to learn from them in a different way and then help them translate that. The mixed work is what's going to be really important. But the activism, that's quite important. But I've seen some of the most atrocious racism of late online. I've seen some of my dearest colleagues being pulled down by invisible people who are using weirdo names on these websites that are then being used against them in the most tragic ways. People are becoming sick, unwell, unhinged, and I worry about — we've heard stories of people dying as a result of that kind of cyber bullying. I see the power of it, but I also see another side of it, which I think is not what we are meant to be doing as a community, is it?

Ariadne Vromen: Sure. And I think that's the discussion that we as a community need to have about that broader public good. Online is not a neutral space, but it is the space that we are all in now, whether or not we're accessing services online, we're engaging with other people online, we're getting our news online. It is the ubiquitous space, but we should have a discussion about how we want to manage that, about how we want to engage civilly with other people on it. I would always condemn hate speech that happens online, of course.

Julianne Schultz: One of the things that I think is really striking is to look at how countries change and what the triggers are that make it possible for them to reinvent themselves. There's been quite a deal of research done on this. In some ways the most striking example — and given the ties between Australia and Ireland are so strong, and Ireland's independence from Britain was about the same time as our federation — is Ireland. There's a good reason to look at that. The process that's gone on in Ireland over the last 20 years or so is something quite remarkable. It's a country which was the most Catholic. It was an impoverished society, if beautiful, but what you've seen over this last 20 years or so — and it's not perfect — but what you've seen is something which has managed to challenge the old institutions and the old frameworks and the old ways of doing things in a way that it is now an extremely progressive. The religious dimension of Ireland is now a personal thing, not a state matter in the way that it once was. That's happened in part because of changing economic circumstances: by being in the EU, it got to have more money than had once been available, and partly as a result of resolving the seemingly intractable virtual civil war known by the bland title, "The Troubles." But since then, the very active process of deliberative democracy exercises there has provided a framework which has made it possible for what would've been once unimaginable changes to have occurred. Ariadne is that something that you've —

Ariadne Vromen: Yes, sure. I totally agree with you to see what quite radical change in a conservative Catholic country like Ireland. But I guess what's important is the politics that embodies. It's a politics that's not the

toxic adversarial politics that we still have in this country. That is very much that kind of partisan arguing that has turned off most people in Australia. When we ask people why they don't trust politicians, it's their image of bickering politicians who don't always follow through on what they may promise that is resonant with people.

This is a different model, of doing deliberative polls that are driven by consensus, that are driven by discussion that are shared: it's usually a hundred people in a room talking about an issue, engaging with experts over a period of time, and then being asked how they want to — the famous ones were on abortion law reform and marriage equality. That Ireland had marriage equality before we did is not what people would've expected, but it was driven by that deliberative process amongst citizens that was then shared. But, also, there was a commitment to government to take up what people decided in that process. I think those kinds of processes is important, but that commitment to creating change and creating politics in a different way and doing it differently that is responsive to what people think and feel is the big shift as well.

Lisa Jackson: I love the way how politics does evolve and how nations do evolve. I think Australia is sitting right on a precipice of an evolutionary leap, because I think most Australians now are just absolutely over talking about Aboriginal people in the abstract and recognising that they've chosen Australia as home and there's a whole myriad of reasons for that. But we call this joint home and we all belong here no matter whether we came last week or 60,000 years ago. We all belong here and we all have a responsibility and we have a really unique culture in Australia. You go overseas and you hear the *yidaki*[4] being played, you know exactly what the instrument is and you know exactly where it's from. You know you can characterise our indigenous art beautifully. People recognise that from a mile away.

That is characteristically Australian, along with our accent and along with all of the other stuff that we have. We are an incredibly diverse nation and one of the most multilingual nations on earth. These are astounding things. We're just at that point now of having these sorts of discussions where we're going to eventually say to our politicians, "We are the people of Australia, and if you don't do what we ask you to do, what you vote you in, get away from this party-political stuff or this thing that they all have to abide by the leaders' rules. We are going to get nowhere fast because the politics will just change." The closure of ATSIC, for example.

In the 1990s we had this extraordinary organisation called the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission. It was the only place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could vote for how an organisation ran. When John Howard got voted in, one of the first things he said was he wanted to abolish it, and he just removed it because it wasn't part of the Constitution. There was no Voice, there was no place for it to be. This is why the Voice is so important for us to all get behind, regardless of whether or not we agree with the model. We'd still agree with the principle, right? This is the bickering that's happening out there at the moment. This is the wedge that's dividing us. We as

4 C.J. Nichols (2017) The remarkable yidaki (and no, it's not a 'didge') *The Conversation*, April 7 https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-the-remarkable-yidaki-and-no-its-not-a-didge-74169 [Ed.]

the Australian people, all who belong here now really need to do something and put a line under this and we can fuss about the how, but we need to get that thing across the line no matter what. Because if we don't —

Julianne Schultz: Heaven help us.

Lisa Jackson: — we're all going to be dead and buried. It's going to be that young lass's grandkids are going to bring them in. And that's not okay. We can't keep pushing this off.

Julianne Schultz: Yes. The attempt to undermine the Voice argument is to say to white Australia, "Oh you've got to pass judgment on the detail of this program." That's not what it's about. It's about addressing a moral failure and making that right and meaningful and then the detail will be resolved. It's pretty simple, really. One of the things that's coming through in what both of you are saying is that there's a threshold question, and that is, what sort of country do we want to be? What sort of society do we want to be? That was a discussion that has gone through various phases in the life of this nation of being an active discussion, one that gets resolved, moves to another layer and then closes down.

