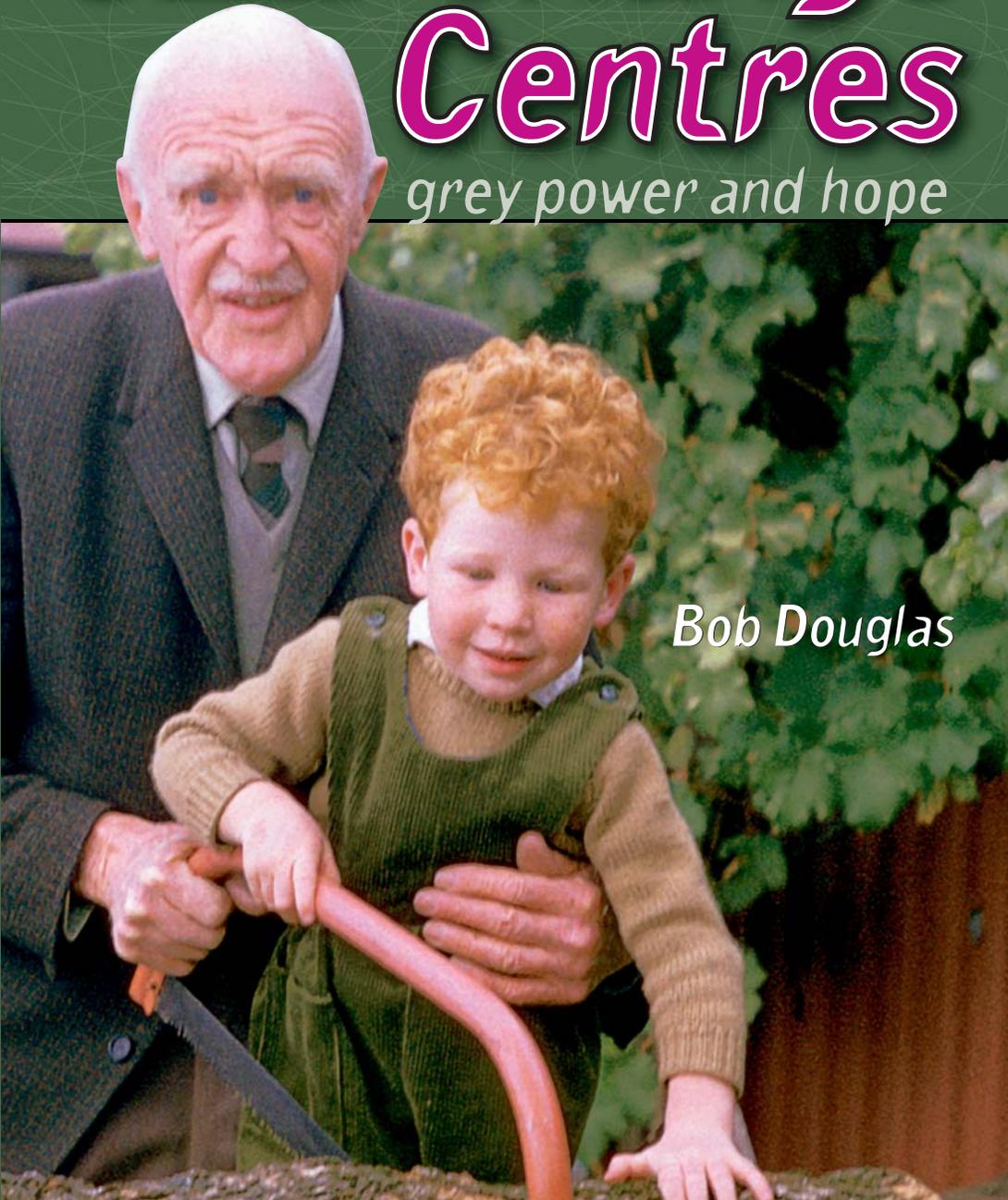


SEE-Change Centres

grey power and hope



Bob Douglas

“When the people lead with vision, governments will follow. Above all, the SEE-Change Centres will show the people of Australia that the path to sustainability is the greatest adventure for the twenty-first century and one we can all join — for our children and the planet.”

Deb Foskey MLA
Leader of the Greens in the ACT Legislative Assembly

“While I disagree with some of the comments made in this publication, particularly the ill-founded criticism of sensible Australian Government policies pertaining to national security, I fully endorse the need for forward thinking and constructive proposals on a range of issues such as climate change and eco-system destruction.”

Bill Stefaniak MLA Leader of the Opposition
ACT Legislative Assembly

“Our future depends on the stories we tell about ourselves. When we tell the wrong stories, as we are doing now, we do the wrong things, individually and collectively. What Bob Douglas proposes in this book, with passion and conviction, would help us to change these stories, and so create a better future.”

Richard Eckersley, Author of “Well and Good”
and Director, Australia 21 Ltd

SEE-Change Centres

grey power and hope

SEE-Change: Society Environment Economy

Bob Douglas



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Foreword

We have all come a long way since the days when ‘sustainability’ was viewed through a purely environmental prism. These days, we know that healthy and happy communities are ones that are socially, economically *and* environmentally sustainable. We know that the most liveable and sustainable communities are those that truly engage their members in their intellectual, cultural, sporting, social and economic life, and that give their members a real say in their own destinies.

SEE-Change Centres are places where individuals can come together to share ideas and information about the health of the planet and the health of their small patch on that planet. They are places where ideas can germinate and take root, where communities can have a say about the kind of communities of which they want to be a part, and the kind of communities they want to bequeath to the future.

Each of us has the capacity to do more in our personal lives, in our homes and in our workplaces, to consciously improve our own health and the health of the planet. Think how much more effective that effort would be if consolidated and multiplied and shared.

Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister ACT

Preface

Human civilization is on a knife edge, but the seriousness of our predicament is not being adequately considered by most Australians.

The stimulus to write this book came from my involvement with networks of thinkers and researchers who are exploring some of the social and environmental challenges facing Australia this century. There is a dissonance between the concerns I hear in these groups and the issues which command our daily attention in the media and through our political institutions.

Australia is drifting towards aimlessness and authoritarian rule as growing numbers of us shrug our shoulders and seem to be saying “I can’t change things so I will get on with enjoying what I can.”

Yet now is the time for us to take constructive action to mitigate and avoid the threats, not when runaway climate change and ecosystem destruction or the danger of nuclear conflagration become irreversible.

A hopeful future is still feasible but it depends above all on an activated citizenry confronting the reality of the threat to human tenure on the planet.

Older and younger Australians working together could lead the way to a safer and a fuller and richer future. SEE-Change Centres could provide a vehicle to assist in our cultural adaptation to the realities that now confront us.

Bob Douglas
July 2006

**For Bryony, Robert, Katherine, James, Angus,
Helen, Marni, Rebecca, Alison, Susan and Hamish.**

Chapter 1

Facing the future

Things are looking grim for the next generation if we stay on our present course. The seriousness of the human predicament is not yet widely acknowledged or understood in Australia. Much of the electorate has given up on the political process and many feel impotent about their ability to change things. This chapter suggests a strategy for Australians to regain some control of our future and respond to the evolving global social, economic and environmental crisis. We need now to embark on a process of cultural adaptation that challenges a number of entrenched values and beliefs. Change will be required in the domains of stewardship, economy, empowerment, purpose and solidarity.

Becoming a grandparent has been, for me, an unmitigated delight. With no effort on my part, eleven exciting new human additions to the planet have arrived during the past fifteen years, and they are my own flesh and blood! As the first of them blossom into adolescence, I find myself asking what kind of world they will inherit. They are my hope for the future, but the signs are that if human populations don't change direction drastically, the planet that my grandkids inherit is at serious risk within their lifetimes of becoming uninhabitable. But it doesn't need to be that way and this book is about how we can all play a part in changing the current climate of fear and denial to one of hope and opportunity.

Bad news abounds

Every day seems to bring new evidence that human activities are destroying the environment on which we depend for our sustenance.

The scientific community has firmly agreed for some time that the planet is warming and that at least part of the current warming cycle results from human induced carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions which raise the greenhouse gas level in the atmosphere. (Schellnhuber) The evidence shows that glaciers are retreating, the polar ice caps are melting, the sea is becoming more acid, coral reefs are bleaching and we are experiencing hotter summers, more hurricanes and extreme weather events. There is real concern that the North Atlantic Gulf-stream which plays a key role in climate regulation is slowing.

Chapter 1 Facing the future

The Siberian tundra is melting and releasing vast amounts of methane gas which will increase the greenhouse gas shield that traps heat in our atmosphere to still higher levels. Climate change represents the most serious challenge of our time.

In early 2005, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, (Millenium Assessment) an international collaborative group of about 1400 scientists from all countries in the world produced an assessment of the State of the world's ecosystems. The report reveals unprecedented changes in recent decades in response to human demands for food, fresh water, fibre and energy. It recognizes that the lives of billions of people have improved but that the ecosystems' ability to purify the air and water have been disastrously weakened in the process. As a result, a massive wave of species extinction is underway and will continue unless human attitudes and actions change very quickly.

In Australia, the productivity of vast areas of our agricultural land has been seriously weakened as a result of a rise in the water table and the leaching of salt into surface layers of the soil. We have known for a number of years that a likely cause of this is excessive land clearing combined with the fact that many of the crops which have replaced native vegetation are poorly suited to the natural Australian environment. But we have been extremely slow to respond to this (admittedly incomplete) understanding. It seems that short term economic health is more highly prized than the long term viability of our environment. (Goldie, Yencken)

In his book "Feed or feedback", Australian biologist Duncan Brown (Brown) points out that the continued growth of the global human population and its use of land to feed itself must soon come to an end if we are to retain the ecosystems of the planet. Brown wryly points out that if humanity becomes extinct it will be a world first. *"Extinction caused by a species that has the capacity consciously to modify the global environment so profoundly as to make it uninhabitable for itself, and actually going ahead and doing so, has all the ingredients of a particularly diabolical Irish joke"*.

The bad news doesn't end with the environment. The gap between rich and poor is increasing everywhere. Literally billions of humans now live in abject poverty and on the verge of starvation while in the West we are eating ourselves into an obesity epidemic and living in the lap of luxury.

On 11th of September 2001, a group of terrorists flew jetliners into the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington killing 3000 innocent people. The psychological impact of that event has been enormous and resulted in a declaration of a “war on terror” which has triggered a series of geopolitical events that keep reverberating around the world.

Bunkering down

Currently, Australia has a strong economy and a strong federal government which has seized on the terror threat, but is trivializing the more serious issues listed above. From neither the federal government nor its opposition is there evidence of leadership in dealing constructively with the future that our grandchildren will inherit.

We have followed America’s lead in distancing ourselves from the United Nations and in the ill-fated invasion of Iraq; we have treated legitimate refugees with appalling arrogance and inhumanity and we have acted irresponsibly on the issue of carbon emissions.

We are behaving as a nation as though it is a practical option to build a fortress around our own national good fortune. But that is not a feasible option in our globalised inter-dependent world. Our contributions to countries less fortunate than ourselves have dropped in recent years as a proportion of gross domestic product (about 0.26%) at a time when the global “benchmark” for affluent countries like ours is 0.7% and some European countries have committed more than 1%.

Our parliamentary representatives on both sides of politics at both state and federal; levels have recently, contrary to the unanimous advice of legal bodies, responded to the perceived terror threat by enacting repressive legislation that suspends civil liberties and habeas corpus, threatens freedom of speech, and moves the nation palpably in the direction of a police state.

The independence of the public service has been seriously compromised everywhere and the current Federal government has doggedly persevered with a radical economic reform agenda, ignoring the concerns of a convincing majority of its constituents about hard won worker entitlements and sacrificing job security and vital national infrastructure on the altar of economic growth.

Disenchantment with the political process is widespread and social surveys are revealing a disturbing degree of cynicism about our ability to control our destiny. For many there is a view that the situation is hopeless and there is nothing we can do about it.

Finding a positive path forward

But there is a great deal we can do and there is hope for our grandchildren's future if we can get together to change things. If we do nothing about the problems that now confront us, the coming generation appear to be facing an unpleasant future. But that is how things have always been. Serious problems arise and if we don't tackle them, things get worse. When we do tackle them constructively, things can change for the better.

Much of my time since retirement from the paid workforce has been spent working with a new Australian research and development body which is building networks of thinkers and researchers to explore solutions to some of the key problems facing Australia this century.

Freed of the institutional and time constraints of earning an income, retirement has been an exciting and liberating phase of my life. I have had the time to read widely and reflect on what we know of social, biological, physical and cultural aspects of human societies. I have also been privileged to work closely with groups of outstanding Australian thinkers and researchers from disciplines way outside my own field of expertise.

This experience has led me to the firm conviction that there are much safer paths for us to follow than the one on which Australia is currently embarked and that nothing short of a cultural revolution will move us in a safer direction.

In his book "Collapse", Jared Diamond (Diamond) argues that societies like Iceland which have survived serious environmental challenge in the past have been able to adjust their cultural norms to the emergent reality. Others, like the community living on Easter Island in the West Pacific, kept on with their culture and lifestyle unmodified until they had totally destroyed the ecosystems on which they depended for their existence. Their societies then collapsed into barbarism, starvation and chaos.

The parallel between what happened to Easter Island and what could happen to our finite planet as we progressively destroy our ecosystems is chilling.

Diamond has a chapter in his book devoted to Australia which he visits often. He points out that the Australian environment is the most fragile of the world's continents and that like the environment on other continents it is deteriorating at an exponential rate. This deterioration is a consequence both of human impact and climate change.

He expresses the view that more than any other first world citizens, Australians are beginning to think radically about the question “Which of our traditional core values can we retain and which ones no longer serve us well in today’s world?”



Fig 1. The remnant statues on barren de-forested Easter Island that was once the home of a flourishing human civilization — a stark reminder of the danger of ignoring the limits of our life support systems

Diamond writes: “Australia illustrates in extreme form the exponentially accelerating horse race in which the world now finds itself..... On the one hand, the development of environmental problems in Australia, as in the whole world, is accelerating exponentially. On the other hand, the development of public environmental concern and of private and governmental counter-measures, is also accelerating exponentially. Which horse will win the race?”

So the question we must ask ourselves is whether we can modify our culture in ways that will address the complex social and environmental threats before they overwhelm us. The World Values Survey (WVS) is a remarkable body of questionnaire data collected about the values and beliefs of the peoples of more than 85 societies around the world during the past 20 years. The survey examines human values in relation to politics, economics, religion, sexual behaviour, gender roles, family values, communal identities, civic engagement and ethical concerns as well as environmental protection, scientific progress, technological development and human happiness.

The WVS shows that different communities in different parts of the world at different times adopt very different communal value frames. Many commentators and people in the street have observed that beliefs, values and behaviours in Australian society have altered significantly in the recent past. We are now a more self centred, acquisitive, competitive, unequal and inhumane society than we were only two decades ago. Human culture is in a constant state of flux.

Adapting Australian culture to the emerging reality of our environmental predicament and the feasibility of long term human survival is a daunting challenge, but if the alternative is human extinction or a barbarous future for our children, most of us will want to understand how to begin the journey.

The evidence is pointing to the need for us to change significantly a number of the beliefs and values that are central to modern Australian culture.
(Raskin, Lowe, Boyden)

In case readers are alarmed at my assertion that we must now set about deliberately engineering change in some of our widely held cultural values, let's be clear that people have been engineering big changes in Australia's community values for many years. That is exactly what marketing is all about. Our values are being subtly manipulated every time we see a television advertisement or switch on the radio.

I will argue later in this book for the need to modify values that many prize highly and which are being reinforced daily by the media, our political leaders and many of our institutions. These include values and beliefs that relate to Stewardship, the Economy, Empowerment, Purpose and Solidarity.

We cannot expect the essential shifts to come first from those who are deeply enmeshed in building a career or from those who are currently benefiting from the power and prestige of the status quo. The rapid change in direction that is needed will emerge when a critical mass of activated individuals is seen and heard to be determined to turn our human ship away from the lethal icebergs that currently threaten us.

Older and younger Australians working together through SEE-Change Centres

To help the transition, I think Australia needs a new form of "grey power" that is linked to the energy and interests of the younger generation. And that we need to embark on the development of a new institution to enliven our democracy, returning real power to the people.

Older people are ideally placed to initiate the value shifts that are required. Many will be attracted to the task by their concern for their kids and their feeling that we have a responsibility to pass on to the next generation a liveable world. Many have the time and wisdom to work on what now needs to be done. For their part, it is likely that large numbers of the younger generation will also be pleased to join the oldies in tackling issues that now stand in the way of their aspiration for a good and satisfying life.

These two groups together have the time, motivation, energy, experience and the opportunity to move us to a brighter future.

To help to facilitate the emergence of this new coalition, we need to build a new institutional network of what Stephen Boyden described in his book "The Biology of Civilisation" as "Life Centres" in communities across the nation.

The team that is beginning to implement Stephen Boyden's idea is calling them SEE-Change Centres to draw attention to the fact that their main purpose is to promote change in sustainable directions in our Social, Economic and Environmental structures.

SEE-Change Centres could become the meeting points and repositories for community information, inspiration and action. They would help to build social cohesion and spread ideas about future possibilities for the community and for those living in it. They would promote discussion about the future and about ways in which ordinary citizens can participate in the way we develop it.

A strategy for managing Australia's threatened future

- 1 Suburban and community based SEE-Change Centres focussed on "Healthy people on a healthy planet"
- 2 Grey power linked to the energy, enthusiasm and motivation of the young.
- 3 Discovery of the power of the people to change things.
- 4 Australians telling our parliamentarians that we are ready to address constructively the new imperatives of a planet and a global human population that are under stress.
- 5 Modification of Australia's social, economic, environmental and political structures to assist us to develop an equitable and sustainable "ecological footprint".
- 6 New attention to the factors which determine human wellbeing, meaning and purpose, environmental stewardship, global solidarity and enjoyment of the benefits of community.

Chapter 1 *Facing the future*

In order to address the challenges of the 21st century, Australians will need to change the way we view our homes and properties, the way we think about the rest of the world, our approach to the economy and its role in our lives and our belief in our ability to change from the status quo. And we must discover new ways of helping people who are alienated or aimless to become connected, important and useful to the human world.

When we realize that we are not alone in our concerns at the likely consequences of the path on which we are travelling and that there is a path quite different that offers our grandchildren the possibility of an even better life than the one we have enjoyed, I am confident that Australians will choose it.

I am satisfied that there is such a path, but that it will require a substantial communal effort to chart it and push away the undergrowth that currently blocks our access to it.

Chapter 2

An evolving vision of hope

Life for our grandchildren could be even better than the life that we have been privileged to enjoy. In dealing constructively with the issues that are threatening our future we could attain a new high point in the way human society operates. To achieve that globally, we will need to stabilize population, redistribute resources, modify agricultural technology and change the way humans relate to the environment. Consensus is building about the kind of human world that is both achievable and sustainable and there are positive signs that leading young thinkers are ready to convert this vision to reality. Having a vision and a set of roadmaps is the first step to finding the pathway to a sustainable future.

At a seminar in Canberra recently, Ian Lowe, President of the Australian Conservation Foundation was discussing the need for an Australian change in cultural direction. When asked what would help Australians to change their cherished values and beliefs he replied. *“It is not good enough for those who have not yet got to the bar, to be told that the party is over. Those of us who believe that the present party is over for our human world and that we must radically change direction, need now to persuade our fellow citizens that by doing so, we can all enjoy a better party”.*

Can we envision a practically achievable better world? The short answer is yes.

Reputable scientists, futurists and modellers conclude that in spite of the seriousness and complexity of the problems which now confront us, there is still time to turn things around and achieve a richer, and more fulfilling global society.

