



OUTCOMES FROM ITS 2021 CONFERENCE

Overview

- Australia21 has been working on complex policy problems for nearly 20 years. In its 2021 conference it shared its unique perspectives and high-level expertise on the critical skills required to better shape our future and address the problems facing Australia in an interdependent and insecure world.
- At a time when politics is becoming more divided and public concern about conflicting and unclear information is growing, this Australia21 conference noted that Australians and humanity more broadly face a suite of multi-faceted problems, including global pandemics, climate change, water shortages, declining food and energy availability, and increasing risks of nuclear conflict; which will all require urgent and unprecedented responses.
- And we do not have the luxury of dealing with these compound problems one at a time: they must be addressed in coordinated and integrated ways by advanced human capabilities and high-level policy tools.

Conference Discussion Points and Recommendations Included:

01

SEE THE UNSEEN

- 1.1** Biosecurity is ten years behind cybersecurity at a time when technology has outpaced governance, legislation and preparedness leaving us vulnerable.
- 1.2** Designer pathogens can now be made by genetic engineering, and the capability for synthetic biology and genetic engineering is cheap, accessible, and getting more so by the day. Currently, there is no stand-alone biosecurity commission to regulate this growing risk.
- 1.3** Humanity faces ten mega risks and the Council for the Human Future believes that these risks constitute the greatest emergency humankind has ever faced and it is dedicated to investigating the evidence base to solve these catastrophic hazards.
- 1.4** To deal with these global threats Australian governments should consider developing a new policy for human survival – because it will only be when policymakers strategically discuss these threats, including the flow-on threat of societal collapse, that we can reduce their likelihood, speed, severity and harm to the most vulnerable, and to our planet.

02

RETHINK OUTDATED IDEAS

- 2.1** Rethink past beliefs that have given prominence to the flow of money as a measure of society's progress and overlooked many aspects of human wellbeing. Instead develop a Wellbeing Economy to redesign institutions, infrastructure, and laws that promote activities to support the wellbeing of people and the planet (<https://wellbeingeconomy.org/>).
- 2.2** Take into account how our cognitive and emotional capacities can work against our abilities to hear and connect with those with differing political and policy positions. At a time when deeper levels of two-way communication are required to hear all sides of a debate, empathy conversations have been shown to find common ground by supporting a more nuanced understanding of another's perspective, and by granting the other a presumption of credibility in shifting fixed notions.
- 2.3** Create a society in which it is unthinkable that young people could take their lives – where instead young people are educated about their emotions and mental state from an early age; where they feel comfortable to talk about mental illness, and where they are well supported by mental health services that take into account the latest learning from neuropsychology and neuroscience.
- 2.4** Consider family size and lifestyle decisions as powerful ways that individual families can contribute to a sustainable future. Environmental resources are shrinking fast due to human over-use, but reducing environmental impact per person, only delays crises unless we also reduce our population.
- 2.5** Review the purchaser/provider model as a viable policy tool – with its focus on the short term, few training requirements, and little expectations for corporate research, this model is not well positioned to respond to the complexity of future health, infrastructure, environmental, and welfare requirements.

03

CREATE POLITICS AND POLICY FOR EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

3.1 Pay more attention to social policy measures that capture diversity (e.g., of skills, experiences, beliefs) and equality (e.g., of access to fundamental human needs and opportunities), because these have been shown to lead to more resilient societies, able to anticipate, prepare for and respond to diverse challenges and opportunities.

3.2 Deeper levels of critical thinking, authentic collaboration, emotional intelligence, two-way communication with stakeholders and the public, along with an appreciation of the scale and interrelationship of the challenges facing the world are all essential to future policy development.

3.3 Integrate learnings from neuroscience into long-term and intergenerational policy issues, by recognising that humans have a highly developed default threat system, which automatically reacts to immediate threats, but is not adequate for long-term threats. In many policy areas, such as climate change, facts have not been enough to engage policy attention in the crucial early stages of long term threats.

3.4 The scale and unprecedented nature of mega-risks is not being sufficiently recognised by global governments and policy authorities. The Council for the Human Future is bringing the best science and experience to encourage global debate of the risks and the possible solutions.