But one of the other things that John Howard said very early in his prime ministership was that we were sick of the endless conversation about national identity. He might have been, but actually there was an appetite that was still there. He slowed it down a bit, but what we've had now for the last 25 years is that that national conversation hasn't been happening. It's been happening in atomised groups and in little community sections and all various other areas, but the national conversation has been shut down. That makes it very difficult to articulate what it is that we want to be if we've not had the means for having that formal conversation. That's, in a way, what the question is that you need to ask that makes that something that we can take quite seriously with a serious openness to different outcomes, not just more of the same.

Lisa Jackson: There's two things to that. Firstly, most of us in this room, and most of our ancestors were not at the table when the Australian Constitution was built. If you're a female, seriously, if you come in the last few generations, you are not represented in the Constitution. That has to change. We have to grip up what the birth of this nation is about. We have a real opportunity now of saying, "All right, we are going to develop a way of being the proper place that is so proud of being on a country that's had 60,000 years of continuous and evolving civilization. And we all belong here now as part of that story." The second thing is that the conversations have been happening. They've been happening in Aboriginal communities and you've got the Uluru Statement, and that was done by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

That was not something that came out of the clear blue sky out over two weeks. That is something that's come out of many clear blue skies over decades, and some would say hundreds of years. What you have is a distillation of generations of thought and knowledge and of almost a million people. It's a lot of people, a lot of thought, and there might be a bit of squabbling around the edges, but, ultimately, we need to have a place in this land because we've looked after it for 60,000 years and you are expected to look after it for the next 60,000 years, right? There has to be that reckoning, there has to be that place where we say the conversations have gone on, they've been happening at

your kitchen tables, they've been happening at all of your places as well. They've been happening in our universities.

That's why we're so committed to growing Aboriginal capability. I'm a graduate of the 1990s, that's only recent decades. Stuff has been happening and we have to own that and we have to be proud of that. That's not a deficit approach, that is absolutely looking at accentuating what we have done. But now's the time for us to really push on and do what it takes, and the power of the pen is important and how you engage with your politicians, how it is you engage with the media, your letters to the editor, to your respected professional journals and to various royal societies. This is the power of your voice and this is where you can really get something happening because, seriously, we are at a precipice in Australia. How we act now and where we'll go to in the next 10 years depends on people like you and me in this room doing something.

Julianne Schultz: But it is that thing about pushing it from those small local conversations to that next level? I don't know, Ariadne, you are an expert in all this space. How does that happen?

Lisa Jackson: That's an easy question.

Ariadne Vromen: I don't know if I want to talk about national identity, but I'd rather talk about the common good, but even I was thinking about that. There are still conversations around there that iron out differences in how we actually talk through, and with difference and with our diversity to come to what are the common things that we think are important. Which means valuing our deep history. The small to the large, the obvious example is what's happened with the kitchen table, or kitchen cabinet, conversations in more formal politics that did lead to independent MPs standing, particularly in rural parts of Australia. I'd differentiate them now from the inner-city Teals. They're motivated in quite different ways, although they used some of those similar local organising techniques, where they were having conversations with people not based on traditional political ideologies but based on what kinds of things people wanted to see change. Then they kind of scaled from there. It also became seamless between the way they used online organising and the offline community organising, as well. Again, it's what's: your theory of change? What do you want to see happen? How do you build to getting there on the way?

Julianne Schultz: Thank you very much. I think we're right on time. It's five o'clock, so thank you very much.

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Forum Program Committee Report

Stephen Garton

Chair of the Forum Program Committee

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The Program Committee for the joint Royal Society of New South Wales and Australia's Five Learned Academies Annual Forum sat down in early 2022 to plan the topic and potential speakers for the event. As we tossed around various ideas for a theme, we kept coming back to the times we have been living in. While bushfires, epochal floods and a global pandemic are not unprecedented, as many commentators have been fond of announcing, their conjuncture was very challenging for all Australians. The response of governments, public agencies, charitable organisations, community groups and many individual citizens, however, was extraordinary. This context of resilience in the face of catastrophe helped shape our thinking.

There were long-term trends that also impinged on our discussions — the growing disparities in wealth and opportunity in Australia, the impact of under-investment in many areas of government provision and the privatisation of key services which came into stark relief as health and aged-care systems struggled to cope with the impact of the pandemic. Evidence that "interventions" such as "Closing the Gap" were facing major hurdles in addressing the needs of Indigenous Australians further highlighted challenges in the provision of effective social policies. How are we to sustain a polity and society that serves all its citizens? How can our citizens become active participants in shaping social outcomes? How might the work of researchers in all disciplines assist our community? Here, was a wide-ranging theme where we could canvas the contributions of experts and those from community organisations who live with the daily reality of these challenges.

Rather than a focus on disaster, however, our thinking shifted to resilience and the ways Australians have managed both the long-term effects of social disadvantage in areas such as health, aged care, child welfare, housing, education, infrastructure, family violence and poverty, and more recent challenges like the climate emergency. While governments play a vital role in tackling these issues, communities, charities and for-purpose organisations have been equally important. Many Australians have little awareness of the significance and importance of the not-for-profit sector, now more commonly and appropriately titled the for-purpose sector. A 2020 Social Ventures Australia and Centre for Social Impact report on the charity sector highlights that this sector of the economy is worth $155 bn or 8% of Australia's GDP, employs 1.3 m workers, 10% of the workforce, and in addition there are a further 3 m volunteers delivering $12.7 bn worth of unpaid labour in the economy.

By any measure the volunteer, community and for-purpose sectors of our economy and society deliver very significant economic and social benefits. The size of the sector and the striking mobilisation of communi-

ties dealing with fires and floods suggest that volunteering and community action remain a strong ethos in Australia.

