



institutions, criteria for citizenship and rights of citizen, role of government, national identity and social cohesion. Australia, as a democratic nation is not immune to these influences.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY**

During public consultation we debated on the following specific questions and discussion is summarised below:

- What does a democratic culture look like? How can it be nurtured?
- Why are there declining levels of public trust and satisfaction with democracy
- What are the implications of declining trust for Australia's democracy? How can these trends be reversed?
- Would you distinguish between dissatisfaction with democracy and dissatisfaction with liberal democratic values such as the rule of law and separation of powers?
- What could be done to encourage adherence to liberal democratic norms and conventions? What is the role of gatekeepers, such as major political parties or the media, in preserving liberal democratic norms and conventions?
- What are the implications of international law and treaties for a domestic democracy and sovereignty? How should we think about democratic representation as countries become increasingly connected and interdependent?
- What is the role of electoral systems including, for example, compulsory voting?
- What is the role of civics education?
- How should we consider the tensions between representative and delegative democracy? How should governments represent both the majority and the minority?
- Could Australia's democracy be enhanced, for example, through forms of deliberative democracy or participatory democracy?
- How are the challenges and opportunities facing Australia similar or different to those of other democracies? What could Australia learn from other democracies?
- Is there a connection between satisfaction with democracy and economic conditions, such as living standards or wages growth?

It is misleading to consider that Australia was a monoculture settlement prior to 1980s. Before European settlement there were around 500 languages in 31 basic Indigenous clans with their own culture of rich oral tradition of songs and stories and rock art, and belief systems comprising about 750,000 people on the island. With start of European settlement in 1788, multiculturalism took another step. (<https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/australia/history>)

Before 1901, Australia was divided into six British colonies which were under the law-making power of the British Parliament. Under the newly ratified Australian Constitution the colonies united to become one nation to form a federation on 1 January 1901, and resulted in creation of a Federal Parliament that governed through mechanism of representative democracy, allowing elected members of parliament to make laws and take decisions on behalf of electorate.

Democracy or demos-kratos (Greek) means power to the people. In today's world, democracy is a form of governing mechanism where representatives elected by the people rule for a certain period of time and are accountable to the people. Underpinning modern democracy is the right to vote, existence of free and independent media, impartial judiciary, commitment to parliamentary democracy, rule of law, separation of power, equality, fair go, and freedom of speech.

## **Some Challenges to Democracy**

There are recent trends or movements that do not encapsulate the underpinning values of democracy, raising the possibility of 'illiberal democracies' where there may be widespread public support at the expense of democratic values.

An example is the strong feeling amongst a group of citizens that migrants have taken jobs from them. This has caused an 'us' and 'them' feeling, intolerance, and expressions of racism. Representations have also been made in the Parliament through some elected representatives to reduce immigration based on ill-informed facts. Another example is the opposition that was faced by LGBTI community to have equal rights for lawful marriage. The worldwide impact of terrorism has focussed unwanted attention on followers of a particular faith and feelings of racism and intolerance.

The elected representatives have many challenges. They have to deal with conflicting expectations from their electorates and sponsors, and also manage party priorities. In addition, there are international pressures on the government, including foreign relations and trade.

Along with lack of transparency and promise breaking by government/political leaders, a major influencing factor of declining trust in democracy is poor economy and lack of jobs. When employment opportunities are scarce it is easy to blame migrants for taking jobs from others. This further leads to discrimination, bullying, racism and calls for stopping migration. It reduces social cohesiveness and may promote extreme views (far right or far left). When governments respond in a reactive rather than deliberative manner to these demands it leads to further decline of public trust in government and democratic institutions.

A good government creates policies and an environment that encourages businesses including large corporations, big and small business, foster employment opportunities and financial security such that people are assured of income in the present and future. This will reduce unemployment rate, number of people seeking welfare will decrease, those who want to buy a house can afford to have one, and blaming migrants for job shortages will take a backseat.

## **Role of Education**

Religious preferences also play a big role in challenging democratic rights. This can be observed in the case of equal marriage rights for LGBTI community and the issue of abortion. Giving a legal status to these issues benefits many, however, a sustained momentum for acceptance can only be gained through education and increased awareness.

