

# VOICES OF THE PEOPLE IN KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS

full report

Canberra, October/November 2014



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*Voices of the People* in Kitchen Table Conversations

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?

### SEE-Change

- is a grassroots non-partisan community group
- seeks to promote a sustainable future
  - through activities in the **neighbourhoods** and **schools** of Canberra
- sees troubling trends in Australian democracy
- believes everyone can help strengthen our democracy
  - and work co-operatively towards a sustainable future.

### SEE-Change means

- **S** = Society
- **E** = Environment
- **E** = Economy

### SEE-Change aims to

- reduce Canberra's ecological footprint
- create communities aiming for a sustainable Canberra
- empower people to make things better
- help our leaders to discover new directions for Australia.

## WHAT ARE KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS (KTC'S)?

### Semi-structured meetings of 8 to 10 people

- spending a couple of hours talking and listening respectfully to each other
- sharing things which matter to them
- held in private homes, cafes, clubs or classrooms.

### Participants include

- friends
- neighbours
- family
- workmates
- people known from community networks.

### Ascribe

- prepares a short report of the discussion and key points
- circulates the short report after the meeting
  - for amendment and approval by the group.

### KTC's aim for

- a society where people's voices are heard, respected and represented
- the promotion and enrichment of conversations about the future
- a diversity of voices and opinion in our discussions
  - everyone can join in
- simple and effective activities to encourage participation in our democracy
- action arising from these conversations.

# WHAT IS THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE PROJECT ABOUT?

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## TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS BEING FACED IN AUSTRALIA

### There is a crisis in Australian democracy where:

- special interest groups have too much political influence
- the community is disengaging from politics.

### Australia and the world are facing huge challenges:

- climate change
- growing inequality of access to wealth
- peak oil
- growing depletion of a range of natural resources
- an economic system needing endless consumption of resources to survive
- continuing growth in the human population.

### The political system is afflicted:

- political parties are no longer the dynamic force they once were
- ordinary individuals feel powerless to change or improve matters.

## THE TRIAL OF KTC'S IN CANBERRA

### The KTC's were

- arranged and managed by the Belconnen SEE-Change group
- tutored at a workshop by Mary Crooks, CEO of the Victorian Women's Trust
- held in 24 groups with 180 people during October and November 2014.

### The five starter questions were:

- What is important to you?
- What are your concerns?
- What are your hopes for the future?
- What needs to change?
- How can we make change happen?

## OUTCOMES OF THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE PROJECT

- 24 groups
- 96 pages of responses.

We do **not** suggest that:

- the issues raised in this report necessarily reflect the voices of the broader population.

We **do** suggest that:

- KTC's are an excellent way to share concerns in neighbourhoods and small groups
- KTC's offer a mechanism for building a stronger and more vibrant democracy.

# WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Responses to the first four starter questions are subdivided into the categories of *Local, Democracy and Politics, Economy, Environment, and Society*. Responses to the fifth question are subdivided by types of possible action.

The full report and the 96-page Scribe Summaries may be downloaded from the SEE-Change website: <http://www.see-change.org.au/voicesofthepeople>

## QUESTION 1: WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

### Local

Canberra, because it's a planned city with:

- Simple governance
- Bushlands
- Proximity to the coast and Sydney
- A good health system
- Community structures
- Commitment to sustainability and renewable energy.

### Democracy & Politics

The positive aspects of the current (modified) Westminster system:

- We can change governments peacefully
- Compulsory voting
- Access is provided to politicians and their staff.

Government should:

- Listen to the citizens
- Govern fairly and equitably
- Act responsibly on the global stage.

### Economy

An economy that is

- Just and fair
- Based on long-term goals
- Adequately considering social and environmental impacts.

### Environment

- Protect the environment
- Address climate change
- Live sustainably.

### Society

Building a better society and a revitalised, re-engaged community based on values like:

- Working for the common good
- A fair go
- Tolerance
- Satisfactory work
- Social justice in education
- Healthcare
- Freedom and safety
- Support for the vulnerable
- A productive transition to retirement
- Medical support for the ageing population.

## QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS?

### Local

- ACT's financial vulnerability
- Dependence upon land sales for revenue
- Role of builders and developers
- The city's dependency on public-sector employment
- Rate increases
- Prospective cost of tramline
- Encroachment on existing green spaces and reserves
- Homelessness and public housing
- Cost of care for the elderly.

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## Democracy & Politics

Disempowerment and difficulty engaging in the political system:

- We don't have true democracy
- Politicians are more interested in power and listening to big business and other vested interests rather than the people
- Politics is still sexist with too few females involved
- The country has gone from being progressive to uncaring
- Dismantling the welfare system and cutting the aid budget
- Shallowness of debate in Parliament and the media
- Government uses divisiveness and fear to get its policies adopted
- Two-party system polarisation leads politicians to be more concerned with ideology than the good of the country
- More public and parliamentary discussion should take place before the Government commits to sending troops to war
  - Our involvement in recent wars exacerbates problems in overseas countries rather than solves them.

## Economy

Debt-based economy:

- Banks lend money at interest into the economy
- The economy must grow at an exponential rate to pay off the debts.
- Growth needed to keep the economy going cannot be maintained as we have reached the limits of our resources (peak cheap oil, etc.)
- Consumption is slowing as the population ages and retires.

Greed:

- Prime motivating factor
- Demands for “growth” and consumerism out of control
- Corporations profit from products that ruin our health and society
- Everyone should be entitled to a fair go.

Economic metrics:

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) being totally unrealistic should be removed as any measure of the health of the economy
- Use measures that include social and environmental issues.

Economic paradigm:

- The growing inequality between the rich and the poor
- The inequitable tax system: poor people pay taxes and the rich get tax breaks
- Unregulated free market system in Australia and globally widens gap between rich and poor
- Gap is undermining society and democracy
- Governments are ceding power to corporations through trade agreements
- Australia is losing its manufacturing sector.

Do people have the skills and emotional resilience to cope with the likely major economic crisis?

## Environment

Environmental management approach too simplistic:

- The few steps taken to minimise environmental damage are inadequate because they do not take into account the complexity of the environment.

Excessive resource consumption:

- We are consuming beyond what the earth can support, with dire consequences for the planet
- Over-population is a major contributor to our failure to live within the earth's means and our failure to address climate change.

Governmental inaction:

- Refuses to tackle climate change
  - Unless we act quickly to reduce our impact, the resultant climate change will have major environmental, social and economic impacts on Australia due to loss of agricultural land, property, danger of fire, etc.

Other environmental issues:

- Decline in biodiversity
- Erosion of natural heritage such as the Great Barrier Reef
- The sacrifice of good agricultural land and natural ecosystems for mining and coal seam gas.

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## **Society**

Broadly:

- Society is becoming less tolerant
- Social inequality is increasing.

