



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Proof Committee Hansard

## SENATE

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS REFERENCES  
COMMITTEE

**Nationhood, national identity and democracy**

(Public)

FRIDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2020

CANBERRA

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**SENATE**

**LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Friday, 7 February 2020**

**Members in attendance:** Senators Kim Carr, Chisholm, Stoker.

**Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Nationhood, national identity and democracy, with particular reference to:

- a. the changing notions of nationhood, citizenship and modern notions of the nation state in the twenty first century;
- b. rights and obligations of citizenship, including naturalisation and revocation, and the responsibility of the state to its citizens in both national and international law;
- c. social cohesion and cultural identity in the nation state;
- d. the role that globalisation and economic interdependence and economic development plays in forming or disrupting traditional notions of national identity;
- e. contemporary notions of cultural identity, multiculturalism and regionalism;
- f. the extent to which nation states balance domestic imperatives and sovereignty and international obligations;
- g. comparison between Australian public debate and policy and international trends; and
- h. any other related matters.

The committee has published a discussion paper to guide submitters with regard to the above terms of reference.

## WITNESSES

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>CAMERON, Dr Sarah, Australian Election Study.....</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>CHUBB, Professor Ian, Councillor, Australian Academy of Science .....</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>COLE, Dr Jonathan, Assistant Director, Centre for Public and Contextual Theology,<br/>Charles Sturt University .....</b> | <b>1</b> |
| <b>DALY, Associate Professor Tom, Deputy Director, Melbourne School of Government.....</b>                                  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>ERGAS, Mr Henry, Private capacity.....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>EVANS, Professor Mark, Director, Democracy 2025.....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>HANCOCKS, Ms Anthea, Chief Executive Officer, Scanlon Foundation.....</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>KARP, Mrs Daryl, Director, Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House .....</b>                              | <b>1</b> |
| <b>MELLEUISH, Professor Greg, Private capacity .....</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>MENZIE-BALLANTYNE, Dr Karena, Lecturer, School of Education and the Arts, CQUniversity .....</b>                         | <b>1</b> |
| <b>O'DONNELL, Dr James, Private capacity.....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>PRASSER, Dr Scott, Private capacity.....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>REECE, Mr Nicholas, Director, Strategy Policy and Projects, University of Melbourne .....</b>                            | <b>1</b> |
| <b>REYNOLDS, Professor Kate, Private capacity.....</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>ROGGEVEEN, Mr Sam, Director, International Security Program, Lowy Institute .....</b>                                    | <b>1</b> |
| <b>SIDOTI, Adjunct Professor Eric, Vice-Chancellor's Fellow, Western Sydney University .....</b>                            | <b>1</b> |
| <b>THOMAS, Professor Julian, Fellow, Australian Academy of the Humanities .....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>WALKER, Mr Iain, Executive Director, newDemocracy Foundation .....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>WALTER, Professor James, Private capacity .....</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>WINN, Mr Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council of Learned Academies .....</b>                                | <b>1</b> |

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**Committee met at 09:54**

**CHAIR (Senator Kim Carr):** I thank you all for coming and I declare open this public round table for the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy. The committee's proceedings today will follow a program, which we've outlined, and it's been circulated. These are public proceedings. They're being broadcast live via the web and throughout Parliament House. There's a *Hansard* record being kept.

I remind witnesses that evidence given in these committees are protected by parliamentary privilege. There are some formalities I need to go through at this stage, for those of you who haven't appeared before parliamentary committees before. It is unlawful for anyone to threaten or disadvantage a witness on account of evidence they give to a committee, and such actions may be treated by the Senate as a contempt. It is also a contempt to give false or misleading evidence to the committee. The committee prefers evidence to be given in public, but under Senate resolutions witnesses have the right to request to be heard in confidence, which we describe as being in camera. If a witness today intends to request to give evidence in camera, please bring it to the attention of the secretariat as soon as possible. I'd be surprised if that's called upon! If a witness objects to answering any questions that are asked, the witness should state the grounds upon which an objection is taken. The committee will determine whether or not it will insist on an answer, having regard to the grounds which is claimed. If the committee determines to insist on an answer, a witness may request that the answer be given in camera. Such a request may, of course, be also made at any other time.

We have received submissions from a number of people who are here today. We've also received additional documents from the Australian National University and from the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. Those documents have been tabled, and I incorporate those as submission to the committee. These are public documents—*Trends in Australian political opinion* and the 2019 Australian federal election survey from the Australian National University; and *Bridging the trust divide: democracy, are you in?* and *Together we are educating tomorrow's leaders* from the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House.

The roundtable format is intended to generate a discussion between the committee and participants and between participants themselves. It will enable, I trust, a variety of views to be heard. I ask participants to keep their contributions as brief as possible. That really means, given the time we have available today, no more than 10 minutes at the outside, but we ask you to keep it much shorter than that if you can. We don't want to limit discussion on relevant issues, but we do want to get as many opinions expressed as possible. With that formality over, I would indicate to you that we've outlined a draft program for you. It's essentially to ensure that you get sufficient breaks during the day. If we conclude earlier than specified, we will. I'm not one to sit here for the sake of it, and I know many of you have travelled some distance, so we will proceed on that basis.

To kick off proceedings, I'm going to ask Professor Chubb if, on behalf of the Academy of Science, he would start. Some of you have prepared statements and others haven't. I'll indicate that from time to time I'll ask Dorothys of you, drawing on your submissions, just to spur on the discussion. I will try to get as many people to participate as possible. If you want to say something on a topic, please indicate, and if you feel that you want to contest an idea, please indicate, but I do want to ensure that everybody gets ago. With that, Professor Chubb, would you like to give us the views of the academy?

**Prof. Chubb:** I'll give it a go, Senator! Thank you for the invitation to contribute to this. As you indicated, I'm here representing the Academy of Science. I am a member of its council. I've been directly involved with it for a number of years, so I guess that's why they asked me on Wednesday if I could fill this gap. The academy put in a submission. I will assume that it's been read and that you may well ask me some questions about that. I'd be happy to take those. Never one to miss an opportunity, I thought I would make some other comments that are related to the topics of the inquiry as well and impinge on the academy's submission.

I should tell you that I'm not a scholar in this field. There won't be any great academic depth to my comments. In order to introduce it, I will tell you what I am: I am an Australian citizen. Since 1990, when I was first appointed a statutory officer of the Commonwealth—when I chaired a statutory authority and was deputy chair of another—I've been directly involved with nationhood and with democracy all the way through until 2015, when I retired as Chief Scientist. 'A pleasant way to transition to retirement,' the then Prime Minister told me after 16 years as a vice-chancellor, the last 10 of them at the ANU. During that time, I've been intermittently close to the very machinery of democracy and, indeed, nationhood. I've had to deal with seven prime ministers and probably 35 to 40 ministers in various guises and with various levels of competence during that period, so I know a bit, I've seen a lot and I've found ample cause now to be anxious—partly because I'm observant.

I find the present state of the country depressing and the future, as I see it, uncertain because not enough of us care enough to work hard for change, for improvement. I think when we don't like what we see—for example, question time in parliament—too many of us turn away and turn off. It's as if it would get better when we do nothing but ignore it, get more cynical and have no expectation of anything better. Others will tell you the consequences of some of that behaviour when they talk about their work—very fine work, indeed, with polls and surveys and so on—and I will leave that to them. But for me, as an observer, it's easily illustrated by voting patterns.

At the last couple of elections, roughly two million of us chose not to vote or not to vote validly, and we should ask why that's so. The issue for me is that it's simply pathetic for us to argue that it happens in other countries, so it's okay, or that 88 per cent or so voting isn't bad. We're not another country, and I think we should try to get full engagement in all dimensions.

Why might that be? It's a deeply cultural issue, I think. And cultural change is hard. We all know that. I think the change that we see now and the lack of trust in politics, politicians and institutions has evolved over time, got worse over time. I know that we can fiddle with bits and pieces on the margins and have a bit of this and a bit of that and make the assumption that it might be better, but we have to recognise that it's cultural, it's deep, and I believe that change starts with you, the polity of this country.

I recently penned a piece to *The Guardian* which might get published either today or tomorrow. I, along with others, was asked what was the one thing we would change about Australia if we had the chance. I gather we were all asked to choose only one, so my chosen one was to get we the people—all of us—engaged, the basic thesis being that if we the people want something enough, loudly enough then the people we employ to work in our interests, you, will actually respond. When we aren't, we're taken for granted. We get told when it suits about how the Australian people are not mugs and then we get treated like mugs for most of the rest of the time.

I also made the point in that article and elsewhere that one of the things we as a people should want is leadership—straight, honest, open, persuasive, insightful, smart and intelligent, particularly in our polity—and values and principles of a high order. We should applaud it when we see it and act decisively when we don't. Instead I think we get self-interest and transparently a greater interest in securing the job than actual leadership

through the tough times and the challenges ahead in an unpredictable world that will mean hard decisions have to be made. The community have to have the choices put to them in a way they can see, understand and accept. It's too often power without wisdom. We get cliches thrown around as if they mean something.

Elections are critical. They are obviously a critical component in a democracy. But ours tend to end up as ritualistic smooching based on fear campaigns and kissing babies, with pure opposition rather than a genuine contest of ideas and a cliched concern for we, the people, that soon fades. We see expertise belittled and cherry-picked. Climate change is a great example of that. There are endless examples of that in this country. But the list goes on and there are others. Half-truths have become the order of the day. Climate change is a good example. I just want to remind you that Mark Twain once said, 'A half-truth is the most cowardly of lies.'

I believe the public has the right to know in a true and functioning democracy. How many times do we hear, 'It's a security matter, so we can't tell you' or, 'It's on water,' or, 'It's in the bubble,' or a straight-out no when there is an opportunity to inform the public? And journalists' homes get raided for publishing a report on a topic that is clearly in the public interest. I accept that there are genuine security matters—there's no question about that. But, for example, the repeal of the medevac legislation swung on a security matter and we aren't allowed to know what it was.

I could go on, but I hear the blade being sharpened. So I will finish by saying that my improvements to Australian democracy and our sense of nationhood would have two components. Firstly, I would ensure that our education system prepares people to engage. At one level, that means accepting the responsibility of being an active citizen. It means planning a future. It means ensuring that the appropriate steps and policies are taken and holding the polity to account both for what they do and for what they don't do. My education system would be of genuine quality and genuinely and equally accessible in all parts of the country. Education would also mean that every single person would leave school with at least a basic understanding of science. As an eminent British statesman once said—he was eminent when he said it; he's not so eminent now, I gather: 'Science is all pervasive. Nearly all the great challenges that confront us will involve the use of science and/or technology if we are to live with them.' He said: 'Science lets us do more, but it doesn't tell us whether doing more is right or wrong, good or bad.' He went on to talk about community decision-making and the moral judgements that need to be made by the community. In order to do that properly, wisely and consistently, you need some basic understanding of how science works—the benefits and the negatives. We've also got to work with other disciplines, because, at the end of the day, you can tell people something is good for them but if we don't get the behavioural change needed, if we don't get the understanding, the embracing of the need, it's not going to happen. We see that around us all the time. My argument for education is broadly based. I don't argue only for science. I do argue for education as the basis for the sort of society we wish to be and we wish to become.

The second point is I do believe that the lack of trust we now see, especially in the younger cohorts of our community, is very largely down to the way politicians comport themselves. Question time is a disgrace, often in front of school groups. They know that that sort of behaviour would not be acceptable in their schoolyard. I pity the teachers when they get them back to school and they try to emulate the role models they've just seen. We get told that sportspeople have to behave because they're role models and then you look at question time or the behaviour of some of our politicians.

The use of public funds can be, not always, a disgrace. How often do we hear, 'It was within entitlements but to avoid ambiguity I'll pay it back'? No robocalls there. How are we to accept the fact that rules written for the community at large do not apply to the people who represent that community in this place? I think that, for our democracy to prosper, politicians have to earn back trust. It's not given. It's earned. We all know that. That will mean a close, hard look at how it works, how it presents, how it represents, how it behaves and whether, for example, the rules they write for themselves are more lenient than the rules they write for us.

What should we as Australian citizens think when we see that a letter that included false data is not being investigated because it caused 'low-level harm'? Every drip on the stone is integral to the integrity of the stone—every single drip. If low-level harm is okay for public officials to use to try to get an advantage over others then I don't know where this country is heading. I saw in the paper today that there was an extra \$150 million in sports grants that were awarded without public applications during the last election campaign. These are the sorts of things, I think, that when people read about them, see them and hear about them mean that the respect for the whole process and the respect for institutions is slowly but surely eroded.

Finally, I want to end on a slightly more positive note. I want to say that I know a lot of politicians and I know that many of them try to do the right thing most of the time, and I like a lot of them. Sadly, the behaviour of others drags down the trust in all of them when not all of them deserve it. I think that also is something we need to address. We as a community have to learn to be more nuanced. Firstly, we have to engage. Secondly, we have to

see the best as the aspiration for all and not reduce our perceptions of it all to an average that's too low. I think the machines get good and honourable people and they turn the handle. We deserve the best, not what the machines spit out. It has to change, and the change starts with you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Professor Chubb. We'll come back to some questions to the academy, but we want to make sure we get a few other people on the record first if that suits you.

**Prof. Chubb:** Sure.

**CHAIR:** We've had nearly 200 submissions. Some people today will be presenting who haven't made submissions but have made substantial public comment on these issues. Mr Henry Ergas is one of those. He is a regular contributor through the pages of *The Australian*. I was wondering if you'd be able to tell us, Mr Ergas, your perceptions of current threats to liberal democracy. What do you see as the main areas on which the work of this committee should be concentrating?

**Mr Ergas:** I don't have a prepared statement, so I hope you will accommodate me if my comments are not quite as focused as they might ideally be. I'd like to start by congratulating you on holding this inquiry and also by thanking you for inviting me to this session today. I think it's fair to say that ever since the notion of democracy was invented, if one could call the process that, it's always had a rather bad name—at the very least a mixed name, but more often than not a bad name. And yet you'd have to say that, historically, it's been an immense success.

You would also have to say that it has almost always been in crisis and almost always been perceived as experiencing fundamental difficulties. Perhaps the easiest way of illustrating that is to go back to the years when I was young—I know that's a terrible thing to say, but bear with me. If you had looked at the world at that point, you would certainly not have been optimistic in any respect about the future of liberal democracy. In Australia, it was a period of extraordinary divisiveness. The Vietnam War had for the first time really mobilised large swathes of public opinion against a conflict in which Australia was engaged, perhaps more profoundly so than even the conscription referendums. It was also extraordinarily divisive and unstable politically. You just need to think of the turmoil of the 1970s.

When you look at the other advanced democracies, the situation was even worse. During Nixon's inauguration, large parts of Washington DC were in flames from urban riots that had hit over 40 US cities over the course of the lead-up to the inauguration.

In other countries as well, it was the start of a period of extraordinary violence—perhaps the greatest period of terrorism in the advanced democracies in their history. In France, Italy and Japan powerful domestic terrorist movements were gathering strength. In Italy alone there were over 2,000 victims of terrorism in the space of a relatively short number of years. You had the start of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, and you also had the beginning of the conflict in the Basque Country, which then persisted for over two decades.

The situation outside the advanced democracies was even more dire. In Latin America there was only one country which remained democratic. Every other country had at least one coup in the period leading up to 1985. Turkey, which had begun a liberalisation process after the coup in 1960-61, descended into, again, the worst terrorism in its history.

It was hardly surprising that the Trilateral Commission issued that famous report on the crisis of democracy, largely written by Sam Huntington and Michel Crozier, which concluded that democratic regimes, liberal democracies and high-income countries were incapable of addressing the challenges they faced, be it the environmental challenges, the economic challenges or the challenges of sociopolitical change. The grim prediction of that report was that liberal democracy would likely be deeply threatened worldwide by the end of that century.

Of course, the reality is that all of the countries which were affected amongst the liberal democracies by the state's loss of its monopoly over violence regained it within 15 years. Indeed, if there is one proposition which I think is unassailably true, it is that no country with a per capita GDP in excess of that of Argentina in 1976 and which has been an advanced democracy for a decade has ever ceased being a liberal democracy. There are no cases in that box.

What does that mean in terms of your proceedings and the issues in front of you? It certainly doesn't mean that we should be complacent. On the contrary, one of the reasons liberal democracy has done as well as it has done is it feels perpetually in crisis and is more deeply self-reflective than any other form of government. It reflects on itself and it asks: what's going wrong and why is it going wrong? And hence, it has more self-correcting mechanisms than any other form of government. It is, in a way, a system of institutionalised political and social hypochondria, and it's that hypochondria that ultimately allows it to restore its health.



But it's hypocritical for good reason, because what is liberal democracy? Well, liberal democracy is first of all a form of institutionalising conflict and division, and hence it will always be embroiled in conflict and division. Its miracle and its secret recipe is to convert enemies into adversaries and opponents into competitors, and to the extent to which it can continue to do that, it's sure to persist. At the same time, it's a system of institutionalised distrust. The only reason democracy survives is because it's built on the distrust of its citizens in those who govern them and finds ways of institutionalising and managing that distrust.

To my mind, in terms of the inquiry that you are undertaking and the very pertinent questions that you have raised, the fundamental question is this: are there things which are leading to the breakdown of those foundations, as it were, of liberal democracy—for example, the capacity to convert disputes of principle into disputes of interest which can then be resolved through negotiation; the capacity to convert enemies into competitors and manage the competitive process in a way that gives rise to stable and effective government; and, finally, the capacity to both institutionalise and hence perpetuate distrust, yet retain a sufficient level of trust that the community is broadly willing to go along with decisions taken by governments which very large parts of the electorate will inevitably and rightly have voted against?

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. You've said some very interesting things in those remarks. I'm sure others will wish to contest some matters, so we'll come to that as well. But, in the process by which you're proceeding, Professor Mark Evans and Mrs Karp from the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, could give us some indication of what your views are? I notice that your submission points to the survey results where you argue that there's been a substantial and sustained decline in the levels of trust and negativity in terms of attitudes within this country towards democratic politics. You argue, of course, that that is obviously a major problem in terms of the way in which this country operates. Could you perhaps indicate to us the work of the museum and the findings that you've reached?

**Prof. Evans:** Yes, of course. I'm the director of Democracy 2025—strengthening democratic practice—which is an initiative based at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. We're called 'Democracy 2025' because our survey research, which is very consistent with both the research conducted by the Australian Election Study and the research conducted internationally, tells us that if current trends continue no more than one in 10 Australians will trust their politicians and political institutions by 2025.

The reason we set up this project is to drive a national conversation on how we can strengthen democratic practice, because, as Henry Ergas has just said, the issue is really about whether the evidence demonstrates that there's a need for a profound national reflection on the quality of our democracy at this particular moment in our history. Our view is that the evidence suggests that that is indeed the case, and basically we need to drive a national conversation about not just where the vulnerabilities are appearing in terms of our democratic settlement but also the importance of celebrating our democratic achievements, because through celebration we can inspire further generations to aspire to build the best democracy in Australia that we can be.

Recent research in Australia and internationally tells us, firstly, that declining political trust—and we're understanding 'political trust' as a relational concept about keeping promises and agreements, which is also in keeping with the OECD's definition, where trust is holding a positive perception about the actions of an individual or an organisation—is impacting negatively on trust in government services, particularly at the federal government level. No more than 29 per cent of Australian citizens, on average, across Australian states and territories trust government services. It's leading to low levels of confidence in government to affect the big public policy issues of our time. Confidence in government is at the lowest ebb since we've been collecting data on this issue. It impacts negatively on service satisfaction. There is evidence now that it's impacting negatively on social trust.

Why does this matter? It matters because we're seeing an increasing sense of powerlessness amongst the Australian citizenry, which is leading to the proliferation of the rise of different social movements seeking to effect different forms of social, economic and political change. It's increasing transaction costs for government due to lower compliance rates. It's leading to lower levels of civic engagement with government. It's leading to lower levels of social cohesion and higher levels of polarisation, when actually we need more cohesive communities to effect sustainable and stable political change. And, of course, this is creating the space for the rise of various forms of populism. Possibly most seriously, it's led to a period of risk aversion in government and policy.

We've been running a focus group program across every state and territory over the last year, and one of the major issues that is raised time and time again by Australian citizens is that they really don't think any real progressive change has been achieved on the major public policy challenges of our time. So there's a sense of policy limbo and stagnation, and that's because governments don't have the confidence. They don't have the

confidence, because they lack public support to actually meet these challenges head on. Risk aversion and low political trust is leading to a vicious cycle of apathy and of stagnation in government.

There are also, of course, costs to our international and regional reputation. At a time when Australia should be defending liberal democracy in our region, its ability to play that moral role has been undermined by problems that we have here in terms of justifying the nature of our politics. Of course, we've just seen the implications of democratic drift played out in a most dramatic way in Europe. Brexit is a classic example of what happens when you allow democratic drift to occur.

