Being a Planner in Society: For People, Planet, Place

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COMPANION WEBSITE

This book was written and edited before COVID-19 appeared on the scene. My final words in the book were: 'But deep political change may also require a catastrophic external shock to trigger the empathic transformation in our being and in society. If it can be achieved in advance of such an event, humanity will have taken the next step in its evolution on Earth'. Well, an external shock is unfolding. It remains to be seen just how socially and economically catastrophic it will prove to be. The momentum for deep political change is building globally. But political leaders remain focused on managing the crisis day by day – some more successfully than others.

If a deep change is to occur in democratic societies it will initially be through the action of the political leaders of nation states. If global change is to occur it will be through the concerted action of those leaders. However, ultimately national publics in democracies have to be convinced that change is necessary. That is only likely to happen through the building of a new hegemony through the action of a wide range of voices and activists across the population. It would seem that something like the Mont Pèlerin Society will need to be convened (as I wrote) with 'a new agenda focused on values of fairness, justice, equality, sustainability and democracy'.

In the book I tried to illustrate the theoretical argument with some contemporary examples of what has gone wrong with government and policy in the so called neoliberal era. This Companion Website contributes more detail of the systemic failures and some of the responses by public policy experts in Australia.

While writing the book I wrote Appendix 1 (below) in order to add detail to the discussions of the structure of public administration and planning in Victoria, Australia, with a focus on land use and transport planning. I next add further detail to the discussion in the book of the experience of inequality and power, followed by an application of some of the ideas of Thomas Piketty in his latest monograph (*Capital and Ideology*). I then move on to examples of national social policy failure: the 'robodebt' fiasco and banking 'misconduct', and environmental disasters involving 'fire and water' and climate policy. I end with some not very hopeful concluding words.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PLANNING (Appendix 1)

Over the years of corporate liberalism there has been a gradual reorganization of the Australian public service (at both state and federal levels) from a structure of professional 'silos' headed by a Minister – essentially the Westminster system, to an amalgamation of portfolios into super-ministries.

At national level, there has been a process of continual restructuring of the public service. More than two hundred changes have reportedly been made to the Commonwealth (federal) public service since 1993-94[1]. To date the current Morrison Government has already abolished four departments and promises to create four 'super-departments' to abolish silos and 'bust bureaucratic congestion'[2]. Economist Ross Giddens comments, 'I think it reveals this government's disdain for public servants. It's the revenge of the ministerial staffers'[3].

In the State of Victoria what we have today is the diametric opposite of the old 'colonial bureaucracy' regime. Instead of a powerful public service organised in professional silos loosely overseen by ministers, power has shifted strongly to the collective will of cabinet, with the public service organised to respond to cabinet's most immediate priorities and pressing policy demands. 'Cabinet' has been redefined in Victoria to include all twenty three ministers.

<u>The organizational structure of two mega-departments of the State Government of Victoria concerned with planning the future of metropolitan Melbourne and the Victorian region.</u>

In Victoria (2018) 'planning' is contained in two super-ministries: the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, and the Department of Land, Water and Planning.

Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources

Nine ministers head the department and work to develop policy in the following areas:

- Transport and Major Projects
- Trade and Investment, Innovation and Digital Economy, Small Business
- Tourism and Major Events
- Creative Industries
- Industry and Employment
- Agriculture and Regional Development
- Industrial relations
- Ports, Roads and Road Safety
- Resources (and Treasury)

There are two main groupings within the department: i) Employment, Investment and Trade, and ii) Corporate Services, Strategy and Planning. There are nineteen subdivisions of the ministry, co-ordinated by an executive board.

Transport, serving the need for mobility of Victoria's population, is crucial to the physical planning and development of the State. Under the heading of 'Transport' there are five project units charged with oversight of the governments list of major transport infrastructure projects, five more or less ad

[1] According to former Labor minister Bob McMullan. (Giddens, R. 2019, 'PM wants his own bubble', *The Age*, 11/12/2019: 22)
[2] Harris, R. 'PM boosts IT funds', *The Age*, 07/12/2019:11.
[3] Giddens, R. (2019) 'PM wants his own bubble', *The Age*, 11/12/2019: 22

hoc units with varied responsibilities from 'networks' to 'rolling stock' (trams, and trains), and two general transport planning agencies charged with roads (the Roads Corporation of Victoria – 'VicRoads') and public transport (Public Transport Victoria). The latter is organisationally subordinate to another unit 'Transport for Victoria' which sits alongside 'Major Transport Infrastructure Program' The planning of Victoria's transport infrastructure and transport service is split up and divided amongst a number of relatively junior sub-departmental units, and remote from land use planning which is situated within another super-ministry.

The separation of transport from land use planning contradicts the requirement of the Transport Integration Act (2010 Section 11.1) which specifically requires that transport systems be integrated with land use planning: 'The transport system should provide for the effective integration of transport and land use and facilitate access to social and economic opportunities'[4]. There is no unit with the authority or capacity to integrate the planning of public transport services (train, tram and bus) comparable with the *Verkehrsverbund* model which has been so successful in most of Northern Europe.

Curiously, given the integrative intention of the super-departments, the portfolio of agriculture is separated from that of water, land use and climate change.

The Department of Land, Water and Planning

The ministry is headed by five ministers with the following four portfolios:

Water
Local Government
Planning
Energy, Environment and Climate Change
(Assisted by a Parliamentary Secretary for Energy, Environment and Climate Change)

There are six groupings (headed by deputy secretaries) under the ministers and the secretary of the department (public service head). i) Water and Catchments, ii) Corporate Services, iii) Local Infrastructure, iv) Planning, v) Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and vi) Forest, Fire and Regions.

The section titled 'planning' is a relatively minor part of the super-ministry concerned primarily with regulating the interaction between the urban development industry and local government, and carrying out statutory duties to subject infrastructure projects to environmental assessment under the Planning and Environment Act (1987 and as amended). A 2003 amendment covers the protection of 'green wedge' land beyond an 'urban growth boundary'[5]. The aim of the Act is to prevent urban development intruding on green open space in the periphery of metropolitan Melbourne.

The history of application of the Act tells us that the urban growth boundary has been extended from time to time by governments, making 'green wedge' land open for urbanisation. As a result development companies buy up agricultural land beyond the growth boundary cheaply, in the knowledge that sooner or later the land will become available for development. At which point they then cash in very large profits. The potential for profits for development companies to be made by government rezoning is an incentive for developers to provide financial support to politicians at local

[4] http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/800014F6404488AACA2576DA000E3354/$FILE/10-006a.pdf (accessed 3/12/2019)
[5] The Planning and Environment (Metropolitan Green Wedge Protection) Act (2003).

and State level to encourage them to release green wedge land for housing. Just this issue has been the subject of a 2019 investigation by Victoria's Anti-corruption Commission of alleged bribes paid to politicians with that end in mind[6].

Restructuring the public service at State and Federal level has been done ostensibly in the interest of, to quote selectively from Lindquist (2010): policy innovation, strategic policy capability, collaborative approaches, engaging outside experts, whole of government perspective, agility, flexibility and mobility.

The remaining items on Lindquist's list seem to be no more than what should be expected from competent traditionally structured bureaucracies: policy advice and contestability, evidence based analysis, effective programs and services, connecting front line experience to policy design, engaging citizens, measuring performance and benchmarking, efficiency and review. I argue that the items on the second part of the list have been sacrificed to the items on the first part.

Restructuring has resulted in the political tier of government being given overwhelming power over the policy professionals of the public service. The short term view (just three years from election to election) has overwhelmed the possibility of long term planning. The integrity and vision of the public service has been lost. The service has been splintered into temporary compartments made to address immediate problem areas identified by ministers (being 'innovative and agile'). No money has thereby been saved, and a great deal wasted on pet projects designed to re-elect political parties. Planning has been utterly devalued.

The limitations of planning for Victoria's urban and rural environment is reflected in the 2019 organisational structure of the two super-ministries concerned:

- Constant reshuffling of the bureaucratic deck of cards to suit whatever the political priorities of the moment appear to the Ministers to be.
- The erasure of memory of public service departments; hence every ministerial policy initiative is considered anew.
- Consolidation of power of the political tier of government (Cabinet) over professional advice.
- Packing the most senior levels of policy advice with ministerial 'staffers' (temporary political advisers faithful to the Party in power), and private consultants.
- The inability to take a perspective past the next election, and incapacity to make long term plans in the public interest.

The planning outcomes of this structure of governance have given rise to some egregious failures. Twenty years ago Brendan Gleeson and I published an essay entitled 'Is Planning History?' in which we expressed doubts about whether the already weak institutions of planning and regulation in Australia could survive the impact of neoliberalism and globalisation[7]. We made a case for planning to be reformed based on the more advanced European models. Unfortunately that did not happen. Instead, twenty years later, it is clear that what has occurred is the politicised form of planning described in Chapters 4, 6 and elsewhere in *Being a Planner in Society*.

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[6] Millar, R. (2019) 'Developer's big role in carving up green wedge', The Age 23/09/2019: 12. The extent of alleged bribery has made headlines in *The Age* over several weeks.

[7] Brendan Gleeson and Nicholas Low (2000) 'Is Planning History?' in Freestone R. ed. *Urban Planning in a Changing World, the Twentieth Century Experience,* London: E & FN Spon. (pp. 270-282).

Much more needs to be written about the failures of planning for cities: the substitution of transport mega projects for transport system analysis and planning; the corrupt synergy between politicians at both State and local government levels and land developers; the failed housing policy which has left many people homeless and others struggling to pay high rents for overcrowded and badly maintained premises; failure to enforce building regulations which has left many blocks of flats with flammable cladding, and others falling into disrepair as soon as occupied; the failure to enforce regulation of toxic waste stockpiled in warehouses which have caught fire, spreading dangerous smoke across whole suburbs; the erosion of urban green space in the inner city producing heat island effects, and the failure to protect green wedges, land for food production and threatened ecologies in the outer suburbs.

INEQUALITY AND POWER

Life at the bottom

Those at the bottom of Australia's economic strata typically have casual, part time, or intermittent jobs. They are often subject to employers who pay less than the statutory minimum wage (AU$694.90 per week in 2017), do not pay statutory entitlements such as sick leave, superannuation, holiday pay, overtime wages or redundancy payments. Persons are not recognised as 'unemployed' unless they are actively looking for work, which means that they must have contacted an employer, had an interview for work, registered with an employment agency, taken steps to start their own business, or contacted friends or relatives to find work[8] (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Merely scanning newspapers or websites for jobs does not count as 'actively' seeking work.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 'not in employment' (aka unemployed) means that a person during a week (the 'reference week'), 'should not have undertaken any work at all (not even for one hour)'[9]. The unemployment rate in Australia between 2012 and 2018 ranged between 5 and 6 per cent of the workforce[10]. In the COVID-19 depression unemployment and underemployment are soaring.

Income support for the unemployed in Australia (social security) is a non-contributory entitlement – that is unlike social insurance schemes to which there is regular contribution during working life. Payment comes from the Commonwealth budget as a 'transfer payment'. The rate for a single person without children (before COVID-19) was $550.20 per fortnight or about $39 per day. For a couple the allowance was $496.70 each per fortnight, and for a single person with a dependent child, $595.10. Eligibility starts from the age of 22 up to pensionable age[11]. Unemployment benefit plus rent assistance provides $680 per fortnight. Various 'waiting periods' apply before a person can receive payment (of up to two years in the case of a new resident). Applicants must be able to prove regularly that they are actively seeking work.

Rental prices in Melbourne's most affordable suburbs range between $300 and $360 per fortnight per room[12]. Elsewhere rents can be much higher: around $700 per fortnight for a 'studio' flat of 45 square metres[13]. So after rent is paid there is not much left for food, electricity and gas (an average electricity bill for two people in Australia is about $66 per fortnight), personal hygiene, household cleaning, washing, clothes, transport (a monthly ticket on public transport costs $146, running a car much more), electronic communications, let alone entertainment, especially for the single parent. If you are lucky enough to get into public housing, the rent will not be more than 25 percent of your total household income, which is what the Victorian Government reckons is the safe proportion of

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[8] http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/6102.0.55.001~Feb%202018~Main%20Features~Unemployment~6 (accessed 03/12/2018)
[9] http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/6102.0.55.001~Feb%202018~Main%20Features~Unemployment~6 (accessed 04/12/2018)
[10] https://www.statista.com/statistics/263695/unemployment-rate-in-australia/ (accessed 04/12/2018).
[11] https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/newstart-allowance/how-much-you-can-get (accessed 04/12/2018)
[12] https://www.rent.com.au/blog/melbourne-shared-living (accessed 03/12/2018).
[13] https://www.expatistan.com/price/studio-rent-normal-area/melbourne (accessed 04/12/2018). Emma King, CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), states that a one bedroom apartment in Melbourne will cost $680 per fortnight. (https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-18/rental-affordability-at-record-low-in-victoria/8676532 (accessed 04/12/2018).

income going to accommodation[14]. But the waiting list for public housing in Melbourne was 82,000 in 2018, and growing at 500 per week[15].