The Australian education system is good but it can be improved. To increase awareness and acceptance, school syllabus should include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history; role of migrants in developing Australian economy; contribution of migrants to Australian society, case studies of countries where migration is embraced; effect of migration on prosperity of a nation vs a country that is opposed to migration; giving factual information about challenges migrants face to settle in Australia; proportion of migrants that go on welfare; job creation by migrants; contribution and integration of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation migrants to Australian society; and much more. India is an example that has embraced migration over many centuries. India has assimilated migrants from different countries including those persecuted due to religious beliefs and has benefitted from contribution by these migrants.

## **Australian Electoral System Reforms**

Australia is a great example of democracy in the world. It is important to retain policies and practices that are ensuring its greatness such as compulsory voting by eligible citizens.

The current system of vote counting of primary vote and preferences needs to be reviewed to make it transparent so that voters understand how their preference votes are allocated. Currently a candidate may win even if their Primary vote is low. This means that only a small number of people wanted them as their elected representative but because they received preference votes and thus reached the critical number of votes, they get elected. At the same time there may be a candidate who received a higher primary vote, but their preference votes were less and hence could not reach the critical number of votes needed to get elected. In this process the voters are not actually getting a representative that had greater number of primary votes. It is recommended that a minimum level of primary vote should be set before preference votes are added.

The current voting system allows for two ways of voting: party based or individual candidate based. In the individual candidate-based system the preferences are decided by the voter and not the party. In the party-based system it is the party that decides how preferences will flow to the candidates and thus influencing who will be elected. The party-based system takes away the decision making from the voter to the party and does not truly reflect the views of the electorate.

Another area of voting that needs review is the winning percentage cut-off. Any party that gets fifty percent plus one vote is declared a winner. In reality it is not a true reflection of majority voting. This margin can be increased to 60 percent or thereabouts to have a clear majority.

In a true democracy representation to the Parliament or Legislative Assembly should be based on population and not on designation of a state or a territory. For example, Tasmania has a population of 522,152 and has 12 senators while Australian Capital territory has population of 411,667 and only two senators. This does not reflect the proportional representation principle that is fundamental to a good democracy.

### **Types of Democracy**

As a governing mechanism Australia follows the representative (indirect) democracy whereby elected officials represent the electorate, take decisions and govern but are accountable to the people.

The delegative (liquid) democracy is partially democratic as the elected representative has a free rein to make decisions and govern as they see fit even if it does not resemble what was promised during election, they can be above the electorate, party and judiciary (practised in Argentina, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liquid\\_democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liquid_democracy)).

In the participatory democracy, emphasis is on broad participation of voters to determine the direction and operation of political systems. This approach has been taken in Indi, Victoria. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory\\_democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_democracy); [https://crawford.anu.edu.au/files/uploads/crawford01\\_cap\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2016-09/indi\\_apsa\\_final\\_upload\\_small.pdf](https://crawford.anu.edu.au/files/uploads/crawford01_cap_anu_edu_au/2016-09/indi_apsa_final_upload_small.pdf))

In deliberative (discursive) democracy, deliberation by voters is central to decision-making. It adopts elements of both consensus decision-making and majority rule. It is being trialled in a region in Belgium. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative\\_democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative_democracy); <https://www.themandarin.com.au/107169-can-belgiums-deliberative-democracy-experiment-work-in-australia/>)

Delegative democracy is unlikely to be accepted by voters in Australia and will not be the appropriate system of governance as Australia has been successfully practising representational democracy for over 100 years. It is not clear if deliberative democracy will work in Australia. It may be useful to wait for outcome in Belgium where it is being trialled. However, to deal with electorate apathy, an approach that brings together representative democracy with participative democracy could be an efficient and effective way of ensuring greater engagement and participation of voters as

demonstrated in Indi Victoria. The message from Indi Victoria and Denison Tasmania is that voters are fed up with the approach of the two major political parties. Voters are electing independents who engage and empower them to influence the outcomes of parliamentary decisions as in the case of proposed changes to citizenship rules (Nick Xenophon). In return they are able to get better outcomes/funds to local constituents. (<https://www.themandarin.com.au/107169-can-belgiums-deliberative-democracy-experiment-work-in-australia/>; [https://crawford.anu.edu.au/files/uploads/crawford01\\_cap\\_anu\\_edu\\_au/2016-09/indi\\_apsa\\_final\\_upload\\_small.pdf](https://crawford.anu.edu.au/files/uploads/crawford01_cap_anu_edu_au/2016-09/indi_apsa_final_upload_small.pdf))