We argue that the evidence is pointing towards the need for a number of things. The first thing is that obviously we have fantastic polling that's done by the Australian National University—another organisation that provides red flags around problems that are appearing in the nature of our democratic settlement. But, actually, apart from in the area of elections—where, hand on heart, I can say that we have free and fair elections here in Australia—in relation to the protection of individual rights, where we can see there's a clear problem in terms of the protection of our individual rights, and in terms of the performance of the Australian Public Service, because it's subjected to cyclical evaluation, not just here in Australia, but internationally, there's a whole swathe of political institutions where, if we ask the question, 'Are our political institutions working effectively?' the answer is, 'We don't really know.' So we're calling for a systematic democratic audit of Australia to ensure that we have a strong evidence base to inform decision-making going forward.

We also think—again, I agree totally with Henry's view—that the evidence now points to the need for a time of profound reflection and democratic renewal. We would argue that a good way of discovering in more detail the realities of our particular democratic situation would be to convene a constitutional convention that mixes citizens and politicians to actually evaluate the state of democracy in Australia and to build public support for a period of renewal. We also argue that there's a profound need—because of the clear evidence around there being an integrity crisis in Australian politics—for a parliamentary integrity pledge for our politicians.

I'm now going to hand over to Daryl Karp to talk about the fourth area, which is on the importance of revitalising our civics education and developing a bottom-up process to change.

**Mrs Karp:** Thank you, Mark. I thought I'd frame it around the museum space, just for a moment, because everyone around the table here is an academic and does research. We have one substantial advantage, which is that we have hundreds of thousands of people that go through our museum every year and engage directly with us. I think the key message that we've been getting from them over the past five years is that they feel unheard and voiceless. So a lot of the work that we've been doing over the past five years has been around—I suppose I could frame it this way—giving hope.

We were talking a little bit earlier about what our achievements are and how we lose sight of our achievements. I often say that, if democracy were a sport, Australia would be Olympic champions. We are one of only a handful of democracies around the world that has had a seamless and peaceful transition between governments since Federation. Our constitution was the first to be written by and voted on by the people. We were the first to give women universal suffrage—the right to vote and stand for parliament. We introduced the secret ballot and have one of the highest voter turnouts in the world. It does help that it's compulsory, but, nonetheless, we should be very proud of that. We have an independent AEC setting electoral boundaries as well as ensuring that they stand as an independent judiciary.

But, as everyone around the table knows, democracy is challenging. The Pew Research Center in 2017 described a great global 'democratic recession'. In 2018, there were more authoritarian regimes than full democracies. We all know these figures, so I won't spend too much time on them. In 2019, the Edelman Trust survey identified that 18 countries have 'a double-digit trust gap' between the informed public and the masses. I think that is one of the challenges that we're increasingly starting to see. Australia has a particularly high gap in trust for our institutions between the informed public and the masses.

The good news is that museums play a really unique role in this space. Museums around Australia—in fact, around the world—are highly trusted. We're one of the most trusted places for fact based information. Unfortunately, there isn't much research in Australia on this, but there certainly is in the UK and in America. We're up there in the top three. That's partly because we tell important stories in unique ways—ways that connect, that educate, that engage and that, hopefully, change thinking or change minds. Australia has this unique institution just down the hill—the Museum of Australian Democracy—which sets out specifically to do that.

We have direct engagement with hundreds of thousands of visitors and 90,000 students who come and do face-to-face civics education with us, along with their teachers. It's a really clearly targeted market, and I can honestly say that there is no doubt that the young people who come there—and we're actually doing some research now on

how young people see their democracy—are not nearly as cynical as we have been led to believe. They actually are quite optimistic about democracy as a framework. They place it well above the other, non-democratic options that you might expect them to consider. So there is hope in that space, and we're certainly working hard to create that.

One of the big challenges we've identified is that teachers feel not well set-up to teach civics education. It's a really small part of the agenda. It's in a very tight curriculum space. We truly believe that there needs to be some more work, both in getting teachers better support and, dare I say it, in getting more funds or research into how best to get civics education to engage with young people. For me, though, the challenge is not just in civics education. The challenge is actually with the people who have finished school and are at the point where they're saying, 'I'm voiceless. I'm not being heard. How does my vote count?'

The biggest concern for us based on our latest exhibition, which is 'Truth, power and a free press', is having a look at what the RAND Corporation in the USA calls truth decay. That's one of our really big challenges. It's a phrase that they use to describe the growing disregard for facts and analysis in politics—political and civil discourse. I think that applies equally over here. There's an increased influence of opinion over fact, there's a declining trust in formally respected sources of factual information, and we're giving credibility to celebrities and others far more than we would have previously. And, if we don't have the capacity to agree about fact and analysis and a willingness to listen and, dare I say it, a willingness to compromise, then finding common ground becomes increasingly difficult. That, I think, is one of the really big challenges. That's one of the opportunities that museums and the Museum of Australian Democracy bring in addressing the challenges ahead.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We'll come back to some of the points that you've raised. I don't want anyone to think that you just say what you say and disappear. These are matters that need to be challenged and pursued. Perhaps at this point we could call on Professor Greg Melleuish from the School of Humanities and Social Inquiry at the University of Wollongong. Professor, your submission is numbered 10. You're arguing, for the benefit of those who may not have had the opportunity to read it, that the Australian national identity has changed over a number of years and it's complemented by a British identity to form a larger identity which is focused on an internationalist outlook and criticises the older Australian national identity. That's the nature of Australian nationalism, I suppose. You also recommend there needs to be a wider Australian national identity fostered that reconciles the reality of Australian identity with an international outlook, such as how it existed in Australia prior to the 1960s. Would you be able to outline how you might see a culture of trust is able to be encouraged by different groups given the nature of multiculturalism in Australia?

**Prof. Melleuish:** Can I come back to the final part of my submission about—

**CHAIR:** You might want to ignore that question and say whatever you like!

**Prof. Melleuish:** Sorry—I have things planned in my mind about Athenian democracy. Following on from what Henry said, distrust has always been part of democracy. One of the famous ways in which politicians are elected is by claiming not to be politicians, because they can actually have the will of the people. Athenian democracy worked. Why did it work? It worked not because of mass participation, because, even though everybody could participate, only a limited number did; it worked because the elites of Athens and the ordinary people of Athens actually had trust in each other. It might have been helped by the fact that there were laws. If the aristocrats insulted the ordinary people, they could actually be prosecuted, which I think may be a thing today. If you insult the average Australian people, that could perhaps be a prosecutable offence! That's a joke, by the way! But, coming back to that, the thing is: how does that fit in? That comes back to what Senator Carr was saying about Australia. If you go back to Australian history—I do Australian history and Australian politics—I think there was an old, established Australian identity. It existed and was created until the Second World War, and since then there have been a number of factors which have really altered that identity considerably. One was post World War II immigration, which has continued ever since, with an ever-increasing number of immigrants coming into the country. The other was the end of the British Empire.

I would argue that Australia still hasn't gotten over the end of empire, just as Britain hasn't gotten over the end of empire. Brexit is at least in part about the end of empire and how Britain reacts to the world, and I think this creates a whole range of problems, particularly with national identity. One thing, which I didn't mention in the paper, is that Australians always seem to want to have approval by their greater and better in other countries like Britain and America. That is very much a colonial mentality. What we actually need is a form of identity that says: 'Look, we can go out and do things. We don't need to have to constantly have American television or British television giving us a pat on the back or giving us a little wag of the finger to tell us how good or bad we are.' So that's a problem.

The end of empire, as I said, was one of the problems, and I don't think we've negotiated that very well over the last 50 years. Part of it is economic. I think Henry mentioned Argentina. Argentina was, of course, actually a British dependency, if not part of the British Empire. Once the old imperial networks went, Argentina didn't do very well in the world in many ways, and it has had authoritarian regimes. I think Australia was lucky. Australia got minerals and other things, which substituted for the fact that it didn't really know what it would've done. There is a distinct connection, actually, between mineral booms and the state of how we think about politics and the way politics operates.

So I think there's a whole range of problems. Part of that has been that, in the last 15 or 20 years, that has opened up into a new set of divisions, and those new divisions are between those who see Australia as having an internationalist base and those who are more nationalist based. Now it's all very well to say, and people do say: 'Oh, the nationalist base—that's just populism.' Actually, it represents the concerns and everything else of the Australian people and what they want. For example, it's all very well to say: 'We need education,' or, 'We need schemes that governments will do.' It's the lived experience of Australians that's the basis of their democracy—and you'll note that in my paper I discussed Hugh Stretton and his views on how neighbourhoods work and so on. Often, the basis of Australian democracy is the fact that people can live in country towns and neighbourhoods and so on. I think that the rise of massive high-rises and the destruction of suburban communities et cetera is one of the things in particular that actually has had an enormous impact on the way people live their lives and the way in which the foundations of democracy work.

So what we're getting is a number of things. One is that we're getting a much more highly educated community who tend to think in terms of Australia being networked into the world. We have a lot of people whom that experience doesn't affect. Coming back to what I was discussing about the ancient Greeks, Athenian democracy worked because, although there was a level of suspicion and a level of mistrust, overall that relationship between the masses and the elites worked in Athens. It may have worked because the Athenians were actually a particularly aggressive, militaristic people—we won't go into that—but it still worked. If there is an erosion of trust, my feeling is that it's because of the relationship between elites and the rest. We have to face the fact that a democracy is not about masses and masses of everybody participating. If anybody wants to see what happens when you get a participatory democracy, they should watch the film *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer*. That's what happens when everybody gets involved in politics. The final solution is that Michael Rimmer says, 'You can all vote absolute power to me because everybody's so sick of participating.' Not everyone wants to participate. But they do expect that the elites they elect and the people in their public service are actually interested in doing the right thing by them. That's what matters. We can have citizenship; that's fine. We can have levels of participation. But there will be a large number of people who will choose not to participate.

I will make one final point, which is a bit of a bugbear of mine, on the size of electorates in Australia: they are becoming huge, particularly in country regions. It's hard to see how a member can connect with their constituents when you have these huge electorates. Why is this the case? There has not been an increase in the number of electorates in Australia since 1984. Why is that happening? My argument is that it's quite simple: it's the nexus. If, for whatever reason, you increase the size of the House of Representatives, you have to increase the size of the Senate. There was a referendum in 1967 to break that nexus. It failed. So, if we're going to have a massive population increase—which we've had—then we're going to have bigger and bigger electorates, and I think that that will make the members of parliament increasingly distant from the people they come to represent. I'm one of the few people who actually think there should be more lower house seats. Whenever I raise this, people say: 'Not more politicians!' But how do you do that? As I said, if you do increase the size of the House of Representatives, you have to increase the size of the Senate. Just to bring you back, of course, Tasmania has five members in the lower house and 12 senators. You could even have that being four times the number of senators or whatever. I don't want to attack the Senate. I'll leave it there. Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much indeed, Professor. The idea of more senators from Tasmania is one that appeals to us enormously! On this question of what the public is thinking—and you've raised some issues about mistrust being inherent, and Mr Ergas has raised a similar matter—I call on the professors from the ANU and your survey results. I must say: I read the results with some alarm. We've tabled this today. Can I just very briefly recap. The survey examined the last federal election. Who is able to speak to this report?

**Dr Cameron:** I am.

**CHAIR:** Dr Cameron, can I ask you to speak to this question because, given what has been said about the level of mistrust as not necessarily a bad thing, I just want to examine what you've found, especially as to the satisfaction with democracy—that's the issue that the ANU survey examined. It said that there had been a drop of some 27 per cent in the support for democracy between 2007 and now, and that we now have a situation where

we've barely got a majority of public support for democracy in this country. Secondly, on the question of who the government is run for, the survey results suggest that a majority of Australians believe that the government is run for a few big interests: 'Just 12 per cent believe the government is run for all the people,' which I would have thought would be a pretty fundamental premise of democratic participation. That's a pretty substantial and alarming set of numbers. Dr Cameron, could you outline the basis on which the survey has come to that conclusion?

**Dr Cameron:** Yes. I'm a political scientist at the University of Sydney and a researcher with the Australian Election Study, which is run in collaboration with the Australian National University and colleagues there.

The Australian Election Study is the major scientific study of elections and voter opinion in Australia. It has been running continuously since 1987—after every election since then. In some cases we can extend trends back to the 1960s, drawing upon earlier surveys which were done by Don Aitkin. This is a representative public opinion survey covering an extensive period of time. Our results show that trust in government in 2019 reached its lowest level on record, with those records covering a 50-year period. Satisfaction with democracy is at its lowest level since the 1970s—the Whitlam dismissal and the constitutional crisis. Just under 60 per cent of voters are satisfied with democracy and just one in four Australians believe that people in government can be trusted.

As noted, just 12 per cent of Australians believe the government is run for all the people, while a majority see the government as being run for a few big interests. These are indicators of tremendous concern for a democracy like Australia. What's important to note here is that this is a new development in Australian politics. Australians used to be among the most satisfied democrats in the world back in 2007, when 86 per cent of citizens were satisfied with the way democracy was working. That would have placed us alongside countries in northern Europe like Norway and Switzerland. So there has been a steep decline in these indicators of trust over a reasonably short period of time.

What explains these levels of satisfaction with democracy and trust in Australian politics? If we look at the cross-national comparative literature, there are three broad explanations for why people are satisfied with democracy. The first is based on the framework of political institutions. The second is to do with cultural change—specifically, rising education levels and generational replacement, as younger voters may have different attitudes. The third explanation is government performance, which can include political performance as well as economic performance. Those are the three explanations in cross-national comparison. What makes sense in terms of the Australian context?

Over the period that we've seen this decline, our political institutions have remained reasonably stable, so that alone cannot explain the decline in satisfaction with democracy. Cultural change can explain gradual shifts over time, but it doesn't explain this very steep decline that we've seen in recent years in Australia. Some of my work has shown that the strongest factor influencing this decline in satisfaction with democracy is government performance, including aspects of both political performance and economic performance—in particular, the frequent change of prime ministers outside of elections. We had six prime ministers in a period of just eight years, with only one change of Prime Minister coming about following an election, in 2013. A majority of voters have disapproved of how those changes were handled and that has been a major factor contributing to the decline in trust. We also see a steady stream of political scandals, which are giving the impression to voters that people in government are more concerned in advancing their own interests or fighting amongst themselves, rather than governing in the nation's interest. Another key factor undermining levels of satisfaction with democracy has been increasing levels of voter pessimism about the state of the economy in Australia, so economic performance is also important.

Some people talk about the decline in trust in Australia as being reflective of trends happening around the world, and we certainly do see in some countries, including in the United Kingdom and the United States, citizens becoming more distrustful of politics. But this isn't a universal trend. In Canada and New Zealand, for example, satisfaction with democracy has remained reasonably stable. So explanations like, 'This is because of young people. This is because of social media', may point to contributing factors but they don't explain the full extent of what we've seen in Australia, which my research shows is primarily driven by government performance.

**Senator STOKER:** Can I ask a question that arises from that. What does your research show that might support or not support what professor Melleuish said about a connection between mining booms and people's satisfaction with democracy and government?

**Dr Cameron:** We don't have specific indicators on mining booms, but economic performance is very important for understanding levels of trust. This is shown by the cross-national comparative literature. The performance of the economy matters for levels of trust, both at the aggregate level and in terms of an individual's personal circumstances; people who are doing better themselves will be more satisfied with the performance of

democracy. The other distinction I would make—not speaking directly to your question—is that it's important to understand the distinction between satisfaction with democracy and support for democracy. Australians, on the whole, are supportive of a democratic political system but are dissatisfied with the performance of democracy—in it not meeting their expectations.

**Senator STOKER:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Can I follow that you. In terms of perceptions as to who benefits—that's the point of who is the government run for, to quote from your report—how do you explain that just 12 per cent believe the government is run for the people?

**Dr Cameron:** That's a good question. I think there are a number of contributing factors. I've looked at the predictors for this particular item on what explains people's attitudes that the government is run for a few big interests. Are people more concerned about this if they perceive the economy is doing poorly? If they voted for the party that didn't win the election—people always are more concerned about what the other party is doing in government. There is a limited time series to draw upon for this, but it is also likely related to the campaign finance arrangements in Australia. Evidence from the Electoral Integrity Project—the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity expert survey—shows that campaign finance integrity in Australia is rated a lot lower than most democracies in the OECD. So voters are potentially concerned about the influence of big interests in politics through the process of political donations.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We are due for a break. After the break I was going to go to Mr Walker, particularly around this issue. Internationally, we have some evidence as to what different political systems are doing with this same question. I listened, for instance, to President Trump's state-of-the-union address yesterday and he was using a different set of language than I've heard other Republicans use. Maybe that's part of this question about how people are responding to perceptions about who is benefiting from the economic system as well as the political system.

**Mr Reece:** Is there scope to ask questions of presenters as a participant in the roundtable?

**CHAIR:** Yes. And if you want to jump in, please do.

**Mr Reece:** Could I ask one question of Sarah about her research, which I thought was absolutely fascinating. Australian states have not seen the turnover of leaders in the same way as federal politics has over the last decade. Do you have a Commonwealth-state breakdown of your data? That might provide a proof point for your theory about the revolving door or prime ministers leading to a decline in trust in federal politics.

**Dr Cameron:** We don't have specific indicators of trust in governments at the state level, but we can certainly break down our results by state. What I draw upon to make the relationship between leadership change and satisfaction with democracy is a question we ask in the Australian Election Study about whether voters approved or disapproved of how the parties handled these leadership changes. We find that, in every case, the vast majority disapproved. In the most recent case, three-quarters of voters disapproved of how that change from Malcolm Turnbull to Scott Morrison was handled. In multivariate regression models that shows up as the strongest predictor of satisfaction with democracy, roughly equal with perceptions of economic performance.

**CHAIR:** Is that right?

**Mr Reece:** Yes. That's very helpful.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We'll regroup after a break.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 11:00 to 11:15**

**CHAIR:** I call Mr Iain Walker, on behalf of the newDemocracy Foundation. There was the point that Nicholas Reece made in terms of asking questions. It's always a very good matter. If you wish to pursue something, please do. Mr Walker, perhaps you'd like to give us the benefit of your advice. Your submission is numbered 45. You're arguing that democracy is a bit more than just voting. Perhaps you could explain what you mean by that.

**Mr Walker:** Certainly, and thank you for the opportunity. We were absolutely cheered to see the discussion paper come out. We all scratched our heads and wondered why it had come about, but it is appreciated. If I have one aspiration for the committee, it's to trial something. It may not be something we agree with, but a trial of any innovation is at least a step forward. It should resonate with the public. It can be small, it can be short, but that's hopefully where we'll head.

We look at those two definitions of democracy. There's the broad one: the rule of law, freedom of speech and freedom of association. And there's the narrow one: how we make public decisions that affect us all. We focus ourselves purely on the item: how do we make public decisions? We argue that democracy is not the vote; it's

acting on the informed general will of the people. I want to give you three examples of positive developments around the world. I want to start from the problem we're trying to solve. I think of it in two days. It goes to Mr Ergas's point at the start. Democracy has had its permanent hypochondria and it has wobbled along and it's always wrestled with the tension of public opinion and public judgement—two vastly different things. Public opinion: what I think in the next 10 seconds. Public judgement: after I've read and considered a range of sources and other perspectives. In the period of hypochondria, we, as a society, built 10 to 15 years worth of massive public opinion tools, and that stress is like a cancer being added to the system. Much like the hypochondriac lives his life, he does end up with a tombstone that says, 'I told you I was sick.' And that's the problem that we now face as people silo, and people can wallow in their own opinions without having to move into judgement.

If I distil the electoral theme more broadly, if you look at elections across the UK and across the US, and arguably here, there is the message of reaching out to people who feel left behind with no voice. We've heard that from a number of the contributors today. That kind of brings you to: so what do you do about it? I'm arguing against public opinion. I don't want to just give a free hand for direct democracy—click to vote, Michael Rimmer tools. We want to say, 'What's a mechanism in society that we do trust?' Our starting point for this is the criminal jury. This is an enormous positive development. You can hear an extremely controversial decision being made through the jury system. We had one with Cardinal Pell last year. Those who dissented or believed it was wrong did not see it as corrupt or influenced by money or jurors trying to get their time on the front page of the newspapers. Those who disagreed said, 'I think they got it wrong in fact.' That's quite different to what is levelled against people who sit within a parliament. If the jury's trusted and judges can find a jury complementary, can people in parliament find some version of that jury complementary? I don't want to stretch the analogy too far. We actually work on the great thing of a jury involved in a policy issue—they need to apply rationale and reasoning, and they should make an effort to find the common ground.

How do we go to the problem? Campaigning is getting to tell everyone that they get to go to heaven. Governing is working out: to get to heaven, it's unfortunate that you need to die. No-one wants to actually convey that message to the electorate. That's what deliberative democracy tries to do. It shares a problem, with the ideal being: 'What's the trust asset? A group of 50 or 100 people. That is the limit of what we can get people to actually read deeply, consider and engage. If they do that and they stand alongside our elected group, we will get a dividend of trust. What are the examples for this? Everyone has a theory. We love real-world examples. If we have one mechanism as newDemocracy, it's show, don't tell; run live trial projects.