3.5 Gender equity remains a work in progress in Australia. Repair the gender imbalance in policy and political decision-making by significantly increase women's participation in political decision-making. This does not derogate from the role that men do and should play. Rather, it requires the patriarchy to reform itself, welcoming the talents that all citizens, regardless of their age, gender or sexual preference can bring to creating an equitable future for all Australians.

04

VALUE KNOWLEDGE, EVIDENCE BASE, AND SCIENCE

4.1 There is a clear link between R&D investment and the innovations and productivity increases that will drive post-pandemic recovery. University research is central in developing new policy responses to the challenges ahead, and a revised appreciation of academic skills and additional financial support by governments and private sectors into higher education is desperately required.

4.2 At a time when there is a greater dependence on poorly assessed information, recognise that partial analysis does us all a disservice. Research expertise and evidence-based advice, including scenario planning ought to be embedded into all rapidly emerging health, social and environmental upheavals.

4.3 While the cost of inaction is harder to calculate, nevertheless with the policy challenges facing us it is timely to develop evidence-based systems that will build these measures into public policy calculations.

4.4 In addition to knowledge types such as administrative, structural, technical, market, prosocial, similarly Aboriginal knowledge should be valued and embedded into relevant policy areas.

05

DEVELOP CONNECTED THINKING FOR CONNECTED RISKS

5.1 Develop new forms of governance that anticipate and prepare for multiple alternative futures, including approaches that engage people across society in thinking about what futures they want and how to achieve them.

5.2 Reinvest in global cooperation to resolve global problems rather than encouraging the strong nations and their leaders to impose their wishes on those nations that are less strong.

5.3 In dealing with 'wicked problems', avoid 'securitising' them, branding them as existential or security threats that demand military solutions designed by military personnel. Climate change, and pandemics for that matter, are not amenable to resolution by military forces.

5.4 Foster the next generation of problem solvers and enable educational institutions to get them there. This means opening doors for the scientists of tomorrow and rewarding curious minds with opportunities in education and employment, particularly for women who face many barriers, including childcare costs.

5.5 Biodiversity repair and water management are becoming crucial policy issues and all future state and federal policies should specifically incorporate diverse social, cultural, ecological, and economic values of water into 'fit for purpose' policy responses.

5.6 At a time where disconnection from the environment may be at an all-time-high, reach out to those who have maintained deep relationships with the natural environment for over 60,000 years by developing profound approaches to the land and engaging Aboriginal experts in water, fire and land management.

06

LIBERATE THE YOUNG

6.1 Put young people in the policy making room - to create active and engaged future thinking. Those born in 2003 are voting for the first time in the next election and need to be meaningfully engaged as they hold their despair and hope about the future, and political parties ought determine how best to involve the next generation in democratic discourse.

6.2 Establish a similar Act to that of the Welsh parliament who, in 2015 passed the Well-being of Future Generations Act ("the Act"). This law requires public bodies in Wales to consider the long-term impact of their decisions; to work better with people, communities, and each other; and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act introduced four pillars of well-being (environmental, social, cultural, and economic) and seven cross-cutting well-being goals (globally responsible, prosperous, resilient, vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, healthier, more equal, and cohesive communities).

6.3 Ensure that young people develop the cognitive skills they need to manage the problems they will inevitably confront, by learning and practising the skills of mindful awareness, compassion, and critical thinking. Wellbeing science suggests this would create a generation of young people who not only have fewer mental health problems, but are more capable, caring, courageous, and able to recognise complexity, accept uncertainty, and act wisely to make a positive difference in the world.

07

JUST DO IT

7.1 Recognise that social problems such as homelessness can be fixed – in fact they are already fixed in some countries who have created homes for all their citizens. For example, in Finland those affected by homelessness receive a small apartment and counselling, without any preconditions, which has resulted in 4 out of 5 people affected, making their way back into a stable life.

7.2 Admit that inequality is a policy choice – markets aren't set up to measure caring. Therefore, new approaches to measuring needs and wants, are needed particularly at a time when the costs of our needs (housing, electricity) are becoming more expensive than the costs of our wants (cafes, gyms).

7.3 Include mental and emotional wellbeing as crucial aspects of urban resilience. Environmental and natural disasters will continue to affect urban areas at higher rates, and these disasters will impact the mental health of urban dwellers. To date emergency management policies have focused on building and sustaining physical and community infrastructure, but that now needs to be broadened to include social wellbeing.