People are losing meaning and purpose in their lives due to

- Pressures on time
- Excessive materialism
- Difficulties in maintaining the work-life balance
- Declining social contact
- Declining community support of all kinds.

The changing educational culture:

- A diminishing emphasis on “critical thinking”
- The flow-on effects it has on citizens at all stages of life
- Lack of investment in science and environmental research
- Young people saddled with HECS debts
- And possibly yet greater debts if the federal government has its way.

Problems for young people:

- The difficulties faced by young people getting established in life due to
  - Lack of jobs in the trades or at entry levels
  - Difficulties in entering the housing market.

The changing work culture:

- Independent thinking is being thwarted
- Public interest disclosures are being constricted
- Whistle-blowers are being victimised.

Problems for the old and the disabled:

- Erosion of health care provision and facilities
- Inadequate care for the aged
- Inadequate care for persons with disability.

The Australian diet:

- Too many people have access only to nutritionally-poor “industrial” food
- Problems in the fuel supply chain could quickly produce food insecurity for everyone and food riots.

Alcohol and drug abuse problems:

- Create a vicious cycle with respect to other social problems
- Current addictive-drug control policies are ineffective.

Unsatisfactory Media industry

- Biased press
- Radio ‘shock jocks’ stifle constructive discourse.

Prevalent atmosphere of fear and distrust in our society

- Created and exacerbated by
  - Media and
  - Government
- Increasing emphasis on “national security”
  - With consequent loss of personal freedoms.

## **QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?**

### **Local**

- High-speed rail link
- The tramline to go ahead
- Innovative housing, and housing integrated with shops and entertainments
- Focus on the relationship between lifestyle and nature
- Get the ACT Liberal Party to address climate change.

### **Democracy & Politics**

- Australia becomes enlightened, egalitarian, fairer, more just, more humane
- Political decisions to
  - Focus on long-term outcomes
  - Be based on science and sound reasoning
- Treat refugees humanely and with respect
- Provide more foreign aid
- Seek international conflict resolution based on common humanity.

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## Economy

- Less consumption-driven society
- Base economy on sustainable technology
- The poor and needy should be helped
- Develop a society-wide response to problems caused as we move away from a growth-based economy.

## Environment

- Dealing with climate change becomes a priority
- People accept responsibility to improve their own environment
- Help the ACT reach its goal of 90% renewables by 2020
- The Federal Government follows the ACT's example.

## Society

- A better civil society based on *Can* and not *Can't*
- One that fosters ecological sustainability
- One promoting sharing and tolerance, especially refugees and immigrants
- One that uses social media to promote these goals – And bypass the political system.

## QUESTION 4: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

### Local

Broadly:

- More and genuine two-way consultation between government and community
- Intentional community co-operative development.

ACT-specific:

- High-speed rail link
- Tramline should be deferred for at least two years
- Promotion of public transport
- An independent federal member for the ACT
- Greater ACT representation in federal Parliament.

## Democracy & Politics

To promote engagement and participation in the political system:

- Stop labelling people as un-Australian when they don't support particular policies (such as involvement in overseas armed conflicts)
- Accept and use processes such as Citizen Parliaments, Referendums and Kitchen Table Conversations
- Constitutional and electoral reforms such as a Bill of Rights
- Longer election cycles
- Gain approval of both houses of Parliament before sending troops to an area of conflict
- Make Parliament more representative
- Australia should **not** sign treaties giving corporations the right to sue governments over trade disputes
- Make the tax system fairer and ensure that everyone including rich people and corporations pay their fair share of tax
- Treat refugees humanely and with respect; shut down off-shore detention centres.

Better behaviour from Politicians:

- Show integrity
- Place the interests of citizens ahead of global capitalism
- Use an evidence-based approach to decision-making
- Less shouting and rancour
- More political bipartisanship (conscience voting).

### Economy

A new economic paradigm:

- Less consumption-driven society
- GDP as a measure of economic success abandoned and replaced by a genuine progress indicator
- Social and environmental impacts of production and consumption factored into the cost of production (triple bottom line)
- Greater use of renewable technology and recycling of more materials
- Stricter advertising controls
- Corrected economic drivers of inequality
- Improved working conditions and accessibility
- Adequate housing and support for vulnerable people.

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Broadly:

- Australia to implement a robust overseas aid program.

### **Environment**

Climate Change:

- Stop using climate change as a political tool
- Accept the science
- Take a long-term view
- Price carbon
- Set up an emissions trading scheme
- Cut back influence of big mining companies
- Implement a renewable energy program.

Other goals:

- Reduce waste by making things more durable and repairable
- Develop a population policy based on sustainability criteria.

### **Society**

- Citizens asserting their views as part of building an engaged society
- Critical thinking made part of both formal and continuing life-long education
- Making active efforts to modify the capitalist and consumerist society with an emphasis on “less is best”
  - Such as fewer cars, luxury goods, technological gadgets
- Producing our own food
- Changing our attitude towards people from different backgrounds, those “not in our tribe,” and to develop tools to deal with this
- Governments to promote freedom of speech without vilification.

## **QUESTION 5: HOW CAN WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN?**

### **General principles to consider before embarking on a process of change:**

Impediments to overcome:

- feeling helpless
- change seeming too difficult
- special-interest groups hijacking the debate
- tension between economic and scientific claims
- the tendency to focus on the near term rather than the future.

Spurs to action:

- connecting with people on the emotional level
- selling the benefits of change
- listening in a non-judgmental way to people with different views
- acknowledging past successes
- not making it all Doom & Gloom.

Empowerment:

- Many young adults are knowledgeable and passionate about social and sustainability issues
  - expressed through the education system and community organisations (such as SEE-Change).

### **Processes and Tools for Creating Change:**

- Kitchen Table Conversations
- Volunteer for and support existing groups
- Speak out!
- Form small groups to undertake specific actions
- Engage with the local community
  - look for and/or create opportunities to get together
- Provide philanthropic support through the Internet
  - Such as Crowd Funding and Micro Loans
- Use modern media including social media to speak out
- Ways of speaking out
  - Talk or write to local politicians and/or relevant government ministers
  - Make comments on policy documents put out for public comment
  - write Letters to the Editor
  - sign petitions.

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### **Taking specific actions to support change:**

#### Individual:

- Challenge wrong behaviour (e.g. racist jokes)
- Become involved in your community
- Reduce one's carbon footprint
- Build general resilience in one's life
- Ethical investing
- Engage in politics
- Improve food security
  - support Farmers' Markets and locally-produced food.

#### Community:

- Change the economic system
- Tackle specific local issues
  - such as car parking
- Set up a way for young drivers to get driving experience
- Car sharing
- Campaign to deal with Canberra's poor PR image
- Reduce consumerism in the community
- Address overpopulation
- Create new structures/organisations
  - such as the Sydney Alliance.