The Great Transition

A recent report of the Global Scenario Group, “Great Transition” (Raskin) provides insights into these prospects for hope. Scenario modelling is an approach which explores the scope of the possible and the likely consequences of various policy responses to different types of risk. This group’s modelling work concludes that adaptive change and a bright future for human society remains feasible.

In the group's hopeful scenario, progressive elements of civil society, government, international organizations, and business, will forge a new sustainability paradigm, with an alternative vision of globalisation that is centred on quality of life, human solidarity, environmental resilience, and an informed and engaged citizenry. The "Great Transition" team developed four hypothetical models of the future, each based on different assumptions about the way humans will respond and adapt to the changing pressures on us. They took into account the state of the world as we now know it and the resource and population pressures that can be anticipated in coming decades.

The four hypothetical models represented different policy approaches that might be brought to bear on societal organization and governance. Three of the models were shown to result in profoundly undesirable global outcomes. They were "Market forces", "Policy reform" and "Fortress world". The fourth approach, which was titled "Great Transition" was built on the assumption that we will stabilize population, redistribute resources, modify agricultural technology and change the way humans relate to the environment. Under these circumstances, the modellers could conceive of a sustainable world that could also be a "better party" for everyone.

The changes envisaged in this scenario will involve large adjustments to the current operation of global and Australian society. Radical new thinking and innovation will be needed if we are to accomplish the Great Transition. But if the modellers are correct, nothing short of the Great Transition will be an acceptable outcome for our descendants. And there is no time to lose.

What might the new society look like?

The Society of the Great Transition was described in the Scenario Report as follows:

"Here is a civilization of unprecedented freedom, tolerance and decency. The pursuit of meaningful and fulfilling lives is a universal right, the bonds of human solidarity have never been stronger and an ecological sensibility infuses human values. Of course, this is not paradise. Real people live here. Conflict, discontent, mean-spiritedness and tragedy have not been abolished. But during the course of the twenty-first century the historic possibility was seized to redirect development toward a far more sustainable and liberated world.

The fabric of global society is woven with diverse communities. Some are abuzz with cultural experimentation, political intensity and technical innovation. Others are slow-paced bastions of traditional culture, direct democracy and small-is-beautiful technology. A few combine reflection, craft skill and high aesthetics into a kind of "sophisticated simplicity," reminiscent of the Zen art

of antiquity. Most are admixtures of countless subcultures. The plurality of ways is deeply cherished for the choice it offers individuals and the richness it offers social life.

The old polarizing dualities — cosmopolitanism versus parochialism, globalism versus nationalism and top-down versus bottom-up — have been transcended. Instead, people enjoy multiple levels of affiliation and loyalty to family, community, regional and planetary society. Global communication networks connect the four corners of the world, and translation devices ease language barriers. A global culture of peace and mutual respect anchors social harmony. The World Union (née the United Nations) unifies regions in a global federation for co-operation, security and sustainability. Governance is conducted through a decentralized web of government, civil society and business nodes, often acting in partnership.

Social and environmental goals at each scale define the “boundary conditions” for those nested within it. Subject to these constraints, the freedom to fashion local solutions is considerable — but conditional. Human rights and the rights of other governance units must be respected. While sophisticated conflict resolution processes limit conflict, the World Union’s peace force is called on occasion to quell aggression and human rights abuse.

Preferred lifestyles combine material sufficiency and qualitative fulfillment. Conspicuous consumption and glitter are viewed as a vulgar throwback to an earlier era. The pursuit of the well-lived life turns to the quality of existence — creativity, ideas, culture, human relationships and a harmonious relationship with nature. Family life evolves into new extended relationships as population ages and the number of children decreases. People are enriched by voluntary activities that are socially useful and personally rewarding. The distribution of income is maintained within rather narrow bounds. Typically, the income of the wealthiest 20 percent is about two or three times the income of the poorest 20 percent. A minimum guaranteed income provides a comfortable but very basic standard of living. Community spirit is reinforced by heavy reliance on locally produced products, indigenous natural resources and environmental pride.

The economy is understood as the means to these ends, rather than an end in itself. Competitive markets promote production and allocation efficiency. But they are highly fettered markets tamed to conform to non-market goals. The polluter pay principle is applied universally, expressed through eco-taxes, tradable permits, standards and subsidies. Sustainable business practices are the norm, monitored and enforced by a vigilant public. Investment decisions weigh carefully the costs of indirect and long-term ecological impacts. Technology innovation is stimulated by price signals, public preferences, incentives and the creative impulse. The industrial

Chapter 2 An evolving vision of hope

ecology of the new economy is virtually a closed loop of recycled and re-used material, rather than the old throwaway society. Some “zero growth” communities opt to maximize time for non-market activities. Others have growing economies, but with throughputs limited by sustainability criteria. In the formal economy, robotic production systems liberate people from repetitive, non-creative work. Most everywhere a labor-intensive craft economy rises alongside the high technology base. For the producer, it offers an outlet for creative expression; for the consumer, a breathtaking array of esthetic and useful goods; for all, a rich and diverse world.

Long commutes are a thing of the past. Integrated settlements place home, work, shops and leisure activity in convenient proximity. The town-within-the-city balances human scale community with cosmopolitan cultural intensity. Rural life offers a more serene and bucolic alternative, with digital links maintaining an immediate sense of connectedness to wider communities. Private automobiles are compact and pollution free. They are used in niche situations where walking, biking and public transport options are not available. Larger vehicles are leased for special occasions and touring. Advanced mass transportation systems link communities to local hubs, and those hubs to one another and to large cities.

The transition to a solar economy is complete. Solar cells, wind, modern biomass and flowing water generate power and heat buildings. Solar energy is converted to hydrogen, and used, along with direct electricity, for transportation. Advanced bio-technology is used cautiously for raw materials, agriculture and medicine. Clean production practices have eliminated toxic pollution. Ecological farming makes use of high inputs of knowledge, and low inputs of chemicals to keep yields high and sustainable. Population stabilization, low-meat diets and compact settlements reduce the human footprint, sparing land for nature. Global warming is abating as greenhouse gas emissions return to pre-industrial levels. Ecosystems are restored and endangered species are returning, although scars remain as reminders of past heedlessness.

This is not the end of history. In some sense, it is the beginning. For at last, people live with a deep awareness of their connection to one another, future generations and the web of life.”

Maps of inspiration

Two documents that are reproduced as appendixes to this book, help to spell out the issues to which Australians will need to pay attention as we move towards the Great Transition. They are the Earth Charter and The Wellbeing Manifesto. The Earth Charter has been drafted by international panels of experts and citizen groups and provides us with a vision of a just and sustainable world. The Wellbeing Manifesto has recently been prepared by

a group of individuals from the Australia Institute and is an Australian modification of a vision document developed originally in the United Kingdom. The Australian version of the Wellbeing Manifesto has since its release in 2005 been endorsed by several thousand Australians.

These two documents provide us with complementary visions. The Charter paints the broad planetary picture while the Manifesto deals with the kind of society that we might aspire to in Australia. Together they point to values that could help us to achieve The Great Transition.

In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev while still President of the USSR, published in the Western Press, a remarkable book entitled “Perestroika” (Gorbachev). This Russian word means “restructuring”. From his position as the political leader of The Soviet Republic, Gorbachev proposed a radical change of direction both in domestic and foreign policy. He advocated a system of openness which was called “glasnost.” Two years later the Berlin Wall came down and by 1991, the former USSR fragmented into its component parts and Gorbachev resigned as the democratic forces he had set in train, took charge.

Now a citizen in democratic Russia, Gorbachev, as Chair of Green Cross International, continues to write and advocate for a positive future for the world. He wrote the foreword to the 2005 State of the World Report prepared by the Worldwatch Institute, where he called for a “global glasnost” — openness, transparency and public dialogue — on the part of nations, governments and citizens, to build consensus around three interrelated challenges:

- the challenge of security including the risks associated with weapons of mass destruction and terrorism,
- the challenge of poverty and under-development
- the challenge of environmental sustainability

Gorbachev has in recent years been one of the architects of The Earth Charter www.earthcharter.org which has now been endorsed by more than 8000 organisations representing more than 100 million people around the world. (Earth Charter). It is the product of a decade long, worldwide, cross-cultural conversation about common global goals and shared values. The drafting of the Earth Charter involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever carried out in connection with an international document. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from all regions of the world, different cultures, and diverse sectors of society participated. The charter has been shaped by both experts and representatives of grassroots communities. It is a people’s treaty that sets forth an important expression of the hopes and aspirations of the emerging global civil society.

What The Earth Charter says

The charter is reproduced as Appendix 1 to this book. It is based on four principles:

- respect and care for the community of life
- ecological integrity
- social and economic justice
- democracy, non-violence and peace

The preamble says that humans must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent range of cultures and life forms, we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. It states that the resilience of the community of life and the wellbeing of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters and clean air. It recognizes that an unprecedented rise in human population has now overburdened ecological and social systems and that the foundations of global security are threatened. It calls for a sense of universal responsibility in which humans everywhere share responsibility for the present and future wellbeing of the human family and of the larger living world.

The charter then spells out interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments and trans-national institutions should be guided and assessed.

The charter calls for:

- human respect for the earth, and the community of life
- participatory and peaceful democracy
- conservation
- preservation of biological diversity
- sustainable patterns of consumption, production and reproduction
- enhanced understanding of ecological sustainability
- eradication of poverty
- promotion of human development
- affirmation of gender equality and equity
- entitlement of all to a natural and social environment that is supportive of human dignity, bodily health and spiritual wellbeing with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities
- strengthening of democratic institutions
- education for sustainable living

- respect and consideration for all living things
- promotion of a culture of tolerance non-violence and peace

The closing section of the charter draws attention to the need for a global human change of mind and heart. It suggests that we need imaginatively to develop and apply this vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally and globally. It calls for a deepening and expansion of the global dialogue that generated the charter, recognizing that we still have much to learn from an ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

The charter is important because it spells out the values which will guide a new and sustainable global human existence. It has been crafted by people who understand human politics as well as the economy of the natural world and it offers a realistic vision towards which we can strive. Without such a vision we can be very quickly seduced into thinking that the way we do things now is the only way things should be done. As I show later in the book, the way we do things now is no longer acceptable.

The Wellbeing Manifesto

The preamble to the Australian Wellbeing Manifesto asserts that there has been a decline in Australian wellbeing during the time that governments have placed relatively narrow economic interests as the centrepiece of their activities. It draws attention to widespread community concern that the values of individualism, selfishness, materialism and competition are driving out the more desirable values of trust, self-restraint, mutual respect and generosity. It states that many Australians feel alienated from the political process and that the main political parties seem to only think of progress in material terms. It highlights the challenge of our age as building a new politics that is committed, above all, to improving wellbeing.

The body of the manifesto states that happiness is not a goal but a consequence of how we live, that comes from being content with what we have. It says that our wellbeing is shaped by our genes, our upbringing, our personal circumstances and choices and the social conditions in which we live. Our collective wellbeing is improved if we live as a peaceful, flourishing, supportive society. Promoting wellbeing, it says, should be a public as well as a personal task. The manifesto states that wellbeing is about having meaning in our lives — developing as a person and feeling that our lives are fulfilling and worthwhile. It comes from having a web of relationships and interests.

Chapter 2 *An evolving vision of hope*

Family and friends, work, leisure activities and spiritual beliefs can all increase our wellbeing. The intimacy, sense of belonging and support offered by close personal relationships are of greatest value. Material comforts are essential up to a point and there is no doubt that poverty remains a serious problem in Australia. But the manifesto makes clear that for most Australians, more money would add little to their wellbeing.

The nine chapters of the manifesto identify specific issues that need attention in Australia under the following headings:

- Provide fulfilling work
- Reclaim our time
- Protect the environment
- Rethink education
- Invest in early childhood
- Discourage materialism and promote responsible advertising
- Build communities and relationships
- A fairer society
- Measure what matters

Like the Earth Charter, the manifesto is a visionary document. Specifically, it challenges the current political wisdom that human wellbeing equates to economic wellbeing. It supports the Earth Charter in pointing to the importance of social capital and the environment and downplaying materialism and dependency on “things”.

The closing paragraph asserts that the changes advocated would inspire healthier communities, stronger personal relationships, happier workplaces, a better balance between work and time, less commercialization and greater environmental protection. The manifesto concludes that a flourishing society is not a futile hope and suggests that refurbishment of Australian democracy would offer people the opportunity to shed their cynicism and commit themselves to creating a better future.

The Australian Future Directions Forum

Early in 2006, a group of 90 young leaders and decision makers met for three days in Victoria in The Australian Future Directions Forum to develop their vision for the future and how it might be accomplished. The participants came from business, politics, academia, religious, union and community groups, the media, indigenous organizations, the public service, creative industries, sport, law enforcement and the military.

The resulting document which emerged from their deliberations www.afdf.net.au contains a series of policy proposals to tackle what the group perceived to be priority problems and build future Australian prosperity, stability and social cohesion.

The group stated that to create a better nation over the next 25 years, Australia must resolve questions of national identity, secure our place in the world, invest in our people, achieve economic and environmental sustainability, and build a more cohesive society. This they said will require principled leadership focused on the long-term challenges facing the nation.

Ending the disadvantage of aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was the agreed top priority of the Forum.

The group said : *“To go forward together in an increasingly complex world, we need to re-evaluate the kind of Australia we want. We need to answer the big questions about who we are and where we see ourselves as a nation. In acknowledging the origins of our national institutions and system of governance, we must consider the suitability of our current constitution and governance arrangements and whether they will be an adequate framework for advancing our future aspirations”*.

The 25 page document placed a strong emphasis on sustainability, the environment, social cohesion and indigenous equity and proposed specific amendments to national policy as it relates to economics, the environment, education, health, leadership and governance, national values and identity, communities, work and families and the nation’s relationship to the rest of the world. There was also an important section on Australia’s creative industries as well as the centrepiece of the document which focussed on the urgent need to redress indigenous disadvantage.

This statement brings a breath of young fresh air and excitement to future thinking that has not been particularly evident on the Australian horizon recently. That it was the consensus product of a large group of young leaders mostly under the age of 40 who currently occupy positions of influence in all segments of Australian life, makes it a document that needs to be widely read and discussed. The various segments of the report would make ideal discussion documents for consideration by groups of concerned citizens of all ages in SEE-Change Centres. Yet most Australians have probably not heard of it.

Imagining Australia

Another source of interesting ideas from young thinkers came in 2004, from four Australians, Macgregor Duncan, Andrew Leigh, David Madden and Peter Tynan who published a book entitled “Imagining Australia; Ideas for our Future” (Duncan). The authors present a wide range of policy ideas to remedy what they perceive as a loss of direction by our nation in recent decades. Their ideas range widely across the landscape identified in the two vision documents above. Many of them are controversial and ambitious, some might say, politically “courageous”. They nevertheless provide fuel for discussion and activism amongst those who are seeking a just and sustainable Australia. The authors come from both sides of Australian politics and have wide international experience.

The authors believe the current predicament of Australia and the world call for openness, fearlessness and clear-headedness as we plan the next phase of what they refer to as “The Australian project”.

Specifically, “Imagining Australia” discusses:

- Australia’s national identity
- The need to refurbish elements of our democracy
- Our need to recapture our zeal for nation building that is part of our heritage
- Desirable changes in social policy
- Issues relating to growth and prosperity
- Our role as global citizens

Each chapter contains many imaginative suggestions for improving things, building from the central premise that Australia’s current national trajectory is both un-exciting and unsustainable. Their main suggestions are summarised in Appendix 3.

The authors have provided useful starting points for vigorous engagement and debate, enabling Australians to take stock and rethink our global citizenship.

I should state that I firmly disagree with these writers’ glowing assessment of the current global economic system and believe that it needs radical refurbishment along with many other of our Australian institutions which their suggestions address. The authors clearly accept, the need for Australia to address the trilogy of global challenges identified by Gorbachev: security, sustainability and equity.

Ingredients for a better party

The four documents discussed here, begin to hint at new pathways for humanity in general and Australia in particular. They offer a vision for a better party and a better world.

Having a vision is only the first step. The pathway to the vision is only dimly visible at present. It is obscured by the undergrowth of our current values frame and by a very sophisticated social and political infrastructure that vigorously beckons us all down the huge well used highway named “the status quo”.

Returning to Ian Lowe’s analogy with which this chapter began, the guests who have not yet reached the bar have at present, little say in how the new party will be organized. We need to bring them into the planning process and to listen to what they have to say. We also need to understand better, the hurdles which stand in the way of Australians implementing the vision that these documents collectively describe. But before describing these hurdles and impediments, I will elaborate on what I believe to be the need for a new institutional structure in our society and what we have begun to do about it in Canberra.

Chapter 3

A SEE-Change movement

The development of a SEE-Change movement, with SEE-Change Centres developing in suburbs and small communities, could provide a new vehicle for cross generational exploration of the future. These could become a venue for education, debate and action, assisting people in the local area to take greater control of their future and explore options in a safe and non adversarial environment. These centres could help to rebuild lost social cohesion and offer a new opportunity for people to interact with their neighbours as well as experts on issues relating to the environment, health and wellbeing. The centres might be located in schools, shopping centres, hotels, clubs, church halls, or other religious premises. They would be staffed by volunteers and could provide a fresh new focus on democracy and the political process. Experimentation with this idea has begun, in Canberra, building on the concern, talent and cross generational interest of older Australians and the enthusiasm and vibrancy of concerned young people. SEE-Change Centres will explore Australian life in all its dimensions.

Australians must now constructively engage with a constellation of serious global problems that are being studiously ignored by our political leaders. If we are to do that we will need also to address as a matter of urgency, a domestic malaise that has descended on Australian society in recent years. The malaise consists of a deep cynicism about politics and democracy, a decline in social cohesion and uncertainty about who we are and where we are heading as a nation.

The SEE-Change Centre concept.

SEE-Change Centres are based on the ideas advanced by Stephen Boyden in his book “The Biology of Civilisation”. He used the term “Life Centres”. Here is what Boyden said in his book about Life Centres.

“In my view, the chief hope for effective cultural reform lies in the growing minority of people in society who already share a deep interest in, and respect for nature and who care about the health and wellbeing of humans and the natural environment. I call them “concerned and interested persons”, or simply “CIP’s” These people, scattered as they are in all walks of life, have a seminal

role to play in the transformation of our society from its present inequitable and ecologically unsustainable state to one that is in tune with nature and which satisfies the health needs of all sections of the human population.

For the cultural reform process to gain the necessary momentum I suggest we need to introduce a new element into the system — in the form of a novel kind of public institution that focuses on the processes of life and the health and wellbeing of people and the natural environment. For the purposes of this discussion I will call these new institutions “Life Centres”. I envisage networks of Life Centres across the nation, somewhat reminiscent of the Mechanics Institutes that sprang up in townships all over Australia in the 19th century. Their overriding theme can be encapsulated in the phrase “healthy people on a healthy planet” — reflecting the reality that human wellbeing is ultimately entirely dependent on the health of the natural environment. They will be focal points for concerned and interested people to gather together to learn, exchange ideas about the future, celebrate their enthusiasm for life and communicate what they learn and think to others.

Broadly speaking, Life Centres will have two important social functions. First they will aim to improve understanding across the community of the processes of life, the human place in the living world, and the major ecological and health issues facing society today. Second, they will stir up interest in practical measures that can be taken by individuals, businesses, local authorities and national governments to achieve ecological sustainability, health and equity. I suggest that these functions will be achieved through the following three main kinds of activity.

First and foremost Life Centres will play a direct educational role. . . . Relevant information, systematically extracted from the natural sciences and other sources, will be put together in a form that is readily understandable to the interested members of the public — free from academic jargon and centred on biological and social themes rather than conventional academic disciplines. It will be communicated in interactive workshops and courses, as well as in displays and publications and on the Internet. Life Centres will thus form a dynamic bridge between the scientific community and interested members of the public on matters relating to the wellbeing of people and of the natural environment.