I would absolutely draw your attention to the Irish experience over the last nine years. For those not aware, the Right-aligned Irish government made a move to reform its abortion laws, which were entrenched in the constitution. Whatever you may think of the issue—the degree of difficulty, politically, in a very religious country—it is an extremely challenging issue to take on. That parliament ultimately felt safe to address that and take that on publicly by having a substantive role for a citizens' assembly of just a hundred Irish people, selected at random, who found some common ground, and, in effect, knocked out the worst edges of the debate, and said, 'Should this law pass, these are the nine main conditions we'd see as operable.'

Where did that project come from? Much as Mark Evans alludes to, it started from a small project related to: what do we want to change about the constitution? There was a single design element that was accidental that the designers resisted. It was when the initial design was for a hundred random people; the people in the parliament said, 'I'd like to have one-third MPs and two-thirds randomly selected citizens.' This had a two-way dividend. That long exposure to people in elected office resulted in everyday people saying, 'They're not so bad.' That's who we trust in society; we trust other people like us. Equally, those within the political side got to see a randomly selected group, who are much different to a self-selected group, who would normally knock on your door, and said: 'This is a group of reasonable people who considered and listened to one another. We should use that again.' So, when the more challenging issues such as the eighth amendment reform on the right to life came up, a bipartisan mix said, 'Actually, we would trust this mechanism as a way to draw in that community.'

I would also draw your attention to two other points. One is in the UK election manifestoes. Every party has actually said, 'We're going to start to look at constitutional reform.' It's an interesting dynamic that we're starting to see that as: so what do you do about it? My starting point for you would be smaller. It could be this committee. My optimistic message is that this is a known quantity—we know how to start to get people more engaged. We don't need to start with a grand, grand program. It can be as simple as this committee saying: 'Look at the question we've posed in our discussion paper. Let's see how a range of everyday people from all walks of life respond to that question.' They're always noticeably absent, because of the rational ignorance principle—it's not worth their time to read and learn. We're quite good at those incentives, at giving people the incentives so they read and learn and come back to you.

I would also draw your attention to President Macron, who is currently doing a citizens' assembly on climate. These have got a little bit popular around the world. What stands out in this program is the depth—150 randomly selected people across France; 21 days of deliberation spread across seven months. You get beyond the public opinion response of, 'Just fix it and someone else can pay for it,' and they are tasked with finding a common ground solution. We especially note that when the citizens said, I think, in the third meeting, 'Well, we'd like to hear from the President,' he turned up and answered questions for 2½ hours. I understand a lot of the initial reaction can be that this is maybe a little soft, fluffy concept. It's worth drawing to attention that President Macron is an ex-Rothschild banker. He hasn't just fallen out of the next flight from Nimbin with his hippy concept to bring out. This is a pragmatic response to 20 weeks of the yellow vest protesters in the streets.

What are the key elements to this? Yes, random selection. To test the jury analogy, we would not allow self-selected criminal juries. For, if Nick and I were to get arrested tonight, we would probably hopefully have six members of our family turn up and probably six members of the victim's family—and, oddly, they would never find agreement. We randomly select juries so they're representative. We give them abundant time to consider a diverse range of sources of evidence and we task them with common ground. I won't do the metaphor to death, but that's the part we invite you to consider, and the asset you will gain is randomly selected people who feel outside the process—and the rest of the population looks up and says, 'There's a plumber, there's a childcare worker, there's a dentist—there's someone like me in this decision,' which has been a little lost over the years. That's the main element that I hope to convey to you. Trials are being run and they seem to be working, and, whether your trial is even quite small, we can open that up today. Thank you for the opportunity.

**Mr Reece:** Thanks, Senator Carr, and all who are here today. I want to try and remain as positive as I can with my comments today. Tom Daly, my colleague at the University of Melbourne, will expand on this later, but we shouldn't forget that, in relative terms, Australia still has a gold standard democracy. I think we have certainly been the subject of some worrying drift in recent times, and we've heard data that I think proves that. But we still have an outstanding democracy, and we got that outstanding democracy because people, like the people in this room, cared enough to create a system which was a beacon for the world, and we can do that again if we're prepared and committed and brave enough to make some changes.

I also want to reflect briefly on Australia's democratic history, because I think it's awesome. In the 1850s when the colonial parliaments were being established, they created a democratic franchise which was the broadest and most radical in the world. You didn't have to prove that you owned property; you didn't have to prove that you were of particular financial means; but you got a vote in those colonial parliaments. They also did things like the establishment of the secret ballot, and little things like holding elections on a Saturday—who would have thought: such a small thing but such an important thing in allowing the citizenry to participate. They also did, again, little but important things like paying representatives of parliament. That happened for the first time in the world in the colony of Victoria in 1856. What did that mean? It meant that you didn't have to be a person of substantial means to participate and be a representative in our democracy because the state would provide you a fund and enable you to represent your community.

You can move forward to the 1890s where, again, Australia led the world, with the suffragettes and South Australia, in particular, being the first jurisdiction—the first in the world—where women could vote and run for office. Let's move forward to the Federation debates of 1900, where we really designed a system of government, state and Commonwealth, which was the best in the world—best in class. We took elements from Europe and elements of the US system, synthesised them, came up with some innovations of our own, and basically designed the best system in the world. We also have the quirk of compulsory voting—something which I think most Australians still support to this day. We established institutions like an independent electoral authority and institutions of government which still serve us well today.

It is interesting when you look at survey results about how our democracy is performing and you see it waning. I would say: the institutions of Australian government still perform very well. Look at our airports, for example: 130 million people travelled through Australia's airports last year. There wasn't one single fatality as a result of an airline accident. That is a system that works. I think our hospitals and many other institutions of government work quite well.

I want to make a quick aside. This week my daughter started high school, and I opened her humanities book to see, out of great interest, what was in there. There was a chapter on Australia's 60,000 years of Indigenous history—a good thing. There was a chapter in there on the marvels of ancient Greece and also a chapter on the conquests and magnificence of the Roman empire. There was nothing in there about Australia's democracy and those things that I just took you through. So, at least in the Victorian school system—my daughter's in the Victorian school system—in year 7 humanities, all these other great and glorious things are being taught, but we



are not teaching those children about our own proud democratic history. It's not normally the sort of thing I rabbit on about, but there you go.

I want to pose the question: how and why did Australia, for much of its history, achieve these reforms that made us the gold standard in global democracy and governing systems? I put it to you that it was first because we had a culture of egalitarianism and that we were, in many ways, unshackled from the norms and ways of doing things of our European forebears. That made us more supple and prepared to embrace new ideas and new reforms. I think part of the explanation for the drift in belief in the efficacy of our democracy is that we have lost the ability to reform ourselves and how to reform our system.

In thinking about that, the University of Melbourne partnered with a number of other organisations. One was the newDemocracy Foundation, which Iain Walker is here representing today. The other was the Susan McKinnon Foundation, also committed to ways of making our democracy work better. We ran an exercise which was trying to come up not with the list of reforms that we thought Australia needed to make so as to make our democracy work better but the list of reforms that we thought could achieve political consensus, because, at the end of the day, politics is the art of the possible, not the pure task of what may be possible in a perfect world.

We engaged an interesting cross-section of people who were open to a conversation about this. It included Labor premiers, like John Brumby from Victoria, and conservative premiers, like Campbell Newman—so we had Victorians and Queenslanders as well as conservatives and Left-leaning folks there. We also had Peter Shergold, obviously former head of the Australian Public Service, and Glyn Davis, former head of the Queensland Public Service—both vice-chancellors. We had Innes Willox, Industry Group chief, and people from the social services sector. We had a real cross-section of people thinking about these issues.

We came up with a list of 15 commitments. As I said, we're not saying this is the perfect list or everything that needs to be done, but it was a list that we were able to get—a cross-section of perspectives—to agree on what could be done and should be done. We divided them into four categories. The first was looking at the parliament, the second was looking at elections and political parties, the third was looking at the operations of government and the fourth was looking at the question of how we drive a conversation to improve democracy.

Turning to the parliament, the first thing was committing to a review of parliamentary terms. There was a view that a fixed parliamentary term would be an improvement to democracy. We've seen that now happen, I think, in every state in Australia—maybe not Queensland. Almost every state in Australia has, over the last two decades, made the shift to fixed parliamentary terms. We thought that was something that federal parliament could embrace. We thought the appointment of a genuinely independent Speaker of the House and President of the Senate would be positive. There are a number of mechanisms you can use to achieve that.

There was a particularly interesting and innovative one that many people may not have heard of. It was to trial—and I emphasise 'trial'—a change to the seating arrangements in the parliament. One way you could do that would be to seat people according to a random ballot. So, rather than parliamentarians sitting according to their tribes, they sit randomly next to a person they may not have actually spent much time talking to over the years. They'll certainly get to know them if they're sitting next to them. It would change the adversarial dynamic in the chamber. You could do it for just one parliamentary sitting week. You could do it for one session. But give it a go and see what happens.

The other suggestion around the parliamentary dynamic was that, when answering questions, a parliamentarian could speak from a lectern next to the Speaker or President. So, again, instead of sitting on one side of the chamber yelling at your adversaries on the other side of the chamber, you are required to stand at the front of the room and address everybody.

A third idea could be to require parliamentarians to sit down when answering or when speaking. That's something which has been adopted in numerous parliaments in Europe in recent years. Again, it's about trying to have a more conversational approach to debate and politics, rather than an adversarial one. It's amazing how the physicality of the room and the rules of engagement can affect the way a dialogue unfolds.

We also suggest the idea of more free votes in the parliament. Parliament is often at its best when people engage in free votes. Now, Liberals will tell you that, for them, every vote is a free vote, and in theory that may well be true. But, if you look at the UK parliament, they use a whip system as a method for allowing more free votes—one whip, two whips, three whips. We thought something like that could be used just to loosen the party political chains on our parliamentarians a little bit while also, of course, remaining true to the party manifestos, which, at the end of the day, we accept people vote on.

In terms of elections and political parties, we have provided a list of reforms to political donations and campaign finance. Again, that diverse group of people signed on to the list of reforms there, which I won't go into the detail of here.

We thought there could be an improvement around transparency requirements for political parties. Again, we list some reforms there that everyone signed on to.

We like the idea of trialling AEC-issued candidate information packs so that when you stand for office you are required to answer a questionnaire that really puts forward who you are, what you're about and what you will stand for. Citizens can get that information, unfiltered by the media, from those information packs and thereby make more informed decisions when casting their votes.

There are others there, but I won't go into them. Iain has covered some of them.

In terms of the operations of government, we thought there was a strong case for comprehensive and continual professional training in policy, ethics and procedures for—you're going to love this—ministers, members of parliament and ministerial staff. In every other walk of life you are now required to go through continual professional training—if you serve on a company board, if you're getting a promotion in an organisation—but in parliament, in politics, that same ethos has not emerged. So we strongly support the idea of executive education, if you like, for our parliamentarians and ministerial staff on policy, ethics and procedures. It would help them do their jobs better.

We think there should be stronger regulation of lobbyists. We've listed some ideas there.

We think there should be a more independent process for senior appointments to the Australian Public Service, the judiciary and major statutory bodies. Those decisions would absolutely still remain with the parliament, and there needs to be respect for the government of the day, but we have some mechanisms which we believe can just make that a bit more independent and a bit more rigorous.

We have a range of suggestions around how to drive a national conversation to improve our democracy. One Iain has expanded on is: why don't we run a trial of a citizen jury on a particular topic? France is doing climate change at the moment. The jury of 150 people said, 'Hey, we want to hear from the President.' He turned up and took questions for hours from them. Iain, you should circulate the link to this group. Just click on the link and watch a couple of minutes of it. It's remarkable viewing. The conversation that will come off the back of that will, I think, be good for our democracy, so why don't we trial it on something?

We also think there needs to be a national conversation about our Constitution, and we've listed a number of areas where we think there can be improvements to our Constitution. Yes, section 44 is on there, but there are some other changes as well that we think should be made around the race provisions. We think that could be done.

Finally, we think there needs to be a national conversation about our Australian federation and how that's working. There were some mechanisms set up in recent years to try and make our federation work better. They have been dismantled. I think that was a mistake. I think that was throwing the baby out with the bathwater. So there was a strong sense that we should have a go at trying to look at that, and we've got some suggestions in there about some mechanisms. That is not a radical list of ideas. In fact, it is by design not radical. It's a list, though, that can get consensus and therefore is possible.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Nicholas.

**Senator STOKER:** I'm interested in one of your last comments, about the effectiveness of the federation. To what extent has the work that you've been doing identified or explored the trust deficit that comes from the governments who raise funds not being the governments who spend?

**Mr Reece:** I agree that is a—

**Senator STOKER:** Vertical fiscal imbalance.

**Mr Reece:** Yes. I think that's a design fault in our federation. We didn't look at that specifically in our paper. Tom and I were having a chat earlier, and it picks up on the survey work that we heard about earlier—actually I think the Museum of Australian Democracy have done some of this work. If you ask people, 'What's your most trusted level of government?' they'll say, 'Local government,' and then state and Commonwealth will jostle a long way down the bottom for how they perform. But there is recent survey work that actually has people now reporting that they see state government as more efficient than Commonwealth government, and there are a whole bunch of reasons, I suspect, for that. But I think there is a strong case for reform in that area. The states could be made to work better. The Commonwealth could be made to work better as well.

**CHAIR:** Mr Walker, you wanted to add something?

**Mr Walker:** Just as a tiny adjunct point: we often get asked about Switzerland, so we did a research note on what's different about Switzerland. People just think referenda. It is the jurisdiction across the Western world with the highest degree of subsidiarity. They spend over 80 per cent of government revenues at the most local level of where you are taxed, so there is absolutely a link to that.

**CHAIR:** Professor Thomas, did you want to add to that?

**Prof. Thomas:** I just wanted to ask Nick a question, if that's okay. It really follows on from your earlier point. Because we do have a number of parliaments and governments at different levels in Australia, do you see any scope for any kind of useful natural experiments, as it were, in democratic innovation across our parliaments? You've talked a lot about what could be done, but is there any value in exploring what might be done among our different organisations, our different democratic institutions, to learn what really might work best?

**Mr Reece:** The short answer is yes. One of the upsides of having three tiers of government and so many parliaments in Australia is that it does give some scope for experimentation. I think the new Democracy foundation, with their citizen juries and so forth, have probably seen the most significant take-up at a local government level. I know the City of Melbourne, where I'm a councillor, with another hat that I wear, engaged a citizen jury to look at a 10-year financial plan for the city. Frankly, they came back with a more sensible but braver financial plan than the elected officials seemed capable of coming up with—and I count myself as one of them. So it was a very eye-opening experiment for me. So, yes, I think that we should try and take advantage of our multiple parliaments to try some new things. If it doesn't work, it won't go any further. But, if it does, others can take it up.

**CHAIR:** Professor Evans?

**Prof. Evans:** As you probably know, New South Wales have launched a review, under David Thodey and Bill English, looking at the problem of vertical fiscal imbalances. I should also say that we conducted a survey of federal politicians just before the last election that actually confirmed a whole range of Nicholas's common ground findings, particularly around issues to do with integrity reform and electoral contributions. But a lot of the small reforms that you advocate were supported by the majority of federal parliamentarians as well.

**Mr Reece:** Yes. My key point is that we should lean in. We should try some things. We should take up that spirit of earlier parliamentarians and our forebears here in Australia and continue to innovate.

**Prof. Melleuish:** I have a question about constitutional change and democracy, because all the things you've mentioned have been at a lower level. The Federation fathers thought they were being extremely democratic when they brought in a system of referendum. They also assumed there would be more states—but they got stuck with six. Four out of six states is extremely difficult to win, which means referenda in Australia invariably fail, and I don't think there's been one since 1999. It's almost as if governments have given up on that. So, when it comes to constitutional change, and people keep on ranging that with democracy, you could say that democracy works against constitutional change in that regard.

**Mr Reece:** Yes. That was just one of the recommendations amongst the 15. We were looking for a list of things. We started with a list of about 100 things. It whittled down to 15 that everybody agreed on. And there was the notion that there were some improvements that could be made to our Constitution. Then we went down another level and said, 'Okay, what would be the list of five or six provisions of the Constitution which would be leading candidates for change?' and then we identified those. Does that answer—

**Prof. Melleuish:** I'm just raising the general point—

**CHAIR:** I think it's valid. Professor Sidoti?

**Mr Sidoti:** I just wanted to pick that up. The question remains as to whether the principal constitutional change we need is changing the double majority, because the other things that we talk about then become more achievable in a constitution that becomes more of a living document. I think it's been raised in the past but never taken seriously. Clearly there are political problems in how you'd sell it to the electorate.

**CHAIR:** But you can't get that changed, in itself. I will put another view to you: how practical are your proposals? For instance, you talk about fixed terms. The reason fixed terms in this parliament are difficult to achieve is that you have to deal with the Senate. That is the harsh reality of political life. The Senate is there—in the numbers it's there—to secure the support of the minor states to the Federation. There are political impediments to changing that. You talk about changing the seating arrangements of political parties. My experience—and I go to the adage; it's been said before—is that over on one side of the chamber are your opponents, and behind you are your enemies. I think you have to understand the nature of the political culture in this country. I think that applies to all political parties, not just mine. In terms of these proposals that come forward for changes, there has

to be some recognition of the way in which politics actually works, as distinct from some idealised vision of how it works.

**Mr Reece:** I would be the first to agree with you on those points, Senator Carr. As the submission does say, because of the link between Senate and House of Reps elections, there is a constitutional change that's required to change those terms. Although we thought that asking Australians, 'Do you want more certainty about elections and would you like them to be on a fixed date so that you can better plan your lives?' was a proposition that Australians could probably come at. So we didn't think it was beyond the realms of possibility—

**CHAIR:** So why hasn't it happened?

**Mr Reece:** that we could get Australians to agree to it. Well, I think there are possibly multiple reasons for that. It could be that the government of the day sees some advantage in being able to control the election date, so the government never puts that forward. As for your second point about moving the seating arrangements around, I agree it's a left-field idea. But I'd put to you that really the only barrier to that occurring is the mentality of the representatives of the people themselves and their own personal resistance to it. And, frankly, they should get over that and realise why they're there.

**CHAIR:** See how you go with preselection with that idea!

**Prof. Evans:** Let me take issue with what you've said there. The survey data is very, very clear that most Australians citizens view that to be the old politics. The new politics is about common ground. It's not about adversarial politics; it's not about conflict-driven politics. So the key issue is whether you think politicians should be a law unto themselves, or whether they should serve the Australian people. The Australian people—it is clear within the survey data—want to see a new style of politics that's based upon consensus building. It's not about getting rid of politics in terms of debate and discussion, but it is about trying to reach more common ground on the big issues that are confronting Australians.

**CHAIR:** But, Professor Evans, my point is to what extent any of the proposals that you've put forward have to recognise political realities, as distinct from—

**Prof. Evans:** But that's not theory. At the moment, for example, in Westminster in the UK they are actually investigating the whole nature of changing the physical layout of Westminster palace in the future—

**CHAIR:** They can't even find a seat in that parliament!

**Prof. Evans:** because they recognised the problem of adversarial politics as fuelling Brexit.

**CHAIR:** I'm just putting the proposition that many ideas come forward about how we fix things—and that's part of the consideration of this committee—but, to actually take an idea forward, it has to have some semblance of success. The point's been made about the nature of our Constitution that it's extremely difficult to change. Professor Sidoti?

**Mr Sidoti:** Yes, I'd like to follow up by challenging in a slightly different way. The question becomes who determines the likelihood of success and how success is likely to be achieved. It seems to me that there's a growing risk in the way that our democracy operates—that a number of issues are pre-emptively taken off the table on the presumption that they will not succeed, or they will not be capable of being handled politically in an appropriate way. We're continually narrowing the scope of debate and the capacity for innovation because we don't even allow it to get to the table. So I think part of the conversation has to be about how you actually do that. If you've got a survey of elected members—let alone former politicians, former members—suggesting that these sorts of innovations are on their minds, surely it at least raises the possibility that a groundswell of support is there. The question becomes how the process is run, within the political structure, to make that conversation real.

I would simply argue that we shouldn't be taking stuff off the table simply because we make a presumption about its failure. Personally, I think that's playing out in a very real fashion when it comes to the Uluru statement. The fact that it is just assumed this won't get up means that we won't actually have the national conversation about it.

**CHAIR:** All right. Professor Daly?

**Prof. Daly:** I just wanted to pick up this point about the perception of the potential for reform or potential success. As you can hear from my voice, I'm not Australian; I'm from Ireland. In Ireland, first there was the Convention on the Constitution, which was a citizens' assembly by another name; and then there was its successor, the Citizens' Assembly, which dealt with things like same-sex marriage, abortion—very contentious issues. When they started this experiment, there was huge cynicism about what it could achieve. It was completely a trial. Our system for achieving constitutional change, same as the Australian system, was by referendum, and we had suffered a lot, with polarisation and misinformation, especially as we got into the 2000s

with referendums on the EU, for example. There was huge cynicism about what could be achieved. It was actually the process and the design of the initial body that worked very well: 66 members of the public, with 33 politicians nominated by their own parties.

What it managed to show was that there was a lot more common ground on a lot of the issues and there was a lot more potential for different options than the very divided, polarised positions being taken by the parties on many different issues. What it also showed was that experimentation can open up people to a sense of what is possible. And it also doesn't have to be wholesale. You don't have to go straight to democracy 2.0, wholesale change. If you don't want wholesale change, you do it on a trial basis.