Centrelink, commencing operations in 1997, is an agency of the Commonwealth Department of Human Services charged with providing social security payments to people in need, including the unemployed. From 2016, using an automated process, Centrelink began matching welfare recipients' social security records against data from the Australian Taxation Office relating to their employment. Centrelink was not required to verify the information about the alleged debt; instead individuals were required to prove that they did not owe the demanded funds.

Automated debt collection which became known as 'Robodebt' resulted in numerous unverified claims for alleged debt resulting in extreme anxiety for vulnerable welfare recipients. At a 2017 Senate Inquiry into 'Robodebt', Australian Council of Social Service CEO, Cassandra Goldie said, 'Since its adoption 12 months ago, Robodebt has issued thousands of debt notices in error to parents, people with disabilities, carers and those seeking paid work, resulting in people slapped with Centrelink debts they do not owe or debts higher than what they owe … It has been a devastating abuse of government power that has caused extensive harm, particularly among people who are the most vulnerable in our community'[16].

Life at the bottom is precarious. There is an ever present risk of simply not being able to keep up the daily payments of the costs of living. Emma King, CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service, points out that more people are being pushed out of the owner occupation market as house prices rise and are being forced to seek rental accommodation: 'we're seeing people's wages stagnating as rents are climbing, which is very much a toxic mix, and we're seeing the impact of what is precarious work and unemployment'[17].

So much has changed since Liberal Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, told the Australian Parliament in 1944:

> The moment we establish, or perpetuate, the principle that the citizen, in order to get something he needs or wants and to which he has looked forward, must prove his poverty, we convert him into a suppliant to the state for benevolence … That position is inconsistent with the proper dignity of the citizen in a democratic country (cited by Dennis, 2018: 3).

Standing (2012) identifies the origin of programmes like Robodebt and Universal Credit (in the UK), and their class generating potential: 'The precariat has emerged from the liberalisation that underpinned globalisation. Politicians should beware. It is a new dangerous class, not yet what Karl Marx would have described as a class-for-itself, but a class-in-the-making, internally divided into angry and bitter factions'[18].

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[14] http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/public-housing#how-much-rent-will-i-pay (accessed 04/12/2018).
[15] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-06/victorias-public-housing-waiting-list-growing-by-500-a-week/9837934 (accessed 04/12/2018).
[16] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jun/21/senate-inquiry (accessed 17/07/2017).
[17] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-18/rental-affordability-at-record-low-in-victoria/8676532 (accessed 04/12/2018).
[18] In a study carried out by the Food Foundation found that 4.7 million people in the UK had at times during a year 'gone a whole day without eating because they could not afford enough food'. While the price of healthy food went up over the last ten years, 'disposable income for the poorest 20 per cent of UK households has gone down every year since 2004' (Taylor, A. and Loopstra, R., 2016, 'Too Poor to Eat, Food insecurity in the UK', London: The Food Foundation (foodfoundation.or.uk, Food Insecurity Briefing May 2016).

Australian governments at national level following the GFC have made the poorest and most vulnerable pay a disproportionate part of the price of restoring the national budget to surplus. They have reduced the unemployed to misery, beggary and homelessness.

Writing in *The Guardian*, Luke Henriques-Gomes has reported the extremely adverse effect of Newstart on finding employment, on the health of the unemployed and on their inability to afford adequate food. He writes: 'As welfare groups demand an increase to Newstart to combat poverty among the unemployed, the annual Foodbank Hunger report found that in the past year [2018-2019] 21 % of Australians ran out of food and were unable to buy more'[19].

Henriques-Gomes also observes the huge increase in the amount of time people spend on Newstart unemployment benefit[20]. Innes Willox, Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group, in a speech in 2016 observed that:

> The working-age participation rate has declined lately, falling from a recent peak of 77.2% in November 2015 to 76.7% in October 2016. This might not sound like much of a change, but such a drop in a short space of time suggests that at least part of it is due to 'discouraged' job-seekers exiting the labour force, instead of actively looking for work[21].

He noted that the drop in the working age participation rate between 2015 and 2016 'suggests that at least part of it is due to "discouraged" job-seekers exiting the labour force, instead of actively looking for work'. Moreover, referring to a U-shaped chart in his speech, he said that long term unemployment had risen over the previous eight years (2008 to 2016, from the GFC to the end of Australia's mining boom) both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the unemployed.

When COVID-19 struck Australia, the Prime Minister and Treasurer set about devising a plan to soften the economic impact of the inevitable recession. He who for so long had resisted calls to increase the Newstart allowance, suddenly doubled it for a period of six months, renaming it the 'Jobseeker Allowance'. With the prospect of a huge rise in unemployment to 10 per cent or more[22], the government could not afford to have a tranche of well qualified workers suddenly plunged into poverty – with the political opprobrium that would generate.

Life at the top: wealth and income

The Australian Financial Review each year publishes a 'rich list' full of advertisements for consumer goods that tempt rich people, like overpriced watches, perfumes, private charter travel, jewellery, clothes, cars and private jets.

There is a sense of competition amongst these owners of capital to appear on the 'rich list' and climb ever higher in the rankings. However, as Stensholt remarks, 'The rich like to envelop their wealth in

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[19] Henriques-Gomes, L. (2019) 'One in five Australians went hungry over past year, study finds' *The Guardian*, 15/10/2019 https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/10/one-in-five-australians-went-hungry-over-past-year-study-finds (accessed 08/05/2020).

[20] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/oct/21/newstart-analysis-reveals-huge-leap-in-amount-of-time-people-spend-on-dole (accessed 08/05/2020)

[21] https://cdn.aigroup.com.au/Speeches/2016/Long-Term_Unemployment_Innes_Willox_Dec2016.pdf (accessed 08/05/2020)

[22] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-13/coronavirus-unemployment-COVID-19-treasury-figures-jobless-rate/12145542 (accessed 08/05/2020).

discretion and the odd secret or two'[23]. The seventy six Australian billionaires owned a total of AU$215 billion.

By way of comparison the Government of the State of Victoria (population 6.38 million 2019) boasted of its education sector 'budget highlights' for 2019-20: AU$3.449 billion across the education spectrum: around the level of billionaire number 17 on the list[24]. The government also boasted of investing AU$11.7 billion over four years in 'healthcare and hospital services': around number 4 on the billionaire list. Two rich-listers' worth of new investment for social services for 6.38 million people.

At the 2019 federal general election number 20 on the billionaire list, flexed his muscles in the political sphere. Mr Palmer allegedly spent AU$53.6 million advertising a political party he had created, not including the cost of huge billboards in each State[25]. That Party received just 3.4 percent of the primary vote nationally. But the Labor Party under the leadership of Bill Shorten lost the election. So, Crowe (2019) asks, what did Palmer buy? Crowe continues, 'He helped to prevent a Labor victory, a tax agenda that would cost him money and a climate change policy that would hurt his interests'. The day before the election Palmer was reported to have unveiled plans for a coal fired power station in central Queensland; and in October 2019 he reapplied for a mining lease to build a massive coal mine in Queensland's Galilee basin[26]. In December 2019 the new leader of the Labor Party, Anthony Albanese, announced that he was backing Australia's coal export industry arguing that 'it would be wrong to damage the industry and its workers'[27].

The Chief Executive Officer of Qantas, Australia's flagship airline, was not on the rich list. However his income was large: AU$24 million in 2019. Two articles discussing the CEO's income appeared in *The Age*. In the first, Steve Purvinas, (federal secretary of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association, ALAEA, the aircraft maintenance engineers' union), pointed out that when Qantas reported a loss of AU$2.8 billion in 2014 'staff were called on to freeze their wages for 18 months, a call that my union was first to heed'. Compared with wage increases consistent with inflation (the rise in the Consumer Price Index over the period), employees had to forgo AU$60 million each year. At the same time 'executive and senior management remuneration packages increased by – you guessed it – AU$60 million each year'[28].

The following day Vanessa Hudson, Chief Financial Officer of Qantas (from 01/10/2019) offered a response. She did not dispute the cost of the 18 month salary freeze. But she writes, 'Since then we've set aside $340 million in non-executive bonuses' on top of 3 per cent annual wage increases'.

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[23] Stensholt, J. (2018) 'Rich List, Australia's 200 Wealthiest People', *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, June: 4. This source cannot be considered authoritative but it is indicative. Piketty (2020: 991 see below) laments the lack of transparent government registers of wealth distribution.

[24] https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/budget.aspx (accessed 29/10/2019).

[25] Crowe, D. (2019) 'Australia's democracy is for sale', *The Age*, 25/10/2019: 19.

[26] Smee, B. (2019) 'Clive Palmer company reapplies for mine four times size of Adani's Carmichael' The Guardian, 28/10/2019, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/oct/22/clive-palmer-company-re-applies-for-mine-four-times-size-of-adanis-carmichael (accessed 28/10/2019).

[27] 'Albanese backs coal exports' *The Age*, 09/12/2019:1. Albanese argued that if the government prevented coal exports from Australia, the demand would be met from elsewhere: the argument put by the Morrison (Liberal- National Coalition) government and the coal industry before the election. But as I noted in Chapter 14, coal exports from six of the biggest mining companies in Australia resulted in more CO_2 emissions than the whole of Australia's domestic economy.

[28] Purvinas, S. (2019) 'Hard to believe anyone's worth $24 million a year', *The Age* 21/10/19: 24.

Qantas annual report 2019 states that 'discretionary bonuses to non-executive employees' would be AU$27 million in 2019[29]. Qantas employs about 25,000 people.

The financial recovery of Qantas since 2014 was built significantly (but not entirely) on wage cost savings. This is not disputed. The 'success' of the airline is judged on its profits. The new CFO boasts, 'And by next month, our shareholders will have received AU$5 billion through dividends and buybacks since 2015. It's these same shareholders who decide what CEOs are paid'. Seventy four per cent of Qantas shares are held by just four companies: HSBC Custody Nominees (Australia) Ltd, JP Morgan Australia Nominees, Citicorp Nominees Pty. Ltd. and National Nominees Ltd. (Annual Report, 2019: 119).

In 2014 Harvard Law School professor Cass Sunstein argued, in response to Thomas Piketty, that people did not seem too bothered about inequality while average income was rising[30]. But, he wrote, there is a risk that economic inequality might turn into political inequality: 'the wealthiest people might be able to buy their preferred policies'. There is also a risk 'that large disparities can have adverse effects on growth and produce a degree of demoralisation – in extreme cases, a degree of civil unrest'. To avoid that happening Sunstein praises Franklin D. Roosevelt's call 'for recognition of the right to a good education; the right to a useful and remunerative job; the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing; the right to a decent home; the right to adequate medical care; and the right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment'. The lack of just those rights around the world, coupled with vast inequality of wealth and income, have led since 2014 to exactly the dangers that Sunnstein foresaw.

[29] https://investor.qantas.com/FormBuilder/_Resource/_module/doLLG5ufYkCyEPjF1tpgyw/file/annual-reports/2019-Annual-Report-ASX.pdf (accessed 29/10/19).
[30] Sunstein, C. (2014) 'What's so wrong with economic inequality?' *The Age*, 15/05/2014: 20.

CAPITAL AND IDEOLOGY

The purpose of Piketty's *Capital and Ideology* (2020) is to argue for reform of democratic market societies in such a way as to redistribute power and wealth, and steer their economic systems away from their current disastrous course of ever increasing inequality. To address his argument here in any detail is of course impossible. But he makes his own summary of his three part programme for a 'participatory socialism' (pp. 494-495)[31]:

1. Increased public ownership. He remarks 'Public ownership can be perfectly justifiable, and it has demonstrated its superiority over private ownership in many sectors, including transportation, health, and education, provided that governance is transparent and responsive to the needs of citizens and users' (p. 495).
2. Social ownership: 'the firm's workers participate in its management and share power with private (and possibly public) shareholders, potentially replacing private shareholders entirely' (p. 494)
3. Temporary ownership in which the wealthiest private owners return part of what they own to the community to facilitate circulation of wealth and mitigate concentration of economic power. A progressive tax on wealth would be used to finance a 'universal capital endowment for each young adult' (p. 494).

Piketty is not very forthcoming on what the universal capital endowment would do, for instance whether it would supplement or replace current state or privately administered welfare/insurance schemes for retirement, unemployment and health risks[32]. Piketty notes that 'welfare state' systems in the twentieth century did little to redistribute wealth and economic power to the bottom fifty per cent of capitalist societies[33].