This presents significant risks and opportunities for researchers. The risk is that researchers claim expertise to give them a privileged position with which to speak for others, on occasion marginalising the views of communities, leading to less optimal policy and service outcomes. The opportunity is for experts to listen, to give communities a voice in how the challenges they face can best be managed. Researchers, governments and communities are increasingly working in partnership for solutions, and this is enriching both the research and the impact of potential interventions.

These were the factors shaping the thinking of the Program Committee. We wanted to explore some of the ways in which community action was shaping Australia and equally highlight some of the ways partnerships of researchers and communities were driving more constructive research and implementation outcomes.

The Forum began with some scene-setting thinking on the economic, demographic and big-data evidence on patterns of social disadvantage and current Commonwealth government approaches to social policy development — economic, rural, regional and metropolitan patterns, the impact of global warming on communities, different patterns in migrant communities, health disparities and especially the evidence for the disadvantages faced by Indigenous communities in Australia.

Our first session was followed by specific case studies. In these sessions we explored the views, experiences and strategies of community groups, climate activists, Indigenous community leaders, as well as the work of leading researchers, policy makers and those in the corporate sector, in such fields as Indigenous health, child and mental health, education, urban policy and infrastructure, who were collaborating with communities to develop better solutions to the policy and implementation challenges facing the nation.

The Forum finished with an illuminating discussion about new forms of community politics. Over recent decades there has been much discussion about the decline in volunteering and community participation. The evidence suggests that there has been an erosion in membership in such organisations as political parties, clubs and societies, established charitable organisations and other institutional forums of civic life. Similarly, there has been declining interest in traditional mediums of information, such as newspapers, television and radio. On the other hand, social media has become an increasingly influential space for community mobilisation and action on specific issues, where community volunteering is more spontaneous, horizontal and immediate than formal and hierarchical in structure, suggesting that community action is still vibrant but more situational and informal than previously. The challenge for researchers and governments is to adapt to and engage with these new forms of community activism.

The focus of the Forum on how communities are re-shaping Australia and how researchers are collaborating with communities as partners rather than as objects of study to the benefit of both the research and the community was uplifting. There remains much to do but the Forum highlighted examples of where community action and expertise were making a difference, help-

ing to address pressing social problems and crafting better solutions to improve the lives of all Australians.

We are grateful to all the wonderful speakers on the day who made these such lively and engaging sessions and particularly to our moderator, Julianne Schultz, who not only provided crucial advice and suggestions in the planning phase but also did a marvellous job keeping the conversation going.

I would particularly like to thank my colleagues on the Program Committee. We were fortunate that the President of the Society, Susan Pond, was able to participate in the program meetings. Her input and ability to keep us on track was vital. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the five Learned Academies in Australia, which each nominated a representative to sit on the committee. Their insights and contribution made all the difference to the program: Annabelle Duncan (Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering), Hala Zrieqat (Academy of Science), Pip Pattison (Academy of Social Sciences), Tony Cunningham (Academy of Health and Medical Sciences) and Bridget Griffen-Foley (Academy of the Humanities). We also benefitted from the participation of Emeritus Professor Robin King, a Fellow of the Society and the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering. Tragically Robin died, in a terrible holiday accident, just before the Forum. He was a wonderful contributor to the committee, and we hope that his family might draw some comfort from the success of the Forum, as a fitting tribute to his contribution to the work of the Society over many years.

Stephen Garton AM FRSN FAHA FASSA FRAHS

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Closing Remarks

Susan Pond

President, RSNSW

Well, what a day. I'll only take up one more minute, but it's important to thank Julianne for carrying the day. She knew it was going to be hard. I knew it was going to be harder, and I'll have to ask her later where it stood on her assessment of the energy that was required. But I think she's done a fabulous job, and thank you, of course, to our final panel and to Lisa and Ariadne and especially Lisa for performing with such consummate skill, having only been contacted yesterday when Marcia was unable to attend because of her health. I promised that we will go back in this digital world and amend the program so that, forever more, you will be on the program and Marcia will be there as an apology. Thank you very much.

Peter Shergold spoke about the number of learning profiles that we create during a lifetime. I thought it was a very good phrase, and I think today I've created at least six of my own: one for each of the five sessions and the other related to how to be a community activist. I realised that each and every one of us here is a community activist. All of the volunteers that have contributed to this through the Society and through the five Learned Academies, volunteers, and by definition, community activists. Everyone else in the audience, including the students, the past officials of the academies, and certainly the Society, the past presidents, of which we have four in the room.

We're all community activists. All of our speakers are activists. As the introduction to the program said, the aim of today was to show how great a community participation might impact long-term policy development for the benefit of all Australians. We heard some wonderful examples of that actually happening, but also some challenges about what else needs to be done to reshape Australia for the better. You've got no excuse when you leave this room. You are now empowered with all of the learning profiles you need to make your own individual and collective contribution and impact to and on a better Australia. Thank you all for coming. Congratulations to all of the speakers, to all of the organisers, and for every one of you who has stayed for the drinks.

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Ragbir Singh Bhathal FRSN 1936–30 November 2022

Davina Jackson and Robert Marks

Seselja, Loui & National Library of Australia. 1999, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-146271021

Dr Ragbir Bhathal was an Australian astronomer and author who gained his BSc from the University of Singapore and a PhD on magnetism from the University of Queensland. Prior to his arrival in Australia, Dr Bhathal had been a member of the academic staff of the University of Singapore. He was subsequently offered the role of Foundation Director of the Singapore Science Centre, one of the largest science centres in East Asia, and served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Science and Technology Centers, Washington DC. He was a UNESCO consultant on science policy for the ASEAN group of nations.