That's how it has been rolled out in Ireland. The Citizens' Assembly right now is working on gender equality. This is the latest iteration of the Citizens' Assembly, and it's new people. What it allows the political system to do is to sort of break that logjam in parliament where parliament is simply not achieving the response to big policy questions that, really, the public expect it to.

It's useful that, when we look at those practical experiences in different countries, we can see that they're certainly not perfect. But they really show that what can start off as a very minimal exercise that is seen with an enormous amount of cynicism can actually bear fruit. I think it's good to start thinking about: what are the first steps? What are potential ways to just move forward? Standing still is not an option. Standing still is drift. If your political institutions remain the same and the society is changing hugely around you, that is drift. It doesn't mean it's negligence, but it's drift.

**Senator STOKER:** Can I challenge just for a moment, the suggestion that these citizens' juries haven't been tested in any way in Australia. There have been attempts at having a citizens' jury in relation to the placement of a nuclear waste dump in South Australia. I understand there has been a similar thing in Victoria around obesity. In the case of the nuclear example, it didn't achieve consensus on anything, and I'm not convinced that the obesity one was truly 'grassroots representative'. It was more a case of, sort of, experts in the room. But in our limited experience so far it doesn't sound as though that kind of consensus has been affected. What can you say as a reflection on that? I'm happy to hear from anyone who knows a bit about it.

**Mr Walker:** They're both my projects so I will answer as a proud parent.

**Senator STOKER:** Okay. And you will know it much better than I do.

**Mr Walker:** The SA nuclear one is actually a great example of, 'It's too hard for politics as usual', which is why we got the phone call. As we said, we restated the problem back about problem definition. You've got two challenges when it comes to a high-level nuclear waste facility. It's wonderful you've done a \$9 million royal commission. No-one will read it. You will then do a roadshow around the state, come back with 10,000 objections, and say, 'Oh, now that we've heard your objections, we know what to do.' So no-one trusts you to do the assessment.

So we did the jury in two parts. The first part of it worked flawlessly. We got 52 people to read a 318 page nuclear fuel cycle royal commission. I can tell you for sure that the royal commissioner was not embracing the fact that this citizens' jury process was being used. My heart was in my mouth on the first day, as a bloke came in and said, 'I load the concrete footings in the hospital we're standing in.' He had his royal commission report curled into a tube and he was standing next to the commissioner. The commissioner said, 'How did you find my report?' He unfurled it. It had a torn cover and a coffee cup stain. He said, 'I've had it in my ute for three weeks. I did not understand appendix H at all. I've got a bunch of questions—there are a whole lot of things.' As he leafed through it, you could see he had highlighted it. He'd read it.

What do we get from that? Fifty people will read and will learn. We saw success in that. Professor Chubb spoke to a mistrusted expert. If I want to build a freeway from here to Sydney, I can find an expert that says its economically essential and I can find one that says a tree frog will die. So we invert that and say, 'Yes, listen to the experts who want to be heard.' But then we ask citizens, 'What do you need to know and who do you trust to inform you?' So we're broadening the pool there. I would encourage you to read the first jury's report. They found common ground. They found things the royal commission had missed. This part of the project was 9½ out of 10.

The part you're referring to is the four out of 10 second component, partly driven by political timing. What am I looking at? What's my most critical variable in a citizens' assembly? What did the Irish example add? The Irish had 10 months. We had six. If you want people to think, embrace and stand in front of it, the most critical variable is time. What's the hardest thing we face politically in Canberra? I run one-year projects and you probably don't want any answers coming back within about 15 months of an election, so you start to see that time compression is very difficult.

The message I give to you is: we know what we got wrong with the second half of the nuclear project. We ran it too fast. The optimum group learning size is 35 to 40. And we wanted to keep them distributed. By virtue of logistics, they got too close together. Three hundred people do not learn the way that 50 people learn. That is the main takeaway. We absolutely have examples that have failed; I actually have a couple of projects that have blown up in my hands; I can talk about others as well. But as a research foundation that's how we're learning this method works.

**Senator STOKER:** It's not a criticism. That's how you learn. That's okay.

**Mr Walker:** I'm happy to be criticised. But the highlights are: when it works well, it works astoundingly. I did want to link this to Senator Carr's point. If I were sitting in your seat, I would not be lining up to start a referendum either. It's a thankless task. I would like to point you to a comment. I remember we got asked to appear before the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. Senator Reynolds was the chair of the committee. It was related to voting and international influence. We had pretty much the same conversation we've had today. The comment the senator made was, 'What I'm really interested in is reforming section 44 of the Constitution.' There's bipartisan agreement that there is unfairness in this and who can be eligible to stand for office, and yet if someone in elected office stands up and says, 'I want to change the Constitution,' there are 16 million voters out there saying, 'I don't want to give you what you want,' which is an irrational opinion and response. That's why I agree with you that it's a thankless task. What we learned from Ireland is that if you say to citizens, 'What should we change about the constitution?' and let them lead the argument and you share that platform with them you have a greater chance of success.

**CHAIR:** I'm pleased to hear that. Dr Menzie-Ballantyne, you've been trying to get the call on this matter.

**Dr Menzie-Ballantyne:** Thank you. I appreciate that I am speaking on behalf of the youth voice rather than being the youth voice sitting at this table. But, as somebody who researches in that field, when we talk trust we are talking perception of the institution and perception of those who represent that institution. All of the research that's coming back from youth is that there is no faith in the democratic system because there's no faith in the people at the helm. With due respect, these reforms that are being suggested don't require a referendum. They require politicians to take a step. We see from the statistics just presented from the ANU that there is no trust. If you look at the next generation, there's even less trust. So we have to do something.

When you talk about the political will, I think the political will needs to step back for a moment from the party politics, which is part of the problem, and look at the way in which the democratic institution is perceived. I'm going to throw out your textbook, Nick, because in our schools there is civics and citizenship in the curriculum. It is compulsory right up to grade 8. We have the general capabilities; we have the cross-curricula. We are teaching overtly in schools how to engage and how to reach consensus. They come to Parliament House and then they go and strike in the streets and get told to go back to school and learn. Forgive me if I'm being a little bold in my presumptions, but this is the forum, this is the step forward, where that youth voice can start being heard. But if the answer is, 'Get back in school,' or, 'Where's the political will?' then we're kind of wasting our time being here.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Prasser, I've been trying to get you, but there has been a very, very good discussion. Professor Chubb has to leave early, so were there any matters that we need to prosecute with the academy on the matters that he raised earlier? There's one question I want to pursue with you before you have to go.

**Dr Prasser:** Did I get it right that 2007 was the high point of people liking democracy in Australia?

**Dr Cameron:** Yes, that's the high point of satisfaction in democracy. What we normally see is, when there is a new government, people are more satisfied. We saw that in 1996, when the Liberals won government, and we saw it again in 2007, but we haven't seen it since then.

**Dr Prasser:** So it wasn't because of 10 years of John; it was because of the new Kevin, basically.

**Dr Cameron:** People were ready for change.

**Unidentified speaker:** Trust had increased over the period leading to 2007, hadn't it?

**Dr Cameron:** But Kevin did change the—

**Dr Prasser:** John was supposed to be divisive and blah, blah, blah, according to academia, so Kevin was the new, fresh way of doing things—is that what drove that?

**Dr Cameron:** Yes, that's right. It's part of the cycle. Normally, when there's a new government, people are happy, but we didn't see it in 2013.

**Dr Prasser:** Okay. Thanks, Nicholas, for listing a whole range of things. There could be a conference in itself for all those different points. Some of them were good; some I disagree with. That's great. I'm in the optimist camp about this whole Australian democracy thing. I think we've got a reasonable level of trust. We've got

phenomenal social cohesion, given the level of immigration we've had in this country—of which my family is part. I think there's a fair amount of tolerance within some limits and in some issues from time to time. We see that with some debates, where people can't debate because they are pilloried for having a point of view which doesn't meet consensus. But overall I think Australia has been pretty fantastic.

*The Economist* said there are only two proper democracies in Asia: Australia and New Zealand. Think about it. And Australia has been one of the seven continuing democracies of the 20th century. All those things have been pointed out before. Professor Arndt at ANU wrote in the 1960s that Australia was 'a small rich industrial country'. And I remember having a delegation from America last year, and I said, 'Hold on a second. Australia is a low-tax regime and we're a low-spending regime, and yet we've got a better health system than America'—thank goodness. We've done a pretty good job of providing a pretty good range of services in responding to crises very well. I think Australia has been great. We don't have the intense welfare system of Scandinavia, but we also don't pay \$10.50 for a cup of coffee. We don't have the social engineering about drinking alcohol, which they do in Sweden, where you almost have to go to a private place to get alcohol. I'm a teetotaler, so I don't care. We've done a very good job, I think, with these matters.

But there are some problems. I think one of the reasons why there's some dissatisfaction is that government's got involved in too many areas that it hasn't got the capability of dealing with. Now, it's often because governments want to do good things and they're being pushed by voters. We see, time and again, governments getting involved in all sorts of areas. I don't know why the Commonwealth gets involved in some micro-programs, for instance. I'm always questioning that. I think it's an overload issue. Governments get overloaded, trying to do too many things and not doing some things well.

Another problem in Australia is the media. Once upon a time, on ABC TV, we used to have state programs reporting on state politics. Then it got put back to one Friday night, and now we don't have that. So, whenever there's a problem in Australia, as Paul Kelly was saying—whether it's bushfires, education or whatever—the Commonwealth cops it from the media. The Commonwealth cops it all the time, when the states are often the ones responsible. There was talk about Ireland; Ireland hasn't got states. There is a different game going on. So we've got that with the media.

Another thing is that, as we know from surveys, there's been a decline in civic education of our young, grade 10 students. It has actually dropped, for a whole range of reasons. And then I look around the academy—and I'm a political scientist—and, in my lifetime, political science has shrunk, and I think political science is important. We don't teach local government anymore in most universities. We don't teach state politics. Federalism, so important, is hardly taught, except maybe in law faculties. You said that the federalism research centre at ANU got closed down. The Fraser government set up the Advisory Council for Inter-Government Relations, a research institute based in Tasmania. It got closed down in 1986. We don't teach a lot of those things, so how can we expect students to know? Our political science academy, of which I'm a member, has shrunk, and that's really sad. I've mainly worked in business faculties, and business students have no idea about the role of government. They're completely bereft of knowledge about the role of government, so I taught government-business relations and so on. So there's been a decline in that.

Other issues in Australia are about the regions versus the inner city. There is a different voting pattern and a different education pattern. The issues of concern to inner-city people aren't the issues of concern to people in outer suburbia. That issue is worth exploring a bit.

The other thing is that I can't get over how, during my lifetime—I'm an old person now, and it might just be a factor of age and cynicism—everything has become so political. I've sat at 16 different education council meetings in the last five years. I have seen federal governments put up sensible, non-partisan ideas, and if a federal minister of a particular political complexion said something was black, the states would say, 'No, it's white.' I've seen state ministers agree in house to a proposal and walk out and attack the federal minister. Everything seems to be so political today—and maybe it's because of the 24-hour cycle of news and the lack of information and how people jump to the politics, or it could just be that that's always been the case. But, to me, it's no wonder young people, as Professor Chubb was saying, see parliament and the haranguing going on, and they watch the news and the quick sound bites: the government says this; the opposition says that. We've got an adversarial system and that doesn't help people's perceptions about those things. I think they're important issues.

However, the late Ian Marsh wrote quite a good paper back in 2012-13 saying the political parties are in decline and can't get things through. I remember having quite a conversation with him, because I believe you can get things through the federal parliament. This time last year, I was involved in a thing called the industrial chemicals bill, which none of you would have ever heard. They'd been stalled in the Senate for 15 months, but we got support from the Labor Party, the Greens and the crossbench and got the legislation through, which was for

the benefit of Australia. So it can be done if the right arguments are put forward and ministers are willing to do their work and so on. I've seen the education council get things through.

I'm more optimistic about things, and I hope that this committee will say, 'Look, there's a lot of good things going on in Australia; there are a lot of proposals.' I think Nicholas has outlined a range of excellent ideas that should be put on the agenda. Let's discuss some of these, and they could make some improvements. I advocated, some time ago, for something like the American Senate confirmation process for the appointment of department heads, because it seems to be that one government comes in and there's a changeover. So there are some good ideas there. I think we've got to develop some sort of agenda for reform, and let's have that discussed. But I'm in the positive camp. I think Australia has done a fantastic job, and that's why people keep wanting to come here—is what I seem to notice.

**Senator STOKER:** Dr Prasser, your expertise is around institutions of government, royal commissions and things like that. I'm interested in whether you've got any reflections about how the trend for governments to outsource hot issues to independent-type organisations or non-departmental organisations—that are, in a sense, less answerable to parliament at least—has affected Australians' trust in institutions. Is there a relationship?

**Dr Prasser:** I don't think there is. Royal commissions and public inquiries—Australia has had a long use of public inquiries. They certainly accelerated under the Whitlam government. But public inquiries and royal commissions have had a great ability to provide community consultation to get people involved in things. Sometimes governments will be seen to be kicking the can down the road by setting up some sort of body and so on. But, overall, they have been very effective, I think, in drawing in outside expertise.

I think there is an issue in our Public Service. It has lost some of its capacity over the years. I'm all in favour of a permanent career Public Service. I'm pretty critical of contractual systems and arrangements for those sorts of people. But I think those inquiries that Australia has had have been a great outreach in promoting discussion and debates and so on. However, there is some sort of view that the appointment of royal commissions and bodies shows a little bit of distrust. They're the institute of last resort that sometimes have become the institute of first resort, as we tend to see.

There's a lot of debate on whether we should have a royal commission or not into the bushfires. I think it could serve a useful purpose, if it was constructed properly and so on. What's great about those sorts of bodies is they're transparent, they're open, you see the reports, you see the evidence or lack thereof and you can make judgements about them. So, again, Australia has been pretty good on these sorts of things.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Professor Daly and then Mr Ergas.

**Prof. Daly:** I want to pick up, just once again, that sometimes if we focus exclusively on trust we can end up only getting part of the problem. I think we also have to talk about it being a holistic view of citizen connection to the system. All of the Western democracies are facing a situation where there is, really, declining party membership, for example. People don't feel connected to the system. And if we're talking about civic education, for example, it's not just about civic education in the schools or formal education, it's also: how do we do democracy in a way that people get informed by being just part of the system?

That goes back to things like citizens' assemblies. I'm not pushing the point that Australia should have a citizens' assembly, but it's more about thinking of the ways we can shore up what has been lost, and connection to the system is one of the things that has been lost. Even if you dealt with the sorts of major issues that people worry about at the government side—how politicians behave, how parliament functions, hyperpolarisation, adversarial politics and so on—that would still only be part of the solution, because you would still have this sense of disconnection. I think that's something that should be part of any conversation.

**Mr Ergas:** I want to comment on the question that was raised and that Scott Prasser addressed, a moment ago, with respect to independent bodies and commissions of inquiry. I certainly agree with what Scott had to say, in terms of the positive role that independent inquiries can play. Indeed, it was, I think, a positive decision by the Whitlam government to create what became the Productivity Commission, which has played a key role over the years in advancing policy understanding in Australia.

There is, however, another aspect to it, which is this. In my view, a very longstanding feature of Australian democracy, dating back to its earliest years pre-Federation, has been its reliance on delegating contentious decisions about value to quasi-judicial bodies that are distinct from the legislature and not necessarily directly accountable to the legislature. That, of course, accelerated in the initial years of Federation, the most obvious example of that being the formation of the industrial relations system and the transfer to the industrial relations system of what had been deeply divisive issues about the setting of terms and conditions of employment. That process has changed in form, but the underlying tendency of Australian democracy to that delegation has



remained. So even after the reforms of the 1980s, where it's true that the role of some of these bodies was significantly amended, what actually happened was that we had a new crop of bodies that took that role, going from the transfer of monetary policy to the Reserve Bank through to the transfer of competition policy to what became the ACCC, ASIC and APRA. The list is never ending.

You can see that as having two impacts over the long term. The first impact is that it helps moderate the kind of overload of politics that Dr Prasser referred to, in the sense that it transfers out of immediate political contention some issues that the political system just finds too hard to deal with. The second aspect of it, though, is that it impoverishes politics. It impoverishes politics because it removes the responsibility that politicians have and that the political system has for taking those decisions and hence could facilitate an infantilisation of politics because the decisions that politics have to bear are in some respects less important. It also—and I believe this also goes to an important point Dr Prasser made—has the effect of weakening the role of the core Public Service because the departmental public service is not directly responsible for those areas of policy. What we've seen in recent years is a new form of the trend that was apparent to anyone that dealt with the Public Service 40 years ago—that, in all those areas where these decisions have been removed, the capacity of the system for policy development diminishes and, in some cases, withers. So, when those issues come back to the fore and have to be dealt with in policy terms, it becomes extremely difficult to do so.

That goes to my final point, which is this: I agree with comments that have been made around the table about the quality of Australian democracy in the long run. I think it has an enviable record by any standard. But I would suggest that perhaps one of the reasons for that is not that it's consensual but, on the contrary, that it's deeply conflictual. It's deeply conflictual and that conflict has always kept it on its toes and kept it focused. Those who are interested in these things will know that Machiavelli, when he wrote the *Discourses on Livy*, which I regard as by far as his finest work, suggested that—although he was turning Livy upside down, of course, as he tended to do—Livy had rightly identified, even though Machiavelli was contradicting what Livy actually said, that the core of the success of republics lay in the fact that they institutionalised conflict and thrived on it. Machiavelli argued that the downfall of Rome came with the rise of the ability of the emperors to rely on bread and circus to quell conflict and keep the populous happy. It was in the great years of the Gracchi when the conflict was at its peak that he maintained Rome had its period of greatest glory. To that extent it may be that one of our gems is the fact we are, and I suspect always will be, a profoundly conflictual society.

**CHAIR:** I think there's something in the argument that politics is about who gets what, when and how, a proposition that's often neglected in the consensual model. But, just quickly, Dr Prasser, the various committees of this parliament are looking at the decline of parliamentary scrutiny. This goes across all governments. We've now passed twice the number of bills in this parliament than the British parliament for instance, and the number of delegated instruments, the use of delegated legislation, has increased astronomically. Have you looked at that as a consequence in terms of the accountability mechanisms within the political system?

**Dr Prasser:** Not of that specifically. I'm very much in the camp of supporting parliamentary oversight. Parliamentary committees I think do good things. I don't think people are often aware of their work in terms of oversight. The estimates process, as you know, is much better at the federal level than at state levels. In Queensland, where I worked, the estimates committees had a one-hour discussion, and it was preorchestrated. At least at the federal level we have a fairly robust estimates process, which can be daunting if you're on the other side of the table. I mean, in many ways the Commonwealth parliament sets the moral for the other parliaments.

**CHAIR:** The Senate in particular, I might say.

**Dr Prasser:** I'm very much in favour of upper houses, which we don't have in my home state, as you know.

**CHAIR:** Having said that, I think it has to be recognised that there has been a failure to actually deal with this issue of a decline in the level of parliamentary scrutiny, and that may be part of the question as to the level of the decline in the level of public support for these institutions.

**Dr Prasser:** Both sides of parliament, when they're in opposition, are very big on parliamentary scrutiny.

**CHAIR:** I'm not arguing the case on a partisan—I'm saying to you that the issue of who draws up the legislation needs to be examined, and that's the Public Service. They enjoy the benefits of delegated legislation, which means they don't have to come near the parliament to deal with substantive policy issues, because it's not actually dealt with in the primary legislation.

**Dr Prasser:** I think I was one of the few academics that made a submission for the Parliamentary Budget Office, and I appeared as a witness. I was very much in favour of an independent budgetary arrangement in the parliament. I think that has been a great attribute—although when I was working in government, it was a nuisance and a pest, but that's what democracy is all about. I think the Commonwealth parliament has done some very

useful things. I don't disagree that delegated legislation is an issue, but there's far more scrutiny at this level of government than elsewhere.

**CHAIR:** That's absolutely correct.

We are over time. I just want to ask Professor Chubb a question because I know he has to leave, and I did say we'd come back to it. Your submission on behalf of the academy deals with the issue of the role of science. The submission goes to a series of recommendations on strengthening the role of science and research by increasing trust between scientists, the parliament, the government and the community. Are you able to enlarge on how that might be achieved?

**Prof. Chubb:** In the statement we put out earlier last year, we proposed to do an Australian version of what had been done in the United Kingdom, and that was to set up a more formal relationship between the expectations on the parliamentary side and the expectations on the scientific side of what it would mean to provide expert scientific advice into the parliament or the government, and that was in Britain. We admired the fact that they have a signed agreement with certain stipulations within it that reflect the roles and responsibilities of the essentially two parties. It was signed by Prime Minister May in the United Kingdom. Somebody at the time declared that it was what conservative governments do. They said the same thing about climate change, of course, and zero carbon by 2050, but that's another matter. It included things such as that scientists had an obligation to provide free, frank advice that was as good as they could possibly offer given the evidence that was available to them and their own expertise and their own work. On the other side, parliament made a commitment to make the advice public.