Any participatory political advocacy would need to spell out in detail what the reformed tax system would do for a given population; how much control the individual would have over the endowment and if (and how) its use would be regulated. The details would almost certainly vary from country to country. But to focus on tax reform without specifying a future vision for how people would benefit would be very unlikely to appeal to voters in a democracy. A discussion in the *New Yorker* magazine in March (2020) takes up for The USA the debate about Piketty's views on inequality, injustice and redistribution, a subject which, as I write, in the midst of the June 2020 demonstrations, seems extremely pertinent[34].

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[31] Piketty, T. (2020) *Capital and Ideology*, Cambridge Mass. USA, and London UK; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

[32] Niels Planel (2018) 'Achieving Equality of Opportunity through a Universal Endowment System for French Youth' (*Chroniques*, 21/06) discusses the concept of universal capital endowment for France. His vision is that each French citizen be endowed with fifty thousand euros over six years to start a business, cover full tuition fees of a Master's program, and/or acquire real estate. This endowment he writes, would be in addition to existing welfare state policies. His argument for the justice of endowment is based on the philosophies of Thomas Paine, John Rawls, Amartya Sen, Bruce Ackerman and Ann Alstott among others. He considers and dismisses two objections to the concept: that the poor would waste the endowment, and that a universal basic income would be preferable to a six year endowment. http://sens-public.org/articles/1330/ (accessed 27/06/2020).

[33] https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2020/02/21/thomas-piketty-the-current-economic-system-is-not-working-when-it-comes-to-solving-inequality/ (accessed 03/06/2020).

[34] Kahloon, I. (2020) 'Thomas Piketty goes Global', *The New Yorker*, 02/03. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/03/09/thomas-piketty-goes-global (accessed 03/02/2020).

The overall thrust of the reformed tax regime is spelled out. Piketty advocates a progressive property tax (financing capital endowment to each young adult) and a progressive income tax (financing the basic income scheme and the social and ecological state). The rates of taxation range from multiples of 0.5 to 10,000 (of a person's property – wealth, and income) for property tax and income tax respectively. In addition there is also an inheritance tax on the same multiples.

Piketty (p. 982) writes 'The figures given here are for illustrative purposes only. Setting precise parameters will require extensive discussion and broad democratic deliberation; it is not my intention to end all debate with this book'. Of course I would make the same claim about *Being a Planner in Society*. There would have to be modelling of the broad effects of egalitarian taxation on economy and society, with transparency of assumptions in the model and appropriate discussion of them.

To make the hypothetical regime more real – taking the proposed property and income taxation rates but leaving aside inheritance tax, I worked out the effect of such a regime on three cases: a high property owning case (hyperpatrimonial), a high income case (supermanager) and a 'patrimonial middle class' case for property and income tax. These are based on real examples in Australia. For reasons of privacy the persons are not named.

1. Average wealth per adult in Australia in 2019 was AU$562,000 inclusive of all forms of wealth, financial investments, property etc.[35]
2. Average annual income for all full time adults in 2019 was AU$86,268[36].

It should be noted of course that actual averages vary from year to year, as do wealth and income.

Australia top marginal tax rate of 75% on income above the equivalent of AU$425,000 in 1951

Case studies[37]

<u>Case 1: Person A (Hyperpatrimonial)</u>

Wealth of AU$2.84 billion. Multiple of average wealth 2019 = 4741. Piketty tax rate band between 1,000 and 10,000 x average = annual 60% of wealth (AU$1.704). Remaining wealth after end of Year 1 = AU$1.136 billion (40%). However, with annual capital growth of 6%, wealth after end of Year 2 = AU$ 1.204 billion. After tax at end of Year 2 wealth = AU$ 481 million. This amount (856 times average wealth) drops down to the next tax range (between 100 and 1000 times average wealth) which is taxed at 10% annually.

<u>Case 2: Person B (Supermanager)</u>

Annual income of AU$ 24 million. Multiple of average income 2019 = 232. Piketty tax rate band between 100 and 1000 = 70%. Income after tax (30%) leaves AU$7.2 million.

<u>Case 3: Person C (Patrimonial middle class)</u>

Wealth of AU$3 million. Multiple of average wealth 2019 = 5.3. Piketty tax rate band between 5 and 10 = 2%. Remaining wealth after tax after end of year 1 = AU$2.94 million. However with annual

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[35] https://www.afr.com/wealth/personal-finance/australia-loses-124-000-millionaires-due-to-dollar-property-prices-20191021-p532le (accessed 12/05/2020).

[36] https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/6302.0Media%20Release0Nov%202019 (accessed 12/05/2020)

[37] The figures are based on Stensholt, J. (2018) 'Rich List, Australia's 200 Wealthiest People', *Australian Financial Review Magazine*, June: 4. but they may be regarded here as hypothetical for the cases.

capital growth of 6% wealth after end of Year 2 = AU$3.12 million. After tax at end of Year 2 wealth = AU$3.05 million.

Annual Income of AU$120,000. Multiple of average income 2019 = 1.39. Piketty tax rate band between 0.5 and 2 = 10%. Income after tax (10%) leaves AU$108,000.

I conclude that Piketty's proposed tax regime leaves **Person A** substantially worse off in wealth, yet still with a massive fortune after two years of tax in which the person's wealth falls into much lower tax bands.

The annual income of **Person B**, taxed at 70% still leaves a very large income (AU$7.2) which drops in the following year into the lower band (60%).

The wealth of **Person C** is still able to increase annually after tax. **Person C's** income is taxed at a much lower level than at present in Australia.

Undoubtedly, the **hyperpatrimonials** would use some their wealth and all of their economic position to persuade the public that such a regime (which would certainly be labelled 'Trotskyite' by the capitalist press) would bring economic catastrophe and monumental injustice to such deserving and meritorious individuals. Here it should be remembered that in 1951 under the Liberal Government of Robert Menzies, the top marginal tax rate was 75 per cent on income above the equivalent today of AU$425,000[38]. The hyperpatrimonials would apply intense pressure on governments using the special power of big business over investment. They would probably be supported for ideological reasons by the **supermanagers**. But both these groups are small. The **patrimonial middle class** with large numbers (30-40 percent of the working population) might be divided ideologically, but the increase in their income after tax would be a big incentive as would be the immense benefits to their health care and children's health and education.

The next question is whether in Australia the increased tax take from hyperpatrimonials and supermanagers would offset the reduced income tax take from the rest of the working population. That question must be left to Australian economists to calculate. It may be conjectured that, together with some existing taxes that do not damage or distort the economy, the proposed income and wealth tax regime plus inheritance tax and carbon tax (not addressed above) could both reduce inequality and deliver a massive boost to the economy as the large majority of the working people find they have more money to spend, and governments have money to apply to the transition to a zero carbon economy.

Reclaiming sovereignty collectively: 'codevelopment treaties'

Since the 1980s nations have been robbed of their sovereignty by what Bruno Latour (2018) calls 'globalization minus' (see Chapter 12 of *Being a Planner in Society*). Undoubtedly the attempt to reimpose the progressive taxation regime described above would immediately invoke the threat of capital flight – owners of massive wealth moving money out of the national jurisdiction and making it invisible. So how can such a progressive taxation be enforced? Piketty (2020) discusses this problem in a section of the chapter 'Social Democratic Societies: Incomplete Equality'. The question relates to the loss of sovereignty to globalization since the 1980s, borders, liberalization of capital flows, and the exchange of information.

Piketty (2020: 553) writes:

[38] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-01/tax-facts/6361050 (accessed 30/06/2020)

> The problem is precisely that when the world moved in the 1980s to free circulation of goods and capital under the influence of the United States and Europe, it did so without any fiscal or social objectives in mind, as if globalization could do without fiscal revenues, educational investments, or social and environmental rules. The implicit hypothesis seems to have been that each nation-state would have to deal with these minor problems on its own and the sole purpose of international treaties was to arrange for free circulation and prevent states from interfering with it.

So there is a contradiction between free flow of goods, services and capital across sovereign borders, and the political choices within them relating to fiscal, social and legal systems. Piketty (2020: 1022) notes that, 'these contradictions threaten to blow up the global system as it currently exists' as also observed by Streeck (2016)[39].

The solution, argues Piketty, 'is to organize the system differently: existing trade agreements should be replaced with much more ambitious treaties that seek to promote equitable and sustainable development, which will require setting verifiable common goals in regard to matters such as taxation and carbon emissions (2020: 1022).

The failure of governments to extract tax from large corporations is well known. The 2019 report of the Australian Tax Office (ATO) records that 'large corporate groups' reported AU$1.8 trillion in gross income, paid $156 billion in taxable income, and AU$47 billion in income tax. The net income tax gap between what was actually paid in tax and what should have been paid according to current tax law was AU$2 billion[40]. However the actual rate of income tax, which is extremely favourable to big business, on gross income is a mere 8.6 per cent.

Michael West writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* writes: 'On our layman's figures, however – and in light of Google's sketchy public disclosures – it is making off with at least $130 million a year that belongs to the Australian taxpayer, and rising'[41]. But the mechanism for reining in the global titans, Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google and a few others, has not yet been devised. Mostly the search is for a new global institutional mechanism, or states acting individually. In *Being a Planner* I looked to the UN for an institutional solution to climate justice. Piketty proposes a new kind of transnational but not necessarily global institution.

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[39] Streeck, W. (2016) *How Will Capitalism End?* London and New York: Verso.

[40] A large corporate group is defined as one with gross income of over $250 million in a given financial year. The report notes that 'some large corporate groups choose to deliberately avoid their tax obligations. The tax gap reflects this deliberate non-compliance https://www.ato.gov.au/About-ATO/Research-and-statistics/In-detail/Tax-gap/Large-corporate-groups-income-tax-gap/?page=1#Estimate_of_the_tax_gap.

[41] https://www.smh.com.au/business/google-paying-a-fraction-of-the-tax-in-australia-it-should-20150208-139176.html.

POLICY FAILURE 1, SOCIAL POLICY: ROBODEBT, and BANKS

Income support for the unemployed

Welfare philosophy of the Australian Right

Forming the ideological doctrine of the Right in Australia is an amalgam of Friedmanite neoliberalism supportive of 'big business' at the cost of democracy, support for commercial interests in fossil fuel coupled with denial of climate science, heavily disguised class warfare, and what has been termed 'prosperity theology'. This last is allegedly the doctrine of the current Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Morrison is a Pentecostal Christian worshipping at the Horizon Church in Sydney. The particular brand of Pentecostalism reportedly embraced by Morrison includes 'prosperity theology'. Badham, writing in The Guardian embedded herself in the Hillsong congregation in Texas. She writes, 'the message is that earthly riches result as a recognition of God's favour. It's an apologia for wealth and privilege delivered with some pomp – as I learned when I spent a year hidden in his mentor [church leader] Houston's Hillsong congregation'[42].

Philip Almond (Emeritus Professor in the History of Religious Thought, at The University of Queensland) writes in *The Conversation* that Morrison in his maiden speech to Parliament, described Hillsong leader, Brian Houston as his mentor. Morrison has famously said, 'The values and beliefs that we hold is what connects us all. If you have a go in this country, you will get a go. There is a fair go for those who have a go**.** That is what fairness in Australia means'[43]**.** 'Almond continues (of prosperity theology):

> This "have a go" philosophy sits squarely within Pentecostal prosperity theology. This is the view that belief in God leads to material wealth. Salvation too has a connection to material wealth – "Jesus saves those who save". So the godly become wealthy and the wealthy are godly. And, unfortunately, the ungodly become poor and the poor are ungodly[44].

Richard Dennis from the Australia Institute wrote of Robert Menzies, founder of the Australian Liberal Party to which Morrison belongs:

> Robert Menzies didn't think like that. He didn't think that we should make citizens convince the government they need help. In 1944, after warning against converting people into "suppliant(s) to the state", he went on to say: "People should be able to obtain these benefits as a matter of right, with no more loss of their own standards of self-respect than would be involved in collecting from an insurance company the proceeds of an endowment policy on which they have been paying premiums for years (Denniss, R. 2018: 9)[45].

Not all Liberal Party members subscribe to Morrison's theology, or for that matter to the philosophy of Menzies, but as Minister for Social Services and subsequently Treasurer, government behaviour

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[42] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/29/the-prosperity-doctrine-and-neoliberal-jesusing-scott-morrison-style (accessed 04/05/2020)
[43] https://www.afr.com/politics/transcript-of-new-prime-minister-scott-morrisons-first-press-conference-20180824-h14h1a (accessed 04/05/2020)
[44] https://theconversation.com/five-aspects-of-pentecostalism-that-shed-light-on-scott-morrisons-politics-117511 (accessed 04/05/2020)
[45] Denniss, R. (2018) 'Dead Right, How Neoliberalism Ate Itself and What Comes Next', *Quarterly Essay*, 70, Melbourne: Black Inc Books.

has followed Morrison's prosperity theology which, in any case, sits quite comfortably with politicians of both the Liberal-National Coalition and the leadership of the Australian Labor Party.