# REVIEW OF THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE PROJECT

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Hosts were asked to complete an online survey:

- 16 out of 24 did so
- 50% said the KTC value was excellent
- 50% said it was good.

Support for the KTC methodology was overwhelming.  
Examples of responses include:

*“What was your greatest insight?” and “Any other comments”*

- People who don’t know each other can soon become engaged and get on well if they have a theme to discuss that they feel strongly about.
- ... ensuring that all have an equal voice, and not simply letting the most vocal people do all the talking.
- ... Terrific community building activity.

*“What actions will be taken as a result of your conversations?”*

- One of my neighbours and I hope to host a street party.
- Some group members may well network together more as a result.

A debriefing in December 2014 agreed that the KTC method:

- opens new doors to communicate with friends, neighbours, acquaintances
- helps people feel that this is their world
- assures them that their views matter
- is an enjoyable social activity
- raises topics that may not be part of everyday social conversation.

The KTC as a building block

- can help reinvigorate Australian democracy
- could be used on many topics, not just democracy
- can help individuals and community groups work with others to effect change on those issues which matter to us.

# WHERE TO NEXT?

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## WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE RESULTS OF THESE CONVERSATIONS?

Each person and each group is free to use the outcomes of these conversations as they see fit. A number of people and groups have already taken or intend to take action. We also hope by circulating the report it will promote change.

SEE-Change exists to help Canberra citizens change our Society, Economy and Environment in more sustainable directions. SEE-Change is willing to work with others on some of the issues identified as requiring action and to run training sessions and provide host kits for groups in Canberra. SEE-Change can be contacted by emailing [office@see-change.org.au](mailto:office@see-change.org.au)

## A CANBERRA ALLIANCE

Several of the participants identified the need to develop new structures and organisations to influence political decisions. We propose a Canberra Alliance of Civil Society Groups. It could include NGOs, faith groups, unions, and community action groups, working together to press for action on issues of broad concern and holding political leaders and policy makers accountable. KTC's and the techniques used by the US *Center for Wise Democracy* could be important building blocks to help set the agenda for such an alliance.

## USE OF KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS IN SCHOOLS

By means of the SEE-Change 2020 Vision Project, the KTC method could be tried in schools with children of all ages to prepare for a *2020 Parliament of Youth on Sustainability* planned for June 2015. Each school is invited to send a Parliamentary Team to speak to their school's green paper on climate change action. For further information please see our SEE Change website ([www.see-change.org.au/ParliamentofYouth](http://www.see-change.org.au/ParliamentofYouth)).

# CONCLUSION

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This KTC experience has been very positive. The KTC method enables small groups of people to engage in discussions not normally part of the Australian scene. It identified a significant number of local, national and global concerns. Participants showed an appetite for taking action to address these concerns.

KTC's could have very wide application and help address the current malaise in Australian democracy.

# 1. SEE-CHANGE AND KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS

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## WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?

**SEE-Change** is a non-partisan grassroots community group that seeks to promote a sustainable future through activities in the neighbourhoods and schools of Canberra. The 'SEE' in SEE-Change stands for Society, the Environment and the Economy. SEE-Change aims to inspire, inform and support action to reduce Canberra's ecological footprint and its vision is "Communities creating a sustainable Canberra." We aim to empower people to make things better and help our leaders to discover new directions for the Australian society, economy and environment.

## WHAT ARE KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS

Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC's) are semi-structured meetings in which a host invites 8 to 10 people to spend a couple of hours talking and listening respectfully to each other, about things which matter to them and on which they have views. Participants might be friends, neighbours, family, workmates or people they know from community networks. The conversations are usually built around one or two "starter questions" and can be held in private homes, cafes, clubs or classrooms.

There are a few simple ground rules. At the outset, the host seeks agreement from all in the group to these rules. These are a) that everyone in the group is entitled to have their say; b) that they agree to listen to one another, stay on track and not dominate the conversation; c) that all respect people's right to their opinion and d) that all agree to try to be constructive and not critical of others.

A scribe is appointed to keep track of the conversation and prepare a succinct report of the discussion and key points made for circulation, amendment and approval by the group after the meeting.

# 2. WHAT IS THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE PROJECT ABOUT?

## THE PROBLEM TO BE ADDRESSED

Australia is currently experiencing a crisis in our democracy. Special interests are wielding disproportionate political influence and the community is disengaging from the political process. This is at a time when Australia and the world are facing huge challenges. These include our response to the climate threat, growing inequality of access to wealth, peak oil, growing depletion of a range of natural resources, the destructive effects of an economic system that depends on endless consumption of resource intensive “stuff” for its function and continuing growth in the human population.

Political parties are no longer the dynamic force they once were and ordinary individuals often feel impotent to change a system that is highly responsive to the needs of big business and influential lobbies.

## A TRIAL OF KTC'S IN CANBERRA

As a result of the concerns identified above, members of the Belconnen SEE-Change group decided that rather than sliding into despair that we would look for solutions by looking for ways to strengthen our democratic institutions and working cooperatively towards a sustainable future. Accordingly, we decided to explore the value of Kitchen Table Conversations, which are being increasingly used as a means by which individuals and communities can become empowered through sharing their concerns and hopes for the future with others. The Victorian Women's Trust is one of the early implementers of this process and we invited Mary Crookes, the CEO of the Trust to run a workshop in Canberra to help us understand the process.

We held a public meeting in September at which 24 people from around Canberra agreed to participate in what we termed the *Voices of the People* project by hosting KTC's.

In the “*Voices of the People*” project we were seeking:

- Enriched conversations about the future, which respect differences of opinion and values.
- Simple and effective activities, which encourage people to participate in our democracy.
- A diversity of voices and opinion in our discussions — everyone can join in.
- A society where people's voices are heard, respected and represented.
- Action arising from these conversations.

It was decided that each group should hold two meetings at which they would discuss starter questions. Meeting 1 included three starter questions which were: “What is important to you?”, “What are your concerns?” and “What are your hopes for the future?”. Meeting 2 included two starter questions which were: “What needs to change?” and “How can we make change happen?”.

The hosts were responsible for planning the meeting, inviting guests and nominating a scribe.

## OUTCOMES OF THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE PROJECT

A total of 180 people met in 24 conversation groups. The scribes compiled a summary document outlining the comments raised in their conversations. The 24 summaries (totalling 96 pages) were provided to the organising group. The full 96 pages of scribe summaries are available at: <http://www.see-change.org.au/voicesofthepeople>

The organising group has prepared this report after careful analysis of the scribe summaries. The next chapter includes a list of comments raised by the various groups. Comments have been edited to make them more concise but care has been taken to ensure the meaning has not changed. Comments that are similar have been combined.