He spent most of his career at Western Sydney University, where he became a Distinguished Teaching Fellow in the School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics, and was known for his work on optical search for extra-terrestrial intelligence (OSETI), nanosecond laser pulsed communications, astrophysics, galactic surveys and the history of Australian astronomy. He wrote 15 books on science and history topics, including *Australian Astronomers: Achievements at the Frontiers of Astronomy* (1996), *Profiles: Australian Women Scientists* (1999), *The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* (2000), *Aboriginal Astronomy* (2010). His last book, with Ralph Sutherland and Harvey Butcher, was *Mount Stromlo: From Bush Observatory to the Nobel Prize* (2013). He wrote several papers published in the *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*.

Dr Bhathal served as President of the Royal Society of NSW 1984–1986, was its Honorary Secretary 1989–1991, and was awarded the RSNSW Medal in 1988. He was elected a Fellow in 2015 and recently served as Honorary Librarian, in which role he was responsible for the first modern valuation of the Society's library since 1936.

He was also an advisor to the then federal Minister for Science, Barry Jones DistFRSN, and a member of the committee set up to establish the National Science & Technology Centre (Questacon) in Canberra. He was also Project Director for renovations to the Sydney Observatory, and Deputy Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (later the Powerhouse Museum) in Sydney. He designed and built the twin-dome Campbelltown Rotary Observatory at WSU and was Director of the Observatory 2000–2022. He also won several literary awards, including a CJ Dennis Award from the Victorian government and a Nancy Keesing Fellowship from the State Library of NSW.

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Christopher Joseph Fell AO FRSN HonFIEAust 21 July 1940–8 December 2022[1]

Robert Marks, Editor

Chris Fell was born and grew up in Stockton, Newcastle, NSW. After Newcastle Boys High, he started chemical engineering at Newcastle University College, the first of his family to go to university. Then he moved to UNSW to complete his degree, living in the UNSW High Street Hostel (which he later described as "interestingly primitive").

In the winter of 1958, running out of hot water, and receiving no joy from the University authorities, Chris and other students from the Hostel took to the streets in their pyjamas, and marched over to the Anzac Parade Hostel, which did have hot water. There (according to the *Sun Herald* of 10 August 1958) they were met by a group of students who turned four fire hoses on them. There was a 15-minute battle. But afterwards the UNSW authorities responded: the hot water was restored within a day, and Chris and his mates had warm showers thenceforth. So, as David Gonski recalled, Chris was one of the first successful student demonstrators at UNSW.

He moved into Baxter College and was awarded the University Medal in 1962, with a degree in chemical engineering. He then won a Shell Scholarship — the first UNSW graduate to do so — to undertake a PhD at Cambridge, which he completed in 1965 ("Diffusion in Binary Liquid Mixtures"). After working for ICI in Britain and then in Melbourne, he joined UNSW as a Lecturer in Chemical Engineering in 1968, then as Senior Lecturer in 1971, and as Associate Professor in 1976. During that period he visited the University of Illinois and the University of California, Berkeley.

He was promoted to Professor in 1980, and was Head of School from 1985 to 1988. In 1989 he became Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, and in 1990 he was elected Chairman of the Australian Council of Engineering Deans. In 1991 he became Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and International) and a year later Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and International) until his retirement in 2001.

As recalled by Mary O'Kane, in 1990 the University of Canberra, a new university, wanted its new engineering courses to be three-year degrees, unlike the four-year degrees at all other Australian universities. Would competitive pressures result in others joining suit? Mary, as the first Dean of Engineering at Canberra, joined the Council of Engineering Deans, where Chris, as Chair, started lobbying. He succeeded and "to this day, engineers across Australia can be grateful to Chris for their four-year degrees." On his watch the UNSW Faculty of Engineering became recognized as one of the top 30 engineering faculties in the world.

1 UNSW celebrated Chris Fell on 21 March 2023. Contributors were: his son Gordon Fell; Attila Brungs FRSN, the Vice Chancellor of UNSW; Mary O'Kane AC FRSN, Head of the NSW Independent Planning Commission; Stephen Foster, Dean of UNSW Engineering; Chennupati Jagadish AC, President of the Australian Academy of Science; and David Gonski AC, Chancellor of UNSW. This obituary draws on their contributions. Jessica Milner Davis FRSN found the photo.

Chris Fell (centre) pictured with NSW Premier, Neville Wran, 1983. Courtesy UNSW Archives.

In 1977, UNSW researchers, led by Chris, had developed and patented a membrane to treat waste water. This membrane removed harmful molecules and pathogens and worked at low pressure, making water treatment much more affordable. It became the industry standard and is now used in approximately 50,000 water treatment plants around the world. In 1988 he became the inaugural Director of the Commonwealth Special Research Centre for Membrane and Separation Technology. In 1991 he became the inaugural Chairman of the Cooperative Research Centre for Waste Management and Pollution Control.

He was National Chairman of the Institution of Chemical Engineers in Australia in 1987–88, and was later made an honorary Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, Australia. In 1992 he was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, and awarded the Chemeca Medal, by the Australian and New Zealand Federation of Chemical Engineers (ANZFChE), the most prestigious award in the chemical engineering profession in Australia and New Zealand.

Soon after his retirement from UNSW Professor Fell suffered a serious stroke, which greatly impaired his mobility. Nonetheless, he was President of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technical Societies (FASTS)[2] and Chairman of the Implementation Group of the Science Industry Action Agenda. In March 2015 he was appointed an FRSN.

He became an internationally recognized expert of nanotechnology, and facilitated the development of the Australia National Fabrication Facility. This was no small task since the nano community was massively interdisciplinary, involving physicists, chemists, biologists, engineers of all subdisciplines, as well as material scientists and mathematicians. He was founding director of the ANFF from 2007, becoming chairman in 2011. In November 2022 he was re-elected unanimously as chairman by the 21 member universities and CSIRO. He was also a commissioner of the NSW Independent Planning Commission, which is responsible for evaluating projects of state significance. He was actually on his way to chair a public meeting in relation to a proposed goldmine in north-western NSW when he died.