This ideology helps explain and justify, more even than neoliberalism, the oppressive injustices of today's 'normal' welfare policy in Australia. The Liberal-National Party Coalition (federal) Government of Australia from 2013 to the present has initiated a number of authoritarian social engineering measures aimed at the poor and unemployed.

Robodebt (Online Compliance Intervention)

Centrelink's algorithm for recovery of alleged debt incurred by welfare payment recipients for incorrectly reporting their income matched recipients' *fortnightly* income (reported to Centrelink) with data provided by employers to the ATO *annually*, often with a significant delay. The latter data reports the *average* annual income of an employee, not the employment of a person at any particular fortnightly period. When people tried to phone the agency they found they could not get through: 'Nearly 48 million calls to Centrelink went unanswered last year (2017) as the agency failed again to meet its customer satisfaction targets'[46]. It was further reported that, 'Parents are being prevented from accessing the government's childcare rebate and other family payments because Centrelink staff are blocking phone lines and fudging caller wait times when reporting back to their bosses'[47]

The Commonwealth Ombudsman conducted an inquiry into the Online Compliance Intervention (OCI) reporting in 2017[48]. The report noted that the Department of Human Services (DHS) 'has conducted PAYG [Pay As You Go taxation] data matching activities with the ATO [Australian Tax Office] since 2004, using its information gathering powers under the Social Security Act 1991'. But manual data matching could only identify some 20,000 cases of non-compliance per year. DHS estimated that with OCI it would be able to undertake about 783,000 interventions in 2016-2017. Under the OCI, the Ombudsman's report noted, instead of the DHS staff checking with third parties such as employers to verify or disprove alleged debt, 'It is now the customer's responsibility to provide this information' … 'OCI system is automatically sending letters to tell customers about the income discrepancy, moving much of the debt management and calculation process online, with customers entering their information directly into the OCI system'. Where debt recovery was initiated and put into the hands of debt collection agents, a ten per cent recovery fee was charged.

The Report noted that, 'Concerns were raised with our office about the accuracy of debts generated under the OCI, including: the suitability and reliability of ATO data, the ability of the system to accurately assess various types of income and exclusions, the practice of 'averaging' ATO data and the automatic application of a ten per cent recovery fee'. Part 3 the Ombudsman's report recorded some specific complaints brought to the Ombudsman. These related to letters being sent to old addresses when the recipient had moved house several times, recipients being overseas at the time of the letter, alleged debts being removed or greatly reduced on manual checking by OHS (after long periods of communications with DHS), inability of recipients to produce payslips relating to periods of employment, recipients being pursued for debt after DHS had agreed that no debt existed, inability of recipients to log on to the relevant website (MyGov).

[46] Doug Dingwall, "No party poppers" as Centrelink woes persist' *The Age* 30/10/2018 p. 4.
[47] Bianca Hartge-Hazelman 'Centrelink overload hurts families' *The Age*, 08/02/2017 p 4.
[48] Commonwealth Ombudsman (2019): *Centrelink's Automated Debt Raising and Recovery System* https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/43528/Report-Centrelinks-automated-debt-raising-and-recovery-system-April-2017.pdf (accessed 07/05/2020).

Peter Martin, the economics editor of *The Age* (Melbourne) in 2018 reported how the Robodebt scheme came about, and what it was designed to achieve[49]. He argued that the scheme was designed to save money from the federal budget; 'the welfare budget was to be shaved by 0.3 per cent'. This was in pursuit of the government's desire to find money for tax cuts. The government settled on what they claimed was a 'high tech fix'. Martin writes: 'According to Porter [Minister for Human Services], Centrelink would cross-match "in a very sophisticated and quick way" data from the Tax Office with data from the Department of Human Services'. If the alleged debt was not disproved to the satisfaction of Centrelink, benefit payments were suspended until the debt was repaid. The Tax Office was also empowered to garnishee tax returns to recover the alleged debt. In an earlier report Martin (2017)[50] writes that those who challenge and get the better of Centrelink are unlikely to be 'the hardest up', 'Many of the automated services' he writes, 'are malicious, created to do harm in the guise of providing a service. The formula used by Centrelink produces consistently false estimates of debts'.

Social Services Minister, Christian Porter, boasted that, 'The complaint rate is running at 0.16 per cent. That's only 276 complaints from those 169,000 letters. That process has raised $300 million worth of money back to the taxpayer which was overpaid'[51]. Of course the very low rate of complaints could reflect not a low level of dissatisfaction, but rather the extreme difficulty of lodging a complaint with Centrelink and having it registered.

The Robodebt system was eventually challenged in court and found to be 'unlawful'[52]. A local government employee was advised by Centrelink of a debt of AU$2,900 in repeated notices sent to an outdated address. When the complainant found that her tax refund had been garnisheed by AU$1,700 she took her case to the federal court, after which, hoping to settle out of court, the Commonwealth Government reduced her debt to AU$1.54.

However the case continued before the court even after the government had conducted an overhaul of the system. The court noted that, 'The initial debt of $2,900 was calculated based on Australian Taxation Office income data averaged across fortnightly periods as if this were [the complainant's] actual income in each period. 'The court said the conclusion Amato had received social security benefits she was not entitled to was "not open on the material before the decision-maker" because there was "no probative material" that the average reflected Amato's actual income'. In common language, the main premise of Robodebt was unlawful.

As a result the government abandoned sole reliance on income averaging to calculate debts, 'dismantling the central plank of the Robodebt program's automation which has seen tens of thousands of welfare recipients overcharged for alleged debts'[53]. The government has agreed that the debt notices were unlawful. At the time of writing a class action against the government has been launched, claiming repayment of 400,000 welfare debts that were unlawfully issued. Under orders from the federal court issued in March 2020, 'the government has been told to identify all

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[49] Martin, P. (2018) 'Extortion is no budget fix' *The Age* 12/04: 18.
[50] Martin, P. (2017) 'Unleashing weapons of maths destruction' *The Age*, 08/01: 29
[51] McIlroy, T. (2017) 'Centrelink debt recovery culls $300 million says minister', *The Age*, 04/01: 10.
[52] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/27/government-admits-robodebt-was-unlawful-as-it-settles-legal-challenge (accessed 07/05/2020).
[53] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/27/government-admits-robodebt-was-unlawful-as-it-settles-legal-challenge (accessed 08/05/2020)

potential class action members and send out notices via *MyGov* [website] or by post about the upcoming court challenge by 25 May'[54].

The saga continues. The government has now admitted that it will have to pay back AU$721 million unlawfully taken from welfare recipients[55]. Some of the recipients of Robodebt notices will be hard to track down, yet the government will have to do this. On top of the unlawfully taken funds, the government may have to compensate their victims for the harm done to them. The lawyer with responsibility for the class action has said, 'The government can't only hand back what they've unlawfully taken; they've also got to compensate the people they've harmed' (Bonyhady as above). The government will be keen to reach an out of court settlement since in court the full extent of the human damage will be on display. Meanwhile it is hardly coincidental that the government is trying to revise the law on class actions under cover of protecting firms trying to survive the impact of the COVID-19 crisis[56].

The government refuses to apologise. Yet the Robodebt scandal is an egregious abuse of power which has damaged the most vulnerable in Australia and wasted 'taxpayers' money' on a massive scale. It is scandal comparable with the worst excesses of the banking, insurance and superannuation industry described below. In 2015 the then Minister for Human Services, Stuart Robert, denounced 'welfare fraud' in the following terms: 'The government says to those: you are not just cheating and stealing from the government; you are stealing from your neighbour; you are stealing from those genuinely in need'[57]. With Robodebt, the government cheated and stole from those genuinely in need. Robodebt was welfare theft.

ParentsNext and Cashless Welfare Cards

There are two other programmes aimed at the poor and unemployed. One is called ParentsNext, the other, the 'cashless welfare card'.

The government describes ParentsNext as, 'A support service for parents with children under 6 who get Parenting Payment. It will help you with your study and work goals'[58]. The 'parenting payment' is the main income support payment for those who are a child's main carer including unemployed parents of young children (in many cases single mothers). To get the payment the recipient must agree to a participation plan, and 'do the activities you have agreed to' (from the website cited above). In addition to various conditions such as income limits and complying with the requirement to seek employment (as with *Newstart*), the participation plan and prescribed 'activities' are compulsory. The official 'Explainer' on the government's website is quite explicit about these activities and the compulsory reporting parents are required to do:

- Providers [of activities] connect participants to local activities and support services such as counselling, financial advice, domestic and family violence, parenting courses, child care,

[54] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/18/robodebt-centrelink-to-issue-hundreds-of-thousands-of-class-action-notices-for-trial (accessed 15/05/2020).
[55] Bonyhady, N. (2020) 'Compo push after $721m refund of robo-debts', *The Age*, 30/05/2020: 1.
[56] Faine, J. (2020) 'Cracks in the façade', *The Sunday Age*, 31/05/2020:24.
[57] https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/chamber/hansardr/83163a85-c413-4318-b2e3-8cd22553fd24/toc_pdf/House%20of%20Representatives_2015_11_26_3875_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22chamber/hansardr/83163a85-c413-4318-b2e3-8cd22553fd24/0000%22 (accessed 03/06/2020)
[58] https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/parentsnext (accessed 08/05/2020)

transport, further education, secure housing, training or volunteering. Participants can change the activities at any time to suit their needs and circumstances.

- Make and agree on a Participation Plan – the plan records participants' education and work goals and the activities, reporting requirements and appointments they agree to do. When participants make new plans with their provider, they have 10 days to think about whether it suits them before signing.
- Reporting – participants may be asked to do two kinds of reporting: to Centrelink, and their attendance at their ParentsNext activity.

Unfortunately compulsion transforms ParentsNext from a 'support service' into a social engineering 'behaviour change' programme designed on the premise that parents who are poor and unemployed are also feckless and incapable of caring for children properly. A not so hidden agenda is the aim of reforming the parenting practices of Australian indigenous people, but of course, if such parents were targeted specifically the programme would also be racist[59].

ParentsNext patently breaches human rights, and quite properly makes parents resentful. Maley (2019) comments, 'The result is bureaucrats invigilating parents from a moral, child-welfare stance, making payments dependent on proof that parenting has been done correctly'.[60] Failure to comply has resulted in payments being stopped leaving parents and children without food.

The 'cashless welfare card' (or cashless debit card) is an electronic card issued to welfare recipients. It is designed to force the recipient not to spend their welfare payments on drugs, alcohol or gambling. It cannot be used to withdraw cash. A large proportion of welfare payments to individuals are made to the card and not into the recipient's bank account. The Department of Social Services website states; 'The Cashless Debit Card is testing whether reducing the amount of cash available in a community will reduce the overall harm caused by welfare fueled (sic) alcohol, gambling and drug misuse'[61]

Like ParentsNext, the testing of cashless welfare cards has been conducted in areas of high populations of Indigenous recipients, for instance in the Northern Territory and Cape York. The programme works by separating businesses that sell alcohol or gambling products into two categories: blocked or mixed merchants. At 'blocked merchants' use of welfare cards are automatically denied. At 'mixed merchants' such as supermarkets the shop must maintain a separate EFTPOS machine for processing purchases with welfare cards[62].

The cashless debit card was preceded by a scheme in which recipients of welfare payments are forced into 'income management' if the recipient is referred to Centrelink by the local child protection authority. Then Centrelink would manage 70 per cent of 'your money'. Under this arrangement a card called BasicsCard was available for use at 'approved stores and businesses' to buy approved products such as food, clothes and health items.

[59] Associate Professor of Law at the University of Technology Sydney, Beth Goldblatt reports in *The Conversation* that 'An announcement in the 2017 budget declared the trial [of ParentsNext] a success and said that from July 2018 it would be expanded to an extra 20 locations with "a significant Indigenous population', and to the entire country, less intensively'. (Goldblatt, B.,2019, 'More than unpopular. How ParentsNext intrudes on single parents' rights', *The Conversation*, 16/01.

[60] Maley, J. (2019) 'Down and out, where Big Brother is watching', *Sunday Ag*e, 03/03: 40.

[61] https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children/programmes-services/welfare-conditionality/cashless-debit-card-overview (accessed 08/05/2020).

[62] Koslowski, M. (2019) 'Compassionate or calamitous?' *The Age*, 13/09: 8.

It was reported that, 'Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, is eyeing a national rollout of the cards as part of his "compassionate conservative" welfare agenda that also includes drug testing of welfare recipients'[63]. It is an ideological experiment not based on evidence, one that publicly identifies, stigmatises and humiliates welfare recipients. The ideological purpose, concealed by anodyne statements about how such programmes are designed to provide help and support, is to reinforce in the public mind the idea that the poor are by nature incompetent and irresponsible. That poverty has nothing to do with cultural practices, insufficiently resourced services, government institutions, or economic models that maintain a certain level of unemployment.