Second, Life Centres will provide much-needed public forums for informed discussion and debate about the future of society and about the practical meaning, for individuals, families and societies as a whole of the current scientific understanding of ecological and health issues. . . . topics are likely to range from actions that can be taken by individuals and families, like changes in lifestyle and retrofitting homes to reduce fossil fuel use, through to changes that need to be made

at the societal level — for example in economic arrangements, electricity generation, transport systems, aspects of land-use and education.

Third, Life Centres will provide a clearinghouse for information on important progress that is being made, locally and globally in the shift towards a bio-sensitive society...

I picture Life Centres as also having an important social dimension. They will be a source of enjoyment for persons of all ages offering a convivial and pleasing setting for creative learning, social interaction, personal involvement and communication. They will encourage musical events, artists, displays, theatrical performances, photographic exhibitions and other activities that are in keeping with their aims and philosophy.

Life Centres will fill a serious gap in the institutional structure of our society, by providing a new framework for constructive collaboration in the environment and health arena between community groups, scientific and professional bodies, businesses, schools, government departments and various other organizations. Their existence will reflect people's appreciation of the fact that we are living beings, products and parts of nature, and totally dependent for our health and survival on the processes of life which underpin everything that goes on in our own personal lives and in societies."

“Healthy people on a healthy planet”

I think Boyden's idea is a good one and so did a group of 34 community leaders who met in Canberra in June 2006 to consider it. The overview of their discussion is incorporated as Appendix 4 of this book. The steering group which grew out of the roundtable and is carrying forward it's recommendations decided that the term “SEE-Change Centres” better conveys their purpose. The SEE stands for Social, Economic and Environmental. SEE-Change will be the term that is used in the remainder of this book. It is a term that is synonymous with Life Centres and the roundtable group firmly endorsed Boyden's central ideas for them.

SEE-Change Centres offer a framework within which we could take greater control of our future and develop a new sense of communal meaning and purpose. Boyden used the phrase “healthy people on a healthy planet” to sum up their purpose. I think there is an urgency about all of this and that a SEE-Change movement could quickly become the vehicle through which ordinary Australians could claw back lost ground in our democracy and regain control of our future. They will offer an alternative view of the world to that which emanates from the shopping mall and the TV commercials and could

enable young and old together to explore ways of building from within our communities, towards a vibrant and sustainable future Australia.

Box 3.1 Purposes and Programs for the proposed SEE-Change (Centre) Movement

The purpose of the SEE-Change Movement is to develop in every Australian community, a vibrant new force for empowerment, hope, support, understanding and vigorous, concerted community action on issues which challenge Australia's future.

“Healthy people on a healthy planet” is the long term goal

The issues which challenge us and which will help to set the agenda for activities in the centres include:

- responding to climate change,
- environmental rehabilitation,
- energy use,
- water supplies
- opportunities for enhancing the wellbeing of the whole community including especially the young
- the development of trust and confidence in our governance,
- desirable aspects of our economy,
- opportunities for discussion of life's meaning and purpose
- the refurbishment of our cities, suburbs, homes and lifestyles towards sustainability
- the way we relate to other countries and
- ways Australians can contribute to global peace

SEE-Change Centres will celebrate the good things about Australian life, take steps to promote communal wellbeing and collaboration and help to build community consensus around issues relating to our collective future.

Each local SEE-Change Centre will be responsive to the needs, aspirations and opportunities of the local community, but be able to make use of programs and resources made available through a developing SEE-Change Movement.

Each Centre will develop educational and social activities and policy forum discussions to promote broad understanding and ownership across all age groups of the community.

A desirable feature of the Movement will be its ability to capture a sense of Australian egalitarianism and cross-generational sharing of the good things of life, involving both young and old in a shared vision of Australia's future place in the world.

How might SEE-Change Centres develop?

SEE-Change Centres could begin in a variety of venues. They might begin in disused school premises, a vacant shop in a suburban shopping centre, as part of a social or sporting club; in a church or religious hall or in the local library or community centre. Volunteers would form a committee to identify a location and an image for the centre within the local community.

Open communication should be a feature of the Centre and it should become a venue that anyone from the community can visit when it is open and when volunteers are on hand to staff it. Static displays, debates, videos, musical events, community bush walks and expeditions, reading groups and celebrations of “life” should be the core business of the Centre which should depend mainly upon voluntarism, but might meet its expenses through development of a small family subscription. It should not however become an exclusive club, but be open to anyone in the community.

Box 3.2 Getting a SEE-Change Centre started

1. Someone must take the initiative to form a small subgroup of volunteers interested in the concept. That could be the reader of this book talking about the idea with two or three close friends who share the reader’s concern that things need to change.
2. The group should meet two or three times to discuss venue, existing bodies in the area, possible committee members and issues of interest to the community that could be used to build interest in the SEE-Change Centre idea.
3. Formal consultation should take place with local school principals, local government agencies, neighbourhood watch, politicians from all parties, local progress associations and service groups to identify key opinion leaders who might be considered as possible members of the committee. Local businesses in the area should be invited to participate in the planning process
4. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that a group of high school students and university students from the area are involved in early events and in the development of the committee.
5. The first planned major event for the SEE-Change Centre needs to be a winner. It should be an enjoyable social event that tackles a serious issue at the same time. For instance, it might be a bush dance that features a debate by high school students about what Australia should be doing on global warming. Or it could be an art show with entries from school

children focused on the issue of global solidarity with people in poorer countries. Or it might be a jazz concert with two or three people speaking about childhood obesity or discussing ways Australia could respond to the fact that oil is running out.

6. All SEE-Change Centre events should be open to the whole community for a modest entrance fee and the community surrounding the school where the event is held should be letterboxed at least two weeks before the opening event to which local politicians would be invited.
7. At the opening event, it would be desirable to announce plans for formation of a management committee, the development of a constitution and the closing date for nominations to the first management committee with plans for a ballot by people attending the election meeting, who can live in the area
8. The interim management committee should have planned two or three weekly events to follow the opening while the management committee is elected and gets to develop the centre's capacity to take responsibility for the activities.

The new movement needs to work towards a vision for the future of Australia and the world. That vision should be informed by community views as well as by those expressed in a growing array of scientific writings and the appendices of this book.

In order to provide coherence, SEE-Change Centres should be networked through the Internet and a SEE-Change Movement would be developed, building linkages with other SEE-Change Centres and a growing range of other groups and activities in Australia that are focussing on issues of sustainability and social justice.

These centres would not be politically aligned but should be in active communication with politicians from all sides. Politicians will quickly recognise their need to communicate with this vital new force.

At the beginning, the centre would probably function under the leadership of a small volunteer local committee which would meet weekly to plan day, night and weekend activities. They would help to develop membership within the local community through word-of-mouth and through the conduct of interesting events.

Once it is formally launched, a simple model constitution would see volunteers elected by members of the Centre to a committee that would manage the centre for perhaps two years. While older people might take the first steps in initiating the centre, the board, when it becomes a constitutional entity, should include people of all ages and from various stations of life who live in the local area.

Voluntary effort would drive the centre but it might run fund-raising events to help to build its profile and respond to local community interests and needs.

Local members of Parliament, councillors, business leaders, church and cultural groups, service clubs and community opinion leaders should be invited to participate in major events. Above all, SEE-Change Centres should become the symbol of a fresh approach to democracy, empowering young and old to explore the future without fear.

Thus, SEE-Change Centres would provide the meeting ground between generations, the intellectual and social impetus for building community support and would become active in evolving national and global agendas for a just and sustainable future.

It is important to recognize that although the new centres will be somewhat different from anything that exists at present, they will be able to draw upon expertise, skills and interests that have been developed extensively in Australia in recent years in governments, universities, conservation groups and special-interest groups. The sustainability movement is alive and well. Many people are active in it. The effect of developing SEE-Change Centres will be to bring the expertise and understanding that now exists in these expert and special-interest groups, to the attention of a much wider proportion of the Australian community. The roundtable discussion referred to in appendix 4, saw the need to build very active and dynamic linkages between the new SEE-Change Centres and the various networks and groups that are already out there.

The principal justification for SEE-Change Centres

I agree firmly with Stephen Boyden, Jared Diamond and Ian Lowe who I have quoted earlier. If we are to secure a positive future for our grandchildren, we must engineer quickly a cultural shift in Australia that leads to new values that are driven not by our currently flawed economic model, but by the principles embedded in the Earth Charter and The Wellbeing Manifesto.

Chapter 3 A SEE-Change movement

SEE-Change Centres will assist the process of empowering ordinary Australians and enlivening our jaded and stale democracy. Until our political leaders hear from their constituents that we are ready to face the realities of the future, they will not have the courage to build into our economy and our social structure the essential modifications that will alter our presently unsustainable trajectory. I think SEE-Change Centres will create the space for Australian communities to explore constructively together the serious challenges that lie ahead.

Business as usual is not an option. We are travelling in dangerous and un-charted waters and a central element of the problem is the way the global economy works. To help get the movement under way, I think we need to engage “Grey Power”.

Chapter 4

Grey power at the leading edge

Concerned and interested older people are ideally placed to initiate the essential change in Australian culture that could usher in a new era of hope. Through the SEE-Change Centres they could build productive and strategic links with the younger generation whose future is at stake. Freed of the constraints imposed by earning a living and bringing up a family, retirement offers older people opportunities to contribute to social and cultural change that are denied to those more constrained by being in the paid workforce. Their wisdom, experience, networks and skills will help to provide the engine that will rapidly kick start the SEE-Change Movement.

In June 2002 the proportion of the Australian population aged 65 years and over was 13%. If present trends continue, by 2050 the proportion will double to more than a quarter of the population. Profound lengthening of the human lifespan is a relatively recent phenomenon. With retirement from the workforce in the 60s, many thousands of Australians are moving into decades of good health, intellectual vigour and a capacity to choose their lifestyle, secure in the knowledge that they no longer need to prove anything to anyone or be concerned at what the boss might think or do.

Many of the current generation of older people are worried about the world that the coming generation will inherit. They are in a strong position to do something about it. Grey power is real and politicians realise it more than many of the older generation themselves. This chapter explores ways in which grey power in Australia could begin to change the political climate from one of denial to one of hope.

The wisdom of age and experience

Those in their seventh decade lived through the second world war, the Marshall plan, the Keynesian welfare state, the fear of nuclear annihilation, the obsession with communism, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the rise and fall of Gough Whitlam, the dismantling and restructuring of Medicare, the floating of the Australian dollar, the “recession we had to have”, the advent of television and the Internet, the fall of the Berlin Wall and more recently disastrous events in the Middle East.

The older generation also have a strong collective understanding of what works and what doesn't in Australian society. They have held a wide range of positions in the workforce, in childrearing, education, health-care, industry, commerce, community service, policy development and senior administration. This spectrum of experience provides them with perspective and a form of wisdom that the younger generation can strive to understand but cannot share.

The fact that retirees are no longer in paid employment does not preclude them from influencing the way society is developed. On the contrary, lack of dependence on a salary liberates them now to apply their wisdom and experience to the challenges which confront their descendants.

Opportunity to explore beyond previous expertise

Being free of the constraint imposed by earning an income and to holding a position in a company, organization or institution, frees us from what is sometimes referred to as a “silo mentality” and offers us the opportunity to apply our intellect and our experiences to new fields of endeavour and to new issues and problems.

Modern society requires specialisation and focus, so most employees tend to become expert at something in order to fill a niche or responsibility that is required by their employer. The danger is that many believe that their specialization is their only ability and that they see others as more expert in everything else. But society needs generalists who can see the way specialties fit into the whole. Corporations pay executive managers huge incomes for this.

Released from the silos of our employment, retirement offers the opportunity to change specialty or become generalists. I have found exhilaration in retirement in the freedom to exercise my mind in fields that I have not previously thought or read about.

Retired people are well placed to shine the light of their previous expertise on new fields of thought and action. And to contribute their generalist capacity in examining issues with which society as a whole is grappling.

The benefit of independence

Now retired from my paid academic post, I realize how constrained I was by the system which now applies even to academic institutions such as the Australian National University.

As head of a new and innovative research centre whose role was to research fearlessly the Australian health-care system, I was nevertheless politically constrained by the availability of funds. When I and my fellow academics

testified to a Senate inquiry about what we believed to be a retrograde development within the health insurance system, the health minister's office warned me that I was running the risk of losing the centre's core grant.

Loyalty to your employer or your paymaster is a central tenet of employment both in the public service and in commerce. It takes great courage to be a whistle blower or even to speak out about things that you believe could be done better. For young people at the early phase of their employment, toeing the party line is essential to progress in the system. Economic security can be severely threatened for those who act or think independently about the way the world works or should work.

Retirees have the privilege of thinking and doing absolutely what they feel is right and important. And, for many of them, nothing is more important than the future for their children and grandchildren.

By world standards older Australians have had a pretty good life. But the storm clouds are gathering and I suggest that we now have a responsibility to exercise the benefits of our independence from the system which is contributing to, and increasing these clouds.

The power of numbers

A paradigm changes when it becomes clear to a large number of people that it no longer serves the purpose for which it evolved. Those committed to changing the world will do so most effectively by discussing the case for change with strategically located colleagues, peers and opinion leaders.

In his book "The tipping point; how little things can make a big difference", Malcolm Gladwell (Gladwell) explores the fascinating social dynamics that cause rapid social change.

He engagingly tells the story of Paul Revere's midnight ride from Boston to Lexington on April 18th 1775 to mobilize a civilian army to resist the imminent British invasion. By making strategic contact with community leaders across the countryside, in a few hours, he began a word of mouth "epidemic" that spread like wildfire. By the morning of the 19th of April, the British met, to their utter astonishment, an organized and fierce resistance. Thus was born the war of the American Revolution.

Propagating an epidemic of new ideas and values clearly requires a minimum number of committed people. Gladwell says that the effective propagation of new ideas requires "connectors", "mavens" and "salespersons" to help move the idea around the community. Connectors, he says are people who know and

relate to lots of other people. Mavens are people who accumulate knowledge and understand its meaning and application. Salespersons are specialists in passing new ideas on to others. Paul Revere was a connector who was able to tap into networks that included mavens and sales persons who quickly got to work and mobilized their communities. Individuals who possess all three attributes are rare. But when a group of people who collectively possess all three get together on a project to which they are committed, they can rapidly effect a change in community attitudes.

Once an idea or concept has “tipped” into an idea epidemic, the numbers can very rapidly prompt a societal turning point.

In every Australian community there are many older people who are natural connectors, mavens and salespeople. Many are concerned about the issues I am discussing in this book. The task is to find ways of bringing them together so that their numbers can make a difference.

Having time to do what is important

One of the luxuries of retirement is the opportunity to explore new ideas, new activities, and different ways of using one’s time. Having time to think about and apply to one’s special interests and projects is a privilege which many of us hankered for throughout our working lives.

Many retirees become so busy with new interests that they wonder how they ever had time to go to work. The purpose in writing this book is to encourage these busy people to commit some of their time and talent to activities that will build hope for their children and grandchildren and to persuade them that such activity is necessary and could be very satisfying.

Developing the momentum for a culture shift of the kind I am discussing in this book will require the time of committed and concerned people. People whose lives are controlled by the workplace and by the needs of a growing family are less able to find precious time to engage in activities of the kind that are now required.

Influence within families

Older people are uniquely placed within their families to generate new thinking about values and the future. Not that our children hang onto our every word or are necessarily desperate for advice from their elders. Mine certainly aren’t!

But children and grandchildren are often open to discuss new insights and all have an interest in their future. Many are so caught up in day-to-day activities that they may not have thought about the predicament that we now face. The more the problems are discussed and understood by those whose future is at stake, the better. The more they recognize the legitimacy of the concern for their future the more likely will they be to raise issues within their own networks.

Simply encouraging the younger generation to explore certain Internet sites may be all that is needed to promote their interest in change.

Influence across networks

Older people are strongly placed to promote discussion of the future among their own networks and acquaintances. These include clubs, churches, old work colleagues, sporting bodies, school support groups, Rotary clubs, Lions, Apex, U3A, and old school friends.

Clearly, the first task is to be well-informed about the extent of the problems ahead and the justification for a shift in values. This does not imply the need to become an evangelist or preacher. If you are convinced of the need to change direction, you can express it in terms of your own preferences and lifestyle. Your friends will quickly get the message and appreciate your reasoning.

The new challenge for grey power is, I suggest, to engage in exploration of the path to a sustainable and equitable future. It is a stimulating exploration and one which we are well equipped to make. The development of SEE-Change Centres is one way we can get engaged and make the connections with the younger generation whose future is at stake.

Chapter 5

Why change is essential

Six large interlinked global threats now loom as threats to our future. They are climate change, the current operation of the global neo-liberal economic model, ecosystem destruction, global inequity, peak oil and the risk of nuclear conflagration. All are global problems and all require collaborative action across the world. Constructive action in the next two decades will be critical and we cannot afford to be paralysed by fear of lesser order problems such as terrorism. Australia should be in the vanguard of action on these issues. Hopeful action begins with concerned and committed individuals and communities. We need to assure our politicians that we are ready to take the difficult decisions that are now required.

We must distinguish legitimate concern for the future from fear. Informed concern is likely to lead to constructive action while ill defined fear can lead to paralysis and denial. Since September 11th 2001 fear of terrorism has been heavily promoted by Australian politicians for reasons which are not entirely clear. The result is that fear of terrorist attack has diverted us from a range of much more serious and more likely determinants of our future.

The six leading threats to Australia's future are interlinked and shared with the rest of the world. They are:

- global climate change and CO₂ emissions
- the current operation of the neo-liberal economic model,
- ecosystem destruction
- global inequity
- peak oil
- risk of nuclear conflagration

That's a pretty daunting list of problems. Each is very serious in its own right and they are interconnected. Considered collectively, they are a marvellous justification for switching off and concentrating on the cricket. And that is mostly what Australians are doing; ignoring or denying the existence of these challenges at a time when we should be taking vigorous mitigating and adaptive action.

Denial, “spin” and diversion are the hallmarks of modern Australian politics. There are structural reasons why our politicians currently appear to lack the motivation to look beyond the next election. We must now insist that short term thinking is unacceptable and by our actions as an electorate, demand that serious attention is paid to the needs of the next generation as well as our own.

The reader might be forgiven, judging from the public statements and actions of our political leaders on both sides of the political spectrum, for wondering why terrorism is not on this list of leading challenges. In my view, it is much less serious than any of the other six. It is linked to some of them and is likely to diminish if we can manage to defuse the ongoing clash between the “have-mores” and “have-nots” in coming decades. Others may wonder why pandemics of infectious diseases is not listed. They are certainly threats that could cause massive dieback and serious chaos in coming years, but in my view they offer a less fundamental challenge to human survival than the listed six.

Continued avoidance of national and international action on these main issues is certainly increasing the risks of terrorism. A hopeful future for Australia’s children demands that we develop a new dynamism in Australian society and that we confront, rather than ignore, these real threats.

These problems will not melt away without concerted and deliberate action that radically adapts the world’s social, economic and political systems to the new realities. A number of European countries have commenced this journey. We Australians are currently lagging behind the leaders, in company with our American allies.

The difficulty for doomsayers

To be fair to our politicians, we must acknowledge the struggle that has been going on for some time between biologists and ecologists on the one hand and most economists and some statisticians on the other. Australian politicians have tended to take their lead from the economists with whom they work most closely.

In 2001, Danish statistician Bjorn Lomborg wrote a controversial but useful book, “The Skeptical Environmentalist”, in which he challenged the environmental “doomsayers” for what he argued was an overstated and unduly pessimistic assessment of the state of the world. (Lomborg)

Lomborg’s book opened with the prediction by economist Julian Simon and proceeded in this vein.