We are not suggesting that the 180 people who participated in these conversations are a representative sample of the population of Canberra. Nor are we suggesting that the specific issues highlighted here are necessarily indicative of how most Canberrans see these matters. We are, however, impressed by the range of issues that have emerged and the strength and consistency of many of the concerns raised in the group reports.

# 3. WHAT DID WE HEAR?

The comments made by participants have been left largely unchanged in the following sections relating to the five main discussion questions and individual comments are separated by an asterisk. Where comments were very similar, generally only one is shown.

The responses to the first four of the five discussion questions are collected under the headings of *Local, Politics and Democracy, Economy, Environment and Society*. The fifth question is *How can we make change happen?* and it is summarised under the headings *General Principles to Consider before Embarking on a Process of Change, Processes and Tools for Creating Change, Taking Specific Actions to Support Change and Some Additional Questions/Thoughts*.

The main themes arising from the main discussion questions have been summarised in the box at the end of each section.

## QUESTION 1: WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

### Local

- Friendliness of the people and that we can walk in the park/take the dog for a walk and people smile, wave and say hello.\* Canberra is like a country town.\* The bushland is at our doorstep.\* Canberra is a well planned city with green belts, cycle paths and walkways.\* Canberra is close to the beach and close to Sydney.\* Facilities are close.\* Whatever interest one might have — there seems to be a club or community group to join.\* Part of reason we live in [our townhouse development] is that structure is designed for people to interact, help each other.\* Living with a sense of community and neighbourhood.\* Safety in neighbourhood, which involves knowing who your neighbours are and looking out for one another.\* Community projects such as community gardens.\* Lots of opportunity to build community through projects.\* Chief Minister's fortnightly open line on the local ABC radio listening to concerns, reporting back the next fortnight.\* Appreciate the Health System — while recuperating, Community Health assisted by cutting hedges and cleaning gutters.\* The ACT Government plans to have sustainable energy by 2020.\* The ACT system is one government, no different levels, easier to influence as a citizen.\* Canberra is the best kept secret in Australia.\*

### Democracy and Politics

- Strong democratic system based on the Westminster system.\* Ability to change government peacefully through elections.\* Compulsory voting: people think and listen, even if only for a little while. The public mostly takes voting seriously and responsibly.\* The ability to talk directly to the politicians' staff and in some cases the politicians.\* No interference from the Queen.\* A Government that listens to its citizens and makes decisions based on what is best for the country.\* That the wellbeing of the less advantaged is looked after with everyone having the opportunity to succeed.\* All individuals and corporations pay their fair share of taxes.\* That the individuals' rights of privacy and freedom of speech are protected.\* That the Government acts responsibly in the discharge of its global duties.\*

### Economy

- Having an economy that is just and fair and does not favour one segment of society over another.\* That economic decisions adequately take into account the social and environmental impact of those decisions (i.e. use the triple bottom line).\* Economic decisions should be based on long-term goals and not short-term profits.

### Environment

- Having a sustainable planet to live on, all else is academic. Addressing the effects of climate change is most important — if we run out of planet what is the point of economic measures? The natural environment is protected for the next generation.

### Society

- **Building a Better Society:** Founded on a value system, and supported by appropriate personal attributes.\* Values include working for the common good; a fair go; tolerance and fair treatment of others; social justice in a broad spectrum of key areas, e.g. education, access to healthcare, support for vulnerable people, freedom and safety, opportunities for all.\* Personal attributes include a sense of purpose; courage; honesty; being a contributor to the society and not just a consumer; being a good listener.\* Citizens to 'think globally, act locally'.\* Society to offer love and compassion, music and art.\*
- **Education:** Schools are important for individuals and for the community, for learning information as well as 'critical thinking', self-expression, connecting with others.\* Schools are a hub for community building.\*

## Question 1: What is important to you?

- **Work:** Having a great place to work.\* Get satisfaction from work.\* Finding a productive transition to retirement.\*
- **Family and Children:** That children will live a happier and healthier life than parents.\* That children can maintain options for future.\*
- **Community Engagement:** Greater neighbourliness enriching lives and working closely, building resilient communities through pulling together, e.g. through growing food.\* Listening to others' perspectives; this helps being listened to in turn.\* Mary Porter's regular stalls at the market were perceived by the community as an avenue for being heard.\*
- **Ageing:** Medical breakthroughs.\*
- **Appreciation and optimism:** A number of participants also identified things which they appreciated and/or were causes for optimism. These included:
  - **Youth:** Many young adults are passionate about social issues; school students are often impressive in their breadth of knowledge.\* Australian primary schools are particularly good at teaching awareness of the environment.\* Community organisations such as SEE-Change have many youngsters engaged in sustainability related activities.\* There are many young people who are working hard in the social change area and who have high ideals.\* Many young people are being very environmentally responsible.
  - **Social Media:** Advent of social media and the new technological options have broadened access to information sources, and therefore to a broader range of opinions.\* Social media appeals as people feel connected and listened to, and can prove to be a vehicle for constructive collaboration (e.g. The Conversation).\* Twitter is a way of undermining the media duopoly.\* ABC radio offers a model for sharing more complex information and being informative without pushing a position — e.g. Rear Vision.\* Young people in particular engage in social media.
  - **Sport:** An important celebration of human capacity, e.g. the fastest runner has something special.\*
  - **Social Justice and Equity:** Australians are reasonable people and will respond if they know about injustice.\* Thankful of a privileged upbringing and recognise that people in other countries have the same concerns for their family as us.\*

## WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

### In summary

**Local:** Participants see many positive features about living in the planned city of Canberra including its simple governance, bushlands, proximity to the coast and Sydney, health system, community structures and its government's commitment to sustainability and renewable energy.

**Democracy and Politics:** Participants see many positives in our current Westminster system including, ability to change government peacefully, compulsory voting and access to politicians and their staff. In addition, they felt it is important that Government listens to its citizens, governs fairly and equitably and acts responsibly on the global stage.

**Economy:** Participants thought it was important to have an economy that is just and fair, based on long-term goals and adequately considers social and environmental impacts.

**Environment:** Participants thought it important to protect the environment, address climate change and live sustainably.

**Society:** The largest focus was on building a better society and a revitalised, re-engaged community based on values such as working for the common good, a fair go, tolerance, social justice in education, healthcare, freedom and safety, and support for the vulnerable. Participants also felt it was important to have satisfactory work, a productive transition to retirement, and medical breakthroughs for supporting the ageing population.

In addition to discussing what's important to them a number of participants identified what they appreciated or what made them feel optimistic about the future. These included the fact that many young adults are knowledgeable and passionate about social and sustainability issues, expressed through various mechanisms such as the education system, community organisations (such as SEE-Change). Social media was identified as an important tool for accessing information and collaborating; this is especially true for young people. The participants also appreciated the fact that Australians are reasonable people and will respond positively if they know about injustice.

## QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS?

### Local

- **ACT City Planning:** Degradation of Garden City concept with systematic deterioration of the woodland planning concept of suburbs in Canberra, e.g. earlier planned canopy of greenery between Black Mt and Mt Ainslie.\* Planners place inadequate value on open spaces.\* Removal of trees on Northbourne Avenue for the light rail.\* Systematic reduction in the setback of buildings from the road.\* Increase in the ratio of building to land.\* Notice of the proposal to convert Haig Park into an on-leash area for dogs was not given to those directly affected.\*
- **ACT Developers/Developments:** The Act Government is serving the interests of developers.\* The ACT depends on land sales and a voracious construction sector bent on redeveloping anything whether it needs it or not.\* Commitment to costly projects without demonstrated need, serves developers and unions but not community.\* Developer donations to political parties should not happen.\* Concern about a stadium on the Civic pool site.\* Moving the showground with Farmers' Markets to Majura Valley leading to greater fossil fuel use.\*
- **ACT Housing:** Shortage of housing and government housing in particular.\* Poor maintenance of government housing, and waste in having it unoccupied for extended periods.\* The inefficiency in knocking down existing housing and building new housing in its place.\* The impact of high-density high-rise development — loss of heritage and character.\* Loss of options when people live in apartments without garden, shed, & space to be creative.\* Government not encouraging multiple-dwelling type developments with communal areas (some exceptions in New Acton, Kingston).\* Government sells land for the maximum price instead of providing affordable housing.\* Impact of interstate and overseas buyers on the availability of houses for owner occupiers.\*
- **ACT Local Services:** Poor compensation to the ACT for services used by outsiders, e.g. schools, hospitals and services used by the Commonwealth.\* Insufficient resources to provide police presence on the streets including in Civic.\* Some important health services not available in the ACT leading to expensive and stressful travel.\* High cost of care for the elderly, especially nursing homes, bed shortage, beds not always in areas of need.\* Nursing homes are of variable quality.\* Poor management of the homeless issue, and if housing exists, very bureaucratic processes, long waiting times. Mental health housing in particular very poorly done.\* Mental Health: Problem with 18 year olds being classed as “adults” and moved from one set of professionals to another.\* Charity bins being removed.\*
- **ACT Revenue Base:** Financial unsustainability of the ACT and threats to revenue base.\* The ACT government must cut its coat to fit its cloth.\* We are running out of land, the main source of revenue.\* A leakage of demand for new detached housing into bordering NSW regions leads to lower revenues.\* Rate increases pose serious strains on residents, especially pensioners: In 3 years rates have increased approximately 65%.\* Older residents with limited financial capacity are distressed by need to move away from neighbourhood support networks.\* High rates with poor services.\* Governments taxing us via rates for services provided by the developer and passed on to the buyer in the house price. In some cases the developer gets a grant for some of the items and then charges the buyers.\* Without revenue, worthwhile programs cannot be undertaken.\* The ACT has narrow tax base, can not function properly while the Feds pay no tax. The Commonwealth Grants Commission does not compensate the ACT for this despite statements to the contrary. States forgo around 5% of their revenue, we lose around 50%. Taxes should apply at all levels, no exemptions, Such a change would probably simplify administration.\*
- **ACT Public Transport (including light rail):** The inequity in bus costs within Canberra and between Canberra and Queanbeyan. Need an integrated system.\* The huge estimated capital costs of the light rail will ultimately be borne by taxpayers.\* Trams will serve a very small proportion of the community, 1% for stage one.\* A satisfactory business case has not been made.\* Population not large enough. Other options preferable.\* If operating costs reasonable might be worth funding for environmental reasons. Most cities subsidise public transport and light rail will reduce road use.\* Electric vehicles will reduce the dependence on fossil fuels.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Canberra Bicycle Paths:** Cycle paths poorly administered.\* Cycleways on side of roads — dangerous, should be separate from roads.\* Some paths should be solely for bikes, mixed paths should have speed limits.\* Dangerous bicycle path beside Barry Drive, cyclists ride too fast down the hill where pedestrians cross it.\* People riding bikes should sound bell and slow down for pedestrians.\* Identification should be required on bikes so riders [causing problems] can be identified.\* Poor maintenance of mountain bike tracks; good tracks attract interstate visitors, encourage exercise.\*
- **Public Service jobs:** Continuing vulnerability to Commonwealth public service cutbacks.\* Trend under all governments to move jobs from Canberra to prop up depressed regions.\* Communication technology makes it possible for the public service to be distributed across the country.\* Governments should be able to regulate employee numbers so that fluctuations do not happen.\*
- **ACT Street Lighting and Traffic Controls:** Monash shops need foot-path lights — young bike riders don't see older people.\* Some local areas need lighting to inhibit vandalism.\* Poor standard of street lighting & poor maintenance of what is there causes risk to safety of pedestrians and increased crime rates.\* Newly placed speed humps (e.g. Coyne Street Gowrie) can be a safety hazard.\* The point-to-point speed cameras on Athllon Drive don't achieve aim, due to distance and roundabouts.\*
- **ACT Parking:** Parking restrictions in Reid mean family and friends can't park outside homes during the day.\* Insufficient parking at ANU for students results in increased parking in Turner, interfering with garbage collections.\* Changed parking arrangements in Turner make exiting the driveway difficult and dangerous.\*
- **ACT Drivers:** Need for better young driver safety training, no requirement in ACT for extended supervised driving before getting licence.\* Behavioural attitudes towards driving; speeding and rules regarding roundabouts not followed.\*
- **ACT Environment:** The possum population in Turner is out of control.\* Impact of invasive species on native species.\*
- **ACT Miscellaneous:** "Canberra" reference made by the media when referring to the Federal Government: It's not us, it's the politicians.\* More education on housing: freehold, leasehold, body corporates, etc. as early as school.\* Concern about future for people who live in Mr Fluffy homes.\* Even modest population growth for Canberra should not be assumed: It could even decrease.\*