Macro-economic modelling is both explicit and contradictory. On the one hand underlying unemployment is termed the 'natural' level of unemployment (as opposed to cyclical unemployment): 'The long-term baseline level of unemployment that occurs year in and year out, however, is called the natural rate of unemployment'. On the other hand, 'The natural rate of unemployment is determined by how well the structures of market and government institutions in the economy lead to a matching of workers and employers in the labor market'[64]. Those government institutions are far from natural, and according to Piketty (2020), determined by ideology. The use of the term 'natural' is itself ideological. As Piketty (2020: 7) remarks;

> Inequality is neither economic nor technological; it is ideological and political … In other words, the market and competition, profits and wages, capital and debt, skilled and unskilled workers, natives and aliens, tax havens and competitiveness – none of these things exist as such. All are social and historical constructs, which depend on the legal, fiscal, educational, and political systems that people choose to adopt and the conceptual definitions they choose to work with.

Sot it is with unemployment, underemployment and welfare, each of which are dependent on the ideology deployed to justify inequality in society, which Piketty terms the inequality regime.

Bad banks

Since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 there were growing numbers of complaints from the customers of Australia's financial services – banks, insurance and superannuation companies, about misconduct resulting in personal financial loss or damage. Unlike the behaviour of investment banks which triggered the financial crisis, this time the scandal came from within the domestic arm of financial services: banks fleecing their customers.

In the early 2000s Australia's major banks decided to enter the field of wealth management and financial advice to businesses, and created specialist investment planning companies for that purpose. A senior banking analyst with Shaw and Partners (a firm of stock brokers) was reported as saying, 'They like to look like they don't actually own the planners – they've got all these different names'[65].

Media scrutiny revealed a culture of greed within financial institutions in which enlarging profits took precedence over customer service. A Senate Inquiry examined allegations of a scandal, 'which saw a group of planners working for Commonwealth Financial Planning (CFPL), a subsidiary of CBA [Commonwealth Bank of Australia], accused of putting clients' money into risky investments without

[63] Koslowski, M. (2019) 'Compassionate or calamitous?' *The Age*, 13/09: 8.
[64] https://www.khanacademy.org/economics-finance-domain/macroeconomics/aggregate-supply-demand-topic/macro-changes-in-the-ad-as-model-in-the-short-run/a/how-the-ad-as-model-incorporates-growth-unemployment-and-inflation-cnx (accessed 10/05/2020)
[65] Irvine, J. (2018) 'Banking's time of reckoning', *The Age* 21/04; 28.

their permission'[66]. CFPL was accused of forging documents 'earning hefty commissions along the way'. The Chair of the Senate Committee recommended a judicial inquiry saying, 'These actions [of CFPL] were facilitated by a reckless, sales-based culture and a negligent management, who ignored or disregarded non-compliance and unlawful activity as long as profits were being made'[67].

At first the government resisted the growing public calls and pressure from within the ruling Coalition for a judicial Royal Commission but eventually the government had to yield. The Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry was established in December 2017.

Jessica Irvine, a senior economics writer at *The Age* (Melbourne) reported that the Commission heard evidence of 'misconduct' including the following[68].

- A bribery and fraud ring operated by bankers;
- A failure to get accurate information about individual borrowers' living expenses before approving loans;
- Selling 'junk insurance' on credit cards;
- Charging 'fees for no service';
- Misleading the corporate regulator;
- Siphoning fees from clients who had died.

Gareth Hutchens, reporting in *The Guardian*, wrote, 'We've heard evidence of appalling behaviour by Australia's major banks and financial planners, including bribery, forged documents, repeated failure to verify customers' living expenses before lending them money, and selling insurance to people who can't afford it'[69]. He points out that the major banks posted enormous profits in 2018: Commonwealth Bank AU$9.8 billion, Westpac AU$8.1 billion, ANZ AU$6.4, NAB AU$6.6 billion.

Even after the final report of the Royal Commission was published, continued bad behaviour was exposed. *The Age* investigative economic journalist Adele Ferguson in 2020 reported that one of the insurance company AMP's financial advice staff, 'cut and pasted signatures on to loan contracts. In one instance, such a signature was placed on a loan of AU$600,000 to a woman who knew nothing of its existence until AMP pursued her for repayments after her divorce'[70]. AMP served a default notice on then unemployed, single parent's home. A confidential internal review by AMP, following a request from the fraud squad of New South Wales police, found no fraudulent activity or compliance concerns. Following investigation by the Financial Ombudsman Service in 2017, AMP, in a confidential settlement, released the customer from liability for the loan. AMP apologised for the distress the customer suffered.

In the final reports of the Royal Commission, 'misconduct' is defined as; conduct that constitutes an offence against certain laws; conduct that is misleading, deceptive or both; conduct that is a breach of trust, duty, or unconscionable conduct, and conduct that breaches a professional standard or a

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[66] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-26/senate-inquiry-demands-royal-commission-into-asic-cba/5553102?nw=0 (accessed 11/05/2020)
[67] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-26/senate-inquiry-demands-royal-commission-into-asic-cba/5553102?nw=0 (accessed 11/05/2020)
[68] Irvine, J. (2018) 'Banking's time of reckoning', *The Age* 21/04: 28.
[69] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/20/banking-royal-commission-all-you-need-to-know-so-far (accessed 13/05/2020)
[70] Ferguson, A (2020) 'AMP in cut-and-paste signature scandal', *The Age* 18/05: 1.

recognised and widely adopted benchmark for conduct[71]. The findings of the Royal Commission contained in the reports are very detailed, and can only be summarised briefly here. They relate to eight cases of superannuation management and ten cases of insurance management.

Superannuation

Australia's major banks (National Australia Bank [NAB], Commonwealth Bank of Australia [CBA], Australia and New Zealand Banking Group [ANZ]) owned or licensed three of the superannuation fund trustees; non-bank commercial companies (AMP, IOOF, Suncorp, Q Super and Hostplus) another five.

The conduct of trustees of superannuation funds was calculated to generate fees from members to the neglect of the best interests of those members (101). This resulted in 'multiple instances of licensees charging clients for financial advice, where the advice was not provided' (11). This became known as 'fees for no service' where money was taken from clients, the Commission found, in breach of statutory covenants (52, 53, 92). Only when this conduct was discovered would financial organisations pay back many millions of dollars to clients (11). The Commission found that:

- There was failure to report breaches of trust in a timely manner (58).
- The regulator (APRA) failed to seek the underlying cause of this behaviour (101).
- Commissions continued to be paid to intermediaries who sold financial products without informed advice to clients. This included payment of commissions from clients who had died. (58, 92).
- The Commission questioned 'whether the trustee overseeing AMPs various superannuation products could fulfil its obligations to members, given the extent its duties are outsourced to other AMP business entities that can choose what information they pass back to the Board'[72] Concluding its evaluation of outsourcing, the report states that the regulator APRA 'needs to do more in its evaluation of how trustees of vertically integrated institutions are complying with their fundamental duties to their beneficiaries.' (160).

The money laundering activities of Westpac.

Banks are required by law to keep records of transactions and identify customers. They must work with Australia's financial intelligence agency, *Austrac*, to report transactions over AU$10,000 and payments deemed suspicious. Under the *Anti-Money Laundering [and Counter-Terrorism] Act* of 2006 banks were obligated to know the customer. Each time money goes in or out of the country, the bank must lodge what's called an 'International Funds Transfer Instruction' report to Austrac.

Charlotte Grieve, in the Sydney Morning Herald (09/12/2019) wrote, 'These reports are due within 10 business days and must include six key details about who sent and received the money, as well as transaction dates, identification codes and information about what the payment is for'[73]. One of Australia's largest banks, Westpac, breached its reporting obligations multiple times.

Austrac lodged in the federal court a statement of claim against Westpac for 23 million alleged breaches of anti-money-laundering laws. Westpac was fined AU$700 million for 53,506 breaches of

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[71] Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry (2019) *Final Report Volume 2 Case Studies*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia Page 1
[72] https://www.investmentmagazine.com.au/2018/08/amp-trustee-admits-its-not-a-perfect-system/ (accessed 18/05/2020)
[73] https://www.smh.com.au/business/banking-and-finance/the-westpac-scandal-how-did-it-happen-20191206-p53ho2.html (accessed 13/05/2020)

its reporting obligations for uncapped ATM transactions. ‘Austrac, writes Grieve, ‘blames an “indifference” of senior management towards compliance. It says the bank was warned about its systemic failures but was either slow to act or did nothing about it’.

POLICY FAILURE 2, ENVIRONMENT POLICY: FIRE, WATER and CLIMATE

Australia is exceptionally well endowed with natural mineral resources. The country is also the site of some of the Earth's most remarkable environments and abundant biodiversity. Yet Australia is among the seven countries with the highest rate of biodiversity loss[74]. The land has been massively exploited for mining and agriculture but, since colonisation, the environment has been poorly cared for. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act, 1999) is Australia's primary national environmental legislation, covering world heritage properties, wetlands of international importance, threatened species and ecological communities, and the Great Barrier Reef marine park. The Act includes protection of water resources from coal seam gas and mining development[75]. A 2020 report of the National Audit Office (2020) found that, almost 80 per cent of federal environmental approvals examined were non-compliant or contained errors. The Audit report found that oversight procedures were not consistently implemented, and conflicts of interest were not managed[76]. In what follows I discuss three instances of policy failure to protect the environment and biodiversity, only partly covered under the Act.

Fire

Australia has experienced destructive bushfires regularly since colonisation. The Eastern States especially are rich in vast forests of eucalyptus, a highly flammable species which has evolved to survive bushfire. Australian Aborigines used fire for millennia to create landscapes that provided food sources without depleting them. They learned the controlled use of fire to create open forest. The open nature of dry sclerophyll forest was noted by one early European settler: 'where a man might gallop without impediment and see whole miles before him' (Mitchell, 1848)[77]. Gott (2005: 1206) shows how the seasonal timing and frequency of Aboriginal burning was embedded in local knowledge of ecosystems. She points out:

> If we manage for biodiversity, we need to realize what the benchmarks are, and how that biodiversity was selected by thousands of years of Aboriginal management. Burning for fuel reduction at the same times and intervals as the Aborigines will preserve biodiversity, burning at other times and intervals can have unintended consequences[78].

When the European colonisers drove out Aboriginal populations, they also lost the knowledge of safe fire management, substituting instead European style 'scientific' systems of fuel reduction and fire-fighting. Forests were reserved for logging and in some areas national parks.

Williams records the five 'deadliest' bushfires in terms of loss of human life: 'Black Sunday' February-March 1926, Victoria (60 killed), Black Friday, January 1939 Victoria (71 killed), Black Tuesday February 1967 Tasmania (62 killed), Ash Wednesday, February 1983, Victoria (75 killed), Black

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[74] https://theconversation.com/australia-among-the-worlds-worst-on-biodiversity-conservation-86685 (accessed 01/07/2020).

[75] https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/referrals-assessments-and-approvals-controlled-actions-under-the-epbc-act (accessed 30/06/2020).

[76] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-25/auditor-general-severe-deficiencies-environmental-protection/12393780 (accessed 30/06/2020).

[77] Mitchell, T.L. (1848) *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia*. Longmans, London. Cited by Gott (2005: 1204) below.

[78] Gott, B. (2005) 'Aboriginal fire management in south-eastern Australia, aims and frequency', *Journal of Biogeography* 32: 1203-1208, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.538.7708&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Saturday February 2009, Victoria (173 killed)[79]. Williams restates the widespread assumption that 'bushfires have been part of the Australian landscape for millions of years' thus normalizing these catastrophes, but the evidence for such an assumption is thin. Uncontrolled bushfire is very different from managed fire.

In 2019 Australia's East Coast States experienced the most extensive, long-lasting and devastating uncontrolled bushfire in the continent's history, now known as the Black Summer. Beginning in June 2019 (mid-winter), increasing in severity and extent from September and lasting until March 2020, the fires, from Victoria in the South to Queensland in the North, burned an estimated 186,000 square kilometres, destroyed over 5,900 buildings and killed at least 34 people[80]. An estimated one billion animals died, many species of animals and plants were threatened, some may have become extinct[81]. Smoke enveloped Sydney and Melbourne bringing premature deaths of some 445 people. The smoke in the stratosphere moved twice around the world. At least eighty per cent of Australia's population was affected[82].