We could say that this trend is increasing. For example, Warringah and Wentworth seats in NSW in recent elections confirms this trend. This is actually a good thing which demonstrates that in a progressive, educated society voters are electing independent candidates, which highlights the importance of participatory democracy. Through this process, they are ensuring balance of power in the parliament which in turn results in good outcomes than having a majority government.

### **Civics Education in Schools**

The indifference and dissociation of electorate could be influenced by lack of understanding of their role in the democracy. Civics education needs to be revitalised and made more relevant in accordance with changing times, particularly in light of increased presence of social media, fake news, and internet algorithms that can influence and skew public perception resulting in an unintended outcome. School students of today are going to be voting citizens of tomorrow. A responsible citizen must know the importance and relevance of politics, government and society to their daily lives; understand public and private responsibilities and rights (personal, political and economic) as a citizen; value Australia's constitution and democratic system; build pride in being Australian; know how they can influence decision making; foster civility that unites individuals from culturally, linguistically and socially diverse groups; promote understanding and appreciation of democratic institutions and processes, thereby developing greater political efficacy. For a strong democratic country, civic education is of utmost importance to develop an informed, effective and responsible citizenry that is committed to fundamental values and principles of democracy, and a free and open society. We strongly recommend revising the school curriculum to include civics training and education.

### **NATIONHOOD AND THE NATION STATE**

The following questions were considered during the public consultation process and discussion is summarised below:

- What constitutes a nation in the twenty first century? How have notions of nationhood developed over time?
- What does it mean to be an Australian? What constitutes the Australian nation?
- What role does and should national identity play in a modern state? Is the nation becoming more or less connected to the state?
- What does it mean to be an Australian citizen, including any rights or obligations? What are the obligations of the state to its citizens?
- How can the Australian nation recognise its Indigenous cultures, peoples and history?
- What does it mean to be a nation of immigrants? How is this different from other types of nations?
- How does citizenship intersect with nationality?
- How could a sense of shared civic community be encouraged for all Australians?
- What is the role of governments, civil society, business, and others in shaping notions of nationhood or the nation state?

- How might employment, class or other individual attributes be tied to national identity?
- What are the implications of the decline of traditional industry and the flow of once regionally-based populations towards our cities?

The concept of nation for Australia should be informed by the pre- and post-colonial era along with over a century of being a Federation and post-1980s immigration policy changes.

Similar to other countries, modern Australia is greatly influenced by increased globalisation as observed through trade and economic developments, technological advances, digitalisation, political developments and rise of social media.

Australia's head of the state is the Queen of United Kingdom. Should this continue in 21<sup>st</sup> century? Does it impact on people's notions about national identity? Australia was not 'terra nullis' pre-colonial era. Should not the Australian Constitution be amended to reflect this?

### **Diversity and Multiculturalism; Tolerance and Acceptance**

Undoubtedly, assimilation will take some time as migrants who uprooted themselves from one place will need to find work to support themselves and their family economically, find a house, school for kids and build networks to assist with their living. All new migrants, in the absence of Australian work experience not only have difficulty in finding paid work but also in finding work in their field of expertise. Some do further studies along with working in odd jobs to increase their job prospects. Migrants from India are proud Australians of Indian origin who embrace Australia as their homeland and also take pride in their Indian heritage.

Diversity is not multiculturalism. Australia needs to be proactive in promoting multiculturalism. With over 180 languages spoken in the country, how can a requirement of one multicultural representative on the board or committee do justice? Greater representation is needed to have meaningful input from the multicultural perspective.