## Democracy and Politics

- **General:** Democracy is not consensus.\* We don't have democracy.\* Democracy is a method where those affected by the decisions make the decisions.\* We don't have true democracy and this is needed to change things, including environmental sustainability.\* Democracy has many defects but it's the best we have and we need to make it better.\* Proportional representation is complex but usually fairer — can be 'gamed' (e.g. Motor Enthusiasts).\* Is the equal Senate representation democratic? (e.g. Tasmania has 3 times as many senators but half the population of the ACT).\* Some think that the current Australian Government wants to undermine ACT population by transfer of jobs interstate, to prevent a third Senate seat for the ACT.\* We should be able to vote for our head of state.\* Traits of a weak democracy include:
  - Disappearance of the middle class, a class vital for the health of democracy.\* The smothering of the democratic voice by big business.\* Social media encouraging the formation of closed groups that do not speak to each other.\* A less sustainable society requiring ever-greater subservience of its members.\* Media less capable of holding political leadership to account.\* Tyranny of the masses.\* Tyranny of the [democratic] election cycle.\*
- **Levels of government:** Federal Government best placed to make uniform national decisions. Are the states an impediment to good government?\* Can elected national governments implement the international changes needed to protect the planet?\*
- **Engagement in political system:** Young adults have no interest in politics ("the brand is being trashed").\* Are young people a neglected constituency? — about 25% of people under 30 years of age are not enrolled to vote, compared with 5% of 55–60 year olds.\* The view that young people are uninterested in politics is contested.\* Young people have a different approach to politics with the [new] ability to act directly and organise differently — the question is how to engage them.\* Hard to stay motivated — too many issues. A feeling of hopelessness with the political scene.\* Students have a low opinion of politicians and think they have outrageous salaries — Obama is paid less than Abbott.\* Constant disruption in Government processes creates chaos and results in feelings of disengagement and disempowerment.\* Women are actively silenced in politics. Many young women find the sexism in politics off-putting.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Overall views on current Government:** Australia has gone from a progressive country showing leadership to an isolationist and uncaring country.\* The positive sense that we once felt working in Government is no longer there.\* Government is trying to ape USA Republican policies (e.g. health system, small government, etc.)\* The government is dismantling Gough Whitlam's reforms.\* Assets are sold off for short term gain.\* Government is not listening.\* For example, gay marriage and climate change produced massive protests yet government ignored them, creating feelings of disempowerment.\* Politicians don't understand what is important.\* Poor standards of governance at all levels: lack of vision, misuse of public funds, corrupt businessmen and politicians, poor level of political debate — 3-word slogans, e.g. 'War on Terror'.\* High priorities given less attention (violence against women).\* NSW ICAC.\* Governments driven by polls and focus groups.\* Not enough time or commitment is given to a multi-faceted, full and fair discussion/debate.\* Debate on important issues like war are shallow 'black and white' discussions.\* Government deliberately distracting public while it makes much worse unpublicised changes.\* Divisiveness and fear are promoted to get government policies adopted.\* Lower salaries would encourage politicians to be 'on the take'.\* Failure of opposition to oppose.\* Politics is stuck in the past — investing in past technologies and not embracing the need for change.\* Government talks about providing choices but it's really about devolving responsibility FROM government.\* Government should deliver services even if it taxes more.\* There is an assumption that governments can cope with issues.\* The Government is decimating the environment, is bound to Big Business.\* Decline in international respect for Australia.\* Our leaders don't inspire us. Government has permanent ideological wars, with cycles of destruction of social programs, leading to waste and duplication.\* Politicisation of the public service means loss of strategic, frank and fearless advice. Reasons include lack of job security for public servants and increasing power of advisors.\* Issue of defence force salaries.\* Government has not been good at picking winners within individual industries.\*
- **Behavior/Character Traits of Politicians:** Too many politicians are more interested in power and own agendas than doing what is right for the country.\* Lack of openness and lies from politicians. The Politicians appear dishonest. Are they manipulative and dishonest, or really believing what they say? Politicians don't represent their constituents and leaders don't show leadership.\* More divisiveness and conflict.\* Retreat into fundamentalism and unwillingness to see other points of view.
- **Political Parties:** Overly ideological major political parties.\* The power of political parties over our representatives needs to be broken.\* Current party system undermines the democratic design of the constitution.\* Politicians see their responsibility is to their party, not to their constituents.\* A few politicians have core principles but must toe the party/faction line to become Ministers.\* The Greens have lost the plot — betraying their values by behaving politically.\* The Australian political system is depressing.\* Parties manipulate policies at edges to win marginal seats.\* The (two) party system is now excessively rigid and self-interested.
- **Ministerial responsibility/decision making:** Bad decision-making and lack of ministerial responsibility.\* Government takes no responsibility for outcomes, e.g. it's "market forces" not us.\* Political process inhibits long-term commitments\* Lack of transparency.\* The Government commissions reports and then cherry picks the data — both sides of politics do this.\* Ministers control release of information from reports.\* Give our politicians a bit more credit.\* Governments do have funding constraints.\* Government has got itself into a tangle — it thinks it's meant to solve all the problems.\* Peter Costello's report on Intergenerational Change is the beginning of a plan for the future.\* Hypocrisy in pursuit of Peter Slipper whilst others get away with worse crimes.\*
- **Refugees (context):** In many cases our own ancestors were refugees.\* Refugee intake is negligible compared to overall immigration levels. Intake could easily be increased to as much as 100,000 a year in place of ordinary immigrants.\* Australia participates in the very conflicts that generate the refugees.\* Less money should be spent on military adventures and more on stopping people becoming radicalised.\* Concern about [the Government's] lack of transparency about refugees coming to Australia.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Refugees (treatment):** Treatment of refugees and asylum seekers is inhumane and immoral.\* Especially inhumane in regard to unaccompanied minors.\* Government is making conditions as harsh as possible as a form of discouragement.\* It ignores the trauma that refugees have experienced and adds more.\* The resultant mental illness caused by our treatment will cost more to treat than to prevent.\* Takes too long to process refugees.\* Our treatment of refugees is the absolute litmus test of our ethics as a community.\* If we think Family is important then how can we treat the decisions that refugees make in the interests of their Families with such derision? Immigration Minister's approach seems to be "Keep people in the dark and feed them bullshit."\* [Under the legislation the] Immigration Minister is guardian of the unaccompanied refugee children — shouldn't be.\* Our Government (with Opposition support in many cases) breaches its international obligations.\* Tactics like torture and imprisonment without protections are seen as acceptable conduct in an artificially generated environment of terror and fear.\* Other ways exist to prevent loss of lives at sea, such as processing in Indonesia and Malaysia.\* Who gets classified as a refugee is a political decision and based on geo-politics. We need to address this geopolitical dimension.\*
- **Refugees (Attitude to):** In the late 1970s refugees were welcomed and resettled.\* Can Australia integrate its current newcomers as efficiently as in the past? People today expect "someone" or "the government" to do something about refugees, when they could do something like what we did with Vietnam War protests.\* Australians often don't see plight of refugees.\* Recent newcomers look different, more distinctive than in the past.\* Current attitudes to refugees are reminiscent of Australia's earlier prejudice against Catholics.\*
- **War:** Growing militarisation of countries and police forces is alarming.\* Horror at US base in Darwin.\* Politicians are too quick to commit to armed conflict — no debate or Parliament approval.\* Deeply religious leaders have taken Australia into unconscionable wars while appearing to believe that they have God behind them.\* Only one 'just war,' against Japan, because we had to defend Australia; other wars are fought for others.\* War is used as a distraction from failed internal policies and to please powerful friends.\* Governments indifferent to mass rallies and marches.\* Most young people in one school opposed to entering wars despite presence of children of defence force personnel.\* The West's involvement in the Middle East is over resources.\* The West's intransigence on the Middle East is at the core of the conflict.\* Australia's meddling in Middle East won't do any good.\* Australia is biased against Palestine.\* No resolution until Palestine receives fairness.\* IS leaders are exploiting the ignorance of their followers.\* War exacerbates problems rather than solving them.\* Government should concentrate on our area before getting involved elsewhere.\* Why are we obsessed with borders? Kurds never had a country but they occupy a space. Can't we recognise and articulate this and how can we sort it out with groups like this? Possible proliferation of drones, with potential for real terrorist activity.\* Why neglect the social safety net to fund war? Money is spent on defence rather than more important things.\* This year we got statement from the government saying 'where did your tax go' and almost as much is spent on defence as social welfare.\* Involvement in the Iraq war helped create the environment that led to current insecurity.\*
- **Tax System:** An inadequate and inequitable tax base is behind many problems.\* The Federal tax system is extremely complex and inequitable as it is used to redistribute wealth as well as collect it. Subsidies are no longer transparent grants but are opaque tax exemptions available to the high and medium income earners and too often used as scams to avoid tax. As a result the tax burden has shifted to the lower income earners with the very rich paying almost no tax.\* The use of family trusts and negative gearing exhibits inflationary impact on house prices, and tax avoidance schemes impact across generations.\* Toll roads as a means to fund roads is expensive in the long run — ultimately the community pays.\* Taxation should be fair and not subsidise the rich.\* Wonderful if we could elect how our taxes are allocated.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Vested Interests:** Politicians bow to big money/vested interests.\* Lobby groups & sectional interests are “running the joint”, looking after their short term interests.\* Machinations going on for years — but now influence-peddling is more blatant.\* Billions of dollars in fuel subsidies to mining industry, etc.\* Finance, Insurance, Fossil Fuel industries shape policy.\* People ruining the planet have vested interests, like Murdoch and the Koch brothers.\* Parliament feeds off these in order to exercise power.\* We have an electoral oligarchy — we pick from the ruling class who will make decisions.\* Clive Palmer has bought his way into Parliament.\* Government’s vested interests lead to poor outcomes and in some cases corruption. Institute for Public Affairs is Right Wing influence vs The Australia Institute as Centre.\* Australian corporations together with politicians are destroying people’s chances to be heard.\*
- **The interaction of politics and the economy:** Leadership has given us a government and an economy that preys on people.\* Recent federal Budget had no impact on ‘us’ but we are concerned for others who will be affected, like low income families. We can empathise, why can’t the government?.\* Longer term planning is needed: our short terms of government plus commercial drive for profit now mean that slowly-developing problems are not responded to. These are seen as externalities and discounted. Bad things that may happen a decade hence are considered inconsequential today.\* Green economy doing well but discouraged.