An extraordinary event also took place in the midst of the fires. The northern rainforest started burning. Joëlle Gergis, a distinguished climate scientist at the Australian National University, wrote:

> This eastern region of Australia is part of the Gondwana rainforests of Australia which contains the largest remaining stands of subtropical rainforest in the world, and the most significant areas of warm temperate rainforest in the country[83].

In a later article, Gergis wrote: 'There are now tens of thousands of people in coastal NSW and Victoria stranded in towns where the highways are closed, supermarkets are running out of food, and queues for petrol snake down the streets of devastated towns. The scenes experienced by those caught up in the ordeal are being described as apocalyptic – rightly so'[84].

The apocalyptic situation made Australians realize that climate change was exacerbating the bushfire threat, which the government belatedly acknowledged by instituting a 'Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements', whose title seems, nevertheless, designed to divert attention from government responsibility. It remains to be seen at the time of writing what the Commissioners will find[85].

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[79] Williams, L.T. (2011) 'The worst bushfires in Australia's history' *Australian Geographic* (November 3rd). https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/science-environment/2011/11/the-worst-bushfires-in-australias-history/ (accessed 02/06/2020).

[80] That relatively few people died in the fires is a result of the lesson learned from Victoria's Black Saturday: that home owners should not stay and defend their homes but leave in good time to shelter somewhere safe.

[81] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%9320_Australian_bushfire_season (accessed 02/06/2020)

[82] Wahlquist, C. (2020)'Australia's summer bushfire smoke killed 445 and put thousands in hospital, inquiry hears' The Guardian 26/05, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/may/26/australias-summer-bushfire-smoke-killed-445-and-put-thousands-in-hospital-inquiry-hears#:~:text=A%20study%20overlaying%20hospital%20admissions,admissions%20to%20hospitals%20for%20asthma. (accessed 02/06/2020)

[83] Gergis, J. (2019) 'I never thought I'd see the rainforest burning. What will it take for us to wake up to the climate crisis? *The Guardian* 10/09/2019. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/10/i-never-thought-id-see-the-australian-rainforest-burning-what-will-it-take-for-us-to-wake-up-to-the-climate-crisis (accessed 02/06/2020).

[84] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/03/we-are-seeing-the-very-worst-of-our-scientific-predictions-come-to-pass-in-these-bushfires (accessed 02/06/2019).

[85] https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/about (accessed 02/06/2019).

Long periods of drought and hot weather, and lightning strikes without significant rain (dry lightning) are well known to be the most common cause of bushfires. Global heating exacerbates these conditions. But there is also a question of the management of the forests, which is politically contentious. Logging and sawmill operations keep small towns in remote areas alive. But the effect of logging of native forests as a cause of bushfires has been well researched. In a recent article Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick of the University of Tasmania[86] with his colleagues wrote: 'The clear and overwhelming evidence is that logging makes forests more flammable'. The causal factors: after logging, increased sunlight dries out the forest floor; new fast growing saplings increase the fuel for the next fire to burn; the treetops, bark and branches are left on the ground – only the stripped trunk being taken; large open logged coups create higher wind speeds which drive fire the 'fuel ladder' to the tree crowns. Yet, 'Post-fire, the logging industry receives taxpayer funded grants for additional, increased logging of burnt forest, as it did last month' [May 2020][87].

These researchers (citing a peer-reviewed paper) argue that logged areas for forests burned more frequently and extensively than old growth forests in national parks. Conservationists with support from people in the major cities want to stop logging of native forests and keep them in what they see as a natural condition, especially in national parks. But when the Aboriginal peoples of Australia have coexisted with and managed the forests for thousands of years, the assumption of a 'natural' condition is debateable.

It seems to me that local Aboriginal elders should be enrolled in the forest management process everywhere. Studies of indigenous methods of forest management must now be considered central to conservation and generously funded, as climate change renders European methods obsolete. Lunt (1998) has pointed out that in an area of the Bellarine Peninsula in southern Victoria in the early 1800s there were less than 20 trees per hectare, 'but that area now has 3000 trees per hectare. Fire was controlled, and patch burning was recorded'[88]. We must now ask, controversially, whether both European-style logging methods and conservation practices have increased the density of native forests beyond what is safely manageable under the reality of global heating.

Water

The waters around Australia's coasts and in Australia's river systems and aquifers are crucial to the natural ecology, the national economy, and Australian society. All are heavily exploited economically without sufficient regard for environmental sustainability. Of course the study of planning for water environments is an enormous field that is way beyond what can be illustrated here.

Perhaps the internationally best known Australian water ecology is that of the Great Barrier Reef. A recent article in *The Conversation* by Day and Heron (2020)[89] summarises and discusses the 45 risks to the Reef identified by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority[90]. The main threats to the reef are climate change, and poor water quality. Climate change is causing sea temperatures to increase,

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[86] https://www.utas.edu.au/profiles/staff/geography-spatial/jamie-kirkpatrick (accessed 08/06/2020).

[87] Kirkpatrick, J. with Sanger, J., Tayler, C., Kooyman, R., Zylstra, P. and Watson, J. (2020) 'Logging has a clear link to bushfires', *The Age*, 08/06/2020: 25.

[88] Lunt, I.D. (1998) Two hundred years of land use and vegetation change in a remnant coastal woodland in southern Australia. *Australian Journal of Botany*, 46, 629– 647. (cited by Gott, 2005: 1204).

[89] Day, J.C. and Heron, S. (2020) 'The Great Barrier Reef is in trouble, there are a whopping 45 reasons why' (https://theconversation.com/the-great-barrier-reef-is-in-trouble-there-are-a-whopping-45-reasons-why-122930 accessed 10/06/2020).

[90] http://elibrary.gbrmpa.gov.au/jspui/bitstream/11017/3474/10/Outlook-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf (accessed and downloaded 16/06/2020).

sea levels to rise, the waters to become more acid (ocean acidification), and changing weather patterns to give rise to more frequent floods, cyclones and heatwaves.

Poor water quality is caused by runoff from land of nutrients (fertilizers), pesticides and sediment. The crown of thorns starfish remains a dangerous mass predator on coral. Among the less well known threats listed are modification of coastal habitats from urbanization, illegal poaching and fishing depleting fish stocks, and outbreaks of disease in corals, turtles and fish. Day and Heron observe (from the GBRMPA report) that, 'many of the 45 threats are not well known or understood. All but two are happening now - and most are steadily getting worse'. However I want to discuss a water ecology and its planning that may be less well known internationally: the Murray-Darling Basin in eastern Australia.

The Murray-Darling Basin

To guide me through the complexities I turned to a recent essay by Margaret Simons (2020) 'a portrait of the Basin and an explanation of its woes' (as the blurb says)[91]. The dendritic river systems in what is called the Murray-Darling Basin cover a vast area of fertile Australia, more than one million square kilometres (nearly one seventh of the entire landmass): '77,000 kilometres of rivers, 2.6 million people, forty Aboriginal nations, 120 species of waterbirds' (p.2) and many species of native fish. More than 3 million people rely on the rivers for their drinking water including the city of Adelaide (1.336 million in 2020).

Simons writes, 'The Basin is a plumbed landscape – one of the most plumbed in the world' (p. 5). The plumbing – reservoirs, dams and irrigation channels – supports irrigation farming in what are really two quite different kinds of water flow, what Simons calls the 'boom and bust' flows of the Northern rivers of the Queensland plains feeding the Darling river, dependent on the irregular downpours in the subtropical North often years apart separated by severe droughts, and the more reliable annual flows of water from the snows of the Great Dividing Range, mostly feeding the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers in the south.

During the later years of the twentieth century it had become clear that the Basin was slowly dying: 'the river system was at breaking point' (p. 4). The mouth of the Murray into the sea had repeatedly closed. River red gums along the river banks were dying. There were fears that the big cities would run out of water. The trigger for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan was a bloom in the 1990s in the Darling River of toxic blue-green algae stretching a thousand kilometres[92] causing the New South Wales government to declare a State of Emergency. Simons writes, 'The shock of the water turning poison made clear to everyone that action had to be taken to save the river system and all it supported' (p. 13).

Labor governments in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and the federal Commonwealth agreed to set up the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) under the Water Act of 2007. The Authority was tasked to produce a plan for the Basin using the 'best available science' which would show how much water was being taken from the river system for human purposes and how much could be taken on a sustainable basis: the 'sustainable diversion limit' (p. 15). The Water Act

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[91] Simons, M. (2020) 'Cry Me a River, the Tragedy of the Murray-Darling Basin', *Quarterly Essay* 77, Melbourne: Black Inc.

[9292] https://www.mdba.gov.au/managing-water/water-quality/how-blue-green-algae-blooms-are-handled (accessed 10/06/2020). The MDBA also notes that 'Extensive blooms have occurred throughout the River Murray between Hume Dam and Euston in 1983, 2009, 2010 and 2016'.

mandates 'a strategic plan for the integrated and sustainable management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin'[93].

Simons' comprehensive and balanced narrative tells in great detail how decision making for the Plan and its implementation evolved through a mixture of science, common sense, political struggles and markets. The fact that the Water Act, the MDBA and the Plan still stand at all is perhaps a triumph of common sense. Many of the key players are impressive in their various commitments to the survival of their industries, their local communities and the riverine environment. But the plan was unhinged early in its life by the subversion of the 'triple bottom line' conception of 'sustainability' at the hands of politics.

The concept of 'triple bottom line' originated with the book by John Elkington (1997), which proposed the triplet of environmental, social and economic sustainability. This idea was quickly taken up by governments and consultants around the world to mean that equal weight should be given to measures of each component, overlooking the potential conflicts amongst them. This was not Elkington's intention. Society, Elkington (1997: 73) states, 'depends on the economy – and the economy depends on the global ecosystem, whose health represents the ultimate bottom line': the ecosystem, not the economic system[94]. Whether global or local, the sustainability of the environment is the ultimate bottom line on which societies and economies depend.

Simons writes of the Water Act, 'So while its principal aim was to return water extraction to environmentally sustainable levels, and "to protect, restore and provide for the ecological values of ecosystems", it also talked about promoting "economic, social and environmental outcomes". The conflict between these words was the basis for a finding by the recent South Australian Royal Commission that the Authority had acted illegally, and unconstitutionally, in trying for a "triple bottom line" approach, putting economic and social issues on an equal footing with the environment' (p. 15).

What is also missing is reliably accurate measurement of water taken for irrigation through floodplain harvesting, 'the capturing of water that flows across land in a flood'. As Simons points out measurement is complicated, 'nobody knows how much of the rainfall is intercepted and, largely out of sight of the public and of regulators, put into storage behind levy banks and in so called ring tank dams – big, earthen embankment storages built on flat land' (p. 54). Assessments of the amount of water captured vary between 210 and 3000 gigalitres (the latter being more than the entire allocation to the environment).

Following the ideology of neo-liberalisation, ownership of water in the Basin has been detached from ownership of the land it falls on and opened to trading on international markets. Water trading is supposed to allocate water in the river system to its 'highest', that is most profitable, use, but there is also the potential for water hoarding while owners remote from the river wait for droughts to push up the price. In any case the commodification of water takes no account of environmental needs, and no account of the needs of communities along the river. It's just hard luck if your community cannot buy the water it needs to survive. Ultimately if all outcomes were determined by the water market the profitability of the economy of the Basin would be the only bottom line.

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[93] https://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/policy/legislation#:~:text=The%20Water%20Act%3A,an%20integrated%20and%20sustainable%20way. (accessed 10/06/2020).

[94] Elkington, J. (1997) *Cannibals with Forks, The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*, Oxford: Capstone.

By opening up the Water Act to the three conflicting 'outcomes', the entire plan was opened to decision-making by the politics of conflicting interests and unequal power. The figure for environmental flows needed to sustain the ecosystems of the Basin was determined by the scientists at between 3000 and 4000 extra gigalitres of water. Politics determined that environmental flows had to be under 3000 gigalitres (p. 19). In 2012, the Labor government, in finally legislating the Plan, determined that the amount of water to be returned to the environment was to be 2750 gigalitres. (p. 20).

The environmental flows determined by politics were not enough. During the drought of 2017-2019 the Darling River ceased to flow and was reduced to a chain of stagnant pools. The drought was judged by the Bureau of Meteorology to be among the most severe on record[95]. The MDBA states, 'The Basin Plan ensures that in times of significant drought, water is prioritised for critical human needs across the Basin'[96]. Yet there is no consistent long term strategy to reduce human use to a sustainable level. So the environment of the Basin will continue to deteriorate.

The outcomes of the Plan and its politics are varied. There have been a few successes, but also major disasters. In December 2018 and January 2019 vast numbers of fish (estimated between hundreds of thousands and at least three million) died along 40 kilometres of the Darling River downstream from the Menindee Lakes. A report into the fish kills by the Australian Academy of Science concluded that the immediate cause was de-oxygenation of the water. But the report states: 'the conditions leading to this event are an interaction between a severe (but not unprecedented) drought and, more significantly, excess upstream diversion of water for irrigation'[97].