One of the things that sticks in my throat on a regular basis is the reports that are commissioned that are kept secret. I don't see how it's appropriate at all that we should not be able to see the evidence on which decisions are made subsequent to the receipt of a report. It has things like that in it, which really get down to saying that scientists don't have to be—and this would apply to most disciplines, I should add, but the academy is particularly interested in the science, and particularly because some of the contentions that go around through the cherry-picking and misrepresentation of scientific result evidence and argument that occurs at the moment. We thought that having an arrangement like that was of particular importance to ensure that when politicians make decisions in areas where they have very little expertise—you will have seen, as I have seen, politicians stand up and say, 'I know nothing about science,' give a five-minute speech and then vote on a bill that is essentially based on science—a better way to do it would be to have a much more formal relationship where the expectations were set out and agreed. Both sides should be held to live up to the agreement. That's part of the submission, so there's more detail in there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Prof. Chubb:** Perhaps I could make just one more comment before I go—and I'm sorry I do have to leave.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Prof. Chubb:** I wish I'd studied more history when I had the chance. For different reasons, I had to learn a bit about Australia's history running into the Federation and the courage that the pro-federationists showed at that time against a lot of opposition, initially. It went to two referenda; the second one worked, and we're now a federation. I agree that we did a number of things very well. In 1890-something—since we've all heard a lot of dates today—Henry Parkes proposed a toast in Sydney to 'one people, one destiny'. I think, in the early stages of Federation, we tried to live up to that ideal. On 1 January 1901, those four words—'one people, one destiny'—were up in lights on Sydney Town Hall. Is that still part of the Australian ethos? We've heard a lot about what Australia has done historically, true. I agree that we've done a good job, and I agree that we did good things. We did set out to be egalitarian. Can anybody now put their hand on their heart and say that Australia today is an egalitarian society? I don't believe you can.

**Unidentified speaker:** Yes.

**Prof. Chubb:** Well, go to school in North Queensland. Go to school in outback Western Australia. Go to school somewhere like that and see if they get the same educational opportunity as a person in an inner-city metro area. They don't. Is that egalitarian? No.

**Dr Prasser:** Australia has a very outstanding record—far better than other countries—of distributing money and resources to areas of need. I'm from North Queensland. I can tell you, right here and now, that compared to the United States and other places like that, there is a phenomenal effort in getting doctors and education out to the regions. You can't have the same facilities in some places as you can in an inner city. But that's not egalitarianism; that's the nature of our society. I think we've done very well.

**Prof. Chubb:** I don't believe that we have. I do not believe that medical practice across the country is equally spread. I do not accept that fact. I think the data is solidly against it. Anyway, that's not the point; the point is: are we still egalitarian? The Australia that I grew up in is different from Australia today—properly and rightly; it should be. The world that we operate in is different. But the second part of our motto is that 'she'll be right' and that good things will happen if we wait long enough. I don't accept that either. I don't understand why we're so polarised. I don't understand why the debate on climate change is so polarised. The evidence is the evidence. It hasn't got a political flavour or a political colour. But it's extremely polarised, and it's held us back from doing something sensible for years, and it just gets more difficult with time.

On citizens' juries, we had a sort of one when we had a gay marriage plebiscite. I know it wasn't as you described it, but it was similar. What happened was that there were representatives of the people in this place who did not vote according to how their electorates voted. I don't think that's appropriate either. As I said at the beginning, I wish I had learnt more history; I really do. I would like to have learnt more history. It's important that we know it. But to the person who lives in south Melbourne—and somebody over here said 'the lived experience'. It's what's happening to them today that counts. It's why some of the change in trust and so on has happened more recently. I think we've just got to recognise that this is the issue that we need to deal with, and deal with quickly.

**Mr Roggeveen:** I'm as hungry as anyone, but I am not excessively—

**Senator STOKER:** I think we should start with a proper opportunity for Mr Roggeveen when we return, but let's give him a short opportunity now.

**CHAIR:** My intention was to give him an opportunity. He's been very decent and very patient. My intention was also to look at some of the international trends on these issues after lunch, because there are a number of people who have made submissions who have a broader understanding of what's actually happening around the world on these questions. But, Mr Roggeveen, go ahead.

**Mr Roggeveen:** I just find that excessively pessimistic. If you want a counterpoint to the idea that Australia is a far less egalitarian society than it used to be, it seems to me the evidence is before your eyes. I'm not exactly sure which golden age, Professor Chubb, you're thinking of, but in that golden age there wouldn't have been as many females in the Australian Senate or in the Australian parliament as there are today.

**Senator STOKER:** Or indeed public school educated, not very wealthy, outer suburbs, on the edge of the regions kind of people—yes.

**Mr Roggeveen:** And certainly the representation of people from non-Anglo backgrounds wouldn't have been as great as it is today.

**Professor Chubb:** There weren't as many.

**Mr Roggeveen:** Well, yes, perhaps. I find it all a little bit too pessimistic. One further point I'd make is that the polarisation you're talking about is extreme. But I would argue it's confined, almost exclusively—that polarisation—to the political class. Australians generally are incredibly happy and tolerant and are doing extremely well. So the kind of extremism and polarisation that we hear bemoaned today, I would argue, is confined almost exclusively to a political class that is escaping up its own naval, rather than looking outwards.

**Unidentified speaker:** Which is why leadership is important.

**Senator STOKER:** Why don't we go to a lunch break. I think we should give Mr Roggeveen an opportunity—

**CHAIR:** He'll get his opportunity to say his bit.

**Senator STOKER:** to kick off when we return.

**CHAIR:** I will give you a few other statistics about how we're going economically.

**Senator STOKER:** I think it's important we don't descend into the kind of petty to and fro about—

**CHAIR:** No, it's not that.

**Senator STOKER:** the politics of the day. Let's focus on institutions and the trends that are the reason we came here.

**CHAIR:** I'm not suggesting it is petty. But there is a really substantial issue that you've raised here. Is this country a country that is able to sustain the sorts of claims it used to make? We were once the laboratory for the world on social policy, on democracy. We were once seen that way. I'm not certain it can be said anymore. And these survey results are putting us in company that I'm not certain we would be proud of.

**Senator STOKER:** I'm committed to approaching this in a bipartisan, open-minded way. But it needs to be conducted that way.

**CHAIR:** But that's not a question of bipartisan; it's a question of actually examining what the evidence is. We can have the very best understanding of how well the country's doing, and the issue then arises, 'Could we do a damn sight better?' which is what we used to argue in this country. We used to say, 'We should be up there with Norway, with Scandinavia and other countries when it comes to the issues of democratic values.' Can it be said that's the case today? I think that's an argument we can have after lunch, when we return. What time?

**Senator STOKER:** Why don't we make it 1.15, given how late we're running.

**CHAIR:** Of course. Does 1.15 suit everyone? Yes.

**Proceedings suspended from 12:37 to 13:22**

**CHAIR:** I will ask Mr Sam Roggeveen to kick off the afternoon session for us. It's submission 149. I'm particularly interested in the advice that you have for us on the recent European elections. You're saying in that submission that it's less a movement away from liberal democracies in favour of right-wing populism and more to do with the decline in the centre-left and centre-right parties and the rise of populist parties on the left and the right. Have I summarised that correctly?

**Mr Roggeveen:** Getting there, Senator!

**CHAIR:** Why don't you tell us what your advice is and what we can do about it. I'm particularly interested given your understanding of the international situation.

**Mr Roggeveen:** I'm from the Lowy Institute, which in itself invites a question. My presence here is a little anomalous, in the sense that the Lowy Institute is dedicated to looking at Australia's place in the world rather than Australian democracy in and of itself. I am the director of the international security program, so my job is actually to look at things like Australian defence policy and the North Korean nuclear program, for instance. So it's a little odd, maybe, that I should be here, but I wrote a short book at the end of last year. The motivation for that was that I thought the community of people I associate with and talk to—the community of politicians, commentators, academics and members of the general public who are interested in foreign policy—as a whole vastly underestimate the importance of domestic politics on our foreign policy. It seems to me the outstanding example at the moment is Brexit. So, I called the short book that I wrote, which came out in November, *Our Very Own Brexit: Australia's Hollow Politics and Where It Could Lead Us*.

The reason it's such an important and useful example is that Brexit happened, really, without any kind of obvious trigger in Britain's relationship with Europe at all. So here we have the biggest realignment in Britain's foreign policy probably since the Suez crisis, and really there was nothing that triggered it. There was no major dispute in relations between the UK and Europe and nor was there any public clamouring for this at the time. In 2010, when David Cameron first came to office, the percentage of people who argued that Britain's relations with Europe were one of Britain's biggest challenges was somewhere around one per cent. So how on earth did this happen? I would argue the reason it happened—and the reason all democratic politics in the West, including in Australia, have gotten really weird in recent years—is because politics has essentially hollowed out in all those democracies. I will come back to that in a moment.

As I mentioned in my little intervention, just before lunch, I was struck by the pessimism that I heard this morning from Ian Chubb and others. As I said, I don't think that that is really widely prevalent among the Australian public. I think that's something that's confined largely to the Australian political class. In fact, the kinds of conversations that we are having around this room—and we're a reasonably good example or cross-section of the Australian political class—are generally quite cut-off from where the Australian public is. I don't mean to dismiss the kinds of results we heard this morning about the opinion surveys or Ian Chubb's own comments. I think that's a real reflection. But I think over and above any sense you get of cynicism and despair about Australian politics, I think the abiding condition of Australian politics today—of the Australian public and their attitude to Australian politics today—is just disengagement. The connection with the system, as we heard earlier, has simply been lost.

So the big question in my mind—and the big question that I tried to deal with in the short book last year—is why that is. It seems to be that the big trend around all Western democracies—not just Australia, but the United States, the UK and Europe—is that our big centre right and centre left political parties are all in decline. It's happening more on the left than on the right. Their decline is faster, particularly in Europe. But it's happening everywhere and on both sides of politics. And that really shouldn't be that surprising. After all, the conditions in which these political parties arose simply no longer exist. Australia's an excellent example. We had the Labor Party come about to be the political representation, the political arm, of the union movement—a union movement which really barely exists anymore in Australia. It's less than 10 per cent of the workforce—15 per cent or thereabouts if you count the public sector. But if that undermines the *raison d'être* of the Labor Party, then it does

of the Liberals as well. After all, the Liberal Party was really founded to oppose organised labour and to oppose the Labor Party. But if organised labour is no longer a major political force, then, really, what's the Liberal Party for? So with both sides of politics we have a system—and this is true of the United Kingdom as well—where we've got political parties which are still at their core, but they lack any real connection with a social and economic base. The parties themselves have become much smaller. Their membership is in decline. When they become smaller, the way they've survived is to professionalise. We're in a situation now where I think roughly half of MPs and senators in the Australian parliament are either former political staffers or party officials. The political parties have gone from being mass-membership movements and true representatives of a social and economic class to becoming, really, machines for producing the next generation of politicians.

So Australians have pulled back from politics through the parties. The parties have pulled back, too. They're no longer mass movements; they've become professionalised movements. What that means is when you get this mutual withdrawal you leave a void in the middle. Australian politics is essentially operating in that void. I think that really is at the core of this breakdown in trust. We heard Greg Melleuish earlier talk about the breakdown in the relationship between the public and the elites. The reason for that breakdown I think lies in the decline of our major centre-right and centre-left political parties, which are no longer representatives of a real social and political constituency but are, as I said, small, highly professionalised organisations.

As for solutions, the best I have heard would be to reinforce what Iain Walker said earlier—that is, citizen juries. The way to test the usefulness of citizen juries—it's not wrong, as you did earlier, Senator, to question whether citizen juries have made a useful policy impact. I would just say that that's incomplete. The reason citizen juries are possibly a useful mechanism in the hollowed out state of Australian politics is that they help reconnect the Australian public to politics, where that connection, I would argue, has almost totally broken down. I'll leave it there for now.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Does anyone want to respond to that?

**Prof. Evans:** Only to say that there was a trigger in Europe, and that was the GFC and austerity. What is remarkable about the Australian case, of course, is that we've had a long period of affluence, and yet we still have this problem of decline in political trust.

**Mr Roggeveen:** Yes. It seems to me the reason we've had nothing similar to Brexit and we haven't had, for instance, a growth in populist parties in Australia or the kind of political earthquake that the United States had in 2016 with the election of Trump, is that our elites haven't failed on the scale that they have in the United States or in Europe.

**Mr Sidoti:** Tom, given your analysis of the state of the parties, do you believe they're beyond redemption? If so, is there a solution greater than citizens juries. Citizens juries, it seems to me, offer part of a solution—they are part of a likely response—but they are not the silver bullet, because there is no silver bullet. So, given your analysis of the parties, what is the likely prospect of redemption or change in that? Can I just add one other thing to that—that is, is it reasonable in your analysis to suggest that, in fact, one of the reasons that Australia survived, as paltry as our parties may have become, is that, essentially, the two-party system continues to provide a balance?

**Senator STOKER:** And stability.

**Mr Sidoti:** And stability.

**Mr Roggeveen:** Yes, a balance and stability, certainly, but that balance and stability can't indefinitely survive the disaffection of the Australian public. The metatrend in Australian politics over several decades is that the primary vote of the two major parties is in sustained decline: at the last election, for the Labor Party it was just upwards of 33 per cent nationally. We're reaching a point now where, in terms of the primary vote, we're getting a three-way split between the coalition, the Labor Party and then, when you put them together, the Independents and minor parties.

It's not so much a question of whether the two major parties are beyond redemption. They are big enough and well organised enough, and so entrenched in the system, that they are impossible to remove. There are lots of reasons for that, but the major one is simply the voting system in the House of Representatives. Partly because of our voting system, we'll reach a tipping point: because of the slow decline of the primary vote for the major parties, we will go from having three, four or five people on the crossbench in the lower house to maybe 10 or 11. At that point, essentially we will have permanent minority government in Australia. That's not necessarily a disaster; lots of Western democracies function quite well that way. So it's not so much a matter of the major parties being beyond redemption, but we will have to find a way for the political system to function with a greater

diversity of party representation in the lower house, probably permanent minority government and, I would argue, probably lots more turnover in government.

Europe is a useful reference point here. For instance, Germany, on the surface, looks like a model of stability, with Angela Merkel now in, I think, her 15th year as leader. But it's worth remembering that the official opposition in the Bundestag at the moment is the AFD, the populist right-wing party, which didn't even exist when Merkel came to office. The Netherlands has had the same Prime Minister for 10 years but he's led three different governments—one of them with the Christian Democrats and another with the Greens involved. That, it seems to me, is a reasonable model of what Australia can more readily expect in the future.

**CHAIR:** The proposition you raise is correct. In Germany the SPD's vote has fallen from 41 per cent to 21 per cent. The Swedes have dropped from 36 per cent to 28 per cent. Denmark has dropped from 36 per cent to 26 per cent. Spain has dropped from 35 per cent to 23 per cent. The Netherlands has dropped from 29 per cent to six per cent. France has dropped from 24 per cent to seven per cent. Finland has dropped from 23 per cent to 17 per cent. But in Scandinavian countries social democracy has had some revival. Spain and Portugal have recently elected socialist governments. Is it just a simple question of demography? Or is it also a question of program and the extent to which these parties have lost support because they argued positions which weren't able to attract popular support?

The SPD's position as it entered into governments of national unity, particularly after Schroder, runs parallel with the decline. Some would argue that if you lose contact with your blue-collar base, however you define it, if you lose contact with the people who actually put you into office, they're not going to vote for you. The policy positions these parties argue for may well be a contributing factor. Hence the situation in Scandinavia and Spain and Portugal. As the policy positions of those social democratic parties changed, they were able to revive their political position. In your analysis, do you look at what is actually said on behalf of the people? Surely the question of why it is that working-class families are moving away from these parties is critical to any analysis.

**Mr Roggeveen:** The short answer is no. I don't look very much at all what these various centre-left parties around Europe have offered to their particular constituents. My emphasis is really on what I would call the secular trend. You've talked about reconnecting with a blue-collar base. But really there isn't much of a blue-collar base anymore in this country, and what blue-collar base there is has moved away from—

**CHAIR:** We just lost it. We know something about it!

**Mr Roggeveen:** Yes. And so does Jeremy Corbyn now, with it having moved to the Tories.

**CHAIR:** But the British Labour Party's vote, even with the catastrophe they have just faced, is still among the highest in social democracy in Europe. This analysis requires a lot more fine tuning, I think, to explain what's happening. Why did the north of England move away from Labour in England and moved to the Conservatives? Why have traditional manufacturing workers moved to Trump in the United States? I think this is part of the question we have to look at, the way in which political messaging has changed as much as it is in terms of demography.

**Mr Roggeveen:** I don't at all argue that Centre Left parties in the Western world have no way back into government, although it has to be pointed out that the Labor Party in Australia has only won government outright once since 1993. But that's not to say there is no way back for Centre Left governments around the Western world. What I'm simply arguing is about the lock that the two major parties in most Western democracies—the Centre Left and the Centre Right have. Essentially, those two blocks used to share power between them in the Cold War-industrial era. That's over now. None of these parties, even the populist parties that are doing well in Europe at the moment, have a lock on the public anymore.

**CHAIR:** That's right. But people aren't going to church and they're not joining organisations—

**Mr Roggeveen:** That's right.

**CHAIR:** Some of the submissions have argued that there is atomisation. The 'me too' generation is such that people aren't engaging in civil society, whether politically or socially. What do you say to that proposition?

**Mr Roggeveen:** I would disagree slightly. I think Australians are still interested in civil society and are still interested in politics; they're just not interested in the two major parties.

**CHAIR:** Obviously, this has sparked a few people here. Do you want to go next, Professor Walter? And then Dr Cole.

**Prof. Walter:** I don't disagree with the arguments about the decline in the constituencies of the major parties, but there is one other factor—if we just stick to the Australian and British examples. There was a very interesting paper published early in last year by Anika Gauja at the University of Sydney and a chap in Heidelberg—I can't

think of his name. It looked at the beliefs of party activists, basically, but it went broadly and compared, let's say for example, Liberal voters with Liberal Party members and people who get into parties—and Labor and so on. What is very striking about this analysis is the change from the past, when they were mass parties and when, in effect, because of membership and so on, they had to respond to public demand and public opinion.

What's happening now is that the closer you get to the centre, the more unrepresentative the people who are in the parties are. So we have leaders who are caught between a majority opinion and what they rightly see as their base. It comes back to the point that Senator Carr made this morning: tell that to a preselection committee. The bases are asking for something different to what the majority opinion is. It's the same for both parties, if this research is right—and if you have a look at that article I think it's very persuasive. So the other reason for disengagement is that people are saying, 'We have these opinions,' we know that majorities want something done about climate change, 'and yet we can't get a National Energy Guarantee up.' It's because of this problem of having to deal with small groups of unrepresentative people in the party base who are holding them hostage.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Dr Cole?

**Dr Cole:** I just want to contribute in this way, in that I think the undeniable decline in the base of the two major parties is not just a story of declining political participation but also one of movement and displacement. That is to say that in deserting the parties people haven't deserted the political system and our democratic life *per se*; they've moved to other organisations.

One of the things I don't think we've really absorbed in this country, and one of the most profound changes, is that the two political movements/organisations that now boast the largest membership are GetUp on the Left and the Australian Christian Lobby on the Right. Their membership has been growing exponentially during the same period in which that of the two major parties has been declining. There might be a relationship there; perhaps dissatisfaction is driving people to try out new political vehicles. But that sort of balances this picture of decline, because, if you just look at either of those two organisations, they are actually building participation—whatever you might think about their politics. I don't think we've quite come to terms with how this has shifted the political landscape. Neither of these organisations run candidates in parliament, so they're not parliamentary parties, but they're quite powerful and involved political organisations, and a lot of people like what they're doing. So their membership is climbing.

**CHAIR:** Yes, that's a valid point.

**Senator STOKER:** Jonathan makes a good point. I wonder, though, whether that's necessarily a reflection of dissatisfaction with the major parties. It may well be. Let me float another possible hypothesis that's more cultural, which is that we have busier work lives, busier home lives, less capacity for participation in what are actually fairly heavy obligations of being involved in a political party, if you want to do it in a fulsome way. These other organisations, like the ACL or GetUp, offer the opportunity to be heard on the things that matter to you without any of the obligations. In a way, they indulge the keyboard warrior style of political participation rather than the 'show up and vote and be counted in debate' kind of model. I'd like to open up contributions a little bit more about the connection between changes in the way we live as Australians and how they're manifesting in democracy.

I'll give you an example. There was a mention a little bit earlier from someone on this side of the room of how we now live in apartments more than we ever have before. I can tell you—and you can all probably say it, too, from your own experience—that neighbours don't tend to know each other and talk to each other as much as they used to. There's not as much trust between people who don't know one another as might have been the case in the past. Is our distrust a manifestation of changes in the way that we live, whether it's about our busy lives or about our degree of connection to the people in our immediate vicinity? I'll open that up for consideration.