### Economy

- **Debt-based economy:** The current economic system is based on debt. Banks put money into the economy by loaning money. The economy has to keep growing in order to pay the interest on the current debt.\* The introduction of interest on money introduces the need for endless and exponential growth in the economy.\* The growth rates of most economies are not keeping up with their debt charges. Resources are consumed at an ever-increasing rate to fund the current debt.\* Borrowing for short-term benefits causes problems.\*
- **Growth and consumerism:** Economic growth plus globalisation of trade is out of control.\* Economic growth pursued for the sake of it.\* influence of advertising.\* There is worshipping of money/materialism. Business does not necessarily do what civil society thinks is OK.\* Greed is a major motivator today.\* People making millions out of pharmaceuticals, out of control.\* Companies make profits by promoting unhealthy products and ideas that ruin our health and society.\* Historically, growth is controlled by war.\* Geopolitical tensions increase as more impoverished parts of the world see our lifestyles.\* Growth is not all bad: new technology has enriched our lives.\* Do we need to have growth?.\* Some economic growth will be required as population grows.\*
- **Money being used as our marker of wellbeing:** Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is seen as a significant indicator of our well being, but it is not.\* GDP only measures production where money changes hands — unpaid/volunteer work is not counted.\* GDP does not take into account the purpose of the goods or services produced. An increase in GDP is considered good even if it is generated by treating cancers caused by pollution.\* Reporting based on the triple bottom line (social equity, environment, economics) is one way to ensure economic policies adequately address social and environmental issues.\* Throwing money at problems is not always the solution. Money becomes a measure of attention paid to a problem.\*
- **Inequality in Australia:** ‘fair go for everybody, particularly those least able’.\* A country is only as strong as its weakest link.\* The rich are getting richer and the poor getting poorer.\* The differential in salaries between lowest and highest is about 100 times these days; formerly it was much less.\* High wages of CEOs unjustified.\* Widening gap between rich and poor is a direct result of government policy. Leads to a high level of public disquiet, lack of trust, and unrest.\* The impact of inequality (economic, social, political) has the potential to undermine democracy.\* Cuts to the disadvantaged seen as vote winner.\* The idea ‘we pay more tax, we get more’ is great.\* Government believes free market will solve all problems but this leads to a very dysfunctional society.\* The Government is not doing its duty to the people, especially the disadvantaged.\* Inequality in Australia was accentuated in latest federal budget and is promoted by tax concessions favouring the rich.\* Those same concessions inflate demand for housing, putting it beyond the reach of young people.\* Wrong that a country as wealthy as Australia has people living in the streets. Inadequate living conditions for many — housing, health, utilities.\* Instead of paying decent wages and good training for low status jobs (nursing homes) we use cheap African labour.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Inequality globally:** Inequality is increasing which will result in a less safe world: two likely results are the rise of the extreme right (fascism) and civic unrest.\* The Ebola epidemic is terrifying.\* Ebola highlights the inequity in health care around the world and what it will mean in these poorer societies. Australia should provide expert support.\* Poor countries are blamed for having corrupt leaders but Western corporations and governments like the corrupt leaders as these provide access to cheap resources.\* Our wealth is based on goods made by those in working conditions we ourselves would not tolerate.\* Concerned that foreign aid has been largely withdrawn.\* Australia should be more responsible and less selfish.\* Strong support for aid for women's education to encourage birth control.\* Need to educate men as well.\* Would rather our tax dollars were spent on saving people from Ebola then dropping bombs.\* It is the most disadvantaged who will suffer most from climate change.\* The West helps itself to the resources and skilled workers of the majority (developing) world.\* The most serious problems occur in the countries least able to handle them.\*
- **Globalisation:** Worries about China: no or little interaction with the world, imbalanced population (more boys than girls), our indebtedness, conflict with Japan. What is Australia's relationship? China has long-term plans... are they a threat? Are we being manipulated into worrying about China? Is their system politically sustainable?\* Our economic future is not going to be competing with China on low wages. China is biggest producer of solar and wind renewable energy technology.\* Governments around the world are ceding power to major corporations.\* Free trade agreements protect the interests of the corporations. Previously health care was removed from negotiations, not so now.\* Negotiations for trade agreements should not be done in secret.\*