Usually when multiculturalism is discussed the word 'tolerance' is bandied around. Toleration has an element of suffering, of grudgingly having to accept. This needs to be replaced with 'acceptance'. Acceptance is an empowering way of giving the other person freedom to be themselves. Acceptance goes beyond tolerance and carries with it a feeling of humanity, to allow those around us, irrespective of whether they are different or not, be themselves without fears.

A part of acceptance is accepting peoples' language. It goes both ways, a migrant should learn, accept and respect the adopted countries language and civilian practices while having freedom, without fear of being judged, to continue to engage with theirs.

Singapore is a good example of an economically and socially vibrant multicultural society and Australia can benefit from exploring and learning from them.

### **Nation and National Identity**

When we consider a definition of nation or nationhood, it is important to remember that many nations in the world were some other countries in the historical past. Food, water, resources and opportunities have been drivers of migration from times immemorial. History is littered with stories of wars, conquests, succession, coups, and reconfiguration of nations based on the conqueror. Fortunately, wars have decreased in most parts of the world and legally acceptable election procedures based on Constitution exist in majority of nations although some are still under monarchy or under the reign of another country. Fight for resources still exist but now it has taken on the form of negotiations over trade agreements.

A traditional definition of nation is a group of people with common ethnicity, religion, language, customs, history, and government. However, with increased world connectivity and migration, people residing in a nation now have diverse ethnicities, languages, religions and cultural practices. Regionalisation, globalisation, diasporic influence, transnationalism are making the nations cosmopolitan, including Australia. As a result, the definition of nation, national identity and nationhood needs to be revised and broadened to be meaningful and inclusive.

The Australia of 21<sup>st</sup> century is cosmopolitan and hopefully will stay that way. There may be groups of people who may feel threatened by diversity and multiculturalism and feel strange in a land that felt familiar before. Their feelings must be addressed in a constructive manner to ensure they feel a sense of belonging. It would be advantageous to take into consideration meaning of self-determination, independence, autonomy, belongingness and sovereignty in this context when considering a meaningful definition of nation, nationhood and national identity. The Australia and Australian identity of today can be defined as:

- Cosmopolitan
- Autonomous/Sovereign
- Egalitarian, without any class structure
- Land of opportunities
- Strong belief in fair play and a fair go
- Friendly and accepting
- Open-minded
- Inclusive/non-discriminatory
- Secure, healthy and stable democratic institutions
- Freedom of choice, speech and debate
- Freedom from oppressive government interference
- Respecting Australian institutions and values
- Pride in being Australian
- Loyalty to Australia while celebrating diverseness in culture and traditions.

The world is changing at a rapid pace and 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia will need to continue to evolve with changing times. Australia needs to build on the best elements of an Australian identity that has equal regard and relevance for all Australians while strengthening shared values.

### **Citizenship**

After world war II, mass migration program was launched in 1945 and Australians at that time had status of British subjects. On 26 January 1949 Australian citizenship came into effect through the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948*. Citizenship and immigration have been closely linked and successive migration policies and programs have been reflected in changes to citizenship eligibility. ([https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/0910/AustCitizenship](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/0910/AustCitizenship)). In addition to responsibilities, there should be certain rewards associated with citizenship. Getting citizenship should feel as an achievement and becoming an Australian citizen should be a matter of pride.

The current policy that enables revoking citizenship (under certain circumstances) is controversial. It carries with it an element of discrimination for those who have dual citizenship or are first generation migrants. If revoking citizenship benefits Australia in maintaining its safety, security and sovereignty then it should apply across the board for all citizens or not at all.

Government needs to strengthen and promote support for diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusiveness. There should be no room for bigotry, racism or discrimination. As a nation, Australian identity could be that of an evolving community that stays strong, that embraces living with multiple

and contradictory opinions and yet stays united with shared values and resilience that stands the test of time and rapid change.

Civics education, pride in national anthem, a healthy dose of patriotism, eagerness to provide valuable community service, understanding rights and responsibilities of a citizen, should be part of education and all who live in Australia. Those who do not understand English can be given English classes and this should also be part of their education.