7.4 As the global pandemic shows no signs of abating – more sophisticated approaches to nurturing social infrastructure and community connections around a compelling narrative that engages and connects Australians in their communities is warranted.

7.5 Increase the number of companies who are already demonstrating that they can transform the nature of business by providing dignified lives for their employees, meeting wider social needs, and contributing to the regeneration of nature.

08

TREAT THE CAUSE NOT THE SYMPTOM

- 8.1** Too many social issues treat the symptom not the cause. Where 1 in 4 people in prison in Australia are Aboriginal, increase the number of programs that include aboriginal history and cultural awareness particularly for aboriginal children, so they can reclaim a stronger sense of self and cultural belonging.
- 8.2** The cumulative effects of recent trends such as shrinking households and the disconnect of COVID have been to erode social cohesion, increase the risk of social isolation and promote individualism and an obsession with difference/ independence/identity. The three associated “mental health” epidemics include social isolation, anxiety, and loneliness are growing and need to be factored into social planning.
- 8.3** Recognise that government policies can negatively impact the mental health of those receiving them. Government welfare policies should consider potential negative psychological impacts and manage them to ethical standards (Robodebt is an extreme example significant adverse impacts but many other policies can have less obvious impacts that should be considered).
- 8.4** Connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the services they need and want, in a way that is accessible for them and makes it possible for the next generation to live active, flourishing and fulfilling lives.

09

ENLIGHTEN LEADERSHIP

- 9.1** Strong evidence is now available showing that many of the conflicts and uncertainties surrounding major challenges to humanity, including climate change, the persistent reliance of key states on nuclear weapons for their security, pandemics and the default position of many states to ‘go it alone’ without consideration of the vulnerability of poor states (and consequently all humanity) and the phenomenon of fake news arise from outmoded understanding of how the human brain deals with uncertainty, complexity, risks, self-identity and the many other components of human consciousness.
- 9.2** Surviving and thriving in the 21st century will involve leaders better understanding and engaging with the emerging body of knowledge from neuropsychology on emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Moving beyond combative ‘us against them’ politics to policy outcomes that take a long-term and inter-generational view will require deep listening to one another, and a move away from simply ‘managing the message’.
- 9.3** We have become accustomed to governments and politicians who no longer lead, relying instead on what focus groups and polling might suggest. There is a desperate leadership deficit across the globe, and not least of all in Australia. Australia needs the kind of political reform that produces leaders.
- 9.4** Politicians and policy makers inform themselves of the new science of consciousness, which investigates the mind’s subjective experience. Basic values of humanity such as responsibility, compassion, and dignity can be derived from these subjective qualities. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio states: *the time will come when the issue of human responsibility, in general moral terms, as well as on matters of justice and its application, will take into account the evolving science of consciousness. Perhaps that time is now.*

This conference honoured the significant contribution of Paul Barratt, AO to Australia21 over 20 years. In the last ten years Paul acted as our Chair, keeping Australia21 focused on the policy issues that shape Australia’s future. Paul’s contribution to public policy is outstanding and his strategic ideas and principled approach set a high standard from which Australia has truly benefitted.



This conference was run in conjunction with Australia21’s two major projects:

- Mindful Futures Network - <https://www.australia21.org.au/the-mindful-futures-network>
- The Council for the Human Future - <https://humanfuture.org/>

Australia21 2021 - Conference Speakers

SESSION 1

SHAPING ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURES



Session MC

Dr Nicky Grigg is a Senior Research Scientist at CSIRO who works in interdisciplinary teams on a diverse range of projects concerned with global change and social-ecological systems. Recent and current projects include profiling Australia's vulnerability to natural hazards, funded by Emergency Management Australia, the National Resilience Taskforce and CSIRO.

Shaping Environmental Futures: Why Facts Aren't Enough

Dr Graeme Pearman joined CSIRO, in 1971 where he was Chief of Atmospheric Research, 1992–2002. He contributed over 200 scientific journal papers primarily on aspects of the global carbon budget. He is now a consultant and Professorial Fellow, Melbourne University and was the Australian science advisor to the Hon. Al Gore.