The crisis of COVID-19 has so frightened politicians that they have been forced to listen to the medical scientists and heed their advice. Science is never without uncertainties, and fortunately the advice from Australian medics has turned out to be sound (as of May 2020). Special interests and pet ideologies were set aside. Collective action could not be postponed. *Timely* action has turned out to be critically important to avoid mass deaths. Timeliness in this case is measured in days and weeks. The threat to humanity and nature of climate change is even more severe, but because it is not yet acute, politics as usual is allowed to continue. But timeliness is just as crucial. With climate change it is measured in years – just a few years now remain. My fear is that politics as usual will continue until the effects of climate change become acute. By that time it will be too late.

Energy and Climate

Australia's climate politics since 2007 at federal level has been an extraordinary imbroglio of interest group pressures, political struggle, electoral insult and betrayal, science denial, failure to find common ground across political divides, and blindness both to future economic/ecological dangers and to future opportunities. There is not space here to discuss the well-documented details (in the Australian print and digital media) of this mess of policy and politics. Instead I want to document two key points: the rise of the renewable energy industry and the immense opportunities it offers to Australia's future economic development, and the push back from the fossil fuel industry working hand in glove with the federal government.

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[95] http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/archive/20191205.archive.shtml (accessed 15/06/2020)
[96] https://www.mdba.gov.au/managing-water/drought-murray-darling-basin (accessed 14/06/2020)
[97] https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/support/reports-and-plans/2019/academy-science-report-mass-fish-kills-digital.pdf (p. 2 accessed 15/06/2020).

Sustainable futures

The electricity industry in Australia is being transformed by individuals and firms under the feet of a divided and vacillating government and a dysfunctional privatised system attempting to impose a disaggregated market on a natural public monopoly. Rooftop solar, scaled up solar power stations augmented by massive batteries, and large scale wind farms are replacing the old industrial model of huge coal-fired power stations supplying electricity to inefficient and environmentally vulnerable grids of power lines.

This is happening because the market for electricity is responding to high prices and unreliable delivery of electricity by the old industrial 'concentration and dispersal model'[98]. Instead, electricity production is becoming more localised with batteries and mini-grids. But disaggregated and individual responses by themselves will not be sufficient to achieve the Paris Agreement targets. The elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, and income neutral policy instruments 'such as carbon tax schemes, cap-and-trade systems, feed-in tariffs, and quota approaches should roll out at large scale'[99].

Science based centres around the world are identifying transitions from fossil-fuelled economic systems to zero carbon sustainable economies with the aim of reducing carbon emissions within the Paris Agreement target of 1.5 to 2.0 degrees of heating above pre-industrial times. For example the collection of essays edited by Sven Teske (2019) 'presents robustly modelled scenarios to achieve 100 per cent renewable energy by 2050'[100]. Rockstrom et al. (2017), however, warned that, 'Although the Paris Agreement's goals (1) are aligned with science (2) and can, in principle, be technically and economically achieved (3), alarming inconsistencies remain between science-based targets and national commitments'[101]. The authors stated: 'Annual emissions from fossil fuels must start falling by 2020' (p. 2).

In Australia universities and NGOs have research units addressing the transition to low or zero carbon economies: the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne, Monash University, the University of Technology, Sydney, the University of South Australia, the University of Queensland, the University of Adelaide. NGOs provide analysis and conduct campaigns, such as ClimateWorks Australia ('We bridge the gap between research and climate action'[102]), the Australian Conservation Foundation[103], and 'Beyond Zero Emissions'. BZE's 'Million Jobs Plan, 'will propose nation building, transformative projects that can upgrade our economy, modernise our industry, reskill our workforce and deliver a bright and vibrant future – economically and socially. Our early research shows clearly that this is entirely achievable[104].

The Morrison Government, it appears, is not supportive of such independent university and NGO research. In March 2020 the government stopped funding worth AU$1.75 million to what is arguably

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[98] Sturup, S. and Low, N.P. (2019) 'Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, A Review of the Issues'.*Journal of Mega Infrastructure and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 1, Issue 1 (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/24724718.2019.1591744 (accessed 26/05/2020)

[99] http://pure.iiasa.ac.at/id/eprint/14498/1/Rockstr%C3%B6mEtAl_2017_Science_A%20roadmap%20for%20rapid%20decarbonization.pdf (accessed 27/05/2020).

[100] Teske, S. ed. (2019) *Achieving the Paris Climate Agreement Goals*, New York: Springer. https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783030058425 (accessed 27/05/2020).

[101] http://pure.iiasa.ac.at/id/eprint/14498/1/Rockstr%C3%B6mEtAl_2017_Science_A%20roadmap%20for%20rapid%20decarbonization.pdf (accessed 27/05/2020).

[102] https://www.climateworksaustralia.org/ (accessed 27/05/2020).

[103] https://www.acf.org.au/australia_recovery_video (accessed 27/05/2020).

[104] https://bze.org.au/the-million-jobs-plan/ (accessed 28/05/2020).

the most prestigious of these university led inquiries, the Australian-German collaborative hub jointly based at the Australian National University and the University of Melbourne[105].

The Energy Transition Hub has continued its work, publishing four synthesis papers: Australia's power advantage, *Energy Transition and Hydrogen Export Scenarios*, *Innovation and Export Opportunities of the Energy Transition*, *Towards Net Zero – Carbon Dioxide Removal and Utilization*, and *Markets, Regulation, Policies and Institutions for Transition in the Electricity Sector*. All are open to readers on the Energy Transition Hub's web page https://www.energy-transition-hub.org/news/hub-publishes-four-synthesis-reports.

The proposition that effective action on global heating can only be at the expense of economic growth has been shown to be untenable. Building on the concept of the 2006 Stern Review for the UK government[106], Professor Ross Garnaut (of the University of Melbourne, and now chair of Zen Energy – a supplier of solar and battery systems) conducted two major climate change reviews of the impact of climate change on the Australian economy (2007 and 2010), the second for the Rudd Labor government. He has published widely on climate change and the economy[107].

In November 2019 Garnaut published a new book detailing Australia's unique opportunities to contribute to carbon emissions reduction in the East Asian region while building a prosperous national economy[108]. This book promised a 'roadmap for progress' covering energy, transport and agriculture. Garnaut is not a disinterested party. He now represents a commercial interest in solar and battery power. But this interest aligns with a low carbon future for Australia's industrial and agricultural development.

Garnaut advocates three early policy developments: 1. the regulatory system must focus on security and reliability of power when most electricity is drawn from renewable resources; 2. the regulatory system 'must support transformation of the energy system to allow huge expansion of supply from regions with high quality renewable energy resources; 3. the Commonwealth government 'could underwrite new investment in firm electricity supply', including grants for low emissions industry including 'the hydrogen strategy being developed by Chief Scientist Alan Finkel'[109].

In respect of the latter, Garnaut envisages both processing of agricultural and mineral products on home soil powered by hydrogen generated by solar or wind power, and in the long term export of zero-carbon hydrogen to countries in the East Asian region. Garnaut warns that Europe will soon restrict imports of high carbon products, but Australia is well placed to become a 'rapidly expanding exporter of goods embodying renewable energy'. Garnaut's ideas align well with the purpose of the government's 'roadmap' discussion paper (see below). So it is worrying to note that his work is not mentioned once in the paper, nor was he a member of the panel that produced it.

Changes in the air?

The fossil fuel lobby is powerful. Coal, along with iron ore, has been Australia's main commodity export for many years. More recently natural gas has joined the ranks of export giants. But coal is a huge contributor to CO_2 emissions as well as ecological damage. Morton (2019) reports that the six

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[105] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/06/morrison-government-to-stop-funding-20m-international-collaboration-on-shift-to-zero-emissions (accessed 26/05/2020)
[106] https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100407172811/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/stern_review_report.htm (accessed 27/05/2020).
[107] https://www.rossgarnaut.com.au/climate-change/ (accessed 27/05/2020)
[108] Garnaut, R. (2019) *Superpower, Australia's Low Carbon Opportunity*, Melbourne: Black Inc Books.
[109] Garnaut, R. (2019)'A bright future is ours to make', *The Sunday Age*, 03/11/2019: 26,27.

biggest coal miners in Australia produce more emissions than the entire Australian economy[110]. In 2015 BHP (then BHP-Billiton) started mining coal in Indonesia. The Jakarta Globe reported in 2015 that, 'BHP in September said it had started mining at the Haju mine, part of the first stage of the IndoMet Coal project, in the forested Central Kalimantan province'[111] (home to Indonesia's endangered Orangutan population[112]).

The Swiss multinational mining company Glencore was reported to have spent between four and seven million dollars on a campaign run by the C/T group (founded by Linton Crosby and Mark Textor) to persuade politicians and public opinion of the continuing value of coal mining and burning. Christopher Knaus reports in The Guardian (07/03/2019): 'Intelligence was collected about key coal detractors, including Greenpeace and 355.org detailing their budgets, social media reach, and issues that could be used to embarrass or undermine them'[113]. The project (Project Caesar) set up on-line groups to spread positive messages about clean coal technology and attack renewables. Glencore Australia's web page states, 'We are one of the world's largest seaborne thermal coal exporters, as well as one of Australia's largest coal producers'. In 2018 Glencore reported production of about 84 million tonnes of thermal (and thermal, coking) coal from Australian mines[114].

The Indian mining company, Adani, is developing an enormous new coal mine in Queensland's Galilee Basin (the Carmichael mine). In 2015 it was reported that Adani had hired staffers, lobbyists and consultants with strong ties to the Labor, Liberal and National Parties in Australia to advance its case to approve the mine. The two heads of the lobbying firm used by Adani were a former state secretary of the Labor Party and a former chief of staff to the deputy premier of the Liberal National Party[115]. The mine, supported by the Labor Queensland State government, played a key role in the 2019 federal election as opposition to the mine was pitched to cost Queensland jobs. But the Australia Institute modelling showed that, with a declining market for thermal coal, even if Australia's coal exports increase, 'Developing new coalmines in the Galilee Basin would cost 12,500 jobs in existing coalmining regions and replace only two in three workers'[116].

It was reported in April 2020 that, with the international price of natural gas dropping from between nine and twelve dollars per gigajoule to AU$4.30, the government was looking to invest in gas projects to provide more cheap energy. Foley reports the statement of the Energy Minister (Angus Tayler) in the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "Gas already plays an essential role in energy reliability, but it could be even more important through a gas-fired recovery"'[117].

[110] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/01/six-biggest-coalminers-in-australia-produce-more-emissions-than-entire-economy (accessed 18/05/2020).
[111] https://jakartaglobe.id/business/bhp-pins-future-indonesian-coal-mine-new-rules/ (accessed 18/05/2020).
[112] Ker, P. (2015) 'Environment groups "devastated" as BHP starts Borneo coal', *The Age 'Business Day'* 23/07: 21.
[113] https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/mar/07/revealed-glencore-bankrolled-covert-campaign-to-prop-up-coal (accessed 25/05/2020)
[114] https://www.glencore.com.au/en/who-we-are/energy-products/Pages/coal.aspx (accessed 25/05/2020)
[115] Cox, L. (2015) 'Adani brings in hired guns to make case', *The Age* Business Day, 04/07/2015: 5.
[116] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jul/15/developing-new-galilee-basin-coalmines-will-cost-12500-jobs-analysis-shows (accessed 18/05/2020).
[117] Foley, M. (2020) 'Gas to fire economic recovery and capitalise on cheap oil prices' *Sydney Morning Herald* 21/04, https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/gas-to-fire-economic-recovery-and-capitalise-on-cheap-oil-prices-20200421-p54lw8.html (accessed 25/05/2020).

According to a Pew Centre report in 2015 eighty per cent of Australians supported limiting greenhouse gas emissions as part of an international agreement[118]. The annual Lowy Institute poll reported an increase of five per cent over 2017. 59 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement, "climate change is a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs"[119].

Has the COVID-19 crisis shifted government thinking on climate change and a 'green recovery'? Two reports were published in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis about future government investment aiming to assist economic recovery and reduce Australia's carbon emissions (February and May 2020). The first was a report from an 'expert panel' examining low cost carbon abatement[120]. The report examines ways to 'incentivise' voluntary action (on the part of companies) to reduce carbon emissions by rewarding polluters who take action to reduce emissions through the Emissions Reduction Fund.

Most of the report is concerned with improving the technical performance of the Emissions Reduction Fund. O'Malley reports that 'among the recommendations was to encourage more investment in carbon reduction schemes by allowing coal and gas companies to apply for funding carbon capture and storage projects. Carbon capture and storage is backed by the Australian coal industry because it involves burning coal, but opposed by climate scientists, because it is unproved and expensive'[121].