**Mr Walker:** I'll slightly reframe the question in light of what's just been brought up by Senator Stoker. I want to offer a quote. It was originally from Sam's point about professionalisation. I don't want to verbal someone on the record. It was a retired Liberal politician. I'm interested in your response to this quote. They said: 'For a free-market party, think of what a party does. It essentially offers access to all the decisions of society, and yet somehow, for some reason, we're offering a product that is no longer of appeal.' I'm just curious about how you react to that statement.

I do want to put a note on the big numbers for GetUp and the ACL. I use fake names; I sign up for them too. They may look like they have a million members, but I just did a quick check. GetUp: 11,700 people wrote a cheque. That's not larger than the major parties. It's a fun way to engage, perhaps, but it's one thing to like something; it's quite another to write a cheque. I'd like a Ferrari but I won't write the cheque for it. The measure is actually those who will part with some money. So I do like the little bit of moderation that—

**Senator STOKER:** That's fair enough.

**CHAIR:** It's a reasonable point.

**Mr Walker:** But, to go back to the quote, I'm curious: how would you fix it?

**CHAIR:** Would you like to say something, Professor Evans?

**Prof. Evans:** There's a lot of research on protest potential. Obviously, what you're focusing on is direct measures of political participation. At the same time, Australians are still engaging in associative behaviour. They're still joining clubs. They're still doing sausage sizzles. In other words, they're making a more informed choice about how they use their leisure time. It's not that they're not engaged in associative behaviour. That's why this is called 'protest potential'. In other words, you can still mobilise them on issues that they really care about. The view from the research is that political parties aren't necessarily focusing on the issues that they care most about.

**CHAIR:** But they're not geared for that.

**Prof. Evans:** But political parties are not necessarily focusing on the issues that most Australians care about.

**CHAIR:** Mr Roggeveen, in your analysis, did you consider the issue of race and immigration? It strikes me that, particularly in Europe, that's been a major factor for the growth of the parties of the Right and for decline for social democracy.

**Mr Roggeveen:** I did consider it. I'll take that one and I'll make a comment on Iain Walker's intervention too. Yes. I'm a sceptic in the sense that there's research that I cite in the book which indicates that support for values around Europe relating to, for instance, immigration, same-sex marriage and other trends that would generally be defined as small-l liberal, is pretty solid. Economic openness is another value. So how do you square the fact that there's this clear, massive growth in the popularity of populist parties and yet, on the other hand, some of the research indicates European values really haven't shifted that much and haven't moved to the Right. There's not actually a lot of evidence that there's more opposition to immigration, for instance. In fact, in the United Kingdom, in the Brexit period since 2016, the public opinion polling suggests that there is more openness towards immigration and there's more appreciation of the benefits that immigration has brought to the United Kingdom. How do you explain those two things?

This is perhaps a little self-serving, but my analysis emphasises the decline of political parties, and, it seems to me, that that's the answer—that's how you square that circle. It's not that populist sentiment is on the rise. It is simply that the minority of people who represent that kind of sentiment in society are no longer the playthings of the major parties. Previously, the major parties more or less had a lock on that populist sentiment. They were able to coopt it and, at times, also suppress it, but they are weaker now. The people who approve of populist ideas and who support right-wing populist policies are now drifting away from the major parties. Are populist parties on the rise? Yes. Is populist sentiment on the rise? No, I don't think that's happening, and I certainly don't think it's happening in Australia.

On Iain Walker's question about why this is not an attractive proposition anymore for people to get this entree into Australian politics: I think the answer is that political parties make it extremely difficult. The reason they make it difficult is it's in their interest to do so. If you're, for instance, a successful businessperson who decides to make an entree into politics by joining the Liberal Party, that doesn't look like a particularly attractive proposition for anyone. I think that's part of the reason political staffers and party officials now dominate the parliament: it's because it's so much more difficult for outsiders to get in. The reason it's so difficult for outsiders to get in is, it seems to me, it's in the interest of the senior power holders within those parties to keep the party small and insular—they're much easier to control that way. Political parties exist, in part, to dole out favours—an ambassadorship here or a board appointment there—but the most powerful way that parties have to spread favours is preselections.

**CHAIR:** Mr Winn, I think you were trying to get the call?

**Mr Winn:** I'm going to your point, Senator Stoker, about how the way we live is changing things. One of the points I make relates to the earlier point about how fake news is influencing how people are receiving information. My understanding is that, in the US alone, over 10 per cent of people receive their information from sources that are fake news or propagate largely fake news. The question is about how technologies and other media are influencing how people are engaging with the truth and how that truth then undermines democracy and how we are educating people to understand how to find fake news. It's not just the science; it's about the research and the humanities—and I acknowledge the submissions by humanities, science and others. It's actually about how we educate people to understand critically—and that's educating through schools and all through society—



but also what are the right mechanisms we have in place in our society about regulations and other things about how these technologies can be used against sharing truth.

**Senator STOKER:** Mr Winn, how would you deal with the fact that people getting a lot of their news from social media means that they are getting the information they receive filtered through an algorithm designed to reflect to them beliefs they already hold rather than encouraging them to see the world from the perspectives of other people?

**Mr Winn:** I profess that I'm not an academic in this space. Even though I'm the CEO of the Australian Council of Learned Academies, I rely on many other experts. Our recent work around artificial intelligence suggested that there's some work that needs to be done around media having to source their sources and information so people can see where that truth is coming from. But also then looking at regulating some forms of advertisement that should be banned. One of the suggestions made was about microtargeting of political campaigns where they can influence people's decisions without people not necessarily knowing exactly how well-informed that is.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Professor Melleuish.

**Prof. Melleuish:** I live in an area where, if they put up a drover's dog, the candidate for Labor would be elected—I'm sorry I'm using that—

**CHAIR:** I understand the point you make.

**Senator STOKER:** I hear drovers' dogs are very good!

**Prof. Melleuish:** I've sometimes reflected on why Wollongong remains so staunchly Labor. Other areas around the country are perhaps even poorer than Wollongong. Parts of Wollongong are not necessary that badly off. I think it's cultural. As a region it has maintained cultural solidarity or some sort of local solidarity over an extended period of time. Perhaps that's why it's so difficult for the other side of politics to disrupt the Labor voters in Wollongong. Again this is anecdotal, but maybe it's cultural disruption that has had the biggest effect on party—not economic but social and cultural disruption. We're a much more fluid society. We're moving around a lot more. People whose previous generations lived in one place have moved to another place. Coming back to Senator Stoker's point, it isn't just about people living in apartments necessarily. People have to travel long distances to go to work. There may be underlying social and cultural factors.

**CHAIR:** And education.

**Prof. Melleuish:** And education. There are still parts of the country that are more solid and parts that are less solid. That's the point that I'm making.

**Senator STOKER:** I want to ask a related question. Are changes in the way that we approach sensitive questions as a society—and I'm thinking here about the rise of identity politics, intersectionality and things like that—affecting the way we either cohere as a nation or divide?

**Prof. Melleuish:** I have a line on this. The problem with a lot of the identity politics and so on is that it has moved out of the realm of personal interaction, where people are soft with each other, and it has become more abstract because it has been put in an abstract medium, so people solidify opinions. When we sit around this room we interact with each other, but if we had an interaction on Facebook or something we might be harsher with each other. I think that's at least part of the reason why people have come to identify with imaginary or virtual communities rather than with real communities.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I'm sorry, I'm going to call Professor Thomas first. He's been trying to get the call.

**Prof. Thomas:** That was in relation to the earlier question about regulatory news.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Mr Walker.

**Mr Walker:** On the identity politics point, it's often seen as—we talked earlier about is the problem polarisation or disengagement? I fall in the camp of disengagement. Polarisation effects such a small number of people. We think most people, as those pieces come off, are switching off. They're not engaging or getting into the war. They hear maybe a predictable set of arguments come up and they just switch off entirely, and that's actually part of the problem to solve.

**Senator STOKER:** So the polarisation of the small group that is engaged is driving the disengagement of the sensible, busy, ordinary people?

**Mr Walker:** Yes.

**Senator STOKER:** It's a good theory.

**CHAIR:** We'll move on I think.

**Senator STOKER:** That's fine. Mr Ergas has been waiting patiently.

**CHAIR:** Sorry, did you want to say something else on the same issue?

**Mr Ergas:** Yes; thank you. I agree with the broad trends that Mr Roggeveen so ably summarised in terms of the decline of mass parties, and that's certainly the case in Europe, albeit less so in North America generally. It has also clearly been the case in the primary vote in Australia.

The issue, to my mind, is how you view that phenomenon and what its implications are. It seems to me that if you phrased it slightly differently, it would look a bit different in the following sense: if you think back to when we studied political science years ago, or what was then called politics—no-one claimed it had an element of science to it—we were told that a fundamental problem that had been identified by Robert Michels many decades ago, at the turn of the 20th century, was that the major political parties were the equivalent of oligarchies who were dominant oligopolies, typical duopolies, in a market where there was insufficient competition. He said that really the hope for the future was that the barriers to entering into politics would decline and the extent of competition in political markets would rise, and that, as competition in political markets rose, they would become somewhat more responsive and efficient. To my mind there is a plausible argument that that's what has happened. Effectively, the barriers to entry have declined, the switching costs for consumers have declined, the extent of information available to consumers has increased, the transactions cost of informing oneself have declined too. As a result of that the political arena has become more competitive.

Now that in itself ought to be a good thing, and in some respects I believe it certainly is. However, it raises two sets of problems. The first is that, as in all competitive markets, the adjustment problem for the incumbents. That's not merely for the incumbents themselves, but also for a system which, used to dealing with a relatively small number of players, now has to adjust its behaviour to manage coalition building and consensus development across a broader range of players. The problems that you quite rightly pointed to in many of the countries in continental Europe, where the duration of governments has shrunk in countries with proportional representation, mean that the time it takes to form governments has increased materially and the stability of those governments has proven much more perilous. All those are parts of that transition.

The second problem it raises is that in more competitive markets the price of getting it wrong is high. Punishment is swifter and surer, which tends to make players more risk averse. And so you get an increase in the degree of risk aversion in political parties, which in turn makes it difficult for them to elaborate bold proposals on the rare occasions where bold proposals would be a good thing. Most of the time they're disastrous, but once in a while a bit of boldness may be worth having.

So, I think the phenomenon that we're grappling with is that of adjusting to a much more competitive market in politics, and the problems with that adjustment are then compounded by the issues that have been raised about change in the media. Again, if you go back over the history, each time the media environment has changed, democratic politics have changed with it. When the British finally repealed the heavy taxes that impeded the production of cheap newspapers in the 1850s and early 1860s—and so there was the rise of the penny press—that completely changed the shape of British politics. The rise of radio had a fundamental effect on politics, not merely in democracies, but it helped in many respects the rise of autocracies around the world. The rise of television was transformational in terms of the nature of politics and the way politics works. It would be entirely surprising if as fundamental a change as the rise of the internet did not in the long run alter the kind of politics we have. So, we're dealing at once with two transitions: a transition in the political marketplace and a transition in the media which supports that marketplace. What will ultimately come of that I think is really a fundamental question.

**CHAIR:** I'm going to have to encourage you to move along, because we do have to finish on time here. I know Professor Daly wanted to say something. I do urge you all to perhaps reduce the length of your contributions. Thank you very much.

**Prof. Daly:** I'll be as brief as I can be. I just want to kick off on something that sort of joins together a lot of things that we talked about today, and that's the idea that a functioning democracy is ultimately predicated on the idea of a shared civic space, and the changes to our media environment in the past 10 years have really changed that—people being funnelled into political echo chambers and so on. But it's wider than that. American research right now focuses on the idea—and one person at Harvard talks about it—of knowledge institutions or objectivity institutions, which includes an independent media, an independent public service and universities and so on, and the very idea that you can have an objective institution in the US has gone by the wayside; it is just not seen as possible that everything is part of the partisan contest. That is a big issue, and it's a huge shift in how we view democracy and where we see any sort of true north or shared civic space as being possible and where people can

come together. I think that's something that we really need to sort of think about in terms of pulling together a lot of the things that have been discussed.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Dr Karena Menzie-Ballantyne has not had the opportunity to make a presentation. She presented submission No. 26. Doctor, you're a lecturer in education at the School of Education and the Arts at CQUniversity. And you've got an argument about a global citizenship education. Perhaps you could give us some indication of the proposition that you want to advance.

**Dr Menzie-Ballantyne:** Thank you. I appreciate that, and I do appreciate having this forum to present in, because I think what we're talking about here goes to the heart of—I can't change what's happening now, but as a teacher-educator hopefully I and my colleagues can influence what happens in the future. To give some context to our submission, my undergraduate work is in political science, and I was in government relations prior to going into education, so I've kind of brought that background with me. My colleague in writing this is April Biccum, who comes from the School of Politics and International Relations at ANU. So, we're coming from those collective spaces.

What we want to put forward is that many of the questions raised in this inquiry and hopefully some of the solutions for future generations actually sits in this concept of education for global citizenship. I want to frame that first because I know that nationhood and national identity is one of the framing arguments of this particular inquiry. Sometimes I think there's a disjuncture, that people think educating for global citizenship is in contest with national identity or in contest with looking at domestic politics. So I wanted to elaborate in this forum a little on what education for global citizenship is. It is actually based on the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship. The cosmopolitan citizenship framework says that it is perfectly possible to hold a local, national and global identity at the same time. In fact, the research shows that using those three levels of terminology with our youth has almost become redundant—because, at the one moment, they will be talking about a local issue with their colleagues who live in America; their tribe, depending on their area of interest and the issue that they are interested in, may be down the road or scattered around the world. So they are holding all of these identities at the same time, without conflict.

Where I think global citizenship education comes to many of the issues raised here is because of the types of activities that we do. Being a teacher, I am going to use an example—the issues raised by Ryan here about being fed the Facebook news. Yes, the young people do not engage with our traditional television and radio outlets; they do have a podcast society; they do rely on Facebook and other sources. We can't change that. But, as educators, what we can change—and it is part of education for global citizenship—is critical literacy. We actually overtly teach, from primary school up, things like what is a fact and what is an opinion. We overtly teach children to have a look at whether it is a '.com', '.edu' or '.gov' website that they are looking at. And it is part of that civics and citizenship education that is being undertaken from primary school up.

Here, I just want to differentiate slightly between civics and citizenship. Our Australian curriculum identifies civics and citizenship education. Civics and citizenship curriculum, in my home state of Queensland, currently gets allocated 18 hours a year. And that, I think, Dr Prasser, is the basis of your year 10 figures of only 50 per cent meeting the benchmark that we like them to be reaching. What is heartening is that, like NAPLAN testing, there is a civics and citizenship test being done every three years with a selection of schools around Australia. They test children in grade 6 and they test children in grade 10. The statistics from those tests are that, on the whole, the highest score we ever get from our grade 6s is somewhere between 50 and 60 per cent—and then the scores go backwards. Our grade 10s scored about 47 per cent in the last testing.

I hasten to add that what they are testing is the thing that is easy to measure—civic knowledge. And yes, we are failing the children in that because we have only 18 hours a year to do it. What comes with that is the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, they ask the children about issues and they ask the children about activities they are engaged with. Not surprisingly, those children who say they are engaged in at least two citizenship type activities score higher on the civics tests. It is praxis learning: we learn by doing. So that's one element. We teach them critical literacy, we teach them to distinguish fact from opinion, and we hopefully give them the skills to engage with the Facebook media.

The other thing is that what we do is a recognised vehicle for social cohesion. I say it is 'a recognised vehicle' because the federal government last year awarded multimillion-dollar contracts to two global citizenship education organisations—High Resolves and Together Through Humanity—to undertake global citizenship education in rural and regional Australia after the Christchurch tragedy. That's what that funding arose from. So there was a recognition that that social cohesion element was needed. Why did they choose education for global citizenship? Because distinguishing fact from opinion overtly teaches intercultural understanding, which is already in our Australian curriculum as well. It also gives that vehicle to explore controversial issues.

Working with my civics and citizenship preservice teachers, because I'm in Bundaberg I gave the Bundaberg example of Keith Pitt being one of the three MPs who voted against same-sex marriage. Whatever your personal opinion, Keith Pitt did what his electorate was telling him to do. Whatever Keith Pitt's personal opinion is, that was what his electorate were saying, and the voting in the plebiscite showed that. These are the types of controversial issues that we discuss in the forum of the classroom. We do things like citizenship juries. We do those sorts of outlets to explore, and we do it right down to the young children, with a game called the Great Divide, where they go to one side of the room, depending on whether they agree or disagree on a particular controversial issue.

What I'm saying here and what I'm putting to this committee is that, although education is essentially state based, we know that our curriculum is national. We have the new Alice Springs declaration, which was signed off by federal and state ministers in December last year, the second goal of which is 'active and informed members of our community' who 'understand their responsibilities as global citizens'. So we have the mandate to do this. We have a three-dimensional curriculum, in the knowledge subject areas, the general capabilities and the cross-curricular. We have education for global citizenship, which we used to fund through AusAID. In the year before it was defunded, it reached something like 27,000 teachers and preservice teachers across Australia, for the budget that it cost to clean the department of foreign affairs building. We know this because it was actually funded by the department of foreign affairs at the time, through AusAID.

On education for global citizenship, if at federal level we could have an endorsement, a backing—heaven forbid, some funding—to give teachers professional development, this stuff is already in the curriculum. They have a mandate to do it, but, as was pointed out earlier, they simply have not been professionally trained to tease it out. These programs are coming. In Victoria they're already there. I'm about to be working with the Queensland state government to do similar. But it would be wonderful to have that national recognition.

**Senator STOKER:** You've said the education system already teaches critical thinking and how to distinguish between fact and opinion, which is important and good. One of the criticisms I hear quite often is that the decisions that people, particularly young people—I understand this is a generalisation, and there will always be exceptions—are now making their political decisions on the basis much more of feeling rather than fact. Does the way that we teach students need to help them to distinguish between feeling and fact? I'll use the example that you provided, and that is the climate change protests. A lot of it is very feeling driven rather than fact driven. How do we approach that distinguishing in the way that we teach teachers and students?

**Dr Menzie-Ballantyne:** I will slightly take issue on fact versus feeling in the strike for climate change, for example. In the interviews I saw conducted and I conducted myself with young people engaged in that process, there was an awful lot of fact there. Yes, there was feeling and, yes, there was passion, but the interview responses that they were giving were actually grounded in really solid research. That's one of the things that I think we need to do in the education system, and I think it is a failing of our education system and something we need to work on. We underestimate. Adolescence is my field. There are all those hormones running around and unpredictable responses. Yes, all of that is there—

**Senator STOKER:** A lot of it has been hysterical.

**Dr Menzie-Ballantyne:** I would hasten to disagree. I think one of the ways in which children have been shut down—and I'm not suggesting, for a moment, Senator, that that's what you're saying—is by being told that they are being hysterical or that they are being emotional or that they don't have the facts. I think it is actually one of the ways that we put young people down. And I think there's a real disjuncture between this—that we're saying we want in our school, we want in our education system—and we're actually overtly teaching them to be critical independent thinkers but then, as soon as they act on that, we shut them down because they're teenagers, because they're emotional.

**Senator STOKER:** I think you and I might agree to disagree on that.

**CHAIR:** We have seven more presentations to go and about an hour. Thank you very much. I do apologise for cutting this a little short. I have a few questions. You know of my longstanding interest in educational matters. But I do apologise—we're running out of time. Could I ask participants from the ANU, so Dr O'Donnell and Professor Reynolds, would you be able to assist us? This is submission No. 85. You're from the ANU Social Cohesion Team. Perhaps you could outline to us the work that you do and whether or not you think that there is something to be said to improve the level of trust through the work that you do.

**Prof. Reynolds:** Thank you for the opportunity to join this roundtable and to address this committee.

**CHAIR:** You have been very patient.

**Prof. Reynolds:** I don't think anyone who would know me has not seen me this quiet for this long. Dr James O'Donnell and I are here as part of a project that's been funded internally as part of the ANU Grand Challenges project. We have three years of money to look very closely at the issue of strengthening social cohesion. We're here really representing a much larger group of academics across the ANU. One of the key parts of these grand challenges is they have to be interdisciplinary, so we have experts on national identity, citizenship, ethnic diversity, multiculturalism, social capital, social entrepreneurship and violent extremism represented in our team. Our submission was really directed at the social cohesion and cultural identity in the nation state elements of this inquiry, a little bit more focused on that than the broader democracy issue but they're all intertwined and interrelated.

I'm sure that we would all agree that individual and community functioning is at its best when we have trust in one another, when we have a sense of belonging and connection to the community and to the nation more broadly, and also when we have a willingness on the part of the members of that community to support one another, help one another and also to engage in their political institutions, including thinking that those institutions are legitimate and representative of who they are. Those elements really define the working research based definition of social cohesion, so it captures trust, it captures belonging and it captures this idea of people being involved in and thinking that their political and social institutions are legitimate and useful.

James O'Donnell is a research fellow on this project and has been looking a lot at the data in Australia when it comes to understanding social cohesion and trying to map levels of social cohesion across different geographies in the Australian community. And what we can see is that there is inequality in the degree to which people in local communities experience those things that we just talked about. One of the aims of the work that we're doing is to try and look at where communities are functioning very well in relation to social cohesion and seeing whether we can transpose any of the insights from that community level to other places where we might say there is a sort of social cohesion deficit. That is a main element of the work that we're doing.