### **Importance of Industry and Job Creation**

A nation that does not manufacture its own products is always at the mercy of others. Australia needs to bolster its manufacturing industry and diversify it to create a degree of self-sustenance, jobs and pride in its ability to look after its people. A nation that cannot provide employment to those who are seeking to earn livelihood in a legal way creates a pathway for discontent, possible increase in crime and social evils. Government needs to review processes including procurements that waste money and channel those resources into creating a robust economy. In addition, government should encourage industry in regional areas to create employment and reduce burden on major metropolitan cities. With employment opportunities in regional areas, other supporting businesses will also get established like education, health, housing, trades, etc in accordance with supply and demand cycle.

### **SOCIAL COHESION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

The following were considered during the public consultation process and discussion is summarised below:

- What are the connections between national identity, cultural identity, and social cohesion?
- What risks are presented by economic inequality, including to social cohesion and national identity?
- How is national identity and social cohesion affected by the decline in industrialised employment?
- How is national identity and social cohesion affected by the geographical location in which Australians live? Has the movement of Australia's population from the regions to the cities over time had an impact? Are you concerned about increasing political divisions between certain groups?
- Are you concerned that economic and cultural anxieties in Australia and elsewhere are increasing? If so, what should be done about this?
- Are you concerned about a decline in civic engagement? If so, what might be done about this?

### **Inhabitants of Australia**

For many thousands of years, we know that Australia was inhabited by Australian Aboriginal people. According to a 2013 German study by a team of researchers on Indigenous Australian DNA genes reveal that a wave of migrants from India arrived in Australia about 4,230 years ago. It shows that the Indian migrants settled in Australia before Captain James Cook's first recorded contact with the Australian coastline. The study also suggests that up to 11 per cent of Aboriginal Australians DNA derives from Indians. During the migration period, dingos first appeared in the fossil suggests that the Indians took their dingos with them and they may also have brought stone tools called microliths. This study overturns the view that Australian continent was isolated from the time it was first colonised about 45,000–50,000 years ago until Europeans discovered Australia in the eighteenth century.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_history\\_of\\_Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_history_of_Australia)

From 1606 there is evidence of Dutch people exploring northern and western coasts and some Dutch sailors settling there. Since 18<sup>th</sup> century Australia is a country of migrants. English convicts, Irish convicts and some military personnel were forced to settle as a British penal colony. Migrants also

came on their own from Britain, Ireland, followed by Europe and China. Post-war mass migration and changes to migration program provided further diversity and enhanced multiculturalism. All this has made Australia a most diverse and a multicultural nation and society which has created its own challenges. (<https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/australia/history>;  
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-14/author-raises-prospect-of-dutch-settlement/4689488>;  
<https://www.nla.gov.au/faq/who-was-the-first-european-to-land-on-australia>)

### **Cultural Identity, Social Cohesion and National identity**

With multiculturalism and diversity comes the notion of cultural identity. Absence of cultural identity can lead to loneliness, a sense of not belonging, and yet too much of it can cause lack of integration with broader society and possible conflict with national identity. A healthy dose of cultural identity combined with national identity builds a society that is cohesive and inclusive. Another way to consider the connections between social cohesion, cultural identity and national identity is to consider social cohesion as the fabric/foundation on which stand several cultural identity pillars overarched by the roof of national identity.

Our world is made of people with different cultural identities and experiences that shape us and define who we are. It is up to us that these experiences and differences bring us closer together as a society and as a nation. A different view does not have to be right or wrong. When we can accept another's view without judgement, we can start moving towards acceptance of our fellow beings as equal citizens in society.

### **Settlement of Migrants**

Given the role and importance of migrants in the Australian society, we suggest a few practical solutions to help migrants settle and contribute to the society sooner than later. For example, currently new skilled migrants are not eligible to receive any welfare payments in the first two years of their arrival. We believe this policy is not helpful as the new migrants need help in the beginning, not two years later. This would allow migrants to find jobs in their area of expertise as local Australian experience is required and a chance to integrate in the society. Presently none of this is possible due to urgency to find any employment to support their living expenses. Skilled people find themselves doing unskilled jobs and unskilled people are finding themselves out of work.