The members of the 'expert panel' responsible for the report are Mr Grant King (chair), Ms Susie Smith, and two government public servants: Mr David Parker, and Professor Andrew Macintosh. King is Chairman of Arventa and formerly managing director of Origin Energy and president of the Business Council of Australia. Smith is the former CEO of the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network (AIGN) which represents a group of the largest Australian and international carbon emissions producers and mining companies, including APPEA (The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association 'The voice of Australia's oil and gas industry'), the Australian Aluminium Council, Cement Industry Federation, Minerals Council of Australia, BHP, Bluescope Steel, BP, Caltex, Chevron, CSR, Engie, Exxon-Mobil, Origin, Shell, and Rio Tinto[122].

In May 2020 Government's National COVID-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) published a discussion paper 'Technology Investment Roadmap' outlining 'a framework to accelerate low emissions technologies'[123]. The NCCC is charged with identifying technologies for future 'efficient' investment by the government in the short, medium and long term (up to 2050). Introducing the report, The Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction wrote, 'The Roadmap and First Low Emissions Technology Statement will be the cornerstone of Australia's long term emissions reduction strategy, to be delivered ahead of COP26' (p. 3).

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118 https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/11/05/2-public-support-for-action-on-climate-change/ (accessed 23/05/2020)

119 https://theconversation.com/lowy-institute-poll-shows-australians-support-for-climate-action-at-its-highest-level-in-a-decade-98625 (accessed 23/05/2020).

120 Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (2020) *Report of the Expert Panel examining additional sources of low cost abatement*, Canberra: Australian Government (14/02/2020). https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/expert-panel-report-examining-additional-sources-of-low-cost-abatement.pdf (downloaded 20/05/2020)

121 O'Malley, N. (2020) 'The high cost of fossil fuel incumbency', The Age 20/05: 19

122 http://www.aign.net.au/about.html#members (accessed 20/05/2020).

123 https://consult.industry.gov.au/climate-change/technology-investment-roadmap/supporting_documents/technologyinvestmentroadmapdiscussionpaper.pdf (accessed 20/05/2020).

The technologies examined included pumped hydro, carbon capture and storage, reduction of methane emissions from landfill, microgrid technologies to supplement or replace electricity supply in remote areas, large scale solar energy, concentrated solar thermal, solar hydrogen generation, large scale batteries, electric vehicles, and liquefied natural gas. Figure 7 of the report lists an impressive range of low emission technologies to lead Australia's carbon emission reduction strategy. Barriers to deployment of technologies are also canvassed including 'stakeholder acceptance' (p. 38).

The mining and export of natural gas as a 'low emissions fuel' has led to criticisms of the report. The report states, 'According to the IEA (International Energy Agency) switching from coal to gas can provide "quick wins" for global emissions reduction and has the potential to reduce electricity sector emissions by 10 per cent' (28). When I looked up the IEA report cited I could find no mention of a potential reduction of electricity sector emissions of 10 per cent. What the report actually says is: 'From an energy transitions perspective, natural gas can provide near-term benefits when replacing more polluting fuels. A key longer-term question is whether gas grids can deliver truly low- or zero-carbon energy sources, such as low-carbon hydrogen and biomethane'[124].

What the IEA report also states is this:

> If the world is to turn today's emissions trend around, it will need to focus not only on new infrastructure but also on the emissions that are "locked in" to existing systems. That means addressing emissions from existing power plants, factories, cargo ships and other capital-intensive infrastructure already in use. Despite rapid changes in the power sector, there is no decline in annual power-related CO2 emissions in the Stated Policies Scenario. A key reason is the longevity of the existing stock of coal-fired power plants that account for 30% of all energy-related emissions today[125].

The NCCC is led by Mr Neville Power. He is known to support a gas led recovery[126]. and supported by an Executive Board of Commissioners drawn from the business and not-for-profit sectors; Mr David Thodey AO (Deputy Chair, and Chair of CSIRO), Mr Greg Combet AM, Ms Jane Halton AO, Mr Paul Little AO and Ms Catherine Tanna[127]. Power, Chair of Perth Airport, was CEO of Fortescue Metals, one of Australia's largest mining companies (chairman Andrew Forest), and a director of Strike Energy[128]. Catherine Tanna is CEO of Energy Australia, a leading electricity and gas retailer a former executive vice-president with Shell. The other members have backgrounds in telecommunications (Thodey) the trade union movement (Combet), public health (Halton) and agriculture (Little).

More worrying than the official publicly released report is an unpublished draft report to the NCCC by a manufacturing taskforce which was leaked to *The Guardian*. The report reportedly recommends

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[124] https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2019 (accessed 26/05/2020 no page numbers are given; under the heading 'Gas, What's in the pipeline for gas?')

[125] https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2019 (accessed 26/05/2020 no page numbers are given; under the heading 'Tackling legacy issues').

[126] Philip Corey, political editor of the *Financial Review*, writes (20/05/2020), 'Committee chairman Nev Power says cheap gas would benefit households and energy-intensive manufacturers who have been struggling under high gas prices for years'. https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/cheap-gas-to-power-recovery-20200519-p54u7z (accessed 23/05/2020).

[127] https://pmc.gov.au/nccc/who-we-are (accessed 21/05/2020).

[128] On its website Strike Energy, a major Australian on-shore gas producer, states, 'Strike will look to achieve its vision through a sequenced and deliberate appraisal and development of its gas assets in Western Australia's Perth Basin, and in the Cooper Basin in South Australia' (https://strikeenergy.com.au/company-profile/ (accessed 23/05/2020).

that 'the Morrison government make sweeping changes to "create the market" for gas and build fossil fuel infrastructure that would operate for decades', and that States should subsidise gas-fired power plants[129]. The taskforce was headed by Andrew Liveris, former chairman of Dow DuPont and board member of Saudi Aramco[130]. As I write, the government is refusing to release conflict of interest disclosures from members of the NCCC[131].

Do these reports signal a shift in the government's approach to climate and energy policy? There are very serious doubts that anything much will change, or that a new vision for Australia's future will emerge.

1. The 'Technology Investment Roadmap', announced by the government as a 'roadmap for recovery', a plan to take to the Glasgow CoP 26 of UNFCC as Australia's response to climate change, is a *roadmap without a road*. It is a survey of selected known technologies without a target for carbon reduction, and without the means for getting there or measuring its progress. It is not a plan. It is a survey that includes fossil natural gas and expensive carbon capture and storage which is in effect a subsidy to support the declining coal fired electricity industry. The government is left to pick and choose the technologies to subsidise that suit its political agenda. The CSIRO produced its 'Low Emissions Technology Roadmap' in June 2017 which specified the emissions goal agreed to by Australia for the Paris Agreement[132]. The 'Technology Investment Roadmap' is claimed to 'update' the CSIRO report, but it is difficult to see how, other than removing mention of emission targets.
2. Thanks to persuasion campaigns such as 'Project Caesar' and Adani's lobbyists, the Australian government has come to see climate change mitigation as a political project on which there are varying opinions. Facts and science, are ignored, even after the series of devastating bush fires that swept through the East coast of Australia in 2109. Advocates of a low carbon energy transition are excluded.
3. The membership of the two committees mentioned above demonstrates a bias in favour of fossil fuel industries. The members may protest that they are unbiased, and without a conflict of interest, but the facts speak for themselves. Where are the economists and climate scientists on the committees and panels? Where are the universities – classified as big businesses by the government? Where are the spokespersons for Australia's people, for climate science, for NGOs? The 'roadmap' is confusingly labelled both a 'cornerstone of Australia's long term emissions reduction strategy' and a 'discussion paper', but the terms of the discussion are already decided. There will be no discussion of targets or taxes. As the

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[129] Morton, A. (2020) 'Leaked COVID-19 commission report calls for Australian taxpayers to underwrite gas industry expansion', *The Guardian*, 21/05, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/21/leaked-COVID-19-commission-report-calls-for-australian-taxpayers-to-underwrite-gas-industry-expansion, (accessed 04/06/2020).

[130] https://www.saudiaramco.com/en/who-we-are/our-corporate-governance/leadership-team (accessed 05/06/2020).

[131] Murphy, K. (2020) 'Government refuses to release conflict-of-interest disclosures from Covid commission members' *The Guardian* 05/06, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/05/government-refuses-to-release-conflict-of-interest-disclosures-from-covid-commission-members (accessed 05/06/2020).

[132] 'The Paris Agreement also requires signatories to strengthen their abatement efforts over time with the overarching goal of limiting the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C'. file:///C:/Users/npl/Downloads/LowEmissionsTechnologyRoadmap-Main-report-170601.pdf. (accessed 26/05/2020).

Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction states in a Foreword, 'At its core, this is about technology not taxes' (page 3)[133].

4. There is no vision for the future of Australia's industry as articulated by Garnaut, The Gratten Institute, Meinshausen and many others. Instead we can expect politics as usual with a divided government managing its internal rift between climate science deniers and those who believe that serious action on climate change is needed.

SOME CONCLUDING WORDS

Historically, Australia inherited from its colonial power, Great Britain, ethical democratic institutions and improved them. Women were given the vote earlier; the preferential voting system can reflect public choices better than 'first past the post' (as in the UK); the elected Senate has often mitigated the worst consequences of ideology-driven government policies; the Australian Broadcasting Corporation remains a bastion of independent reporting and questioning of government policy; the public service has had a proud history of integrity since federation, even though it is now diminished. The Australian population is full of courageous, inventive, compassionate, far-sighted and ethically minded people. But few find their way into politics. The Labor Party and Liberal Party each have around 50,000 members nationwide or around three per cent of the voting population.

Politics in Australia today is venal, short-sighted, and driven not by the public interest but by the power of factional kings in both the Labor and Liberal parties who cultivate their power by stacking local Party branches with their own supporters. Experts on policy topics are normally systematically excluded unless they can be guaranteed to support political priorities. When political leaders are courageous enough to articulate a long term vision, they are quickly cut down, denigrated and diminished. In order to win elections they are reduced to merely holding their parties together in the face of factions that threaten to tear the Party apart.

Politics in Australia is a career not a vocation. Aspiring politicians start their careers in student politics, find their place as political staffers and work their way up the ladder through factional power and allegiance. The neoliberal mantra of 'small government' has paradoxically given increased power to this 'politics' to decide policy. It has been a disaster. Despite the glossy brochures announcing 30 year strategies, real planning – planning that will stay the course for a future beyond the electoral cycle – is nowhere practiced.

Australia has had its share of egregious failures, not least in its treatment of Indigenous Peoples, and recently of refugees (since the beginning of the century[134]). It is fair to say that towards both these social sectors public policy has been inscribed with monstrous injustices. As to the injustice to Australia's first peoples the figures tell the shocking story. In 2019, 2536 per 100, 000 Aboriginal people were incarcerated compared with 218 per 100,000 non-Aboriginal[135]. The Australian Law Reform Commission found that, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up about 2 per

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[133] https://consult.industry.gov.au/climate-change/technology-investment-roadmap/supporting_documents/technologyinvestmentroadmapdiscussionpaper.pdf (p. 3 accessed 27/05/2020)

[134] A useful time-line of refugee policy puts Australia's treatment refugees into long term perspective, suggesting that a harsh stance began with conservative governments around the beginning of the present century, especially since the 2001 'nine-eleven' attack on the USA. https://www.rch.org.au/immigranthealth/clinical/refugee-policy-and-timeline/ (accessed 18/05/2020)

[135] https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/aboriginal-prison-rates#:~:text=Since%201989%2C%20the%20imprisonment%20rate,per%20100%2C000%20non%2DAboriginal%20population. (accessed 10/06/2020).

cent of the population, they constitute 27 per cent of the national prison population[136]. Since the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, there have been 432 more Aboriginal deaths in custody (up to 2020). Average life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, both men and women, was about nine years less than for the Australian population average[137].

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis (as I write) there are some signs of a public hunger for long term visions and futures for Australia's unique environment, its ancient indigenous culture, its desperately vulnerable environmental assets and its immense untapped resources. But we have to keep before us the pattern of appalling past failures of governance which undermine social justice, threaten urban, rural, and wilderness environments, and endanger our economic, social and environmental future. We have not yet seen the full global economic impact of the COVID-19 Depression. But at this moment in July 2020 it seems extremely doubtful that the crisis will produce real change in the planning and governance of Australia's most fundamental environmental and social problems.

[136] https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/pathways-to-justice-inquiry-into-the-incarceration-rate-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-alrc-report-133/executive-summary-15/disproportionate-incarceration-rate/ (accessed 10/06/2020).
[137] https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/3302.0.55.003~2015-2017~Main%20Features~Frequently%20asked%20questions~14#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20although%20the%20average,their%20life%20expectancy%2072.2%20years. (accessed 10/06/2020).