He was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2003 for service to engineering, particularly through the Membrane and Separation Technology Research Centre and FASTS, and in 2021 Chris became an Officer of the Order of

2 Now called Science and Technology Australia.

Australia (AO) for distinguished service to science and engineering, with a focus on nanotechnology research and fabrication.

What of Chris the man? He was a husband (twice), father, grandfather, colleague, mentor, and teacher. As Gordon Fell recalled, Chris was a loving husband, father and grandfather. As a young man, he was scoutmaster of the First Kogarah Bay Sea Scouts, and, as Gordon remembered, two of Chris's favourite pastimes were sailing and fishing. He was a member of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron for his whole life in Sydney. According to his son, Chris had a strong impact on many people with whom he came into contact: "He hadn't read the manual on how to win friends and influence people; he simply treated people decently and they responded in kind."

Students, as Attila Brungs (who was a boy when he first met Chris) remembered, benefitted from Chris's intellect and guidance. "Not only was Chris a brilliant scientist, but he was deeply interested in the way that science could improve both technology and the way that the world worked." Chris supervised more than 50 research students, many of whom have gone on to successful careers of their own in academia and in industry and have had profound impacts on our world.

The speakers and the attendance at his memorial event in March attest to his influence on people in his life. For myself, I remember his guidance after a promotion of mine had gone awry thirty years ago: his advice and encouragement meant I was successful a year later. Most recently, a few weeks before his death, he and I had a long casual conversation about my career: I soon found what others have spoken of — his close attention to his interlocutor, and his insights into life's decisions. His death is a great loss.

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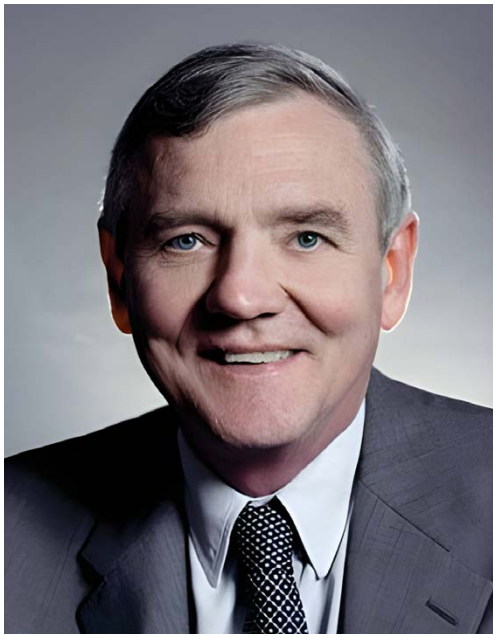
Jeremy Guy Ashcroft Davis AM FRSN
4 December 1942–13 June 2023

Robert Marks and others[1]



Jeremy Davis AM FRSN used to say that one of his best pieces of luck was when, as a 13-year-old, he was thrown into debating and made the team's third speaker, a role which demanded a lot of thinking on his feet. "You have to live by your wits and, while you need a structured argument, you also need to respond to the dynamics of what has been going on," he would muse. "That experience also helped me overcome any fears about public speaking, and I've often thought that teacher did me a real favour by not letting me off the hook." He went on to graduate from the University of Sydney as University Medallist, Bachelor of Economics with First Class Honours in Accounting, in 1964. Debating would also have exposed him to strategic interactions among debaters: how to counter and attack, as did his experience in student politics, both in the SRC, as President of the University of Sydney Union, and as Vice-President of the National Union of University Students (where he met his wife, later Dr. Jessica Milner Davis FRSN).

Jeremy Davis became the second Dean and Director of the Australian Graduate School of Management in 1980, just four years after the AGSM was founded at UNSW, based on the Cyert Report's recommendation to the Australian Government that a national school with a strong research orientation and an independent Board of Management, should be established in a University willing to host it under those conditions. Richard Cyert was Dean of Carnegie Mellon University, which had just such a research-based school of management. Jeremy served as Dean of the AGSM ,teaching as well as leading it, until 1989, when he stepped down as Dean and took up the role of Professor of Strategy at the AGSM. He remained at the School until it was absorbed into the UNSW Faculty of Commerce and Economics in 2006.

1 This obituary has benefitted from the contributions of many of Jeremy's past AGSM colleagues, especially Bob Wood, John Roberts AM FRSN, Roger Collins AM, Baljit Singh, and Timothy Devinney. Jessica Milner Davis FRSN has also contributed.

In 1980 Jeremy was an unusual appointment: he did not have a conventional academic background, having chosen not to pursue the offered PhD at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, after completing his MBA and a Masters of Economics while lecturing there. Instead, he started his business career with Boston Consulting Group (BCG) at a time when the company was small and rapidly growing, and soon moved from Boston to Paris to help set up their French office. In 1974 he was asked to serve as Managing Partner and open BCG's second US office in San Francisco, a challenging time when businesses were struggling financially while BCG was rapidly hiring new recruits. This led to Jeremy's pioneering work in consulting to banks and financial services about their social as well as economic impacts. In 1978, after building a successful Californian team, he returned as Managing Partner to Paris where a daughter Rachel was born to him and Jessica. Two years later, UNSW's then Chancellor, Sir Robert Webster, encouraged him to return to Australia and the new AGSM.

On first meeting Jeremy, we faculty members at AGSM were not disappointed — he was intelligent, engaged, and curious about us, our teaching, and our careers. He proceeded to target and hire people both as faculty and students who have gone on to brilliant academic careers in Australia and abroad.