“This is my long-run forecast in brief. The material conditions of life will continue to get better for most people, in most countries, most of the time, indefinitely. Within a century or two all nations and most of humanity will be at or above today’s Western living standards. I also speculate however, that many people will continue to think and say that the conditions of life are getting worse”.

Lomborg’s scepticism of the doomsayers was enthusiastically endorsed by “The Economist” and roundly rejected by “Science” and “Scientific American” and by environmentalists around the world. Lomborg did not dispute the then known facts about climate change but questioned its magnitude and seriousness and doubted that it constituted the serious threat that is perceived by the huge majority of climate scientists. He established, and led until quite recently, the Danish Environmental Assessment Institute which developed in 2004 “The Copenhagen Consensus” on priorities for action on global challenges. Lomborg brought together a group of leading economists to debate how best to use \$50 billion to address the world’s most pressing problems. The conclusion by the economists was that such funds should be spent, not on addressing climate change but on HIV, malaria, removal of trade barriers and the provision of micronutrients to manage malnutrition in developing countries. Predictably, the group did not question the prevalent economic paradigm. Recently, the global recognition of the seriousness of climate change has made Lomborg’s assessment of the climate risk no longer politically or scientifically tenable.

In his 2002 book “The future of life”, Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson (Wilson) contrasted the views of the doomsayers and the sceptics as being fixed on different points in the space-time scale. He said that they differ in the facts they take into account in forecasting the state of the world, how far they look into the future and whether they take into account the complexity of the relationship between human and non-human life. Biologists and ecologists think in terms of interconnected and interdependent systems while many economists think of linear systems and have little understanding of the economy of nature.

Richard Eckersley has characterised the debate as a struggle between “systemic pessimists” and “linear optimists”. (Eckersley) Linear optimists tend to base their views on linear extrapolation from what has gone before, whereas systemic pessimists, (I prefer to call them realists) base their thinking on the concepts of resilience, thresholds and the tendency for complex interacting systems, when pushed beyond a certain limit, to flip into chaos or profoundly different and unpredictable new states (Capra, Davies).

Many of the scientists who have been trying to alert the global community to the warning signs of an overstressed planet for several decades, are becoming desperate that their warnings will be ignored until it is too late. The revered scientist who formulated the Gaia Hypothesis, James Lovelock, now in his eighties, has in early 2006, published a book outlining his reason for believing that it may be already too late to halt what he describes as “Gaia’s revenge,” which he thinks will make much of our planet unfit for human habitation in the not too distant future. (Lovelock) Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis has always been controversial and he could well be wrong about where the balance is located at the moment. But we cannot afford to ignore the man who played a significant role in rescuing us from destruction of the ozone layer through CFC refrigerant use. Whether he is correct in his assertion that we are already beyond the point of no return or not, there can be little doubt that climate change is the most pressing and urgent problem that we must now confront and we have absolutely nothing to lose by setting out to prove Lovelock wrong.

Climate change and CO₂

Our planet is warming and the central concern is the contributory role that human activity is playing in elevating greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere as a consequence of our relentless demand for fossil fuelled energy.

Already the arctic ice cap, most glaciers and the Siberian permafrost are melting at alarming rates leading to changes in the activity of the North Atlantic Gulf stream and compounding the release of CO₂ with massive release of methane, another greenhouse gas.

The pre-industrial level of CO₂ in the atmosphere was 280 parts per million(ppm). Currently it is nearly 380 ppm and rising at about 2 ppm a year. In ten years it will be higher than it has been in at least the past 400,000 years. Without concerted global action there is little prospect of the level reaching a plateau. Once released into the atmosphere CO₂ persists for up to 100 years. Predicting the precise long term consequences of the greenhouse problem is very difficult but all are serious. They range from continuing massive loss of biodiversity, to a 6-7 metre rise in sea level which would wipe out vast human populations, to a flip to ice age conditions for the northern hemisphere.

As the highest per capita CO₂ emitter in the world, and as a country whose economy is deeply dependent on the export of coal and on energy derived from coal, Australia has a particular responsibility to rapidly lower its CO₂ emissions.

Yet the Australian government, while recognizing the global problem, has not committed to a realistic national strategy to bring our emissions into line with

what will be required globally to avert catastrophe. Our national strategy is focused almost exclusively on hope for a technology to reduce the atmospheric CO₂ consequences of generating electricity from coal by storing CO₂ underground through the technique of geo-sequestration. Climate scientists tell us that to avoid catastrophe we must reduce global CO₂ emissions by at least 60% in the next four decades and even the most optimistic assessment of geo-sequestration cannot justify our current policy stance.

The development of mandatory caps on national emissions and a market in CO₂ credits is a minimum strategy whether or not we sign the Kyoto protocol which is the first of many internationally collaborative steps needed to bring global CO₂ emissions to acceptable levels

Profound cuts in greenhouse gas emission are feasible and there are many ways to achieve them. All will have some cost for Australian society. This will be a difficult task but it is fully achievable if we have a mind to do it. To meet essential targets will require a significant change in the current Australian approach to environmental stewardship.

The first step must be for the electorate to understand the problem, to become activated, and to convey to our parliamentarians that this issue is at the top of our agenda and that we are ready to pay the price for vigorous remedial action. The potential consequences for our children if we do not act quickly and decisively, which are carefully documented in “The weather makers” by Tim Flannery (Flannery) are enough to make us all pause and think.

The task for SEE-Change Centres on climate change should be to engage Australians in a consideration of the many options that remain open to us and to promote discussion and debate on the issue right across the community.

The current operation of the neo-liberal economic model

In the modern nation state, economics reigns supreme as the determinant of government policy on issues ranging from taxation to government spending, overseas trade, competition, the relative roles of public and private sectors, employment, wages and working conditions, banking policies, superannuation and development of community infrastructure. The human economy has generally taken the economy of nature as a given without understanding it or acknowledging it. (This contrast between the human economy and nature’s economy is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6) A determined effort is now being made by some economists to build ecological considerations into the human economic models that determine government policies. But for now, the human economy virtually ignores nature’s economy and is in many ways, hostile to it.

In the last 20 years, a fashion has swept through the discipline of economics that is variously labelled economic rationalism, structural reform, neoclassical economics, free market-ism and neo-liberal economics. The fashion has been adopted worldwide, often in response to coercive pressure from the “Washington Consensus” which includes the United States Government, the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank and The World Trade Organization.

Australia was a relatively early joiner but the fashion had developed under Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States in the late 1970s. This economic reform agenda grew originally from the ideas of Austrian, Frederick Hayek and American Milton Friedman. It was a response to the “stagflation” of the 70s and a reaction against the Keynesian economic paradigm which had held sway for several decades.

The key elements of the “Washington Consensus” economic package are de-regulation of the market, privatization, labour market reform, user pays, reduced government spending, intensified competition, and tax and welfare reform which usually means a lessening of the “tax burden” and a tightening of welfare support to those in the lower income bracket of society.

Both of Australia’s major political parties have broadly accepted the Washington Consensus. So Australians have had no real choice in the way our economy has been managed. With his comfortable re-election in 2004, John Howard, has moved further to deregulate the labour market and change the welfare system. These latter moves have offended the Australian Labor Party which nevertheless still seems wedded to the main elements of the Washington Consensus and to the belief that economic growth through consumer spending is the answer to community wellbeing.

That simplistic view of the world is firmly challenged by Clive Hamilton (Hamilton) and his colleagues at the Australia Institute. In “Growth Fetish”, Hamilton argues that, far from being the answer to our problems, a preoccupation with economic growth and the marketing society lie at the heart of many of Australia’s social ills. He believes they are corrupting our social priorities and political structures and are creating a profound sense of alienation in some groups. In their more recent book “Affluenza”, Hamilton and his colleague Richard Denniss (Hamilton) claim that Australian society is, as a result of current economic policy, addicted to over-consumption. They point out that rates of stress, depression and obesity are rising, as Australians wrestle with the emptiness and endless disappointments of the consumer life.

Geoff Davies, a Canberra geo-physicist, recently published a book entitled “Economia” (Davies) which provides a birds eye look at the discipline of economics in human society. Davies insists that economic systems are the creation of humans for the benefit of humans and that neoclassical economic theory that has dominated the organisation of the world in the past two decades is built on foundations and assumptions that are demonstrably false. He goes further and shows why this theory is incapable of solving the problems of the world’s poor and is actively promoting degradation of the environment on which the global population depends for its survival.

Is it possible that there is already more than enough wealth in the world to feed, clothe, educate, house and provide a satisfying life for all of the 6.5 billion people on the planet as well as the extra two or three billion that we are expecting in coming decades? Almost certainly there is, argues Davies, and the reason we are not doing it is that the current economic model around which the world is now organised, is deeply flawed. So, why has the theory survived and why wasn’t it ditched years ago? Primarily, Davies believes, because it serves the interests of the already rich and powerful and because it lacks essential feedback mechanisms.

Davies writes *“I find the present condition of humanity to be deeply shocking. Our vaunted economic systems don’t come even close to providing for the most basic needs of most of humanity. Their record is not one of mediocrity but of abject failure. They create human misery on a vast scale and threaten humanity with decimation or extinction either through the propensity of our present societies for violence or through our assaults on our own life-support system.”*

In his 2005 book “The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World” (Saul) Canadian intellectual John Ralston Saul concludes that the current economic paradigm has passed its useful life. Global free markets are not the panacea that their advocates hoped. Saul believes that globalism has already effectively collapsed and left us with a vacuum and that the future depends on what he describes as “positive nationalism”. He thinks that the challenge ahead is to create a new era which is citizen based and focused on the national common good and on binding international treaties in a range of areas .

Not only is the current economic model failing to meet the human needs for which it was theoretically designed but, through its heavy dependence upon consumption of non-renewable resources, it is promoting the destruction of nature’s economy on which we all depend for our survival.

While recognizing the benefits which de-restricted markets, enhanced competition, downsized bureaucracy and reduced taxation have delivered for many sectors of society, these benefits are now being extracted at unacceptable cost. The costs are not restricted to the environment. Both in rich and poor countries, the unconstrained free-market has widened the gap between rich and poor, distorted civil society, run down societal infrastructure and fostered corruption at the top and exploitation of those at the bottom of the economic heap.

The human economy is the creation of humans and it is modifiable. Economic theory is fallible and as in all human endeavours, it is constantly in flux. A slavish commitment to undifferentiated economic growth has now become a serious national liability. We now need to temper our commitment to growth with a new understanding about the interaction of the human economy with nature's economy and by a refocussing of the purpose of economics. New thinking is occurring in the economics faculties around the world and leading economic theorists are beginning to write about the economics of happiness and wellbeing (Layard).

Throughout social and scientific history, dominant paradigms have changed when they no longer served the purpose for which they were developed. Growing numbers of Australians are becoming disillusioned with the operation of the current paradigm and the religion of consumption which is driven by the unconstrained advertising of consumer goods.

Keynesian economics developed in response to world crisis and depression. The welfare state produced its own excesses of regulation and "nanny-statism". As a result of the stagflation of the seventies, neo-liberal economics evolved, has served humanity, and has nearly run its course. Inevitably a new economic model will evolve to better serve the needs of our now globalised world and we should be actively promoting its evolution.

There is a strong temptation to say that Economics is for the experts and that non-experts like me are hardly in a position to question the technical economic advice which experts are providing to our governments. But the economic model is now a significant part of the constellation of problems which could deny a future to our kids. It is both fallible and modifiable. As responsible electors, we must ask the difficult questions which it is unable to answer.

This is our economy and we must be its masters not its servants. It is closely interlinked to the other five issues being discussed in this chapter and we need to do what we can to modify it in ways that will promote a more just, sustainable and equitable world. That means we need to understand the role

that it plays in our lives and actively participate in redirecting it. And we need both to speak out and act with our parliamentarians to hasten the advent of its successor, which should address the linked issues of global equity, ecological balance, intergenerational equity (sustainability) and human wellbeing.

SEE-Change Centres could play a valuable role by encouraging open community discussion about the assumptions that are built into the economic systems that hold so much sway over our lives. Intelligent Australians have a right and a responsibility to challenge these assumptions and to discuss with their political representatives, the kinds of adaptation that will be needed to foster sustainability and equity.

Ecosystem restoration

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Millennium Assessment) referred to in Chapter 1 and numerous recent scientific papers, point to a massive wave of species extinction which will continue unless human attitudes and actions change very quickly. The Millennium Assessment emphasises that ecosystem services must be recognized urgently as both precious and limited. Ecosystem services are the natural assets such as soil, plants, animals, air and water that are essential for us to obtain clean water and sustenance, to maintain a liveable climate and atmosphere, to meet our cultural needs and to provide options for the future through the maintenance of biodiversity.

Ecologists argue that loss of biodiversity is already seriously hampering our ability to feed, clothe and house the 6.5 billion people who now populate the planet. Yet, both in Australia and around the world, the plunder of natural ecosystems and destruction of nature's economy by our human economy continues at an alarming rate.

Wackernagel and his colleagues (Wackernagel) define the "ecological footprint" as the area of biologically productive land that is required by each human to provide resources and absorb wastes, given prevalent lifestyle and technology. It is currently estimated that with currently available biologically active land and the current world population, there is about 1.7 ha of land available for each human alive on the planet to use for these purposes on a sustainable basis. But globally, we are currently using on average 2.3 ha of land per capita which means that the planet is already in ecological deficit. That is why Earth is showing signs of decompensation. Worse than that, Australians currently use, between 7 and 9 ha of ecological services per person.

Add to that the fact that we expect another 2–3 billion people on the planet before population growth is likely to stabilize, and it is evident that our ecological footprint comes at the cost of ecosystem services that are essential to

people in poor countries. If all the people currently on the planet used ecosystem services at the current Australian rate, there would need to be three or four times our planet's worth of biologically productive land. And yet we are continuing to destroy our biologically productive land!

Most Australians now live in the cities. A declining national economic dependence on agriculture has left an ageing remnant population in rural Australia as young people, especially women, move to the cities in search of economic security. Small family farms are being aggregated into large agri-businesses. Those remaining on small farms seek, often desperately, to maintain a viable livelihood from a productive land base that is shrinking.

We still look to rural communities for management of our land and natural resources. Complicating any view we have of the future, are potential surprises that could rapidly exacerbate the already serious health of Australia's rural hinterland. Climate change will continue to produce such surprises.

To reduce Australia's footprint, we need to broaden national understanding of the implications of our current way of life. We will only do that when we appropriately value the vital services which the ecosystem provides. Currently they are barely factored into the price of production and we are destroying them at a terrifying rate. These ecosystem services are now more important to national survival than wool, wheat or beef markets.

Just as we have begun to recognize the importance of valuing and trading water, we must now develop proper trading systems in carbon, water filtration, salinity remediation and biodiversity credits. These, along with timber plantations and ecotourism, could become the new growth industries to support Australia's declining rural infrastructure.

Preservation of our ecological niche must replace undifferentiated economic growth as a very high national priority. Landholders could derive a significant part of their future income from salinity remediation, water filtration and biodiversity credits.

In their 2004 book "Going Native", Michael Archer, (Archer) and his colleague Bob Beale have painted a vision for Australia that depends much more upon the species of flora and fauna that have adapted to our landscape over millions of years. They suggest that we should explore the vast commercial potential of native trees and grains and the health and environmental benefits of harvesting kangaroos. They argue that we need to adapt to our unique landscape rather than to keep trying and failing to force it to adapt to us.

Archer's team at the University of NSW is developing proposals for pilot interventions that will combine conservation with conventional agriculture through management and harvesting of native flora and fauna. They have also been exploring new partnerships with groups of landholders, including indigenous people, and possibilities for new niche food markets based on Australia's native fruits and vegetables.

The UNSW group is also developing ideas about "Green-leasing" which seeks to enlarge the area of land managed for multiple objectives in strategic locations. Under these arrangements, landholders could sublease sections of their land to be managed by consortia that include urban investors. The Greenlease consortium would see its role as optimizing the use of that land for ecosystem services. Green-leasing would bring city investment to the country, building bridges across the rural-urban divide. Green leased properties could provide employment for some of the rural unemployed and could lead to significant expansion of land that is set aside to provide a high level of biodiversity and ecosystem services to the nation.

Large pockets of land in Australia are not profitable or are, at best, marginally profitable. So what should we do with this land? In the United States, the federal government pays farmers not to farm some of their land and to devote it to other things such as ecosystem services, wetlands, wildlife refuges and tree plantation. In the US Conservation Reserve Program, landowners can receive annual payments to establish long-term natural resource conserving covers on eligible farmland. Participants enrol for periods of from 10 to 15 years. We need to consider schemes like this.

There is plenty we can do to restore ecosystem services in Australia if we have the will to do it. Restoration will come at a cost. And we will not be willing to pay this cost until we change our value frame, recognizing first that we are temporary stewards of a priceless heritage that we must pass on to our children and secondly that we must adjust the human economy to make it compatible with nature's economy.

SEE-Change Centres can play a vital role in this debate. People in the cities need to understand the concepts surrounding our ecological footprint and ways in which it can be reduced. Groups from SEE-Change Centres should be peppering our political representatives with questions and encouragement to take the essential decisions about the valuation of ecosystem services.

We must move the national perception about land towards one which properly values the natural ecosystems on which the world's future will ultimately depend. Once community perceptions and values change, the essential policy changes will quickly follow.

Inequity

The disparities between rich and poor are increasing locally and globally. Inequity is contributing to the climate of hopelessness and despair in large parts of the world that breeds hate and desperate acts of terrorism. The inequities between the “have mores” and the “have nots”, beamed to us daily in our living rooms are obscene.

Ethicist Peter Singer and Canberra researcher Tom Gregg, in 2004, published a stinging commentary on Australia’s recent record as a global citizen. In “How Ethical is Australia?” they forcefully reject the notion that it is in our national interest to look after our own needs and not play a responsible role as a highly privileged member of the global village. (Singer).

In September 2000 there was an optimistic commitment by heads of 148 nations (including Australia) to eight “Millennium Development Goals” (MDG’s). The goals and their accompanying targets committed the world community to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than \$1 per day by 2015 and to halve global hunger by that time. (Currently more than 1 billion people belong in these two categories). The world’s leaders also agreed that by 2015 the world would achieve universal primary education; would eliminate gender disparity; would reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five; would reduce by three-quarters, the maternal mortality rate; would halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS; would halt and reverse the spread of malaria and other diseases; would integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; would reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation and would develop an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. (Millennium Development Goals)

But the optimism of September 2000 has evaporated and been overtaken by a “war on terror”, a pre-emptive and divisive war in Iraq and growing international concern about climate change. The mood has changed and Australia’s response to this changing world has been largely determined by our unwavering and apparently uncritical commitment to the American alliance. (Langmore) The fortresses are up and we are digging in, not to build a better world but to concentrate on building a better Australia in a world of rapidly growing unhappiness and despair.

Adequate progress in meeting the MDG’s is not occurring because rich countries like ours are not making the necessary financial resources available. It is estimated that the rich countries of the world need to increase their financial

commitment to the MDG's from \$60 billion per year to \$120 billion per year. Success is believed to be feasible but not without a change of political will on the part of countries like Australia. An international conference on financing for development in March 2002 in Monterrey Mexico urged developed countries that have not yet done so to lift their giving to 0.7 percent of gross national product as official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries. Australia currently commits about 0.26 percent of its gross national product to ODA and ties much of it to expenditure on Australian goods and services which the experts agree is not the way to meet the MDG's. The Australian government has recently announced initiatives that will expand this figure perhaps to 0.33% over the next five years, but that is not enough for a country as rich as we are. The United States commits even less at 0.14 percent. Meanwhile a number of European countries are already well above the 0.7% target, 4 of them at 1.0% or more and Australia's performance as a donor is declining significantly by comparison with its OECD counterparts

The question we must all now ask is: "What is the ethical acceptability of pursuing our own security and prosperity regardless of the interests of the rest of the world's inhabitants?" "The core commitment of living ethically for individuals", say Singer and Gregg, "is that people should put themselves as individuals in the position of others affected by their actions and do to others as we would have them do to us". And they ask "Is it defensible for nations to be selfish to a degree that would be wrong if practised by an individual?"