Where to Next for Climate Change Policy?

Ian Dunlop is the Chair of the Advisory Board for the Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration. He was formerly an international oil, gas and coal industry executive, chair of the Australian Coal Association and CEO of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is currently a member of the Club of Rome and Board Member, Australia21. For many years, Ian has focused on the interface between climate science and policy, specifically the real risk and uncertainty implications.

Today's Decision Making for Tomorrow's Water Futures

Dr Carina Wyborn is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Water Futures who works at the intersection of science, policy, and practice, where she is interested in understanding how decisions are made in complex and contested environmental management challenges. Carina is particularly interested in the capacities that enable future-oriented decision making, and the methods and practice that are used to support decision-making in the context of uncertainty.



Next Gen Reflection

Hannah Feldman is a PhD candidate in science communication and sessional academic at the Australian National Centre for the Public Awareness of Science at the ANU. Hannah's current projects are investigating how and why teenagers end up forming events such as #climatestrike, and what happens when politicians tell them to "go back to school".

SESSION 2

SHAPING YOUTH FUTURES



Session MC

Geoff Gorrie is a Board Director of Australia21 and retired as Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in 2003. He has maintained his interest in agriculture, fisheries and forestry by taking on leadership roles in Australian Forestry Standard Ltd, Safe Food Production (Queensland), Seafood Services Ltd and continued to lead the negotiations leading to the Australia/EU Wine Agreement for some years after his retirement.

Getting the System Working for Next Generation Scientists: A Lived Experience

Dr Aparna Lal is a researcher at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at ANU. She has degrees in Zoology and Wildlife Management and has a master's degree in wildlife science. Her research examines how the physical environment impacts human health and well-being. Dr Lal's projects combine public health surveillance with remote sensing, and water quality monitoring data to quantify, monitor and understand the processes that shape disease patterns.



Creating the World Young People Want to Live In

Professor Felicia Huppert is a psychologist whose work brings together approaches from cognitive psychology and neuropsychology with a population perspective derived from epidemiology. Her current research focuses on studies of the effects of mindfulness and compassion training in education, healthcare, and business organisations. She is Founding Director of the Wellbeing Institute at the University of Cambridge, and Emeritus Professor of Psychology and is Honorary Professor at The University of Sydney's Body, Heart and Mind in Business Research Group.

How Did my Generation so Screw things up for Young Australians?

Dr Alex Wodak is a physician who was previously the Director of the Alcohol and Drug Service, St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney. His major interests include prevention of HIV among people who inject drugs, prevention of alcohol problems and drug policy reform. Dr. Wodak is President of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation and was President of the International Harm Reduction Association. He helped establish the first needle syringe programme in Australia and is a Board Director at Australia21.



Next Gen Reflection

Mark Dorman holds a Bachelor of Psychology and a Master's of Environment, specialising in Education and Social Change. He is a policy adviser in Education for the National Indigenous Australians Agency and has worked with Australia21 on projects relating to education, climate, and public engagement on complex topics for over five years. Mark hosts a podcast titled Making Waves that champions the projects and people that are committed to promoting social cohesion and increasing public awareness of important social and global issues."

DINNER SPEAKERS

Global Developments in Wellbeing Budgets



Dr Katherine Trebeck is a writer, a researcher, and an advocate for economic system change. She is Senior Strategic Advisor for the Wellbeing Economy Alliance – a global collaboration she co-founded in 2018, the same year she co-founded WEAll Scotland. Her book *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a Grown-Up Economy* (co-authored with Jeremy Williams and published in 2019). Katherine instigated the group of Wellbeing Economy Governments; developed Oxfam's Humankind Index; and led Oxfam's work downscaling the 'doughnut' for various countries.

Dr Trebeck was introduced by Dr David Morawetz, who is a psychologist and economist and Founder and Director of the Social Justice Fund. As a Counselling Psychologist in private practice he is widely acknowledged as one of Australia's foremost experts on helping people to sleep better without drugs. Dr Morawetz has published articles on sleep in the United States, the Netherlands and Australia. He is Board Director of The Australia Institute and Australia21.