It is recommended that new skill-based migrants should be provided 24 months of welfare support on arrival including six months of support to help them get local experience in their field of expertise. In addition, new migrants should be given extra points to settle in regional areas and they should stay in regional area for at least five years. Government needs to create employment opportunities in regional areas to help develop them. With migrants settling in regional areas, population growth will then start driving supply and demand cycle and a pro-active government will ensure that those who stayed there for five years feel so settled and satisfied that they do not feel the necessity to move to metropolitan cities.

Australia is considered an egalitarian society, does not have division of labour, and where everyone benefits. However, in reality economic prosperity is not spread equally. The difference between 'haves' and 'have nots' is increasing, unemployment is going up, those with low skills are unable to participate in the economy. This is leading to disgruntled citizens who are feeling marginalised and getting attracted to extreme right or left movements.

Economic and cultural anxieties are increasing in Australia and rising suicide rates, depression, mental health issues are indicators. Job insecurity, unemployment, breaking families, etc are contributing to the anxiety.

Currently governments provide subsidised lands and also assist with building religious places. These religious places assist with strengthening cultural identity. What role they play in enhancing social cohesion or strengthening national identity is not clear. Religious fundamentalism also seems to be increasing in society across all religions.

It is our view that greater skilled and un-skilled employment opportunities particularly in regional areas, improved civic education, and greater integration of migrants in regional areas will assist with social cohesion which will help create a successfully functioning effective society.

## **GOVERNING IN A DEMOCRACY**

The following were considered during the public consultation process and summarised below:

- Is Australia's current approach to major policy problems working? How can governments, business, civil society and others best approach significant policy challenges?
- How can we maximise the strengths and abilities of the public service?
- How can we build trust in the abilities of those delivering public services?
- What is the role of compromise in politics? What is the place for principled stances?
- How can our democratic institutions manage competing interests in a way that is respected by all participants?
- How can we encourage long term vision and planning in politics, when our election cycle is much shorter?
- Does the rise in the number of independent agencies and commissioners appointed by governments harm democracy by passing contentious issues to bodies and individuals that do not face the accountability of elections?
- How can democratic institutions such as parliament best engage with the public?
- Is there a problem with how government communicates with the public? Is the language of politics broadly understood?

## **Australian Policies**

The current government policy is economically difficult for family reunion visa. For any society family is the foundational unit which holds the fabric of society together. Family structure is critical to effective functioning of a healthy society. Grand parents play a pivotal role in teaching family values and life skills to grand kids and caring for them. It is recommended that visa fees should be reduced to enable grandparents to spend time with their grand kids.

The current government policy to provide no support to new skills-based migrants is also counter-productive. It has already been discussed in the submission.

In the last decade or so, Australia's approach to major public policy problems related to water and climate change has been dismal. For a country like Australia these are very critical problems that needs science-based solutions. Instead of relying on latest science and facts informing the policy response, we have turned them into politically contentious issues with little or no progress in solving these policy conundrums. Somehow, we have managed to polarise the community with confusing and conflicting messages. This approach is not going to solve the solution with short term band-aid solutions which is what we are doing currently. Recent demonstrations and media reports suggest that concern for climate change is causing anxiety amongst people, particularly lack of perceived action is causing anxiety in youngsters. Major public policy problems like these, if not addressed, could erode public confidence and lead to distrust in government and its ability to respond to environmental consequences effectively in the longer term.

Education policy is another topic that has been subject to significant changes and controversies in recent years. This is a complex policy matter but the debate gets hijacked by ideologically driven simplistic views. One such issue, for example, is allocation of funding to public and private schools. We should have an open debate on such issues, considering facts and data, and make a bipartisan decision once for all, and then move on with the implementation. Another question is allocation of government funding of schools based on religion - does it promote social cohesion in the society? Do all regions get equal funding proportionate to the population? Is the level of education in public schools deteriorating? Why do parents feel the need to send their children to private schools? Are the children not going to private schools receiving a lower standard of education in public schools? Does funding of private schools create disparity in education? We, as a society should be able to have an open debate on these questions, where all views and comments are expressed and heard in a supportive environment rather than counting winners and losers. We expect policy makers to carefully consider these issues in formulating policy responses without political interference.