He was the prototype of the true academic in all but a lengthy list of publications, the modern, often misguided, marker of contribution to knowledge. Despite this, in 2003 he was elected President of the highly prestigious Society of Strategic Management by academics from leading universities in the USA and Europe, based on his lectures and other key contributions to the discourses that shaped the field. He had the sharpest of intellects and was a leading thinker in the then nascent area of business strategy, which brought together the disciplines of economics, sociology and psychology in the study of organizational strategies in competitive environments. His acceptance and high standing among academics were also evident at UNSW, where he was twice elected President of the Academic Board and served on the University Council, chairing various committees and working parties and advocating for academic input into university decision-making.

During his Deanship at the AGSM, Jeremy built a diverse culture of young academics that included basic researchers and those with more applied and policy interests. Under his leadership, the AGSM became recognized as Australia's leading business school. Most of the young academics he recruited progressed from lecturer to professor and became internationally recognized scholars. The AGSM became known for rigour and critical debate. Jeremy sat on all admission, selection and promotions decisions, often championing unusual cases when he saw value to the School. He attended research seminars presented by staff and visiting scholars where his intellect was evident in his forensic questioning of the presenter.

A major mission of the School during his leadership was the training of future Australian academics as he foresaw the burgeoning growth of business schools around the nation. Jeremy attended all doctoral thesis presentations, reorganizing his schedule when needed. His support of PhD students mostly offset the fear they felt when anticipating his cross examina-

tion during their presentations. They came away with better theses for his input. And, over time, he did publish a number of book chapters and journal articles on business strategy.

As well as an academic side, the AGSM had an applied side. Under Jeremy's leadership, the School developed executive programs that trained Australian managers in the latest evidence-based models and methods. Everything was underpinned with a commitment to rigour. Populist management models and the Harvard case-based teaching that relied solely on practitioner anecdotes were replaced with rigorous analyses of problems that combined practical insights with research evidence. The mix was underpinned by Jeremy's belief that academics needed to strike a balance between providing students with intellectual and conceptual structures and giving them learning opportunities to master these concepts.

As Dean, he insisted on the AGSM's founding autonomy, as envisaged by the Cyert Report and UNSW as host institution. He successfully argued for the School's right to pay salary supplementation and housing loans, publish student teaching evaluations and charge fees for the short-courses that would fund such things, a first in Australia's then fully-regulated university sector. Later, he lobbied the Federal Government for deregulation in the larger academic sector, particularly in overseas student fees and academic merit payments. He was a strong opponent of the controversial "Unified National System" of amalgamated tertiary institutions proposed by federal Minister John Dawkins in the late 1980s, foreseeing a resulting diminution of quality and specialisation. Owing to the efforts of Jeremy and others, UNSW itself was happily spared this fate. He had strong views on how universities and educational institutions should be managed with proper academic involvement and avoiding second-rate managerialism and reflected this as a Ministerial nominee in a review of governance of South Australian universities.

Given Jeremy's commitment to interaction and learning between the University and the business world, he became involved with many companies and enquiries in wider society both as professor and after his retirement from UNSW in 2006. He was Deputy Chairman of small venture capital group AMWIN Management Pty Ltd and a long-term Director of the subsequent CHAMP Ventures Ltd; he was Chairman of Capral Aluminium Ltd and a Director of Singapore Power and the SP AusNet Group; a Director of the ASX and of Transurban Group. For the Hawke-Keating Government, he chaired the Australian Industries Development Corporation Limited, a pioneering future fund for Australia later dissolved by John Howard's government. He also delighted in serving on the boards of innumerable small innovative high-tech ventures including Nucleus Limited (the cochlear implant company), Gradipore Limited, XRT Limited and the Very Small Particle Company Limited. He was a Board member of the St. James Ethics Centre (which he had helped found) and of the NSW Division of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, of which he was a Fellow, as well as the now defunct Australian Institute of Management (NSW and ACT). He chaired a number of high-level Federal government advisory committees and enquiries. In 2018 he became a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

His duties as Dean and Director never interfered with his teaching. Jeremy's Strategy and Negotiation courses were always oversubscribed. They were both the most demanding of courses and the most popular. No AGSM alumni event goes by without someone sharing a story of what they learnt in Jeremy's courses and how he sharpened their analytic skills. They also testify to his continued support and wise counsel for many in their later careers and lives.

He was a devoted father, uncle and husband — for 52 years. He had many extra-mural interests including his and Jessica's enthusiasm and support for Sydney's Pinchgut Opera, the Bangarra Dance Company, Taikoz and for the Adelaide Festival, where they would meet up for a chat with friends. He was active in environmental and Indigenous and human rights causes, supporting many financially through his family trust, the Sisyphus Foundation.

Jeremy's contributions to education were recognized with an AM in 2008: "for service to tertiary education, particularly as an educator in the discipline of strategic management, through a range of academic administrative roles, and to business and commerce." In 2013, the University of Sydney presented him with its Alumni Award for Professional Achievement. He contributed so much more in his many Board roles, on government committees and in his charitable endeavours. Jeremy will be sorely missed by all his friends and colleagues at the Royal Society, the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney, the Society of Strategic Management, and beyond.

Jeremy's funeral, for family, close friends and colleagues, was held on 26 June. There will be a Memorial Service celebrating Jeremy's life at his original alma mater, the University of Sydney, on 22 September and all who knew him are warmly welcome to attend. Please email jgadavismemorial@gmail.com for further information.

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Royal Society of New South Wales

Awards 2023

The Royal Society of New South Wales has long recognised distinguished achievements in various fields of knowledge through its Awards. Some are amongst the oldest in Australia while others are more recent. From its Act of Incorporation in 1881, the Society's mission has been to encourage "studies and investigations in Science, Art, Literature and Philosophy." In 2023, the Society determined to broaden and streamline its Awards portfolio to recognise recent and evolving fields and disciplines, and emerging as well as established stars.