Leaving ethics and morality aside, there are also very pragmatic reasons of national self interest and international security for us to work collaboratively with our neighbours to build a better world and to lessen the gap between the haves and the have nots. Understanding the way best to work on this project of survival with our fellow travellers on an increasingly damaged "spaceship earth" is a task that our nation has barely commenced. The government's own advisory committees have warned it that aid which is tied to our own self interest is in danger of not meeting the purpose of poverty reduction through sustainable development in the countries to which the aid is directed.

We need a larger view of the national interest than our current leaders from both sides of politics are articulating. We now belong to an inter-connected world. A secure and prosperous Australia is only likely if it is part of a secure and prosperous world.

Australia's recent policy towards asylum-seeking refugees is further evidence of our growing distance from world reality and the needs of the future. Whereas Armenia in 2000 took in 74.1 refugees per thousand inhabitants, Sweden 17.8, Denmark 13.3, Norway 10.7 Switzerland 8 and Canada 4.1, Australia took in

three per thousand inhabitants and was ranked 39th amongst the top 40 recipients of refugees. (Singer)

Shifting the Australian value frame from one of national self interest to one of solidarity with humans everywhere must be our target. The MDG's have recently been reviewed and agreed to be realistic and achievable. Our politicians need to hear from us that we want them to back them enthusiastically and with expanded resources.

A change in our national stance on inequity will not come cheaply. It will require substantial adjustments to the way we currently think about Australia and its borders. We must look beyond the simplistic view that we can build a fortress around our current good fortune and develop a more balanced understanding of what will enable our children to live in harmony with the other 8 or 9 billion people with whom they will have to share the planet.

Changing the national mindset on this topic could begin in the SEE-Change Movement. Australians are logical and naturally compassionate people who understand the concept of a "fair go". They need to become engaged in a shared understanding of both the imperative and the complexity of what global solidarity will involve.

Also, focussing on our home territory SEE-Change Centres should consider ways of developing genuine solidarity with our own grossly disadvantaged indigenous Australians and with those Australians who are yet to be born.

Peak Oil

The anticipated peaking of world oil production represents a global challenge of immense proportions. Without forward planning for this apparently imminent event, the social, economic and political costs will be enormous. A February 2005 report prepared by Robert Hirsch and a group of economist colleagues for the United States Department of the Environment makes sobering reading. (Hirsch)

Nobody knows with confidence when the peak of oil production will be reached. Most authorities believe it will be within 20 years. And many believe it will be much sooner. When it occurs and when it becomes clear that the suppliers can no longer increase their supplies to meet the ever-expanding world demand, the economic impact on the world will be profound.

Hirsch set out to examine the range of mitigation activities which would be required to avoid chaos and economic disaster in a world that is utterly dependent upon oil not only as transportation fuel but as feedstock in a wide range of industries.

He concluded that if mitigation is aggressively commenced 20 years before the peak occurs, the impact on global society might be kept within reasonable limits. If we wait until oil peaks before embarking on a massive cooperative global effort to put mitigation strategies in place, the impact on society is likely to be disastrous.

That means that mitigation should be commencing now. What does mitigation involve? While greater end-use efficiency is achievable and essential, it will be neither sufficient nor timely enough to solve the problem by us all driving Prius cars or getting rid of our diesel 4WD vehicles. Production of large amounts of substitute liquid fuels will be essential to maintain even heavily modified western economies.

A number of commercial or near commercial substitute fuel production technologies are currently available for deployment, so the production of vast amounts of substitute liquid fuels is feasible with existing technology. But the scale of the substitution, which will include, bio-fuels, gas and hydrogen fuel cells, is huge.

This problem also intersects with the CO₂ emission problem. In Australia, we need actively to plan our preferred mitigation strategies. Government leadership is important but that leadership must be informed by an educated electorate which understands the seriousness of the problem and the relative costs and benefits various strategic approaches to the declining availability of oil.

This is vital business for all Australians and we need to signal to our politicians that we are ready to share the problem with them. For most Australians now, the car is a way of life. SEE-Change Centres could play a valuable role in helping individuals, communities and governments to make essential adjustments in car use, public transport efficiency and fuel substitution.

Nuclear Peace

The expanding need for “clean energy” has reactivated the global debate about the safety and desirability of increasing world dependency on nuclear fission as a source of growing energy needs. Unsurprisingly, this debate is deeply influenced by the concern that nuclear technology when widely dispersed is in danger of being used to make nuclear weapons. And the more widely dispersed nuclear weapons are, the greater the likelihood that they will be used.

In Australia the nuclear debate is coloured by the fact that we have some of the world's largest supplies of uranium and also that our vast uninhabited land areas are seen by some as a potentially safe disposal area for high-grade nuclear waste.

The risk of a nuclear winter, brought about by nuclear war which appeared to diminish after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, is back with us, heightened by the poverty gap, religious clashes, a belligerent and hypocritical United States, which continues to develop its own nuclear weapons arsenal, a deeply troubled and tense Middle East and sabre rattling on the Korean Peninsula.

What can a minor power like Australia do constructively about this problem? The answer is "quite a lot". We are one of the major global suppliers of uranium ore. In 1995 Australia established the Canberra Commission which produced the most comprehensive and coherent argument yet for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The commission's report elevated the elimination debate from the corridors of think tanks and non-government organizations to the highest level of international dialogue. This promising initiative should be reactivated.

Many believe (Duncan, Langmore) that we can play a valuable role in global policymaking of this kind if only we choose to do so. This is a very complex problem which requires an activated electorate to encourage our political leaders to move back to the high ground of international dialogue. We have, as a nation in the past, played a key role in the development and early activities of the United Nations. Recently, we have allowed the American alliance to dominate our international policy stance.

Furthermore, the debate in Australia on nuclear energy requires a broadly educated electorate that can unmask vested interests which will want to insist on simplistic solutions to our energy future. Because the spectre of a nuclear conflagration is back, Australians need to reengage in debate about the place of nuclear fission in our children's future.

This issue needs to be discussed over the dinner table and back fence and SEE-Change Centres could catalyse informed discussions about the options that will face us. We should not leave it to the vested interests and their lobbyists. Our parliamentarians need to hear from their communities that they are engaged on this topic and want to know that their representatives are also.

Hope not fear

The six issues discussed in this chapter are serious problems which demand collaborative global action. All require urgent policy debate and action at both the national and international levels. Positive action to change them will also change our lives, and as members of a democratic society, we need to be actively engaged in helping our government to play its part in the global collaborative response.

Fear is a powerful political weapon and it has been used to great effect by leaders of both political parties in the recent past. Most of us are uncomfortable with change and the unknown. And when fear is introduced into that equation there is a tendency for us to shut down and switch off, subconsciously hoping that by ignoring the problem it will go away or that someone else will deal with it.

The problems discussed here will not go away. They are our problems and they are a cause for concern and concerted action, not a cause for fear. A constructive and collaborative response could avoid problems for our children. The worst outcome would be for us to be paralysed by fear.

As individual citizens of a tiny nation each of us can play a role in ensuring that Australia embarks on a process of renewal and refurbishment and is up with the leaders on a path of hope.

Chapter 6

The human economy is a subset of nature's economy

The human economy is a subset of nature's economy, but humans have generally presumed that nature was there to serve our needs and taken nature's economy for granted. Now that we are the dominant mammal on a finite earth, we are beginning to realise that our future survival depends upon nature's economy and that ours must adapt to it rather than it bend to our will. The current human economic model is now part of the problem that threatens human survival and must and will change. Australians need to be involved in promoting the emergence of a new economic framework that is not only bio-sensitive but more adequately addresses human wellbeing and equity.

In the early 1970s, the Club of Rome, a group of future thinking intellectuals, issued a famous report entitled "Limits to Growth". (Meadows) It was based on computer simulation of both human systems and the natural systems on which we humans depend for our sustenance. The report warned of serious problems looming because of our rapidly growing population and the demands that our economy was placing on the natural ecosystems of the world.

Unfortunately the authors were laughed out of court and largely ignored by economists and politicians who insisted that the report failed to take account of human ingenuity and the capacity of markets to manage the distribution of scarce resources.

But the authors of "Limits to Growth" were absolutely correct in their key assumption that there are inevitable limits to exponential growth of anything that operates in a confined space or closed system like our planet. Anything that grows at 1% per annum will double in 70 years and if the growth rate is 2% per annum it will double in 35 years. How much doubling or quadrupling of the human economy or population can the relatively closed environment of spaceship earth withstand?

The world human population growth rate peaked in the 1960s at 2.2 percent per year and has now dropped to 1.3 percent per year. Still, that means that eighty million new people are being added to the human family each year.

The world population rose from 1.65 billion in 1900 to 6.08 billion in 2000 and 6.5 billion in 2006 and average life expectancy has more than doubled since 1900 — from 30 to 63 years.

Population growth rates are now expected to continue to fall but the United Nations Population Division still projects that the world human population is most likely to reach 9.1 billion in 2050 and it could go as high as 10 billion before it declines. If these projections are correct, (and there are significant difficulties in projecting accurately), we face an acute “bottleneck” situation in the next 45 years. During that period, we have to adjust our current approach to human existence in such a way that at least another 2 or 3 billion people can be accommodated on a planet that is already groaning and seriously stressed under the weight of the 6.5 billion of us who are already here. And especially for the majority who live in developing countries, we must continue to grow the economy if everyone on the planet is to share in the good life.

Between 1965 and 1999, the average annual growth rate in the world's economic gross domestic product was 4.1 percent in low-income countries, 4.2 percent in middle-income countries, and 3.2 percent in high-income countries. 3% growth means a doubling time of 23 years and 4% means a doubling time of 18 years.

As a result of this stunning growth in both the human population and in the human economy, nature's economy is now in deep trouble. Human induced climate change is one manifestation of the fact that we have overshot our environmental limits and the findings of the Millennium Assessment on the serious ill health of the world's ecosystems are another.

A recent update of the Club of Rome (Meadows) computer models, using 30 years of data derived from what has actually happened since their earlier computer simulations shows that continuation of population and consumption growth is likely to result in collapse of civilization as we know it, and that if we continue on our present trajectory collapse could occur in our own lifetimes.

The central problem is that the modern human economy is at loggerheads with nature's economy and unless we can reconcile the two, humans will lose out very badly indeed.

What is Nature's Economy?

The word biodiversity has crept into our language in recent years. We are repeatedly told that it is essential that we retain the very diverse range of micro-organisms, plants, animals and birds that share the earth with us.

Why is biodiversity so important? Why can't humans simply take over the planet from all the other species and do our own thing with it?

The short answer to that question is that all life on earth is a complex web of interdependency. The more scientists probe life and living things, the more they recognize the role that multiple species play in maintaining and regulating the environment for other species. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the climate we experience and the effects on our psyche all depend to some extent on a diversity of species of other living organisms.

Although we still only partly understand it, humans have evolved from, but remain an integral part of, a huge web of delicately interacting complex systems that all depend for their existence on others. The outputs of one species become the inputs for others. The more species there are, the more complex the web and the more resilient it is to outside destructive forces. Conversely, the less complex and intricate the web, the more vulnerable the whole web becomes to outside forces.

So complex and resilient is the web of life that some have thought of planet earth as a self organising organic and resilient "being" which is sometimes referred to as "Gaia". At times in the history of earth, Gaia has been subjected to such overwhelming external forces that there have been massive extinctions of species and the earth has been threatened with extinction of all life. The growing scientific consensus is that the sum total of human activity now seriously threatens the integrity of the web of life itself. By hastening the extinction of other species we hasten our own extinction.

There is something unique about our own planet that has enabled life to evolve and prosper over a period of four thousand million years. Humans are latecomers on the scene and have only been around in significant numbers for about fifty thousand years. And in the last hundred of those years we have become the dominant force on the planet, quadrupling in numbers and profoundly changing the economic equation for all of the other species that were here before us.

The web is so complex and our understanding of its inner workings so puny that we don't even know how many species there are or what they all do. But we do know that as we invade their territory, we are killing them off as fast as we are discovering and naming them. And we now know enough to make the world's leading biologists very concerned that we could quickly pass the point of no return when Gaia will have lost its capacity to bounce back and maintain an environment that continues to support human life.

Mostly we use the term “economy” to describe the way humans manage the production, distribution and exchange of the things that we want and need. But of course every living organism has its own economy and every species has a different economy. At the very simplest, an economy involves the process of supply and distribution of resources. In living systems, the supply of essential nutrients and gases for some species is met by the cast off nutrients and excreta of other species. Humans and other animals breathe out CO₂ and depend on a supply of oxygen which comes from plants which do precisely the opposite. They take in CO₂ and give off oxygen. The economy of human life is thus utterly dependent on the living economy of plants which in turn depend on the economies of other living creatures

Nature’s economy is the sum of the economies of all living species. The net effect of nature’s economy is a Gaia-like global self regulation in which billions of natural supply and demand curves and feedback loops interact and result in global homeostasis and the maintenance of a liveable environment for all. Nature’s economy thus works by a process of cooperative interdependence between multiple species.

The modern human economy is not serving us well

Into nature’s delicately maintained and intricate economy, we humans have stumbled rather like bulls into a china shop. What distinguishes humans from other species is our ability to invent symbolic language and to use it to communicate with each other. This enables us to accumulate knowledge, express feelings, develop communal assumptions, policy, priorities and values and to innovate technologically. That is the basis of what we describe as human culture.

The main survival advantage of culture in hunter-gatherer society, according to ecologist Stephen Boyden, (Boyden) may have been its role in the exchange and storage of useful information about the environment. The agricultural phase of human civilization began about 12,000 years ago leading rapidly to increased population densities and the formation of cities about 8000 years ago. Most humans lost direct contact with their life giving environment and ignored it or took it for granted.

As human wants and needs became more complex people devised methods for managing the economies of human groups, communities, nations and more recently, the world. Modern economics dates back about 230 years to the publication of “The Wealth of Nations” by Adam Smith. Since that time, the discipline has gone through many phases and fashions.

According to Hugh Stretton *“Economic life is complicated and shot through with conflicts and uncertainties, so the science which studies it can't be simple expertise, agreed by all. It deals with hard facts but also with conflicting interests and disagreed social values and purposes. Some economists see it as the science of choice and scarcity as we decide the best array of material goods we can get from our limited resources and productive capacities. Some want it to be a branch of environmental science which studies how to conserve resources for our grand children and for continuing human life on earth. Some see it as the study of provisioning of the nurture and cooperation by which we supply each other's material needs and organize our mutual care and interdependence and there are others with other concerns. Economics is thus — like other social sciences — part study and part debate. An expert, many sided, continuously changing debate. It is a mixture of science and social philosophy and politics”*. (Stretton)

Economic Nobel laureate, Joseph E. Stiglitz, who was chair of President Bill Clinton's Council of economic advisers and then became Senior Vice President and Chief Economist at the World Bank, left the bank, and in 2002 published a stinging critique of the operation of the global economy under the terms of the Washington consensus. He had become increasingly disillusioned as he saw the International Monetary Fund and other major institutions put the interests of Wall Street and the financial community ahead of the world's poorer nations.

Stiglitz says in his book *“Globalisation and its discontents”*: *“For millions of people, globalization has not worked. Many have actually been made worse off as they have seen their jobs destroyed and their lives become more insecure. They have felt increasingly powerless against forces beyond their control. They have seen their democracies undermined, their cultures eroded... Today the system of capitalism is at a crossroads just as it was during the Great Depression. In the 1950s, capitalism was saved by Keynes who thought of policies to create jobs and rescue those suffering from the collapse of the global economy. Now millions of people around the world are waiting to see whether globalization can be reformed so that its benefits can be more widely shared... The developed world needs to do its part to reform the international institutions that govern globalization. We set up these institutions and we need to work to fix them. If we are to address the legitimate concerns of those who have expressed a discontent with globalization; if we are to make globalization work for the millions of people for whom it has not, if we are to make globalization with a human face succeed, then our voices must be raised. We cannot, we should not, stand idly by”*.

Chapter 6 *The human economy is a subset of nature's economy*

In Australia, sociologist Michael Pusey (Pusey) has documented the experience of middle Australia which he described as the “dark side of economic reform”. He concluded that only a minority of people in middle Australia believe that they and the society as a whole have benefited from this dramatic shift in economic policy. Specifically, he saw as a direct consequence of the reforms, a diminution in social capital and evidence of a growing inequality of opportunity between rich and poor.

Fred Argy, an economist who advised Australian governments from Menzies to Keating argued in his 1998 book “Australia at the crossroads” (Argy) that it could, as a nation, continue to move relentlessly down the free market route and transform our society into one of harsh competitive individualism. Or it could choose a progressive liberal path — one that is consensual and caring and just as effective in achieving its economic goals. He acknowledged that Australia’s growth in living standards had surpassed that of many other developed countries. But he pointed to the widening gap in income and opportunities for rich and poor and the worsening quality of life for many Australian families as a consequence of the operation of the economic rationalist model.

The discipline of economics is always in flux. It can certainly serve us better than it is currently doing and the current neo-liberal economic paradigm must very soon be replaced by a new version of a global human economy that pays adequate attention to equity, human wellbeing, social cohesion and to the subsidiary role which our economy must play to the operation of nature’s vibrant economy.

How can we hasten the essential change?

People power is the only way to hasten the modification of the current economic model. There are now massive vested interests dedicated to the preservation of the current model which will ensure that without determined action by the world’s citizenry, humanity is in danger of consuming itself to extinction.

Sooner or later the neo-liberal economic model will destroy itself and people like John Ralston Saul think that is already happening. It would obviously be much better for everyone if we could avoid the sort of crisis and collapse of the world economy that we saw in the nineteen thirties. And perhaps we can.

But we will not do so if we leave action on modification of the economic model to our political leaders, their advisors, the banks, the multinational corporations or the media. Action to force reconsideration of the way we manage the human economy must begin in our own backyards, across the fence, in the clubs and in our ability to apply pressure to our political decision makers.

In turn, concerned and committed citizens will need to become better informed and large numbers of ordinary Australians will need to work together to examine seriously the impediments in the present model and ways to make the economy work for us rather than have it working to destroy us. Such discussions can begin in SEE-Change Centres.

Chapter 7

Which values will we need to change?

A number of aspects of modern Australian culture are barriers to our participation in the Great Transition. We now need to rethink attitudes in five belief/value domains. These are stewardship, the economy, empowerment, purpose and solidarity. Each domain is important. Finding a safer path for Australian society requires a large shift in the national mindset. Exploration of these elements of our culture could be facilitated by the SEE-Change Centre movement.

In my childhood, Australian society was premised on a White Australia policy. Women were not allowed to work after they were married. Sunday school attendance was the rule rather than the exception. The quarter acre building block, the Holden car, and beef or lamb and vegies for dinner were elements of our vision for “the good life”. People who had travelled overseas were distinctly unusual. If they did, mostly they went “home” to Britain, the base of the great British Empire of which we were proud members.

Much has happened during the past 60 years to mould and shape our culture and we are now a very different nation. We have been involved in several wars, none of them on our own soil. Television, air travel, immigration, the Internet, a decline in the authority of the church, the feminist revolution, sexual liberation, growing affluence and changes in the social, economic and political milieu have changed the dynamics of Australian society including the factors which define who we are and what we believe. Our principal cultural ally is now the USA not Great Britain and we have become a cosmopolitan multicultural nation. This culture change over my lifetime has been gradual but the shift is now clearly visible and many of the beliefs and values that were central to my childhood have virtually disappeared from our national radar screen.