Public health is another important policy agenda. Medicare should continue but it needs to be reviewed to make it relevant, efficient and effective. Dental health needs to have its own scheme like Medicare. The quality of health services provided in emergency departments in hospitals has deteriorated as indicated by increased waiting times across the country, lack of correct diagnosis and treatment, in the ACT in particular. This is due to a combination of factors such as mismanagement of hospitals, lack of funding, shortage of doctors, etc. At the end of the day, community members expect elected government representatives to solve these public policy problems collaboratively with the help of experienced public servants, with inputs from industry and other stakeholders, without political interference, purely based on merit-based solutions. Such an approach would strengthen the public confidence in democratic governance and its institutions.

Another important consideration is level of taxation. High taxing policies of a government could lead to increased cost of living through increased rates, parking fees, electricity costs, oil prices, inflation, and stagnant wages are putting economic, emotional and mental pressure on families. At the same time, it is important to have sufficient revenue for the government to fulfil public expectations in providing high quality public good services such as health, education, transportation, aged care, etc. According to the latest survey by ABC (Australia Talks), top five problems for Australia are – household debt, cost of living, drug and alcohol abuse, water and ageing population. Interestingly, not far off list, 81% of the respondents identified “how government is run” as a major problem. There is a clear message to both sides of politics and the public service more broadly to act on these problems.

The Australian Public Service (APS) underpins the stability and continuity of Australia’s democracy. It is fundamental to the efficient functioning of the government. APS provides impartial advice to the elected government of the day. Given this, is the Australian Public Service (APS) fit for serving the country in the years to come? This was the key question addressed by an independent review of the APS, chaired by David Thodey. This report was submitted to the government on 20 September 2019. Although there have been several reviews of the APS in the past, we hope this time government will consider implementing the recommendations from the latest report. There is no point in spending significant time and money if we don’t follow up on recommendations from such an in-depth independent review of the APS.

### **Tenure of Elected Government**

Another issue to be considered is the tenure of elected government. We believe the current 3-year tenure is short and does not encourage long term vision or planning. It does not give the elected government enough time to implement its policies and for voters to see the impact of policy implementation before next elections. A tenure of five years for elected government will not only give the government time to invest in thorough deliberation and implementation of policies and for voters to see the results but also decrease the financial cost to the taxpayers. For example, in 15 years a 3-

year tenure would mean five elections while a 5-year tenure would mean three elections, thereby saving the tax payers cost of at least two elections.

### **Political Correctness and Other Issues**

According to ABC chair Ita Buttrose, political correctness in Australia has gone too far. She thinks we have become too sensitive to have an open public debate on contentious issues without anyone being offended. We note that poor behaviour is never acceptable and should not be described as political correctness.

Another issue is youth disengagement. The youth today is feeling disengaged and is lost in the digital world of virtual games. Youth needs to be reconnected with society through meaningful individual and communal activities.

The technological and digital advancement is taking away jobs and leaving people unemployed. There is an obvious need to find ways of reskilling people to make them employable. This should be addressed in a timely manner before it snowballs into something much bigger.

The current aged care policies are not sufficient and the aged care system is failing the most vulnerable. Exploitation, abuse and negligence of aging parents and older people can be addressed better. The Royal Commission is looking into this and we hope that these concerns will get addressed and provide dignity and security to the most vulnerable tax payers who are in the last stages of their life's journey.

### **PUBLIC DEBATE**

We did not discuss this topic separately as most of it had been covered in discussion on above topics.

We believe that public debates are a good way of engaging people. However, public debates should not divide people.

We also believe that news and media are influenced or controlled by those in power and not genuine. ABC radio/TV and SBS Radio/TV still have people's trust in their coverage and authenticity of news. We strongly recommend that media should be encouraged to be authentic, fair, timely, accurate and complete.