From 2023, the Society Awards are made in two main classes reflecting the Society's history: Career Excellence Medals and Discipline Awards and Medals; with additional Awards, Scholarships, and Citations, including Internal Awards for distinguished service to the Society and community. External nominations are most welcome for all but the Internal and Discretionary Awards which require both the nominator and seconder to be Members or fellows of the Society. Conditions and nomination forms are listed at each Award's individual webpage, together with some guidance notes.

Nominations for all available Awards open on 1 July each year and close on 30 September. Awardees are announced by the end of that calendar year with formal presentations of their Awards in the following year. All nominations require a nominator and a seconder. All RSNSW awards are assessed relative to opportunity.

See the Awards page for all links, at https://royalsoc.org.au/awards.

The RSNSW Awards Program from 2023

The new program comprises four categories of awards, with individual awards within each category itemised as follows. Follow the links to information pages and relevant nomination forms for each individual award. Please note that the nomination forms will be available on these pages before 30 June 2023.

Career Excellence Medals

RSNSW Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Scholars Medal

Awarded for the most meritorious contributions to knowledge and society made by scholars identifying as Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and conducted mainly in New South Wales. Recipients may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Scholars Medal was established by Council in 2023 to reflect the full scope of the Society's values. The application procedure for this Medal is described on the nomination form.

Note: When appropriate, this Medal recognises teams as well as individuals. Nominators are welcome to consult the Society for guidance before making a team nomination, noting that only one physical medal is presented.

RSNSW James Cook Medal — for lifetime career contributions

Awarded for the most meritorious lifetime contributions to knowledge and society in Australia or its territories made by an individual and conducted mainly in New South Wales. The recipient may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The James Cook Medal was established by Council in 1943 following a donation made by Henry Ferdinand Halloran to celebrate his 50 years as a member of the Society and it has been awarded periodically since 1947. In 2023, Council determined to award it annually. Additional information about the establishment of the James Cook Medal is available at the link. The application procedure for this Medal is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Edgeworth David Medal — for mid-career researchers

Awarded for the most meritorious contributions to knowledge and society in Australia or its territories, conducted mainly in New South Wales by an individual who is from 5–15 years post-PhD or equivalent on 1 January of the year of the award. The recipient may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The Edgeworth David Medal was established by Council in 1943 in honour of Sir T. W. Edgeworth David FRS, who compiled the first comprehensive record of the geology of Australia, and following a donation made by Henry Ferdinand Halloran to celebrate his 50 years as a member of the Society. It has been periodically awarded since 1948 and in 2023, Council determined to award it annually. Additional information about the establishment of the Edgeworth David Medal is available at the preceding link. The application procedure for this Medal is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Ida Browne Early Career Medal

Awarded for the most meritorious contributions to knowledge and society in Australia or its territories by an individual from 0–5 years post-PhD or equivalent on 1 January of the year of the award and conducted mainly in New South Wales. The recipient may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The Ida Browne Medal was established by Council in 2023 in honour of Ida Browne DSc, palaeontologist and first woman President of the Royal Society of NSW, serving from 1953–1954. The application procedure for this Medal is described on the nomination form.

Discipline Awards and Lectureships

These Awards are made on a three-yearly cycle. The discipline awards in 2023 are as follows.

RSNSW Clarke Medal and Lectureship in the Earth Sciences

Awarded for distinguished research in any area of the sciences affecting the planet, excluding Medicine and Veterinary Science, and Agricultural and Environmental Science, conducted mainly in New South Wales. Recipients may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The Royal Society of NSW Clarke Medal honours Rev. William Branwhite Clarke, a geologist, and a father of the Royal Society of NSW, serving as its first joint Vice-President. It was first awarded in 1903, with the first Clarke Memorial Lecture delivered in 1906. Since 2018, Medal and Lectureship have been conjoined. Additional information about the establishment of the Clarke Medal is available at the preceding link. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Walter Burfitt Award in Medical and Veterinary Sciences and Technologies

Awarded for distinguished research in any area of the Medical and Veterinary Sciences and Technologies, conducted mainly in New South Wales. Recipients may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The Walter Burfitt Award honours the life and work of Walter F. Burfitt BA MB ChM BSc, an eminent Sydney surgeon in the 1950s. It was established as a prize with generous support from Dr Burfitt and his wife, and was first awarded in 1929. In 2004, funding for the prize was augmented by Dr Burfitt's granddaughter, Dr Anne Thoeming. In 2023, Council designated it the Royal Society of NSW Walter Burfitt Award. Additional information about the establishment of the Walter Burfitt Award is available at the preceding link. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Award in the Social and Behavioural Sciences

Awarded for distinguished research in any area of the Social and Behavioural Sciences including Psychology, Economics, Management, and related disciplines, conducted mainly in New South Wales. Recipients may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

Council established the Royal Society of NSW Social and Behavioural Sciences Award in 2023 to reflect the full scope of the Society's founding values. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Award in the History and Philosophy of Science

Awarded for distinguished research in the History and Philosophy of Science conducted mainly in New South Wales. Recipients may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

The Royal Society of NSW History and Philosophy of Science Award was established by Council in 2013 to reflect the founding values of the Society and was first awarded in 2014. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

Scholarships, Early Career, and Student Awards

Three RSNSW Bicentennial Postgraduate Scholarships

Three scholarships, the value of which is determined annually by Council, plus a complimentary year of Associate Membership of the Society, are awarded each year to recognise outstanding achievements by young researchers in any academic field. Applicants must have completed an undergraduate degree within NSW or the ACT and must on 1 January of the year of nomination be enrolled as research students in the first or second year of their first higher degree at a university or other research institution in NSW or the ACT.