Now we face the reality of a globalised and deeply threatened world in which “business as usual” looks increasingly likely to destroy the human species. Can we rapidly shift our culture to adjust to this new reality, enabling the nation to emerge as a significant contributor to world harmony and sustainability?

I suggest there are five key domains of values/beliefs in which our present stance is inimical to our long term survival, standing in the way of Australians achieving a hopeful future. While growing numbers of Australians are making changes in some of these five domains, it seems that we will need to build momentum quickly and intentionally to move our culture in directions that will enhance prospects for survival of our grandchildren.

Stewardship

Home and land ownership have long been part of the Australian dream and for large numbers of Australians they are now a reality. Our preference for a moderately large block of land on which we can make our own imprint and which is our “castle” where we reign supreme and are free to do what we want, is now part of our cultural heritage.

On this basis, we have radically cleared land of natural vegetation, introduced species that are ill adapted to our inhospitable environment, wasted precious water resources on huge lawns and gardens and unproductive agricultural enterprises and squandered energy, and non-renewable resources on ever larger houses and sprawling suburbs. Both our cities and our agricultural industries are now unsustainable and we must reconsider the impact of unconstrained exploitation of the environment and the “castle” mentality on the world that our children will inherit.

A shift from the notion that “My home and my land are my castle and I can do what I like with them”, needs to give way to a recognition that: “I am a temporary steward for this small part of the planet and I need to care for it in such a way that my descendents will have a life”. This is a journey that most Australians are yet to make. And it is a journey which is currently opposed by our booming building and development industry, our economy, our TV shows, our media barons and the glamour of celebrity life.

Caring for the planet doesn't equate to a poorer quality of life. If we don't care for it human life will disappear and if we do, we can move civilisation up a notch. Our sprawling brick and concrete jungles have insulated us from our precious life giving natural environment.

Once we downplay the castle mentality and introduce genuine stewardship and concern for a viable future for our kids into the value frame, we can expect to rediscover the environment and turn our innovative capacity to retro-fitting houses, changing our modes of transport within towns and cities, restructuring our gardens, changing our use of agricultural land and giving nature's ecosystems another chance.

Of course this value change will be vigorously opposed by those who will claim that such a change will damage the human economy. “Think of the jobs that we will lose,” they will say. But think also of the jobs we will gain as we systematically set out to restructure the way we live. There will be plenty of employment in that! The first step is to change our value frame and we will begin to discover new employment opportunities and important new industries as we build for a sustainable future.

Economy

During 1992, Bill Clinton and George W Bush’s father were fighting for the presidency of the United States. Clinton was barely holding his place in the opinion polls until one of Clinton’s senior advisers came up with a simple focus for their campaign. He wrote four words — ‘It’s the economy, stupid’ — on a whiteboard for Clinton to see every time he went out to speak. Clinton won the election and every modern Australian politician still believes with justification, that the way to win elections is through the “hip pocket nerve”.

Our susceptibility to financial inducements of course will not go away. But as I argued in Chapter 6, the human economy is utterly dependent on nature’s economy and as the seriousness of the human predicament becomes clearer and the electorate understands the stakes for which we are now playing, it is becoming likely that electoral success in future will depend on a modification of the Clinton slogan to “It’s nature’s economy stupid!”

The modern human economy has been built with almost total disregard for nature’s economy which is now beginning to bite back. Future economic Nobel Prizes are likely to be awarded to those economists who propose ways in which we can rebuild the human economy in tune with nature’s economy. This is not a luxury, it is an imperative. But it is a view that is presently not widely shared or understood in Australia. Shifting our culture to a new, expanded view of the vital importance of nature’s economy is urgent.

Empowerment

There is a prevalent Australian belief that “I cannot change what the rich and powerful are doing to the planet, so I will simply concentrate on doing what I can for my family here and now.” Social researchers are documenting a tired cynicism that has descended on Australia society in recent years and a feeling of impotence and disaffection with the political/democratic process. University campuses are no longer a hotbed of youthful idealism and activism. Most students are nervous of anything that could interfere with their career prospects. The economics of being a student have changed profoundly.

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There was a fleeting moment during the build-up in the protest movement against the Iraq war when it seemed Australian activism might again be on the march. That feeling evaporated and cynicism re-emerged when the government ignored the protests, took us into war and was re-elected using the old hip pocket approach.

It was the anthropologist, Margaret Mead who wrote “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”. I am convinced that Margaret Mead is correct and that a change in the direction of world events depends upon small groups and individuals with vision, commitment and persistence working together. I also think everyone can become a world-changer if only they can begin to believe in their own capacity to act. I will return to that theme at the end of the book.

Purpose

We live in a materialistic age. People in Australian society are being encouraged to define themselves in terms of the things they own and the image that they portray. The modern human economy works to maximize consumption of material things and success is measured by wealth and possessions. Supermarkets and shopping malls are our modern temples.

We now spend much of our time and effort deciding what to buy and how to get more money to buy more. The advertising and marketing industry are committed to ensuring that we don’t let up on this activity. Each time we turn on the television we are urged to covet more “things”. A visitor from Mars could be forgiven for believing that human wellbeing depends on what we own and consume and that society’s main purpose is to maximise consumption. But the evidence shows that beyond a certain level of affluence, more money or possessions do not contribute to greater happiness or enhanced wellbeing.

The Wellbeing Manifesto highlights the fact that human wellbeing depends not on what we own, but on having meaning, purpose and fulfilment in our lives. Society should thus be concentrated not on maximising consumption, but on maximising societal wellbeing. Adjusting the human economy requires not only that it becomes compatible with nature’s economy but also that it ceases to distort society’s purpose and pays attention to the factors which are more likely to promote meaning, purpose and fulfilment in peoples lives.

There is growing recognition that the tendency to equate national wellbeing with per capita gross domestic product is seriously flawed. Efforts to include new economic indicators of national wellbeing into the national accounts are at last getting underway. (Eckersley) But for now, growth in the gross domestic

product per capita prevails as the national driving force and serious discussions of purpose and wellbeing are not part of the public discourse.

We must shift our societal value frame on purpose away from our addiction to “things” to a focus on the wellbeing of all members of society. This value shift will force a re-examination not only of the economy, but of many of the institutions which underpin our society

Solidarity

Finally, I think we need a value shift from the prevalent belief that “This is our country; we have earned what we have the hard way and it’s not our fault that other countries have mucked things up with over breeding and corruption” to the recognition that “Globalization now means that all 6.5 billion of us are in the survival business together and that building fortresses around our own good fortune will not alleviate the threats to our children’s future”.

Our prime minister earned widespread applause during a recent election campaign when he expressed the view “This is our country and we will decide who comes here and under what circumstances.” But that is only one side of the issue. The problem is that our country is also part of the planet and a very large part at that.

Australians who make up only 0.3% of the world’s population occupy 5.1% of the world’s land mass. Of course large parts of Australia are inhospitable desert but that is true of huge areas of other parts of the world which are equally unsuitable for human habitation. Despite our low population density, we are contributing per capita, more greenhouse gases to the world’s atmosphere than any other country and are destroying our arable land at an alarming rate. And we are consuming a disproportionate share of the world’s non-renewable resources.

The idea that we can isolate our privileged nation and ourselves from the pain and suffering that is being experienced by our fellow citizens in other parts of the world is false. The forces which threaten our future are of human making and we are as much a part of the problem as anyone else. The problems are global and we are now more interdependent as a species than ever before.

Scenario modelling suggests that we have no viable option but to work together and develop solidarity with humans everywhere, whether they are born into an African village or into a Saudi Arabian Palace. Australians can and should be leaders in this endeavour. The authors of “Imagining Australia” have developed exciting ideas for involving young Australians in a new approach to global solidarity.

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Of course we all want to have a good life, but our own good life will increasingly depend on the rest of the world also sharing in the good life and that as a world community we are working constructively together and also with nature's economy.

We need more than compassion. We need a shift to genuine solidarity with all of the 7–10 billion other humans who will share our common fate. Once all of us come to recognise that, perhaps we will be ready to move to the next step which will be to outlaw weapons of mass destruction and stop the senseless global trade in armaments. Phase 1 must be a communal shift from national self-centredness to global solidarity.

Effecting a values shift

So that is my shopping list for cultural change. We need a shift in stewardship, economy, empowerment, purpose and solidarity. If we Australians could shift our current stance in each of these five domains in the next 20 years, we could become world leaders in the race to a sustainable future. And our children are compelling reasons why we should try to do so. We should be asking ourselves what sort of world we are leaving for them.

We have imperfect insight into the factors that have moved Australians to become more self-centred, less generous and less compassionate than in the past and why people are becoming disinterested in the political process and in the long term consequences of our lifestyle choices.

The reasons probably include the decline of religion as the former custodian of Australian morals; the promotion of the neo-liberal economic model and “the economy” as an end in itself, the associated rise in power and influence of large corporations, the seductive power of computers and the media and the ascendancy of post-modern philosophy. All of these are likely to be acting in concert to promote independence and self-centeredness.

Political parties have become factionalized and pragmatic rather than leading luminaries for the public good. Advertising is a sophisticated and all pervasive enterprise aimed at promoting behaviour change that is desired by corporations which benefit from fostering selfish and acquisitive tendencies. The human economy reigns supreme and economic growth is falsely presented as the primary arbiter of human wellbeing. Advocates of neo-liberal economic theory are pressing for minimization of taxes and diminution in “public good” activity.

The events of 9/11 and the so-called “war on terror” have provided governments with the ultimate opportunity to exploit fear and introduce repressive legislation. In Australia, these factors have been magnified by a subtle form of xenophobia which has built upon Australia’s longstanding innate suspicion of those with a different skin colour.

Many Australians to whom I speak are seeking a way out of the current impasse. They know that there are serious things wrong with the world and with our nation and that we must urgently change things, but they cannot see how they can help to bring change about. Many of these people will already be inclined to agree with significant parts of my argument while others will be reluctant to break from their current comfort zone into the social activism that is now required. Others still will disagree vigorously with my analysis. So we need to get the discussion out into the open. People need to be able to exchange ideas about the most effective way forward.

Currently, there is not a suitable environment for this to happen in Australian society apart from the internet. But while cyberspace offers real possibilities for building consensus and action, people also need face to face contact with like-minded and unlike-minded others and the opportunity in a safe environment to weigh up alternatives before they are likely to move beyond their conventional values frame.

Neither of the major political parties currently provides an environment that is open to creative new thinking of this kind. Christian churches are no longer the central institution in Australian society that they once were.

However the churches and the mosques, synagogues and temples around the nation offer an important base for reflection discussion and action. We are now an extremely multicultural society and, while we have many clubs and single-issue advocacy groups, developing a safe place where Australians can together explore the changes which will move Australian society represents a serious challenge

The spiritual dimension

The importance of the spiritual dimension was brought home to me during a recent visit to Egypt, as I saw and heard of the huge intellectual infrastructure built around the Pharaohs and their Gods, which presumably provided ancient Egyptian people with a framework that helped them make sense of their existence. I was awoken at 5.30 each morning by the call to prayer in Muslim mosques around our hotels and I photographed a sign on a business, “closed for ten minutes for praying”. I also heard of the 3rd century Christian era in Egypt (10% of the population still practices Christianity) and of the later

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arrival of Islam which is now the dominant religion in that country. Throughout history humans have found meaning and purpose in many ways and have developed a huge range of “religious” institutions, myths, monuments and practices to help anchor them and mould their sense of where they fit in the scheme of things.

None of the large array of man-made religions can lay claim to “the truth” yet clearly all of them are responding to a common human need to identify our place in the cosmos and to find meaning and purpose in our lives. Culture, spirituality and religion are closely interwoven. Culture with its associated values and beliefs provides the framework within which our behaviour is determined. Our values are embedded in our psyche and determine our intuitive response to challenge. They are susceptible to modification through nurture, through our environment and through intellectual, emotional and “spiritual” experiences.

Spirituality is the driving force for meaning and purpose in life. It determines how we perceive ourselves to be connected to the rest of society, the world and beyond. All of us need to make sense of who we are and how we relate to others as well as to our physical surroundings and whatever lies beyond them. We ignore the spiritual dimension of life at our peril. For many in modern society, that dimension is based on the concepts of humanism or environmentalism. For others, it is based on a commitment to follow the teachings of dynamic religious leaders such as Jesus or Mohammed or Buddha.

Religion is the vehicle within which many practice or develop the spiritual side of their lives. Religion plays a pivotal role in the development of many people’s spirituality and values. But most of us fall accidentally into one or other religions or into none. And some are socialized into making a particular religion the vehicle for their spiritual development.

Currently, Australians are being encouraged to find meaning in their lives through consumerism. This view of identity is heavily promoted by corporations which depend for their existence on fostering this addiction. The shopping mall has become the central focus of Australian community and helps many define who they are and where they stand. But through a growing tendency to worship belongings, and a religion of rampant consumerism, we are destroying many of the ecosystems which are the very basis of our survival.

If values and beliefs are to change, they will need to be compatible with peoples' sense of spirit; who they are and where they fit into the larger scheme of things. The new values frame needs to strengthen people's sense of involvement in their environment and with the whole family of man.

Turning points and tipping points

By the time the captain of the Titanic had taken the essential steps to turn his ship away from the icebergs ahead, it was too late. Persuading people in positions of influence that a change of direction is necessary is always difficult. The evidence that we need to make a change is received by some with denial that there is a problem; by some who accept that although there is a bit of a problem, we can muddle through, and by some who accept that the problem must be faced and that a change in direction is essential. People in the third category could make a difference. They do not have to be in the majority, but they need to be committed and determined and they need to combine their forces to effect change.

Tipping points (Gladwell) arrive when those in charge suddenly see that a new reality has arrived; that new forces are in place and that a change in direction is the only logical course. In the world of science the tipping point is often referred to as a paradigm shift. Suddenly, the jigsaw pieces in the scientific puzzle do not fit the frame into which scientists had been trying to place them and someone recognizes that a different frame of understanding is necessary. A shift in perception occurs as more and more scientists come to see that the pieces fit better into a new frame and suddenly there is a new mainstream view of the world.

Currently, the dominant human economic view of the world does not "fit" into the jigsaw frame provided by nature's economy. More and more people realise this but not yet enough to effect the paradigm shift that is almost certainly on the way.

Recent surveys indicate that as many as 23% of Australians are now opting out of the mainstream "rat-race", engaging in what Clive Hamilton (Hamilton) calls "downshifting" behaviours to concentrate on the quality of their existence rather than the acquisition of more "things". A tipping point to a new economic paradigm could be very close.

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Chapter 8

Finding the pathway

Australians alone cannot save the planet for human habitation but we can play a significant role in working with other nations to do so. The culture shift which will be an essential part of the solution has commenced. It will not be the fault of our leaders if our children do not inherit a viable planet. It will be collectively ours. We need now to clear away the undergrowth and chart a new national pathway to hope. And we need to pave the pathway to sustainability and equity with broad electoral understanding and commitment, so that our politicians will follow it.

Another world is possible.

In a recent book entitled “Another world is possible.... If”, Susan George argues that unless humanity can summon the collective will to change direction very quickly, we face collapse this century of global civilization as we know it. Catastrophe will in George’s view, be the outcome for humanity if neo-liberal globalisation continues unchecked. She believes that the hope of the world lies with a resurgent and independent Europe and a mass movement of world citizenry. Her book is a manual for a non violent revolution, which she argues, can succeed.

George thinks that we, the people, are now in a strong position to insist on a re-casting of globalisation and economic growth to meet the needs of all global citizens and not just those of the currently rich, greedy and powerful elites who currently dominate all of the economic global policy making institutions. She argues that for perhaps the first time in history, the world can afford to provide access to a decent life for every person on the planet — enough food, clean water, adequate housing, basic education, health care and public services as set out in the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The revolution, she believes, must begin with a new worldwide program of taxation and redistribution. Such a program would need to be administered so that citizens would actively share in the responsibility for choosing priorities and overseeing programs for each country. Financial redistribution alone won’t do the job, but without it, hundreds of millions are doomed to the merest survival and worse.

The trouble with economic globalisation in its current form is that it depends upon manipulated consumerism and the wanton destruction of non renewable resources, paying zero, or near zero price for the damage it inflicts on the world's "commons". Further, it entrenches and rewards the already rich and is not seriously committed to sharing the world's limited resources with those at the bottom of the global heap. It is long on "the economy" and short on distributed human welfare. While a rising tide of affluence may, to some extent, "lift all boats", the way the system works at present, it is increasing the rich/poor divide and not doing enough to assist really poor countries to escape the poverty trap.

The comfortable re-election in late 2004 of Australian and American governments which are firmly committed to the current approach to managing the world is a challenge to those of us who believe that we must, as a global society begin to head off on new paths. The growing pace of climate change and destruction of ecosystems mean that we do not have much time to craft a viable future for the next generation.

Recently, I participated in a stimulating roundtable with a multidisciplinary group of 20 Australians including very distinguished ecologists, systems scientists, futurists, policy analysts and social scientists. The topic was "Pathways past the precipice; Turning points and tipping points en route to a sustainable future". The questions discussed were "How close are we to civilization collapse, what precipices does Australia face as a nation, how close are we to them and what can we do to avoid falling over them? The most important outcome was that the entire group agreed that our present path is leading us directly to either a precipice or, at the very least, a dangerously steep cliff. The group could not say how long before we reach the edge or falling off point, because of the complexity of interacting systems and the resilience that living systems have before becoming chaotic. There was unanimity however that there are much safer pathways and that we know enough to identify them.

While many Australians are worried about the path we are currently taking, many, I suspect, are also unaware how perilous it is or that there are alternative paths. If they had this necessary information, many would demand of their elected representatives that we reset the compass and take the safer path. At present neither of our major political parties has reset its policies to a safer path. The good news is that both parties watch the polls to see which paths Australians want to take. So we must tell them!

There are huge vested interests and passionate believers in the view that our current path is the only logical one. These people currently have control of government, the instruments of economic activity, much of the media and many of our institutions. They are not seeking a change of direction.

On the brighter side, there are large numbers of individuals and groups already discussing these issues and making changes in their lives that are based on the recognition of a need to discover a more sustainable path. We need a vehicle through which these people can support each other and others can join in the process of discovery, consideration and action.

Those groups in Australian society who are already embedded in the task of running things are not as free to view these matters as dispassionately as those of us who no longer depend on it for our livelihood and who have the luxury of looking back over the decades. That is why the push to radically reassess Australian values could come first from the growing group of Australians who are no longer paying mortgages, and making their way in the system. When Australia's grandparents are convinced that change is essential, they and their logical partners, the younger generation, will need to develop and navigate the new pathways.

The shift has commenced

In their book "Affluenza", Australians Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss describe "downshifters" as people who have made a conscious decision to accept a lower income and a lower level of consumption in order to pursue other life goals. They are motivated by a desire for more balance in their lives, more personal fulfilment and more time with their families. I have already alluded to the 2002 a nationwide survey which showed that 23% of adults belong to this category. But it bears repeating. It highlights the fact that many Australians are already taking a new path and adopting values which conflict with convention. Why wouldn't they? There is a great deal more to living than driving expensive cars and owning big houses. And as I have said several times in this book already, the evidence shows that economic growth per se does not enhance communal life satisfaction.

Australia's strong economic growth in recent years has come at substantial cost. Social and community infrastructure have been neglected. Family and community life have been sacrificed on the altar of economic growth. Educational infrastructure has been degraded and the economic model which we serve, while it has delivered us considerable wealth is also playing a significant role in facilitating environmental destruction. Downshifters are leading the way in a re-evaluation of the important things of life.