So in that vein, in the context of our submission to this inquiry, we have looked at the data landscape in relation to these issues and we think that there is a lot of scope to work towards getting better economic and social indicators of social cohesion at the community level so at a level where it becomes very informative for researchers not just like ourselves but for people in the community who are working to try and strengthen social cohesion and also for public policy-makers and also parliamentarians to work out how to go about best supporting and strengthening their communities.

The bulk of our recommendations in the submission are concerned with the data landscape we have, the way in which that might inform decision-making and policymaking, and the ways in which we might try and get better information about how to understand and strengthen social cohesion within Australian communities. We do things such as call for a minister of cohesion practice, which has been called for in other jurisdictions. We call for a research institute on social cohesion, and we certainly would like to see the Australian Bureau of Statistics get support to able to collect more regularly and more systematically data on these constructs that we think are really important to inform practice and decision-making. James, did you have anything you wanted to add?

**Dr O'Donnell:** I think you've summed it up very well.

**CHAIR:** James, I didn't quite hear in your remarks whether you think social cohesion, in your assessment, is increasing or decreasing.

**Dr O'Donnell:** I think there are certainly threats to social cohesion.

**CHAIR:** You'll need to be a bit more precise than that. I'm old-fashioned about these sorts of things. What do you reckon is happening, and why?

**Dr O'Donnell:** We know that there are big geopolitical changes going around the world and these are intersecting with economic and social change. Local communities are changing demographically, socially and economically in terms of how we're working and the way we're working. The composition of our neighbourhoods and towns is becoming much more diverse. For many places that's a good thing. It's rejuvenating a lot of towns. That's one of our reasons for putting an emphasis on the local community. There are several towns around Australia that are starting to decline in population or will do so in the not too distant future. Migration is one of the things that's propping up and will continue to prop up some of these regional towns. It is already happening. It's a policy focus of the government, but it has been happening for the last 10 to 15 years. In many ways that's going to contribute to social cohesion. We have great national level data—we've heard about some of it—but we don't have the data at that community level to really understand how communities are changing—well, we know how they're changing—but how they're adapting and thriving with that change.

**Senator STOKER:** There are a number of studies out of the US that say that the siloing or the echo chamber that we see on social media is starting to be replicated in the real world, so that you have suburbs of people who all have fairly homogenous political beliefs living near one another and different political beliefs in a different place. Do you see any evidence of that transfer from the digital world into the real world when it comes to siloing and division?

**Dr O'Donnell:** Not so far in Australia. The thing that has struck me the most in research on this project is the diversity in Australia. It occurs at almost every level. I expect to see some sort of siloing and segmentation and segregation of people within at least neighbourhoods, or if not, suburbs or cities. But Australia is diverse.

**Senator STOKER:** It's a relief to hear that that's not replicated. That's good.

**Dr O'Donnell:** Not yet. I guess it comes back to how the housing markets are structured and how it intersects with our job markets as well, as to whether you get that sort of conglomeration of political perspectives, let alone social and economic conglomerations.

**CHAIR:** I thought the evidence points to the growth of jobs, economic prosperity in the inner city areas, which is attracting people with higher incomes. I think about Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The gentrification of those areas is forcing out people with lower incomes and traditional communities. It's changing those communities. Because of housing costs people are being forced into other areas with all the transport problems and all the unemployment problems and the social difficulties. Surely you're picking that up?

**Dr O'Donnell:** Yes, certainly.

**CHAIR:** But you still say there's a level of diversity. I think of Fitzroy. Apart from the housing commission flats, where do people with limited incomes live, given the price of property in Fitzroy?

**Dr O'Donnell:** There is that sort of economic segmentation. It is not necessarily a segmentation on social, political or let alone ethnic dimensions. I would agree that those kinds of economic forces are still the driving forces behind that agglomeration in how we live.

**CHAIR:** You're familiar with my city, Melbourne. Think of Croydon. Think of Dandenong. The social composition of Dandenong is very, very different. There isn't a lot of diversity in Dandenong, is there?

**Dr O'Donnell:** Dandenong is changing. And it's one of the reasons—

**CHAIR:** How do you mean 'changing'? Tell me about that.

**Dr O'Donnell:** If you think about some of those arrival places in some of the big cities, obviously we have a diverse migration stream, but at the lower skilled and lower income end, one of the reasons why places like that diversify so much is because of the availability of affordable housing. Many of those areas will be linked by economics, but they are diverse in terms of—

**CHAIR:** Can I follow through? What do you say is the relationship between social cohesion, national identity and nationhood as such?

**Prof. Reynolds:** They are highly interconnected. One would argue that if you looked at some of the research landscape, social cohesion is providing you with a sense of national identity—in fact, it is part of social cohesion—and a sense of nationhood. One of the arguments within this body of work is that if we can work out how to strengthen social cohesion at a very local level, that will build individual and community wellbeing and build the sense of nationhood that you're talking about.

You also wanted to hear about the international landscape. When we look at what's happening in Australia compared to other countries, using things like the World Values Survey, we can see that social cohesion is fragile in a number of countries around the world. We can certainly see that Australia is in a better position, for some of the optimists around the table, than some of those other international experiences. But we can also see that there is a decline emerging in the data that we have in Australia. Some of that data comes from the Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion Survey. Some comes from the Bureau of Statistics general social survey. When we look at certain items, we can see the decline starting here. That is where Australia has an opportunity to look at that landscape and think, 'What are we going to do to buffer the kind of decline that we see can happen and the fragility of things to do with social cohesion and nationhood now?' That speaks to the timeliness of this inquiry and its recommendations. This is a point in time where there is still opportunity to think about different ways to act that could buffer some of these early signs that we're seeing in the Australian data.

**CHAIR:** What are you recommending that we do about it?

**Prof. Reynolds:** There are a number of things that we are recommending. We think that a lot of the ways in which government has thought about this issue has been through the lens of multiculturalism. In fact perhaps we need a lens of social cohesion: that we are now a multicultural country; we have multicultural communities; and if

we use a lens of social cohesion to try and strengthen individuals and communities, that could lead to a whole-of-government framework that would strengthen all sorts of initiatives or communities around Australia. So the first is to change the mindset through looking through a policy framework to do with social cohesion. The second is to think about our data and the way we're using it to inform our thinking and decision-making. We've got some good indicators, but we need more of the kind of data that will help us improve decision-making and inform both research and policy activity. One of the recommendations is to think about a minister for social cohesion and that this is the glue that is fundamental to individual and community functioning and wellbeing and that it needs to be really raised in terms of its importance in the way we think about strengthening Australian communities.

**CHAIR:** Are there any questions on that matter?

**Prof. Evans:** All I would add is that if you look at the HILDA survey, which is the longitudinal survey that we have on social trust, social trust in Australia has dipped below 50 per cent to 47 per cent for the first time—and that was in the latest wave, reported towards the end of last year. We are starting to pick up. I talked earlier about the impact of political trust on social trust. We are starting to see a significant correlation between those two things.

**Mr Reece:** Can I ask what may be a challenging question, but, I think, in the interests of academic inquiry, it needs to be asked. Do you think there is a link between immigration levels, multicultural diversity and levels of trust in our political system? I was given pause to reflect on this when I was in Denmark last year. You see this country with all these remarkable achievements. They readily boast about having the highest level of political trust in the world. They say, 'That's part of our secret sauce and why we're able to achieve all these extraordinary metrics in terms of OECD rankings,' et cetera. But the thing that I couldn't help but notice was that it's a monoculture. In fact, both sides of politics, the Social Democrats and the Conservatives, are now fairly hostile towards immigration.

**CHAIR:** In fact, the Social Democrats have moved pretty hard on the issue.

**Mr Reece:** Yes, they have. I know this a very challenging and controversial area, but I would be interested in your reflections on that.

**Prof. Reynolds:** It's a subject of a recent publication. Thank you very much. I can point you in the direction of that.

**Mr Reece:** Please.

**Prof. Reynolds:** More broadly, this is a problem that was introduced to us by Putnam and others—that there's a relationship between increasing ethnic diversity in our communities and a lowering of social cohesion. Trust is one of the measures that is used there. When we look at the Australian data, which we have—we've looked at the Scanlon mapping social cohesion data on this question—we've been able to look at that and say that we can't see that relationship in the Australian context. Furthermore, with increasing diversity in local communities there is also, it seems, more opportunity for positive contact, which is leading to benefits to social cohesion. I would like—and I'm sure my colleagues would as well—to be able to answer that question even better with better data sources at the local level. But certainly, when we look at the Australian experience, we don't see that relationship. In fact, what it shows us is, if we can come up with activities in local communities that actually build positive contact—and there's a role for local leadership, there's a role for local government, there's a role for members of those communities to build the kind of community that they want to live in—those opportunities will lead to a bolstering of social cohesion. Certainly, for us, that relationship doesn't seem to be evident.

**CHAIR:** Ms Hancocks is from the Scanlon Foundation, and the Scanlon Foundation's mapping and social cohesion survey is quite pertinent at this point. This is submission 115. Can you contribute at this point?

**Ms Hancocks:** I completely concur with Kate's comments about the social cohesion and the relationship with immigration. It's not there. That is not the impact point. I would say that we are a highly cohesive society. Compared to societies around the world, Australia is an extremely cohesive society.

**CHAIR:** Can I push you on that. Is it comparative, or—

**Ms Hancocks:** Comparatively.

**CHAIR:** It doesn't mean that we are a cohesive society; it would just be by comparison to others?

**Ms Hancocks:** The measures that are used on a global basis—along with Canada—actually indicate that we are a highly cohesive society. I would say that since we've been measuring social cohesion, since 2007, that cohesion measure has dropped slightly—not a great deal, but slightly—and it has been primarily due to discrimination, the increase in people's experiences of discrimination. I would like to say, though, that Australia has many strengths by virtue of its diversity and as a consequence of the resulting diversity of thinking, which is

recognised and valued by the vast majority of the population, particularly the young. They really do appreciate and value our cultural diversity.

We do, of course, always have to be aware of not making overgeneralisations. I would make a point here that survey methodology is becoming increasingly difficult and very expensive. One of the things that we often do miss when we're talking about surveys across the population is the diversity between young and old, between people of different genders, between people with different levels of education, and in perceptions of their economic future or cultural or faith backgrounds. There just isn't enough research at the local level, but amongst all of those different parameters as well. I think it's really important to bear that in mind when we make gross statements about the population's views on certain things.

The majority of Australians believe in democracy. From the couple of questions that we have in ours, about 65 per cent believe that it's the best model for Australia. But trust in government has taken a hit since 2007, 2009 and 2010, when many promises were made, and I would suggest that that included the ability to be heard and the Kevin Rudd concept of bringing lots of people here to Canberra to have big discussions, after which nothing occurred as a result of those big discussions. Whether you call them the preliminaries of citizens assemblies or not, it set up a set of expectations about being heard that didn't go anywhere. And it not being delivered means that—

**CHAIR:** I might have introduced a couple of ideas, to dispute that.

**Ms Hancock:** But since then some of those things have—

**Unidentified speaker:** Don't forget that the National Disability Insurance Scheme came out of that.

**CHAIR:** There is the bionic eye.

**Unidentified speaker:** There's still a team at the University of Melbourne working on it.

**CHAIR:** Yes, there is.

**Ms Hancock:** To a certain degree, that led to—

**CHAIR:** I know what you mean.

**Ms Hancock:** a plateauing of trust in government that hasn't been able to rebound again.

**CHAIR:** The perceptions, yes.

**Ms Hancock:** New arrivals value democracy very highly, although they may be anxious about participating. But I do note that local government representation is increasing along cultural diversity and faith diversity lines. They want to be heard through representation at all levels and they value what Australia offers and what it contributes to its success. I think that's a very important point to make. Most importantly, we need to tell positive stories about the role diversity plays in our society and recognise the diversity that exists within our diversity and not try to overgeneralise, as I said, about the population.

To pick up on Nick's earlier comments about our suppleness, it is an incredibly important feature of Australia. We continue to learn from the diverse knowledge base that we now have and to build new Australian ways of doing things and create more firsts. That is only possible if we actually invite and engage with the broader diverse population.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. You raised the issue about your survey methodology. The recent election demonstrated the paucity of opinion polls. We all—on this side of the table, anyway—have learnt something about this in real terms. There is a view amongst the polling industry that it's incredibly difficult—

**Ms Hancock:** It is.

**CHAIR:** to secure accurate information, particularly given that people won't use landlines; demographic groups will not respond to surveys—that is, by age and class; and online surveys fail dismally for much the same reason. So there is a real issue, surely, about how we do measure any of these questions?

**Ms Hancock:** And how representative they are of the broader population.

**CHAIR:** What's their value? Dr Cameron, did you want to respond to that?

**Dr Cameron:** Yes, I just want to add a quick comment. In evaluating survey research, I think it's important that we look at how the surveys are conducted, because not all surveys are conducted the same way. There are absolutely these problems with online opt-in surveys, which aren't representative.

**CHAIR:** Like the Australian opinion polls!

**Dr Cameron:** There are also problems using landlines or mobiles, because it's very difficult to get a random sample of the population. But there are certainly still scientific surveys, including the Australian Election Study



and several other surveys, using scientific methodology, which does enable us to break down trends by gender, by age group, by region and so on. So what it—

**Ms Hancock:** I'm not suggesting that you can't, except that if you've only got 2,000 respondents—and we recognised this in ours, and we used the very latest in methodology thinking—you can't get small enough groups to be representative of those smaller demographics, let alone local areas.

**CHAIR:** That's right.

**Dr Cameron:** Absolutely.

**CHAIR:** There is a real issue, though, about whether or not you can conduct an accurate survey given those restrictions. I'm told that there are different indicators that could be used and very complicated systems if you've got a big enough sample to adjust for demographics—for class, for age brackets. But are you satisfied that your surveys are able to do that?

**Dr Cameron:** It's also about the sampling frame that you start with. If you start with a list of landlines, that's not going to be reflective of the Australian population, because not everyone has a landline. The same problem exists if you start with a list mobiles. Not everyone has a mobile, and some people have two mobiles. The approach that has been used by the Australian Election Study historically has been to use a random sample from the electoral roll. Because we have compulsory voting, that is a very good sampling frame. And we've moved over to the Geocoded National Address File, which is a comprehensive list of addresses in Australia. To go out to a representative sample and to have incentives to encourage people to participate to increase the response rate is a more expensive way to run surveys, but certainly what we see in our results is that, when conducted in this manner, responses are broadly reflective of the population in many respects, including age, including vote and so on. So it is still possible to conduct quality survey research. There are, of course, challenges going along with societal changes. It's harder to get people to respond to surveys. But it's important, when we evaluate survey research, to understand how it was conducted and to make an evaluation of the robustness of the results stemming from that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for that. Can I call Professor Thomas? We've managed to shut you out for most of the day! Would you like to make a contribution to this point, given that we are running close to time?

**Prof. Thomas:** Sure. Thank you, Senator. I will be brief. I am here to speak on behalf of the Academy of the Humanities. We've made a submission, which touches on a range of the issues that are being dealt with here and will be dealt with next week. I wanted to say that our academy president, Professor Joy Damousi, will be appearing, I think, next week at your round table.

**CHAIR:** That could be right.

**Prof. Thomas:** She will have further comments to make.

**CHAIR:** If anyone else wants to appear next week, we can arrange that as well.

**Prof. Thomas:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** You should be aware that those invitations are extended. It's not restricted to one appearance—if you could pass that on.

**Prof. Thomas:** Right. I'm a member of the council of the academy. I'm also the director of a new Australian Research Council centre on the social implications of automated decision-making. The issues that have been raised here and in the discussion we've had today are directly related to a lot of the academy's core interests and concerns. It's been fascinating to follow the discussion, especially as we've started to talk more about the social and cultural contexts in which these critical developments in our political and democratic culture are emerging. In the interests of time, I wanted to draw out just one or two points from our submission. Professor Damousi may say more next week. But just in relation to the context, we've already talked about it a bit, but the context of digital transformation, I think, is absolutely critical. An essential part of the ethos of the humanities in Australia has been about how we can make our Australian institutions and political culture as inclusive as possible. Democracy only works really, you know, if we're all engaged with it and involved with it. In Australia, I wanted to emphasise that a critical problem is that digital inclusion and digital citizenship are still very unevenly distributed. We have large numbers of people who are not connected, who have deficits in terms of the sorts of digital skills and literacies that they have, in terms of their access to critical information infrastructure, and in terms of the affordability of those services for them. Digital inclusion is particularly unevenly distributed in this country, across our regions, as we know, and, of course, also across our social and economic geography. There's really been a real wave of research in this country around these problems over the last several years and we can say more about it. Without broader digital inclusion, we don't really have effective democratic deliberation here.

It is a necessary condition for the kinds of institutional and practice experiments in democracy that we have been talking about. We really do have to bring everybody with us, and we're not doing that at the moment. That's a major issue of concern.

When we measure digital inclusion—and we look at the work of organisations like the Bureau of Communications and Arts Research or the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, a project that I have been involved in—and look at it longitudinally, what's concerning is not really that we're not yet covering everybody, but it is the trends. What we see are that, while inclusion is increasing, the gaps between Australians, in terms of where they come from, their income or their age, are not narrowing as we go along. That's a key area of concern, I think.

We'd also want to reinforce a number of comments that have been made today about the importance of institutions in democratic innovation and experimentation, and in our whole system. We see them as particularly important in this context of digital transformation. So, if we are thinking about how we are going to respond to the problems of automation or the appearance of widespread artificial intelligence—the kinds of issues, for example, that have been dealt with in the recent ACOLA report—the resilience and adaptability of our institutions is really critical. I would leave it there. They are the critical points we'd like to make.

**CHAIR:** It's not a point we have emphasised enough today. We clearly need to come back to those issues in regard to the effect of digitalisation. Thank you very much. Next week we will perhaps come on to this issue, particularly in regard to the citizenship issues. Dr Cole, could I call you to the table please.

**Dr Cole:** I think it's fair to say that throughout the course of the discussion today two camps have emerged broadly. There are the optimists and the pessimists. There is some variation between them. I mention that by way of framing Charles Sturt University's contribution. We're in the optimists' camp, but it's a qualified optimism; it's not as bullish as some of the opinions here, but we're certainly not in the pessimistic camp. While, on the one hand, we certainly recognise and acknowledge the research that has been done that shows a growing sense among the Australian people that their democracy is under threat and growing dissatisfaction, the operative word here is 'sense'. It's not clear, in our view, to what extent we're dealing with perception here versus actuality. Perception doesn't always correlate to actuality, and there's plenty of research that shows this, whether it's recent research into economic class in Australia, where a lot of people put themselves in odd classes compared to the research parameters, or research that shows that a lot of people actually think politicians break more promises than in actual fact they do.

That's not to say that there's no problem here. I just mention that it's worth at least attempting to distinguish and differentiate, to the extent possible, between voter perception and the actual institutions and their health, and I would just note that it is actually easier to measure and test perception than it is to substantiate more abstract notions like the health of democratic institutions. We do, I think, have a good handle on voter sentiment, feeling and perception, but it doesn't necessarily correlate with the functionality of our institutions. In actual fact, it occurred to me that this hearing today is possibly a good example of this because we've had some discussion around the theatrics of question time, which, undoubtedly, thanks to the short grabs that make the news—the more dramatic the events in question time the more likely they are to make the nightly news—shapes the perceptions in the minds of a lot of voters of the business of parliament. Yet here today we've spent hours with two senators from different sides of the political divide sitting almost side by side, and we've had a robust and, I think, really deep, respectful, civil conversation about the fate of our democracy, hearing a range of views from experts from different parts of the country. Yet I daresay that, although this is being filmed, the majority of Australians don't see this side of the parliamentary business. They don't see the bills that pass unanimously in the more sober, boring, half-filled parliament.

**Senator STOKER:** And, for them, perception becomes reality, right?

**Dr Cole:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** People don't understand that politics is often performance art.

**Dr Cole:** And there are some very good performers.

**CHAIR:** Question time is the chance for some people to really give it a good workout. Now there's nothing wrong with that. There needs to be some theatre.

**Dr Cole:** Look, I'm not against theatre. I just think people don't get a full view of the life of parliament.

**CHAIR:** That's very true.

**Dr Cole:** While I've found what we're doing thoroughly stimulating and interesting, it's probably too boring to make the nightly news. So they don't see that other—

**CHAIR:** Yes, you're absolutely correct. Can I push you on something else, though? You're the assistant director of public and contextual theology research at Charles Sturt University. You're particularly interested in the intersection of religion and politics, especially in regard to Christianity and Islam.

**Dr Cole:** That's right.

**CHAIR:** That's correct?

**Dr Cole:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Have I got that right?

**Dr Cole:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** I know that as minister I was approached about doing some work with you, which was always a bit of a challenge for the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. I'm interested to know what your perception is of the question of religious tolerance in this country. I come from Melbourne, which has a very large Islamic community. There is a lot of tension in regard to some questions that have arisen, and there is some intense hostility being expressed by extremist groups against the Islamic community. Islamophobia is alive and well. What is your impression? Has there been growth in the level of religious intolerance in this country?