Winners will be expected to deliver a short presentation of their work at a general meeting of the Society in February or later of the year following that in which the award was made, and also submit a paper to the Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

Scholarships were first awarded by the Royal Society of NSW in 1999 and in 2023 were redesignated by Council to commemorate the Society's Bicentenary. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

Three RSNSW Bicentennial Early Career Research and Service Citation

Three citations plus a complimentary year of Associate Membership of the Society, are awarded each year to recognise outstanding contributions to research and service to the academic and wider community. Applicants must on 1 January of the year of nomination be no more than 5 years after the award of their PhD or equivalent by a university or other research institution in NSW or the ACT.

Winners will be expected to deliver a short presentation of their work at a general meeting of the Society in February or later of the year following that in which the award was made, and also submit a paper to the Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

Council established these Early Career Citations in 2023 to commemorate the Society's Bicentenary. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Jak Kelly Postgraduate Award

Awarded for excellence in postgraduate research in physics annually. The winner is selected from presenters at each year's Australian Institute of Physics, NSW Branch Postgraduate Awards, as advised to the Awards Committee of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

The Jak Kelly Award honours Jak Kelly (1928–2012), Professor and head of Physics at the University of NSW (1985–1989), Honorary Professor at The University of Sydney (2004), and President of the Royal Society of NSW (2005–2006). It was first awarded in 2010. Additional information about the establishment of the Jak Kelly Award is available from the preceding link. There is no nomination form for this award.

RSNSW Internal and Discretionary Awards

Please note that the call for nominations for relevant awards opens on 1 July and closes on 30 September of each year.

Notes relating to Internal and Discretionary Awards:

1. For Internal Awards, the nominator and seconder must be either a current Member or a current Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW.
2. Selection of these Awards is made by the Council of the RSNSW, excepting for the Archibald Ollé Award.

RSNSW President's Award

Awarded at the discretion of the President and Council of the RSNSW to an individual whose distinguished work in any area has made an outstanding and eminent contribution to the State and people of New South Wales. The recipient may be resident in Australia or elsewhere.

Council established the Royal Society of NSW President's Award in 2023 to reflect the full scope of the Society's founding values. There is no nomination form for this award.

Three RSNSW Citations

The Royal Society of New South Wales Citations recognise an individual who has made significant contributions to the Society, but who has not been recognised in any other way.

The Royal Society of NSW Citation was first awarded in 2019. Council may make up to three Citations in any year at its discretion. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

RSNSW Medal

The Royal Society of New South Wales Medal recognises an individual who has made meritorious contributions to the advancement of knowledge in any field and also to the Society's administration, organisation, and endeavours.

The Royal Society of NSW Medal was first awarded in 1884, revived in 1943, and has been awarded periodically thereafter. Council may award the Medal in any year at its discretion. The application procedure for this award is described on the nomination form.

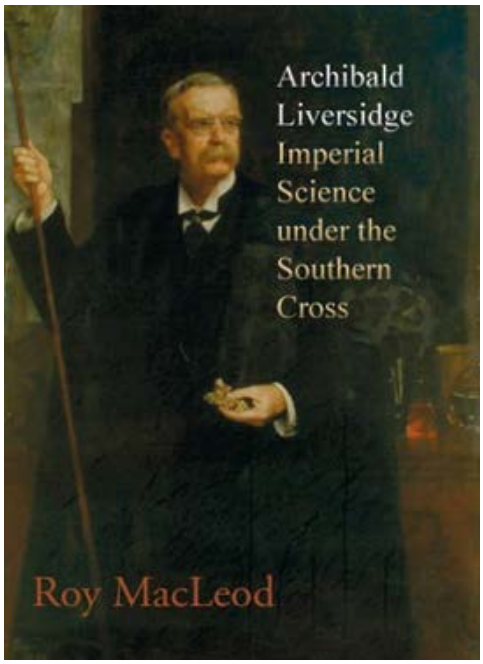
RSNSW Archibald Ollé Award

Awarded to the author/s of the best paper submitted to the Society's Journal and Proceedings in any year in which the Award is made.

The Archibald Ollé Prize was first awarded in 1956, established by a bequest from Mrs A. D. Ollé. The award of the Prize (currently $500) is determined by the Editor of the Society's Journal, in consultation with the Editorial Board. There is no nomination form for this award.

Archibald Liversidge:
Imperial Science under the Southern Cross

Roy MacLeod
Royal Society of New South Wales, in association with Sydney University Press
ISBN 9781-9208-9880-9



When Archibald Liversidge first arrived at the University of Sydney in 1872 as Reader in Geology and Assistant in the Laboratory, he had about ten students and two rooms in the main building. In 1874, he became Professor of Geology and Mineralogy and by 1879 he had persuaded the University Senate to open a Faculty of Science. He became its first Dean in 1882.

In 1880, he visited Europe as a trustee of the Australian Museum and his report helped to establish the Industrial, Technological and Sanitary Museum which formed the basis of the present Powerhouse Museum's collection. Liversidge also played a major role in establishing the A*ustralasian Association for the Advancement of Science* which held its first congress in 1888.

This book is essential reading for those interested in the development of science in colonial Australia, particularly the fields of crystallography, mineral chemistry, chemical geology and strategic minerals policy.

To order your copy, please complete the Liversidge Book Order Form available at:
https://royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/McLeod_Liversidge_Order_Form_Rev.pdf
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The Royal Society of New South Wales

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journal-ed@royalsoc.org.au

The templates available on the Journal website should be used for preparing manuscripts. Full instructions for preparing submissions are also given on the website.

If the file-size is too large to email it should be placed on a USB drive (or other digital media) and posted to:

The Honorary Secretary (Editorial),
The Royal Society of New South Wales,
PO Box 576,
Crows Nest, NSW 1585
Australia

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