

Submission to Joint Senate Committee Enquiry- Nationhood,
National Identity and Democracy

I retired a few years ago after a lengthy career in the APS, and as a member of the Senior Executive Service. I worked in Canberra and ran offices in various States and managed several overseas projects, largely associated with government administration and democratic processes. I have a strong personal interest in democracy issues, particularly relating to Australia, but also internationally. Hence this submission to the Joint Senate Enquiry.

I am actively involved in our local U3A, where I co-facilitate a Current Affairs program, which regularly focus on democracy issues. Our group discussed the recently released Committee Report.

The views in this submission are my own, and do not reflect the opinions of the above mentioned group.

I have a major concern about the lack of trust in Australia's current democratic processes, and especially elected representatives of all three tiers of government, government administration, and across all major parties. I understand explicitly, that it is the role of the administration to implement the policies of the government of the day. I also have major concerns about the damage done to several organizations whose independence is clearly outlined in our Constitution, but whose role has been thwarted and influenced by political interference. This has led to perceptions of 'fouling' of independent progress assessment.

I think we need to find a mechanism or process where our community has access to information about progress against government priorities, and an ability to provide input to community priorities, without political interference.

Unfortunately, the concentration of media in Australia, and their deliberate affiliations, are readily manipulated to influence community thought. Criminal justice issues, and the way in which they are reported in the media, and seized upon by some politicians is the perfect exemplar of this corruption in our democratic processes. It has led to appalling and xenophobic discussion in public fora, and has clearly damaged our traditional

'fair go for all', multicultural society. Most criminologists will readily site this example as a fundamental missuse and abuse of information.

Our Defence Strategies, tend to be well developed, are long term, and tend to receive bipartisan support. However, more generally we seem to focus on 'short termism', plugging holes, and argument about contrary view.

As a country, we are crying out for:-

- A strategic Population Plan which supports sustainable communities, our multicultural society, as well as world population priorities
- A broad Environment Strategy which focuses on climate issues and especially long term energy needs
- A national (and international) Economic Strategy which reflects our role in an international economy, which in particular addresses inequity and inequality, and supports our local industries, and a long term workforce strategy
- More fundamental overt recognition and support of Our First Peoples.
- A Federal Corruption Commission, which must be supported by the judicial arm, and which focuses on both elected and appointed officials and particularly their involvement in financial and key delegated decision making, as well as electoral and democratic processes.

Whilst each of the above issues have a degree of complexity, developing a strategic response or approach is not that difficult. It fundamentally requires a recognition of the problems, and then a willingness to put the priority needs of our country ahead of short term political interests. A more robust approach to consulting with the Australian community, would be a good start.

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