**Dr Cole:** There is research done by the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation at Charles Sturt. My research centre has both Christian and Muslim scholars and we do a lot of work in interfaith dialogue. They've done now two reports on Islamophobia and it's become a yearly research. Certainly the trend there is of an increase of incidents. These are incidents reported by Muslim Australians where someone might suffer verbal abuse or some physical harassment going about their business. So there's certainly an increase, but this research is quite new so we don't have a 10 to 20-year sort of base of data to go by. That obviously is unique to the Muslim community. What I would say about Christianity and religious tolerance is that I think a lot of Christians not only feel but are well aware that their place in Australia has shifted.

I'll use my own personal story. I was born in 1976 into a very religious family. My father is a minister and a very prominent evangelical theologian in the US. But although I was aware that most of the people I went to school with didn't go to church, it wasn't an issue growing up in that Christian family. It was kind of just one of the—I dare say, to use the new language—identities that was part of the fabric of Australia. I think now that's changed. Christianity has become a more controversial, more politicised issue in Australia and so a lot of Christians—and part of this is undoubtedly perception—feel like they have to justify their position and contribution in a democracy because there are growing voices. They want a strict separation of religion and politics, which in my view is not possible in a democracy unless you have two classes of participation for religious believers and non-religious believers. And there is also just a sense—and it is a sense—of growing hostility. I think this is exacerbated by—

**CHAIR:** You think there's a growing sense of hostility towards Christians?

**Dr Cole:** Yes, particularly towards conservative Christians. Not all Christians are conservative. There are Christians whose views really are in step with the mainstream culture. So this is a phenomenon for conservative Christians, those, for example, who voted against same-sex marriage or indeed campaigned against it. I think a part of that perception is fed by social media. It only takes a couple of real incidents where someone is verbally abused or someone suffers what they might call a bit of persecution. They're plugged into large networks of other conservative Christians, so everyone learns about that story almost overnight. And because they identify and say, 'I have the same views as that person,' even though they've never had any ill treatment, they start fearing because of that incident that they learn about.

**CHAIR:** So what do you say to the proposition that religious tolerance, if it's to extend to religious groups, has to extend to all religious groups, even to conservative Christians to Islamic groups?

**Dr Cole:** I think that is a tension for some conservative Christian groups. But in my own view—and I often have this discussion with conservative Christians—is that it's got to be a one-size-fits-all. So if you want religious tolerance then you can't complain about what is preached in a mosque if you don't like it, because it's religious freedom for everyone. You can't have two types of religious freedom based on the religion. That is a tension for some conservative Christians because they're concerned about Islamic theology. I have spoken to people who want what is preached in a mosque regulated but not what's preached in the church.

**CHAIR:** This is a serious issue in this parliament and there are questions being raised about these matters more generally.

**Mr Ergas:** You mentioned Islam and Christianity. Have you done anything about the increased anti-Semitism in Australia?

**Dr Cole:** I haven't personally, no. I lack the expertise in both Jewish theology and the Jewish demographics in Australia, other than I'm broadly aware of the increase in Australia, which is matched by some very concerning signs in both America and Europe of not only anti-Semitism but anti-Semitic violence. That is the really concerning thing.

**CHAIR:** In your studies, surely you would have picked up on that anti-Semitic behaviour. I mean, these right-wing groups are anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic.

**Dr Cole:** That's certainly true of right-wing ultranationalist or populist groups.

**CHAIR:** They're fascists. They're actually using fascist symbols.

**Dr Prasser:** Aren't some Islamic groups anti-Jewish?

**CHAIR:** Of course they are. But, equally, I put to you that there are Jewish groups that are anti-Islamic.

**Dr Prasser:** Yes, of course. They're having a war over there, aren't they?

**CHAIR:** No—in Australia.

**Dr Prasser:** But it's fuelled by what's going on in the Middle East.

**CHAIR:** But, in your studies—I'm just saying: in terms of this question of religious tolerance, what are you picking up between the groups?

**Dr Cole:** It's a mixed story, like a lot of things. My own research centre—I'm a Christian scholar. I work with Muslims.

**CHAIR:** I'm not questioning your views; I'm just asking: in terms of your research, in terms of your understanding of how Australian society is adapting, are you detecting any changes in attitude?

**Dr Cole:** Between the faith groups?

**CHAIR:** Between the faith groups.

**Dr Cole:** That's what I'm saying: it's mixed. There are stories of great collaboration and co-existence—

**CHAIR:** I understand that.

**Dr Cole:** and then of course in each of these communities there's obviously a persistent threat from a minority of Muslim Australians who have a radicalised theology and have not only the intent—we have people in prison and unfortunately we've had some successful attacks in Australia. Each of these communities has at the fringes, if you like, people who not only don't have a favourable view of people from other faith; they have quite a negative attitude to our political system, for one reason or another. They're not the same reasons. On the Christian side it's: we've become an unchristian country; we've lost our Christian culture; we're becoming immoral. On the Islamic side it's: it's not a legitimate Islamic regime; we don't have sharia law in place. So, there are tensions, certainly, at the edges, but I think a lot of the other research that has been mentioned here shows that, broadly, devout religious Australians are—

**Senator STOKER:** Sorry, I don't mean to cut you off, but I just wanted to ask you a question. You described at least a perception of growing hostility towards Christians, particularly those who have more traditional points of view that might run contrary to some of the more in-vogue kind of attitudes of the time. Does that feed a disengagement from participation in public debates? Does anything in your research indicate whether or not it is having an impact on those people's participation in the big issues of the day?

**Dr Cole:** I think it is having an impact, but I think it's actually activating, not disengaging, their political participation. I think that's one reason why the Australian Christian Lobby has grown so much, because a lot of people really feel like they need a voice and an advocate.

It wasn't that long ago that the major parties—and to some extent they still do, although it's become slightly imbalanced—there were a lot of religious believers in the parliament—and there still are religious believers in the parliament. But I think the response to this sense of being besieged and the sense that there is a lack of tolerance—and there is some real intolerance; it's not pure fantasy, but I think it's magnified because someone hears of someone else's story, even if they don't have a story themselves—and I'm generalising here—is that we've seen an emergence of new political coalitions. This came out of the same-sex marriage debate. A lot of the coalitions and infrastructure that were set up then has continued long beyond the debate.

**CHAIR:** Yes, that's very, very true.

**Senator STOKER:** Finally, is there a link in your research between the rise of identity politics and some of the phenomena you've described about religious tolerance?

**Dr Cole:** I don't have research on it, but I could voice an opinion. Others have done research on the fact that identity politics has actually become a phenomenon on the right; it's not just on the left. It's been replicated, whether in the form of nationalism. In the case of conservative, in this case, Christian Australians, because Islam is slightly separate because it's predominantly a migrant community, in second and third generations, the profile of Australian Christians is a little bit different. I think with at least again the perception that everything's based on identity, and no-one likes my identity, then your identity as a religious believer becomes your primary identity. Perhaps I'm not making sense—I've just used the term many times. What I am saying is that I think, certainly for some conservative Christians, that sense of growing hostility has really led them to the conclusion that they need to—you know, if everyone is going to treat me like I'm just a Christian I'm going to champion my Christian identity and not only go on the defensive but start a kind of more offensive campaign for Christian values and a kind of public Christianity. But, again, we're talking conservative Christianity here and there's another side to—I don't want to sort of pigeonhole all of Australia's Christians just into the conservative camp.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. That was very interesting. Mr Sidoti, you have submission number 113. You are a vice-chancellor's fellow at Western Sydney University. I guess you're arguing that there should be some limits on our expectations of the state, if I've understood you correctly?

**Mr Sidoti:** I'm not sure that you have, Senator!

**CHAIR:** That's good—tell me about that!

**Mr Sidoti:** What I was trying to suggest in the submission is that there are certain things in the debate around trust and democracy that are not particularly mysterious. I would suggest that we need to be sure that we're asking the right questions. An example to my mind would be that a lot of work has been done and a lot of research has been available and a lot of breast-beating has gone on about why people are not joining political parties. I would suggest that the much more germane question is of the parties themselves. What would it take for people to join our party? It goes back to an earlier conversation. One of the perennials, it seems to me, is that those in power and authority do not cede it willingly. I think the analysis earlier about political parties is largely true. I mean, why would you join a political party? These are rational decisions. Why would a young person get involved in the mainstream of politics? These are the questions that give us a different way of tackling the issues.

At the Whitlam Institute, where I was director for a decade, Newspoll at one stage gave us all their voter intention survey data from 1996 to 2013, because we shared an interest in what was happening with young people. It was voter intention survey data rather than actual votes, but it was extraordinarily instructive. I'll send a copy to the committee, because it does reflect a number of the issues and some of the analysis today. Our conclusion in that research and in other research is that young people are not apathetic, not by any stretch of the imagination. They are engaging in different ways for quite rational reasons. In the paper—which is why you might have come to that conclusion, which is a bit of a worry on my part!—I give a couple of illustrations that essentially there is a whole range of responses to these issues, and this has come out during the course of today, I would suggest. Some of them are immediate, some of them are questions of how we enable innovation to happen, and others are about longer-term change, whether it's educational programs and investing in those ways. I would urge the committee to promote this—whether an informed risk approach to both democratic innovation and to the sorts of issues we're trying to address is not a more sensible approach than the approach to date. Of the illustrations I gave, one was the response to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. I'm not trying to reflect on these issues in the illustrations. The second was to the student strike.

In both instances, the government of the day—and I'm sorry, Senator Stoker, but if it was a different government I would have given an illustration from the other side, let me assure you—shut down consideration of the issues. And I think the point was made earlier about young people. The response was, essentially—and I do give some chapter and verse in the submission—'Get back into school, don't cause disruption, would you do this if it was on a Saturday? You're just a young person; how can we expect you to have ideas about this?' So, the whole message was one of saying, essentially, that as a young person you are not informed, you've not made the effort to understand the issues, and even though you are participating in a civic way, quite legally and legitimately, it is illegitimate in the eyes of the government. What that is saying, in a sense, is reinforcing the constant sense that somehow our participation is not wanted in reality, that it's not warranted and it's not taken seriously.

That's where I'd go back to the research that we did at the institute. Essentially what we found from young people was that they were not asking that their views be taken on board; they were simply asking that they be recognised as being legitimate agents in a political process and be treated meaningfully and with respect.

**Senator STOKER:** And breaking a law that requires them to go to school every day. One could engage in an act of civic participation in a way that aligns with one's other legal responsibilities, such as having your protest on

the weekend. I don't think you can say that it is wholly an act of participation. It is also an act of noncompliance with the law. I'm happy for you to make the rest of your point, but—

**Mr Sidoti:** But I will come back on that, because in a sense we have to appreciate that these young people are making a political decision, and they are willing to wear the consequences of that decision, and some have worn the consequences of it. Whether the government wanted to prosecute them for the illegality of not attending school is a different issue. Politically it probably would have played into their hands, I would have thought.

**Senator STOKER:** It's a state government issue, too.

**Mr Sidoti:** But the point I'm trying to make is that we did have tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands—of young people in this instance who were willing to engage. And the response was not recognising the legitimacy of their engagement, their willingness or their issues or indeed the sense that they actually understood what they were talking about. So, there was no sense in sitting down and arguing. I'll just give it as an illustration: the Uluru Statement from the Heart similarly was a process that went over many years though all sorts of committees, special panels et cetera. Finally, there was a final report of the referendum council, and it was decided in the executive. Now, again, it's representative—and this is all I'm trying to say here—of a shift in the way the political institutions are playing in the space of democratic engagement in conversation. In this instance of the Uluru Statement from the Heart—again, stand back from the issue itself—clearly what it was saying was that we as an executive will make the decision, without reference, as far as I know, to the party, and not to the caucus and certainly not to the parliament, and not talking to the Indigenous leaders in advance. They're simply illustrations of a pattern of behaviour of governments over some time in the way they shut down the space for conversation at the same time that we're saying we want to open the space for conversations. That is simply the point I'm trying to make here.

**Senator STOKER:** Although, to be fair, the government did at that time immediately appoint a joint select committee on constitutional recognition of Indigenous people, of which I was one member.

**Mr Sidoti:** Yes, I know.

**Senator STOKER:** And we participated in a process that was about translating what could in practical terms be a matter of consensus into action from this place. So, I don't think it's fair to say that it was shut down entirely.

**CHAIR:** I'm sorry—I'm going to truncate this.

**Senator STOKER:** That's fine.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Professor. Did you want to say anything else?

**Mr Sidoti:** The final point that I would make—and I will send some material through—is that there is one other issue that I would raise in this context, and it's the importance of this committee. In 2008 the Whitlam Institute ran a five-part series on energy security, which was terrific but largely ignored. One of the issues that arose for us in the context of that was that I was struck by one senior person, a very informed person, who was speaking admiringly of the fact that China was able to ban plastic bags with one simple edict, because of the way its government is organised.

A subsequent speaker in the conversation, talking about the urgency of the issues—this was in 2008—talked about the fact that the emergency was coming upon us and that we should be looking at forming a government of national emergency and a war council. This is amongst a whole lot of other conversations from economists, the RBA and Treasury. One of the things we took away from that was that, when it comes to risk, one of the missing pieces in the whole debate on climate change was the democratic risk of climate change. What we tried to suggest was that if we allowed an emergency to get to a point of crisis then democracy itself would come under threat. I'm not suggesting that we're at that point, but we have seen elements of this in what has played out over the last three months. If you look at the emergency powers, legitimately applied, you can understand why they were applied. But the emergency powers that were used in New South Wales are broad powers. I think what was required was simply that it was a threat to property or persons. We had a response nationally from the Commonwealth government, looking to extend its capacity to declare a state of emergency. I'm not saying these are not legitimate; all I am saying is that the discussion that we're having here is absolutely critical to preventing circumstances in which a threat may, in fact, go further than undermining our relationship to the environment and may, in fact, undermine our relationship as a democratic state. I'll leave it at that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I'm sorry about time getting away from us in the way that it has. Professor Jim Walter, who's a fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and a past president of the Australian Political Studies Association, would you like to contribute?

**Prof. Walter:** Yes. I'll speak fairly briefly. Quite a lot of what I might have said has been covered. But I think there are a couple of issues that I want to raise. I was very glad that there hasn't been much discussion about nationalism and national character, which I think is very tricky territory. Most of our discussion has been about civic engagement and civic responsibility and our civic institutions, which I think is exactly what we should be talking about. But I think, too, that citizenship is a sort of a bargain. Citizens get entitlements, but they also have responsibilities. We have had this robust democracy in Australia; I'm not questioning that for a minute. We have a very strong history, but I think that over probably a couple of decades there has been a sense among people that they're entitled. The things they're expecting are not being delivered or are not being delivered in the ways that they want. The evidence for this doesn't just come from 2007. Michael Pusey and Peter Saunders back in 2003 both published very interesting research showing that, at a time when our economy was booming and things were going well, all the indicators were good, a lot of people—middle-class people and certainly the low-socioeconomic classes—were saying: 'It doesn't work for me. That's not our experience.'

Now, Will Davies has done some interesting work in the UK to show that statistical measures of things like GDP which suggest everything is terrific and everything is going well can be happening at the same time as the lived experience of expectations not being met—'it's not working for me'. And that's what starts to emerge in 2003 after the great reform period that we're talking about under Hawke, Keating and Howard, and we've seen from the figures and we've got very good data everybody has shown us that show it has got very much worse than that. So, when expectations are not met, civic engagement disappears.

**Senator STOKER:** How much is that a consequence of us asking governments to do things that were once jobs for individuals or civil society?

**Prof. Walter:** No, I don't believe that's the case. There has been a very resilient tradition of an active state in Australia under governments of all persuasions, not in the sense of being socialist or even necessarily social democratic; it's been an ameliorative liberalism that both of the major parties have practised to some extent.

**Senator STOKER:** But they're not necessarily mutually exclusive concepts. The fact that both parties have done lots of things and taken a broad approach doesn't necessarily sit impossibly with the conclusion that they may not be delivering well because we're asking them to do things they're not well suited to do. Do you have research that shows that it's one over the other?

**Prof. Walter:** I think some of that research I suggested shows that. But one of the things that we've done is to turn to—the sort of marketisation agenda in itself is not something that we necessarily question, but governments have tried to handle that through regulation and saying, 'Okay, things that governments might be expected to do can now be done through market provision, and we'll manage it through regulation.' Banks, aged care, technical and further education: you could go on and on about the ways those things have not met what people expected and the disquiet that has risen. I won't go on about that because I'm very conscious of the time, but I think that sort of issue of the match between expectations and failure to meet them, and disengagement, is very important. It's part of what we're seeing in these other measures that have been presented today.

The other thing I want to quickly touch on is the issue of a national conversation about these big issues. It comes back to issues that Senator Stoker has raised about social media. It comes back to what Julian Thomas and Henry Ergas were talking about: the transitions in media bringing about major political transitions. I don't profess to say that the legacy media of the past was perfect and everything was hunky-dory and there was a golden age, but the increasing fragmentation that we're seeing now makes just the possibility of getting rational, sensible discussion and getting lots of information more and more difficult. I think that's another major issue.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Professor. Look, there's just one more contribution, if you could bear with us. We may have to go a little bit over time. Mr Ryan Winn is here with us. He's from ACOLA, which is the overarching body for the learned academies. Ryan's had extensive experience in public service, so he'll be able to help us with some observations with regard to the capabilities of the Australian public service in education and in the Prime Minister's department. You're the organisation that covers the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Academy of Science, the Academy of Social Sciences and the Australian Academy of Science and Engineering. Perhaps you'd like to contribute. I do apologise for leaving you to last. Someone had to go there!

**Mr Winn:** No, that's okay. Keep the best until last! I'll be really brief because I can see the clock ticking away, and I'm quite happy to follow up afterwards directly with the secretariat. Joy Damousi is the current chair of ACOLA, and I'm also happy to brief her to provide more advice.

The reality is that democracy is based on trust, and trust is hard earned but quickly lost. I think that's the reality. I'm thinking about synthesising some of the thoughts others have had today, and I support most of what everyone has said. I think it really comes down to an informed public and an engaged public. When you think about

informed, that's about people having the right critical thinking to be able to test the knowledge and what information is. It's about having the trust in science and research to be available to the political class and others, and an open conversation around that. And I appreciate government's partnership with the learned academies and ACOLA. It's also about having the right advice available. That goes to the artificial intelligence report we talked about. We're happy to provide more advice separately around the recommendations in that report and how we go about that.

From an engaged perspective, I completely agree on the participant forums that people have talked about. I guess the one example I'd point to is the current project by the National Health and Medical Research Council on mitochondrial donations. That has a fantastic panel of citizens that sits alongside the scientific panel. They've presented the same, or very similar, evidence to the citizen panel to see whether, if they had the same information, they would come to the same result. I think that's another really good example of how the public can be engaged. It's almost that pub test: would the public come to that same consideration? That's another useful model when thinking about participatory forums. I'll leave it there, as I think the time is ticking away. I appreciate all your time today and I'm happy to follow up with you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Winn. There are many issues that have been canvassed today, and it's been absolutely terrific. I've found this very valuable and extremely useful in terms of our terms of reference. However, there are many questions that remain unresolved and many matters that require further advice. If you feel there are matters for which you think we could benefit from your further advice, there is an opportunity for supplementary submissions. I know many of you are very keen to provide advice. In my line of work I've noticed that the best goals are always kicked from the spectator side of the fence. This is one of those occasions where, as spectators, you can provide us with advice on how to kick those goals. So supplementary submissions would be welcome, if you think we haven't canvassed an issue properly today or if you think there are other matters that require our attention.

**Dr Menzie-Ballantyne:** In light of those supplementary submissions, may I ask both the senators: what is it you're looking for? We were discussing at lunch that this is a very broad gambit that you've been given.

**CHAIR:** This is always an issue for senators—'What are you looking for?' There's a formal process in the Senate. We have terms of reference, which govern our authority to act. Those terms of reference are written up in such a way as to allow you to say whatever you like, if the truth be known.

**Senator STOKER:** They're deliberately broad!

**CHAIR:** We are trying to address some big questions. This is an unusual inquiry. In fact, I'm starting my 28th year after Easter, and I don't recall any other Senate inquiry of this type. So there are no real precedents to go by. There is, however, an opportunity here for you to provide advice to the Senate about what we could do to improve the current situation. Some will take the view that things are pretty good. Others will take the view that things are pretty crook. That's not an unusual situation in the Australian Senate. We are looking for advice on what we can do to improve it. I will say to you that I'm looking for practical advice as to how to make things work. Others will say to me, 'You don't need practical advice; you need advice of any description.' That's fine too. This is an open book as to what you think is valuable, given the terms of reference. I'm particularly concerned about what's happening around the world. I don't see these issues as a problem unique to Australia. The whole point is: we want to hear from you on any of the matters you think are relevant to these terms of reference.

I want to thank you, one and all, for coming, and I really do want to thank you for your contributions today. We're having another one of these sessions next Friday, where we're concentrating on the issues of citizenship—the rights of citizenship and the changes that have occurred. If you are keen to participate in that or if you have colleagues that want to participate, please let us know. Once again, thank you very much for your attendance today. We really do appreciate it enormously.

**Committee adjourned at 15:34**