Australians could be at the leading edge of the global value change

Although I have been discussing the situation in Australia, most of the issues are global. That is particularly true of our economic system. Australians cannot single-handedly change the shape or direction of globalization. Nor can our efforts alone make a significant impact on greenhouse gases and climate change. We are part of a thoroughly interdependent global society of 6.5 billion people and there are only 20 million of us. But even with one of the lowest population densities in the world, our environment is being significantly degraded by human activity and we lead the world in our per capita emission of greenhouse gases. We must play our part in restoring sustainability to the large part of the planet for which we have a stewardship role.

Australians are deeply privileged socially, historically, economically and culturally. Despite our small population we excel in sport, science, the arts and the humanities. And in the past, Australians played a key leadership role in the development of the United Nations.

In an unhealthy partnership with our American allies, Australia has become something of an international pariah and deservedly so. In the new global order we are now seen by many in the Third World as wanting to insulate ourselves by building a fortress around our own good fortune. Naturally, Australians want to preserve what they have and it is understandable that as an island state we have been anxious at the possibility of losing the gains we have made as a nation.

But in the interests of the next generation, we must constructively address the linked challenges of 6.5 billion people, a warming planet, environmental destruction and a dysfunctional economic system. These are not someone else's problem; they are ours. Once Australians understand that and turn our minds to it, we can be at the leading edge of transforming the world for our descendants. And we have the reassurance of knowing that values changes are taking place everywhere as more and more people confront the new realities.

If you partly or fully agree with my diagnosis, it is probable that you are asking "So what? What can I do about it and how do I begin to change things?"

Build on your strengths. Some of us are good at organizing, others at writing, talking, playing sport, music, parenting or grand-parenting. Many of us belong to sporting clubs, churches, parent groups, Rotary, Lions, Probus, University of the Third Age and so on.

We need to be talking within our peer groups not only about the bad news but also the hopeful possibilities for the future. The trouble is that the media emphasise the bad news with little mention of the possibility for change. We need to examine the values that are uppermost in society and ask whether they are outdated. If we care about a future for our kids, we need to ask whether the values that we pass on to them are compatible with a viable human world. And we need to ask whether there are ways in which we can involve our friends in futures thinking.

If you feel really adventurous, you could join with a few friends to develop plans for a SEE-Change Centre in your community.

Involve your children and grandchildren, your parents and your grandparents

If you are a grandparent or a parent, talk to your children and grandchildren in an appropriate way about these issues. If you are a child or a grandchild involve your parents and grandparents in the issues and ideas discussed here. This is something which affects us all.

Some of us are freer than others to take action. The forces joined to maintain the status quo are formidable. We can expect that they will fight a very strong and effective rear guard action. Expect to be laughed out of court, described as a utopian, unrealistic, a bleeding heart and much worse. But stay with the evidence. The evidence is accumulating that we are at a crossroads which could lead us either to a new and hopeful future or over ugly precipices. We can all help to steer our society along the hopeful path.

The current commitment to the neo-liberal economic view of the world is enormous. It permeates all levels of Australian society and many still believe that we can spend and consume our way out of trouble. It is that view of the world to which we are constantly exposed through television advertising, controlled media reporting, and the declarations of our political leaders on both sides of politics.

It will be easier for those who are no longer in the workforce and who do not depend on maintenance of the status quo for their livelihood to take action first. The action that is most important is a transformation in the five value domains which are framing our current Australian view of the world. When the values frame changes, we will see problems in an entirely different light and will structure our institutions and the economy in a more appropriate way.

It will be over to the grandchild generation to build the next version of Australian society. I have no doubt of their ability to do better than we have done in making it fairer, better integrated with the rest of the world and more in harmony with our environment. The alternative is not a pretty one

Keep your local parliamentarians informed

I have argued that Australian democracy is under threat. Both of our major political parties have been captured by neo-liberalism and have lost their way. Politics is the art of the possible and politicians have a tough job in the modern world. Visionary leaders arise rarely and when they do they are often unappreciated and ultimately suppressed.

I firmly believe in the essential goodness of all humans. We need to find mechanisms for promoting that goodness rather than promoting a climate of selfishness, fear and suspicion. Politicians on both sides of politics need to hear from us that we are now alert and alarmed at the directions they are taking us and that we insist on going in positive new directions.

Once we are organized and vocal, they will hear the message.

Chapter 9

We can all be world changers

*The world changes because individuals and small groups set about changing it.
The attributes required for being a world changer are concern, vision, persistence
and self belief.*

Believe in your self and in your dream
Though impossible things may seem
Someday, somehow you'll get through.
To the goal you have in view
Mountains fall and seas divide
Before the one who in his stride
Takes the hard road day by day
Sweeping obstacles away

Believe in your self and in your plan
Say not I cannot, but I can
The prizes of life we fail to win
Because we doubt the power within
Anonymous

This little poem jumped out at me from a rack of sentimental cards in a country store a couple of years ago. I was so impressed that I have taught it to all my grandchildren.

The poem highlights a number of things which I think enable us all to play our part in changing the world. They include self belief, persistence and the un-recognized capacities that we can discover within ourselves when we pursue “impossible dreams”.

Humanity is in serious trouble. But things have looked hopeless many times before. Our human world changes, not because our leaders think it should, but because determined and visionary individuals dig in to make it change.

We can all contribute to changing the world for the better if only we have a mind to do so. That is my conclusion from observing at reasonably close range,

three men, all doctors, who at relatively late stages in their lives took on causes that have been influential in changing the world.

Charles Duguid

On the day he died in 1986 at the age of 102, workmen were in the process of laying down a brass plaque on North Terrace Adelaide in recognition of the fact that in the 150 years since Europeans had colonized South Australia, my father-in-law had been one of 150 South Australian “greats”.

In their book, “Turning Points in the Making of Australia”, Michael Page and Robert Ingpen (Page) point out that nearly fifty years of unremitting advocacy by Duguid was highly influential in changing Australia’s approach to the treatment of aboriginal people.

Charles Duguid was a Scottish born doctor who migrated to Australia in 1912, working first as a Victorian country GP, and later as an Adelaide surgeon. He was already in his 50s when in 1934 he became aware of the plight of Central Australian aboriginal people.

His interest was sparked by a patient from the Northern Territory who told him stories of injustice to aboriginal people which he found hard to believe. So he went to see for himself what was going on. In his 1963 book, “No dying race”, Duguid quoted Ruskin. “I saw an injustice done and tried to remedy it. I heard a falsehood taught and was compelled to deny it. Nothing else was possible for me. I knew not how little or how much might come of the business, or whether I was fit for it; but here was the lie, full set in front of me and there was no way round it but only over it.” (Duguid)

I didn’t meet Duguid until he was in his 70s and his campaign was already 20 years old. By that time his activities had led to the establishment of Ernabella in the north of South Australia as a place where aboriginal people were treated with respect and educated in their mother tongue; led the development of the formidable Aborigines Advancement League and waged a long running battle against disparate forces, deeply entrenched in Australian society that saw it as preferable that aboriginal people be allowed to die out. He was by then engaged in a battle with the Australian government over its development of the Woomera rocket range in arrogant disregard for the needs of the people over whose land the range would pass.

Aboriginal people found a safe haven in the Duguid home and many lived with the family over various periods. He deeply respected the wisdom and warmth of aborigines and they reciprocated, requesting that his body be buried at Ernabella on their land, which he saw as a huge honour.

Of course Charles Duguid was not alone in the battle which eventually led to aboriginal people being given land rights and the right to vote in the land they had occupied for 40,000 years. And the fight for aboriginal justice is far from over. But many agree that Duguid played a very influential role in shifting the Australian value frame on aborigines in a more positive direction. He was aided and abetted in all of this by a degree of innate bloody mindedness and determination, by an unusual degree of self belief and by his remarkable wife Phyllis. Always a “doer” he was shocked into action fairly late in life by his keen sense of social justice and his strong but thoroughly unorthodox Christian faith.

Basil Hetzel

I first met Basil Hetzel when I was a junior medical student and he was a member of the medical academic staff at the Adelaide University. Our paths have crossed repeatedly since then. I attended a dinner to mark his “retirement” from Headship of the CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition in 1985 at the age of 63. Little did I realize at that time that Basil’s world changing activities were just beginning.

Since 1985 Basil has personally masterminded the global eradication of iodine deficiency disorders. His actions have prevented the birth of literally millions of mentally retarded and deformed children. Along the way he has been a University Chancellor, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia and designated a “Living National Treasure.”

In 1983, using the results of his own research Basil reformulated the concept of iodine deficiency. He applied his own public health model of intervention to design and build the global infrastructure for a program to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders. First, he established the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders. He steered the program from a number of international posts and at the age of 84, has this year stepped down from a leadership role in the council. The number of countries where iodine deficiency remains a public health problem decreased by nearly half from 118 in 1993 to 54 in 2003 and millions of children have thereby avoided neurological damage at birth.

Graeme Clugstone, an Australian administrator in the World Health Organisation wrote recently of Basil: “In Nepal, and then in many Asian countries, where iodine deficiency was rampant, affecting some 400 million people in the 1980s, I watched Basil at first hand, working with Governments, with WHO and with UNICEF, at national and at Regional inter-country levels. He was tireless in his efforts at persuading Governments, Heads of State,

Health Ministers, scientists and programme managers about the clinical and epidemiological evidence for Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD), convincing them of the magnitude and spectrum of IDD, motivating them to assess and monitor the evidence for themselves, and helping them develop appropriate programmes through both iodized oil and iodized salt. Many of us watched with amazement his exceptional ability to speak and persuade with a scientific yet compellingly understandable voice, whether to Heads of State, expert scientific groups — of which he has organized and chaired many in WHO over the years, or across the floor of the World Health Assembly.”

Basil’s accomplishments in changing the world are remarkable. He would be the first to agree that what he has done is a result of the combination of chance and commitment. Indeed “Chance and Commitment” is the title of his recently published memoirs. (Hetzel) The book tells the story of a medical student who wanted no more than to become a good physician like his father. And when I first knew him that is what he was. Basil developed the vision, first suggested by his research, of the possibility of eliminating a worldwide scourge and set about with remarkable determination and persistence at a late stage in life to implement it. On the way he discovered strengths and abilities which I am sure he was surprised to find he possessed.

Fraser Mustard

Canadian, Fraser Mustard is another medico whose world changing work has been carried out in the later decades of his life. (Mustard) In 1982 after a distinguished career as a medical researcher and medical school Dean, he took on the task of establishing a unique new institution, The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR). The distinguishing feature of this institution is that it has no walls. It consists of networks of outstanding thinkers and researchers who focus on big questions but come from a diverse range of institutions and disciplines. Each network meets for several days each year following which, members return to their home institutions enriched and inspired by the multi-disciplinary interactions that occur when groups of outstanding thinkers and researchers interact on apparently intractable problems and let their imagination fly.

The Institute’s programs have focussed on science, technology, innovation and economic growth and the effect of economic change on the social environment and the health and wellbeing of individuals and populations. Several of these programs have profoundly changed the way scientists around the world think about their subjects.

I spent six weeks in Canada in 2001, reviewing the operation and accomplishments of the CIAR and seeking to understand how Fraser had made it happen. I came up with the same answer; concern, vision, persistence, and self belief.

From the activities of one of the programs, Fraser has become in the twilight of his career, a world leader on the socio-economic determinants of human development and health. His particular emphasis has been on early childhood and the role of communities. He co-chaired a report on “The Early Years” for the Government of Ontario which has become an important world resource. He is still an indefatigable global campaigner, emphasizing the enormous importance to society of early childhood development. The impact of his work has been reflected in government policy changes here in Australia and many other countries.

Now in his late seventies Fraser still leads The Founders’ Network, which links together 1,000 or more individuals in the private and public sector in Canada and other countries who helped him to build CIAR.

So what?

The accomplishments of these three remarkable men, with whom I am particularly familiar, lead me to assert that everyone who is willing can do their bit to change the world. For some like Basil Hetzel the chances on offer could have profound global implications. For others, the canvas will be smaller and the opportunities less dramatic but no less important or challenging.

Having a concern and the vision to respond to that concern is the first step. The second is a firm determination to follow through on what may often appear to be an impossible dream. Self belief is more difficult, because most of us are understandably tentative and shy about the poem’s “power within”. We can’t know what we are capable of until we have tried. And when we try, we can be surprised and even stunned at what we can accomplish.

The stakes are too high for us to ignore the threats to our children’s future. It would be easy to sit back and blame others for our predicament. The future is now in our hands and is our responsibility whether we are 15 or 80.

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Appendixes

- 1 *The Earth Charter*
- 2 *The Wellbeing Manifesto*
- 3 *Proposals for change in
"Imagining Australia"*
- 4 *Overview of Roundtable Discussion
on SEE-Change Centres*

Appendix I

The Earth Charter

Preamble

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the wellbeing of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous — but not inevitable.

The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future wellbeing of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

Principles

1. Respect and Care for the Community of Life

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.

- a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
- b. Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
 - a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.
 - b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

- a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
- b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

- a. Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.
- b. Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.

II. Ecological Integrity

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

- a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.
- b. Establish and safeguard viable natural and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.
- c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.
- d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.
- e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.
- f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

- a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.
- b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.
- c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.
- d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.
- e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.

7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community wellbeing.

- a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.
- b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.
- c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
- d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.
- e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.
- f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

- a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.
- b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human wellbeing.

- c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

III. Social and Economic Justice

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

- a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
- b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
- c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

- a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.
- b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.
- c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labour standards.
- d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

- a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.
- b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
- c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual wellbeing, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.
- c. Honour and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfil their essential role in creating sustainable societies.
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.

IV. Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.

- a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.
- b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.
- c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.
- d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.
- e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.
- f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.

14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.

15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

- a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.
- b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.
- c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

- a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.
- b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.
- c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.
- d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
- e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.
- f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

Appendix 2

The Wellbeing Manifesto

Preamble

Australians are three times richer than their parents and grandparents were in the 1950s, but they are no happier. Despite the evidence of a decline in national wellbeing, governments continue to put economic interests first. The obsession with economic growth means other things that could improve our wellbeing are sacrificed.

There is widespread community concern that the values of the market — individualism, selfishness, materialism, competition — are driving out the more desirable values of trust, self-restraint, mutual respect and generosity. Many people feel alienated from the political process; the main parties seem too alike and think of progress only in material terms. The challenge of our age is to build a new politics that is committed, above all, to improving our wellbeing

Wellbeing

Throughout history sages have counselled that happiness is not a goal but a consequence of how we live, that it comes from being content with what we have. Today, we are sold a different message — that we will be happy only if we have more money and more of the things money buys. Human experience and scientific research do not support this belief.

Our wellbeing is shaped by our genes, our upbringing, our personal circumstances and choices, and the social conditions in which we live. Our collective wellbeing is improved if we live in a peaceful, flourishing, supportive society, so promoting wellbeing should be a public as well as a personal task.

We often think of wellbeing as happiness, but it is more than that. It is about having meaning in our lives — developing as a person and feeling that our lives are fulfilling and worthwhile. Wellbeing comes from having a web of relationships and interests. Family and friends, work, leisure activities and spiritual beliefs can all increase our wellbeing. The intimacy, sense of belonging and support offered by close personal relationships are of greatest value. Material comforts are essential up to a point, and there is no doubt that

poverty remains a serious problem in Australia. But for most Australians more money would add little to their wellbeing.

What can governments do?

Governments can't legislate to make us happy, but many things they do affect our wellbeing. Industrial relations laws can damage or improve the quality of our working lives; government policies can protect the environment or see it defiled; our children's education depends on the quality of schools; tax policies can make the difference between a fair and an unfair society; and the cohesiveness of our communities is affected by city design and transport plans. This manifesto proposes nine areas in which a government could and should enact policies to improve national wellbeing.

1. Provide fulfilling work

Fulfilling work is vital to our wellbeing; insecure, stressful and unsatisfying jobs diminish it. High-quality work can provide us with purpose, challenge and opportunities. Through it we can develop our capacities, begin to realise our potential, and meet many of our social needs. In short, fulfilling work is essential if we are to flourish. Workplaces that provide secure, rewarding jobs should be encouraged. Workplace flexibility, including quality part-time jobs, should operate in the interests of employees as well as employers. Unemployment is more damaging than just the loss of income, and disparaging unemployed people serves only to increase their anxiety and sense of exclusion.

Pursuing full employment is essential to a wellbeing economy, as is ensuring decent minimum workplace standards. Satisfying work can be found inside and outside the home. Work in the household and in communities is essential to social health but it is ignored because it falls outside the official economy. Governments should value this work, and employers need to adapt to the realities of family life. Maternity leave, paternity leave, carers' leave and sick leave are not costs but essential to our wellbeing.

2. Reclaim our time

Among the countries of the developed world, Australians now work the longest hours and have less holiday leave than most. We systematically overestimate the amount of wellbeing associated with high incomes and long work hours. As a result, our families, our health and our sense of achievement all suffer. If Australia is to thrive, our working lives should

contribute to, rather than sap, our wellbeing and that of our families. Spending more time with our families, friends and communities would make most of us happier, and our workplaces must be reshaped to allow us to reclaim our time

To flourish as a nation — not just as an economy — we need to limit working hours by reducing the maximum working week to 35 hours initially and by more thereafter. Other developed countries have reduced working hours without the often predicted chaos. If we took productivity gains in the form of a shorter working week rather than higher pay we could improve our quality of life and create new job opportunities, all without any reduction in pay.

3. Protect the environment

A healthy, diverse natural environment is valuable in itself; it is also essential to human wellbeing. But government and business tell us we cannot afford too much protection — it's bad for GDP. We know, though, that the wellbeing of future generations will be heavily affected if we fail resolutely to tackle biodiversity loss, pollution and waste.

Climate change in particular poses a severe threat and demands immediate and far-reaching measures by government. We can do much more than we have to date. We should increase taxes on damaging environmental activities such as burning fossil fuels and reduce taxes on socially beneficial activities such as providing fulfilling work. We should make the generation of waste very expensive and reward businesses and households that reduce their consumption and recycle materials.

4. Rethink education

It is impossible for all students to come first in their class, and our education system should stop pretending they can. Our schools should be dedicated to creating capable, confident, emotionally mature young people who are equipped to face life's vicissitudes.

Young Australians are told they will have up to six careers in their lifetime, yet we insist on making high schools and universities more vocationally oriented. As a result, students learn less about themselves and the societies around them. A greater focus on children's physical, emotional and moral wellbeing — rather than competitive test results — would produce happier, healthier young people. We should stop turning universities into businesses selling degrees and make them the critic and conscience of society, places where students flourish as humans and where academics feel free to question powerful institutions without fear of victimisation.

5. Invest in early childhood

Studies show that, for each dollar wisely invested in early childhood education and care, we can save up to seven dollars in avoided costs of crime, unemployment, remedial education and welfare payments. A wellbeing government would invest more.

Children need a great deal of individual attention in their early years. Shared parental leave should be extended to cover the first two years of a child's life. Parents, too, need support so they can do the best job for their children. Adolescence too is an important time; parents need to participate actively in the whole developmental journey.

6. Discourage materialism and promote responsible advertising

Buying a particular brand of margarine cannot give us a happy family, and owning a four-wheel drive will not deliver us from humdrum lives. But the advertisers seek to persuade us otherwise. Advertising makes us more materialistic, even though we know that people who are more materialistic are usually more self-absorbed, less community oriented and less happy. Materialism is also bad for the environment.

Marketers have hijacked the media and most of our cultural events, and it is impossible to escape their daily barrage. We need commercial-free zones in our cities and limits on shopping developments. And governments should use tax and retirement policies to help people who want to change to less materialistic lifestyles. Advertisers prey especially on children because they know they lack the ability to distinguish between facts and advertising fiction. As in Sweden, advertising aimed at children under 12 should be banned, and advertising codes of conduct should be made legally binding so that irresponsible and deceptive marketing is outlawed.