Dr Lynne Reeder thanked Dr Trebeck and reflected on her messages. In Lynne's role as a Board Director of Australia21, she established the Mindful Futures Network to map innovations in the science of mindfulness, empathy and compassion within Australian organisations. She is the National Director of the Australian Compassion Council, linked to the global Charter for Compassion, a network of collaborative partnerships. She is an Adjunct Research Fellow, School of Science and Psychology at Federation University Australia.

SESSION 3

SHAPING SOCIAL FUTURES



Session MC

Peter Yuile is an Executive Coach and was Deputy CEO and Executive Director of AusTrade. Prior to that he held the positions of Deputy Secretary, Department of Transport and Regional Services where he was responsible for aviation, transport security and regional policy and services issues; and Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry. Peter is a Board Director of Australia.

Social Revolutions in an Enduring COVID World

Hugh MacKay is a psychologist, social researcher and writer. He is a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society and the Royal Society of NSW, and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. Hugh was a weekly newspaper columnist for 25 years and is still regularly appearing commentator on radio and television. His most recent book was written during the COVID lock down of 2020 and is entitled *The Kindness Revolution*.





Addressing Increasing Anti-Social Behaviour in Society: the criticality of honesty, evidence, courage, and causal connection

Mick Palmer, AO is a retired Australian police officer and lawyer who was the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police. Between 2004 and 2012 he was the Federal Government's Inspector of Transport Security, a position created after the 9/11 and Bali bombing terrorist incidents to review air, sea and land transport and off-shore critical infrastructure and advise government of the efficiency and effectiveness of existing security arrangements.

The Economics of Inequality – Implications for Social Policy

Emma Dawson is Executive Director of Per Capita. She has worked as a researcher at Monash University and the University of Melbourne; in policy and public affairs for SBS and Telstra; and as a senior policy adviser in the Rudd and Gillard Governments. Emma has published reports, articles and opinion pieces on a wide range of public policy issues.



Next Gen Reflection

Carla Alexandra is a PhD candidate at ANU and an experienced Project Manager with a demonstrated history of working in the non-profit organization management industry. Skilled in Sustainable Development, Program Evaluation, Policy Analysis, and Sustainability. Carla has a strong program and project management professional with a Master's degree in Globalisation, Environment and Social Change focused in Human Geography from Stockholm University.

SESSION 4

SHAPING THE HUMAN FUTURE



Session MC

Emeritus Professor Bob Douglas AO was the Foundation Director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at ANU. His 40-year medical career involved clinical work as both a general practitioner and a specialist physician, research into the development and licensure of a pneumococcal vaccine, consultancies with WHO and other agencies in developing countries. Since his retirement Bob has established Australia21, SEE-Change and The Council for the Human Future.

The Council for The Human Future

Prof John Hewson AM is Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU. He is a former Australian politician and was leader of the Liberal Party from 1990 to 1994. Prior to entering politics, Hewson worked as an economist for the Reserve Bank of Australia, an economic advisor to the Fraser Government, a business journalist, and a director of Macquarie Bank. He is currently Chair of The Council for the Human Future.





The Human Futures Challenge

Julian Cribb is a distinguished science writer with more than thirty awards for journalism. He was a newspaper editor, founder of the influential ScienceAlert website and author of eight books, including *The Coming Famine*. He is a member of the Council for the Human Future.

Pandemics and The Future

Prof Raina MacIntyre is an NHMRC Principal Research Fellow and Professor of Global Biosecurity. She heads the Biosecurity Program at the Kirby Institute, which conducts research in epidemiology, vaccinology, bioterrorism prevention, mathematical modelling, genetic epidemiology, public health and clinical trials in infectious diseases. She is a dual-specialist physician with training in epidemiology and modelling.



Human Population Growth

Dr Jane O'Sullivan is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Queensland. She researches the environmental and economic impacts of demographic change, challenging the many myths that are used to dismiss concerns about population growth. In particular, she researches the environmental, social, micro and macro-economic impacts of population growth, and the efficacy of policy and program options addressing it.

Conference Overview

Alan Behm is Head of the International and Security Affairs program at The Australia Institute, CEO of FearLess, a charity that works with people living with the consequences of post-traumatic stress. Allan spent 30 years in the Australian Public Service, as a member of the Australian diplomatic service, the Prime Minister's Department, the Department of Defence and the Attorney General's Department.