7. Build communities and relationships

A flourishing society is characterised by vibrant, resilient and sustainable communities. Loneliness and isolation cause much unhappiness, especially among single parents, unemployed people, older people living alone and people with disabilities and their carers. Instead of criticising single parents who do the best they can, we should support them. Instead of judging people by their sexuality, we should encourage all loving and supportive relationships. And we need to help people develop the skills to build stronger family relationships.

We all depend on others for care at some time in our lives. Care is provided by parents, children, friends and others. We need to value all carers more. Governments and employers should do much more to support workers with caring responsibilities. Governments should also support participation in community organisations, especially among marginalised groups. Volunteers contribute greatly to our wellbeing and need to be recognised and rewarded.

8. A fairer society

Strong economic management will always be needed; but instead of a narrow focus on GDP growth, the objectives should include building public infrastructure and reducing social and regional inequalities. Widening disparities in incomes and access to services create resentment and disharmony. Instead of blaming the victims, a wellbeing society would acknowledge that some people are left behind by the market. A fairer system of taxation and government spending — including better public services and income support for those less able to compete in the marketplace — would enhance social wellbeing.

More public funds could also go to overseas aid to help the poor in developing countries escape from poverty and destitution. Increased public spending on measures to improve wellbeing in Australia could easily be financed by cutting business and middle-class welfare and cracking down on tax avoidance.

9. Measure what matters

Economic growth is treated as the panacea for our ills. But for affluent societies growth in GDP has almost no connection with improvements in national wellbeing. Bushfires, car accidents and crime waves all increase GDP, but they don't make us better off. GDP takes no account of how increases in income are distributed or the damage to the natural environment that economic activity can cause.

We need a set of national wellbeing accounts so that we can monitor our progress. They should report on the quality of work, the state of our communities, crime rates, our health, the strength of our relationships, and the state of the environment. Governments should be judged by how much our wellbeing improves, not by how much the economy expands.

Towards a flourishing society

The question for Australia in the 21st century is not how we can become richer: it is how we can use our high standard of living to build a flourishing society — one devoted to improving our wellbeing rather than just expanding the economy. Many Australians are anxious about declining moral standards. We worry that we have become too selfish, materialistic and superficial and long for a society built on mutual respect, self-restraint and generosity of spirit.

The changes proposed in this manifesto would inspire healthier communities, stronger personal relationships, happier workplaces, a better balance between work and home, less commercialisation, and greater environmental protection. A flourishing society is not a futile hope. Australian democracy offers people the opportunity to shed their cynicism and commit themselves to creating a better future.

The Australia Institute

To give your endorsement of this manifesto please go to www.wellbeingmanifesto.net

Appendix 3

Some Ideas for our Future discussed in “Imagining Australia”

by Macgregor Duncan, Andrew Leigh, David Madden and Peter Tynan:
Published by Allen and Unwin 2004

1. Australian identity

- Our national identity should be restructured around a core set of national values.
- The great Australian values of egalitarianism, mateship and a fair go should be updated to better reflect modern Australia.
- Australia lacks a meaningful central legend of nationhood despite repeated efforts to elevate the Anzac legend and the Federation story to that role.
- The Eureka uprising could become the central legend of Australian nationhood and its legacy could be reclaimed from fringe elements of the Australian community.
- Australia’s national symbols — the Republic, flag, oath, anthem and national holiday — need to be made unambiguously Australian.
- The process of reconciliation should become more celebratory, by raising understanding of the totality of aboriginality, rather than focusing exclusively on past injustices.
- The best way to raise understanding is through interpersonal reconciliation and for reconciliation to succeed, advocates must seek to win over the Australian suburbs.
- Australia should set in place strong and positive symbols of reconciliation, including a Makarrata (treaty) Day, Eddie Mabo Day and assigning dual names to Australian capital cities.
- Australia’s multicultural society is one of its greatest national strengths. The policy needs to be refined so that suburban Australia is given a sense of ownership over its direction.
- Australia’s international focus should become a source of pride, acknowledging our culture of international travel and disproportionately large diaspora.

2. The Australian democratic system

- Australia should become a republic in which the Australian people directly elect a president from a list of six bipartisan candidates.
- Australia needs a bill of rights to protect certain fundamental freedoms against government abrogation, and to give the high court a greater role in the spiritual concerns of the nation.
- Australia should institute regular constitutional conventions to heighten constitutional awareness and to ensure that the Constitution accords with the values of all who live under it.
- The Senate should be transformed into a house of national policy formation. The number of senators should be reduced and no senator should be eligible to serve in the Cabinet.
- Cabinet government should be reformed by enabling the prime minister to appoint ministers from outside the parliament to expand and diversify the pool of candidates for those positions.
- The public service should be reinvigorated by fostering greater public — private job mobility, to make a public service a font of new and exciting ideas.
- The House of Representatives should have fixed four-year election terms with the House and the Senate staggered two years apart.
- Australia should develop a national deliberation Day in which citizens come together in small groups with their political representatives one week before major national elections to deliberate and discuss pressing issues in the campaign.
- The preselection of political party candidates should be opened to all party supporters not merely to the 1% who belong to the political party. Open primaries will boost citizen involvement in the quality of politicians.
- Campaign finance reform should encourage the donation of more money to political parties but through blind trusts so as to avoid the potential for corruption.

3. Recapturing nation-building zeal

- All professional and vocational degree programs should be grounded in a year of liberal arts education and Australia should create a liberal arts university that specializes in teaching rather than research.
- Australia should dramatically increase investment in higher education through greater government funding and the full deregulation of student fees.

- The meritocratic principal of entry into university should be maintained and the practice of allowing a lower entry standard for full fee paying students should be abolished. University admission decisions should consider the parental resources and debt aversion of those from the poorest backgrounds.
- Australia should create a National Sustainability Council to champion the process of sustainability reform and environmental modernisation.
- There is need for a wide-ranging environmental tax reform package to create the incentives for consumers and companies to become more environmentally friendly.
- Australia should embark on a national project to develop renewable energy and energy efficient technologies.
- The Australian population should be doubled to 40,000,000 by 2050 together with policies to build support for increased immigration
- The immigration program should be expanded primarily by broadening the definition of economically useful skills to greatly increase our intake of skilled migration.
- Targeted immigration schemes should be developed for lower skilled workers to encourage prosperity, global labour mobility and to reinforce our values of equality and fairness.
- We need to humanize our humanitarian programs, enabling us all once again to be proud of our treatment of the world's refugees.

4. Sustaining growth and prosperity

- Economic liberalization was necessary, on the whole well implemented and has benefited Australians by raising living standards. Critics of economic rationalism have got it wrong and their alternatives represent a false promise of prosperity.
- Australia's policy makers and leaders need to engage with the public and to clearly articulate the importance of continuing economic reform.
- Australia should pursue a multilateral reduction in trade barriers and reinvigorate global trade negotiations by leveraging Australia's trade relationships.
- We should create an independent fiscal authority using adjustable taxation rates to help smooth the economic cycle.
- Corporate bankruptcy rules should be amended and reoriented towards director-led reorganizations of large firms.
- Industry assistance should be transparent to ensure the greatest return from public investment in industry promotion.

- There should be government and business support for the development of industry clusters to improve innovation and productivity.
- Australia's capacity to innovate should be strengthened by extending innovation funding, facilitating circular migration for expatriate researchers and establishing overseas technology parks for Australian firms.
- A culture of innovation and entrepreneurship should pervade all levels of Australian society and be encouraged by our national leaders.
- The next generation of business leaders must meet the challenges of business in the global economy and be trained to do this.

5. Rethinking Australian social policy

- There is a need to distinguish between poverty and inequality. Inequality actually matters — despite the recent trend to claim otherwise.
- To reduce unemployment, an earned income tax credit should be introduced to make work more attractive at the margins and to be funded by rolling the GST forward.
- We need to embark on a suite of policies to improve indigenous social policy including additional targeted health funding; and giving indigenous communities the power to tax alcohol; and rewriting private prison contracts to focus on rehabilitation of indigenous offenders; and providing market-based job-training programs in entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Reforms to the Australian education system should include improving teacher quality by boosting performance-based incentives; raising the school leaving age and recasting government funding to private schools.
- In an effort to reduce geographical pockets of poverty, there should be a trial of housing vouchers to assess whether moving from a high poverty neighbourhood to a more affluent neighbourhood improves the lives of poor families.
- To guarantee opportunities for older Australians, a default employee superannuation contribution should be introduced.
- Schools — especially primary schools — should become community focal points for civic engagement and to enhance the quality of interaction among community members.
- A scheme called Australia Corps, which gives young Australians the chance to serve in disadvantaged communities, should be introduced in return for education credits.
- Australia should reintroduce an inheritance tax, carefully designed to encourage increased philanthropic giving to community activities.

- Real tax reform should be undertaken by removing four types of middle class welfare — negative gearing, the First Home Owner Grant, the Baby Bonus and the present rebate on private health insurance — and in return, the marginal income tax rate should be decreased.
- There should be increased attention to policy evaluation and experimentation, so that new policies may be implemented more frequently and ineffective policies discontinued.

6. Australia's global citizenship

- The Canberra commission on the elimination of nuclear weapons should be renewed and expanded with the aim of eradicating all weapons of mass destruction and curtailing the trade in small arms.
- A market-based alternative to the Kyoto protocol should be developed that could be acceptable to all countries developed and developing alike to address the problem of global climate change.
- The Australian Broadcasting Commission should join forces with the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, to create a World Broadcasting Service to enhance the quality and flow of information and ideas around the globe, particularly in the developing world.
- Australia should play a leading role in developing a strategic recovery facility to coordinate international efforts to help countries that have suffered from war or state collapse to quickly become functioning and stable states.
- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum should be rejuvenated by transforming it into an expansive social and economic community to respond to the ever widening range of issues affecting the region.
- Australia should work towards creating a permanent regional security organization to address the broad array of security threats facing the Asia-Pacific region.
- Australia should work towards the establishment of a supranational body, the Australasian Union, to reap the benefits of the political, economic and social integration between Australia and New Zealand.
- There should be a new Department for international development with a minister of cabinet rank, to give greater priority to the challenge of development in our international policy.
- To meet our international obligations and to increase the impact of our foreign aid, we should increase our aid expenditures and experiment with non-bureaucratic delivery channels such as market-based voucher schemes.

Appendix 3 *Some Ideas for our Future discussed in "Imagining Australia"*

- A scholarship program should be developed to create incentives for some of the best and brightest to focus on the challenges of development and contribute to the global contest of ideas.

Appendix 4

Overview of Roundtable discussion on SEE-Change Centres

A group of 34 Canberrans met at a roundtable at the Nature and Society Forum (NSF) on the 17th of June 2006 to discuss the need for, and shape of, a SEE-Change Centre movement in the Australian Capital Territory.

The group included interested local politicians, administrators, business people, physical, biological, environmental and social scientists, medical practitioners, schoolteachers and members of NSF. Their names are appended to this document.

The proposition that a new public institutional movement is needed in Australia to promote learning and action within the community on sustainability, health and well-being had been raised in a recent book by Canberra biologist Stephen Boyden. It had been elaborated by two other NSF members, Bob Douglas and Keith Thomas. A proposal for development of a number of trial “Life Centres” (the name was subsequently changed to SEE-Change Centres) in the ACT had been sent to roundtable participants, who then circulated their preliminary reactions to this idea in a set of “dot-point” summaries prior to the meeting.

The day was spent in dialogue and small group discussion aimed at assessing whether, and how, SEE-Change Centres could most appropriately serve our society, and how they might be tested and evaluated.

The group reached consensus on the following statement, which has been prepared after careful consideration of the transcripts of the discussion. A full transcript of the discussion is available on the NSF web site www.natsoc.org.au.

The challenge

Our present human world is ecologically unsustainable. Our planet is already overstretched by the demands which humankind is making upon it. Human-induced changes such as the enhanced greenhouse effect, thinning of ozone layer, pollution of the planet with synthetic pollutants, land degradation in its various forms and massive loss of biodiversity are threatening the future of our life support systems and our personal health.

Underlying these challenges is our society's commitment to an economy which demands ever-increasing growth in consumption, increased competition and more intrusive working conditions. "Material progress" is diminishing, rather than enhancing, the quality of our lives and our health.

The future well-being of Australians will depend on big changes in our national culture. Which of our cherished beliefs and values do we need to reassess? What actions can we take — as individuals, groups, communities and regions — to recover a sustainable trajectory?

A cultural response

Many Australians appreciate the urgent need for change and would like to reset the national compass in the direction of sustainability, equity and a richer quality-of-life. But often they also feel trapped by a system over which they have little or no control. They would like to explore alternatives to the current dominant culture and examine, with their friends and neighbours, ways of making Australia a healthier, safer and more sustainable home for their children.

The transition to an ecologically sustainable society will require action by individual citizens, communities and businesses. It will also be dependent on firm and enlightened action on the part of government. However, appropriate governmental intervention will not come about until there is strong support for such action from an informed and concerned electorate that understands the absolute necessity for, and desirability of, this radical societal transformation.

Need for lifelong learning, open debate and appropriate action

There is therefore an urgent need for an arrangement that will engage Australians in an exploration of what we know about our predicament and what we can do about it. At present Australian society lacks appropriate structures for this.

However, there is no lack of scientific information about the nature of the challenge and there is a multiplicity of government agencies organizations, groups and individuals committed to a sustainable and equitable future.

What is missing is an institutional framework that:

- (1) systematically makes this information available, in understandable form, to concerned and interested members of the public, thus bridging the gap between the scientific world and the rest of the community, and
- (2) provides a framework that encourages Australians to engage with each other in lifelong learning, dialogue and action about these vital matters.

The SEE-Change Centre concept

The idea of developing a trial series of SEE-Change Centres in Canberra received firm support from the group which endorsed the purpose and functions of the Centres as being:

- To provide easily accessible information about the nature and origins of life on Earth, the state of the environment, the health and well-being of human populations around the world and the current state of the science of sustainability and of human health and well-being.
- To provide opportunities for informed discussion and debate about the future of Australian and world society and the various institutions and policies which shape environmental and human health and well-being.
- To work with a coordinating body/ group for dissemination of valid and well-authenticated scientific, health and social information that can aid and document the shift towards a bio-sensitive and healthy local and global society.
- To explore the opportunities for — and barriers to — change in sustainable directions that face Canberrans today.
- To provide pleasing settings for creative learning, personal and collective involvement, physical activity, and communication, using where appropriate, music, art, displays, performances, exhibitions, cross-generational dialogue and community social functions.
- To assist Canberrans to move towards a lifestyle that, while it may be less consumerist, will be more healthy, more enjoyable and more resilient to the shocks which inevitably lie ahead.

These centres would be accessible and visible to people in their local neighbourhoods. They would be staffed by volunteers and would facilitate cross-generational exploration of a wide range of issues that impact on daily Australian life. And they would provide enjoyable opportunities for social interchange and enrich people's lives.

SEE-Change Centres could be developed in a local or disused school buildings, shopping centres, sporting or cultural clubs, churches, mosques, temples, hotels or community centres.

Development of a series of trial live centres was widely endorsed by the roundtable, which noted that assistance with the process could be facilitated by already committed trainees in community development from the Australian Catholic University and possibly others from other ACT universities.

Appendix 4 Overview of Roundtable discussion on SEE-Change Centres

The roundtable recognized the need for coordination of the trial of SEE-Change Centres. It was proposed that NSF acts as facilitator and coordinator of this trial in the coming months.

SEE-Change Centres will flourish only if they meet genuine needs of the people in the communities in which they are located and if there is active support from business, government, academic and existing community bodies. SEE-Change Centres could become new and uniquely Australian institutions that are “owned” by the local community.

A Sustainability Network

Notwithstanding that the SEE-Change Centre concept as described above is a new one, there are many activities, groups, agencies and individuals in ACT that are already actively involved in attempts to engage Canberrans in the challenges identified above, and that share many of the objectives of SEE-Change Centres.

The establishment of SEE-Change Centres provides an opportunity to create a new mechanism that will encourage dynamic links between these groups (including, of course, the SEE-Change Centres themselves). It is therefore proposed that an on-line Sustainability Network be set up as a vehicle for exchange of information among these groups about each other’s activities and ideas.

It is proposed that The NSF and (later) the Australian National Sustainability Precinct play a facilitatory role in developing and maintaining this Network.

The anticipated outcome

It is envisaged that SEE-Change Centres and the Sustainability Network will be a springboard for the development of a nationwide SEE-Change Movement”, leading to a meaningful shift in our society towards sustainability, resilience, good health, caring, vibrancy and equity.

Canberra has the potential to become a national and international showcase in moving from being one of the most unsustainable communities in the world to one of the healthiest and most sustainable. The challenge of becoming sustainable is not only essential for human well-being and the survival of our civilisation. It constitutes an exciting adventure which will enrich all our lives and reward our descendants.

Commencing the journey

The journey has already begun. Canberra has many experienced and skilled people who have begun to chart the path to a sustainable future. The SEE-Change Centres and Sustainability Network will bring together, in a dynamic partnership, the diverse elements that will help us all to make the transformation.

Roundtable participants expressed a willingness to act as a reference group to support the development of SEE-Change Centres and the new movement. Work on the development of trial SEE-Change Centres is commencing immediately.

A logical question is: Where will the resources to do this come from? The answer is “from within Canberra”. We are a resource rich community and we have within our borders all that we need to make it happen if we want it to happen. Roundtable participants took the view that we cannot afford not to make it happen.

The group agreed to convene again after a steering group has examined the detailed recommendations and worked out a way forward.

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All of these people have helped to improve this book and I am totally responsible for its deficiencies.

Bob Douglas
July 2006



Bob Douglas graduated in medicine at the University of Adelaide in 1959. In 1967 he became a specialist physician in Papua New Guinea where he developed an interest in epidemiology, becoming involved in international health, vaccine development and health services development as an academic in community medicine. In 1989 he moved from his post as Dean of The Medical School in Adelaide, to become the first Director of The National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at The Australian National University.

Since his retirement from that post in 2001 he has worked with others to establish a new organization, Australia 21, www.australia21.org.au which is supporting networks of scholars and thinkers to consider some of the challenges ahead. He has recently also become associated with the Nature and Society Forum www.natsoc.org.au in the exploration of SEE-change Centres as a mechanism for re-empowering concerned and interested people to take charge of their future. He lives in Canberra with his wife Rosemary.

Each of us has the capacity to do more in our personal lives, in our homes and in our workplaces, to consciously improve our own health and the health of the planet. Think how much more effective that effort would be if consolidated and multiplied and shared.

Jon Stanhope MLA Chief Minister ACT

If we are to re-invent community after decades of growing isolation and individualism it will be through the efforts of community entrepreneurs and idealists like Bob Douglas. The incipient SEE-Change movement could prove an inspiration for us all.

Clive Hamilton Author of "Growth Fetish" and Executive Director of the Australia Institute

SEE-Change Centres

grey power and hope

This book has been written for Australians of all ages who are concerned at the mounting evidence that humans are placing unprecedented strains on the planet and are wondering how, as individuals and communities, they can begin to turn society in new directions of sustainability, equity and peace.

The author argues that a positive outcome to the current human predicament will depend upon a major culture shift and that in Australia, this shift could be initiated by a coalition of thoughtful older and younger people acting together through networks of newly evolving structures called SEE-Change Centres. He believes that a safer social and environmental path is both feasible and practicable and that a cultural "tipping point" is imminent in Australia. He suggests that cross-generational SEE-Change Centres could become a meeting ground where concerned Australians could discuss future options and reclaim control over our currently uncertain future.