- **The future of the Australian economy:** Concerned we are in for tough economic times due to monetary policy, peak oil, unsustainable consumption and Australia's demographic changes.\* Overall consumption will slow as the percentage of retired people increases, making it difficult to have continued growth in the economy.\* Concerned that government is not going to respect our superannuation in the long term.\* Concerns that society will break down in a major crisis because many people will not have the skills, know-how or emotional resilience to cope.\* Economists do not have all the answers — most economists did not predict the 2008 crash.\* Where are the jobs of the future to come from?\* High prices are putting home ownership beyond the reach of citizens. High demand by investors (encouraged by the tax structure) is pushing prices up.\* Australia is becoming too dependent: a country no longer capable of making things.\* We are too dependent on oil.\* Technology is over-relied on to solve our problems.\* We have allowed our own manufacturing industry to deteriorate but Chinese products will not always be so cheap.\*

### Environment

- **Unsustainability — the planet has finite resources:** concerned about the environment, climate change, sustainability, future of the planet, security of food, water and air, and peace globally.\* Humans can't go on plundering resources.\* The environment is complex. Most people are impressed by initiatives [to minimise environmental damage] without appreciating their inadequacy given the complexity.\* People are decreasingly connected to the natural environment and thus less able to appreciate what it offers or to feel safe in it.\* The present will have to answer to the future for its failure to adopt a sustainable economy.\* We have finite resources.\* Western societies are consuming beyond what the Earth can support.\* There is overexploitation of 'renewable' resources e.g. forests, fisheries, causing them to become finite.\* Environment is being degraded through unsustainable use of resources.\* Grave concern about extraction of minerals. Sustainability of society and the environment are both important.\* People are unaware of obligation to the planet and unaware of the way it will be affected.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Climate change:** Climate change/global warming is “a real issue”.\* Reason to fear unless we take seriously climate change and the economic, environmental and population issues linked with it.\* Government is ignoring climate change — not a big vote winner.\* Delaying action will cost more in the long run, as it did with the asbestos problem.\* Denying climate change is exploiting people’s ignorance.\* Politicians do not understand the importance of the environment.\* Politicians attitude to pollution, climate change and coal sales is destroying the environment.\* Encouraging to know that other parts of the world have accepted the reality of climate change and are taking action.\* Australia has fallen behind and looks silly in the eyes of the world.\* Five years to prevent tipping into a world 6°C warmer.\* Concern that the younger generation has accepted that global warming is inevitable.\* In his book *Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth about Climate Change*, 2010, Clive Hamilton said the planet will survive, we will not.\* Humans fail to recognise that we are the same as every other animal and yet we are killing ourselves and the environment and there is nothing I can do to stop it.\* There is poor shared understanding between environmentalists and the average citizen (noting the elitist attitude of some environmentalists).\* Globally we are not doing enough.\* Horror at the way the PM struts world stage and the paring down of RET.\*
  - Problems that will be brought on by climate change: economic problems through loss of agricultural land, property, danger of fire, etc.\* Xenophobia due to migration/climate refugees.\* Social implications of a changing environment including food and water security.\* A 4C° rise, which would result from business-as-usual, would turn most of Australia into desert.\* Government cites growth and jobs as reasons for no response, but a 4C° rise would destroy both the Australian and world economies.\*
- **Overpopulation:** There is exponentially increasing population and increasing resource consumption per capita.\* World will be overcrowded and living with environmental disasters and pandemics.\* A growing population presses on resources and is the biggest environmental threat.\* Overpopulation is an important factor in climate change — implications for wars and security.\* Australia may already be overpopulated with regard to available resources and our environmental footprint.\* Australia suffers from a lack of a properly articulated population policy. Why do we encourage people to have babies? We need to limit our population.\* Forces against limiting population growth are so strong; organised religion is one.\*

- **Other environmental concerns:** Decline in biodiversity and erosion of natural heritage due to declining Australian funding, lack of media attention, not seen as important at either federal or state levels.\* The Great Barrier Reef.\* Dangers of fracking to the water tables.\* Agricultural land and natural ecosystems are being sacrificed for coal and coal seam gas.\* The Great Artesian Basin is at risk from coal seam gas exploration and fracking.\* Environmental damage — climate change, water shortages, soil degradation, etc. — will lead to conflicts and refugee movements.

### Society

- **Building a Better Society:** Social inequality increasing.\* Society is less tolerant: we see a decline in empathy, manifested in our poor treatment of the weak members of the society.\* Society seems to have lost ability to treat others fairly. Is there a lack of an ethical framework here?\* Ignorant things are said about Muslims in our community.\* Lack of respect is often shown to people from different cultures, e.g. Muslim women who wear headscarves.\* We have a huge range of immigrants but now when a new ethnic group arrives we have problems adopting it into society (contrast with Fraser’s welcome to Vietnamese).\* ‘Divisiveness’ being cultivated in the society; need a statesman, not a street fighter or a team leader.\* Not much confidence in our ability to deal with the growing range of problems in the world.\* Gender-based violence and denial of it.\* Deplorable exploitation of gambling for state revenues.\* Against live animal export which is being increased. No amount of money is worth being cruel. Has flow-on effect on the land, more cattle will destroy ecology. Farmers suing government for stopping trade — have right to earn livelihood, but this is ludicrous.\* The system is under pressure from increasing demand for services.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Loss of Meaning and Purpose In People's Lives:**
  - Symptoms include: Breakdown of social connections and community support.\* Less time to be part of one's community because of long working hours.\* Loneliness and increased isolation.\* Rising incidence of mental illness.\* Loss of resilience.\* Spirituality being rejected and replaced with money.\*
  - Contributing factors include: Pressure on time and breakdown of community — excessive pressure at workplace, pressures of dual-career families juggling work, home and children, cost-of-living pressures.\* Excessive consumerism/materialism: most of our media seem obsessed with consumption, the creation of wants and feelings of dissatisfaction, 'keeping up with the Jones'.\* Complex personal administration: paperwork and management of personal/family life now takes an incredible amount of time. Too many 'choices' people need to make in products and services, and the amount of follow-up needed to get things right, leaves people fatigued.\* Lack of independent unbiased information to assist through the above (ABC's Checkout program and Choice magazine were cited as two of the better sources).\*
- **Education:** Current education is dumbed-down, discouraging critical views and thinking differently, thus stifling people's natural abilities.\* Liberal arts including languages are at a terrible loss, most popular courses are to do with financial management.\* Many Australians are not getting relevant education; the opportunities of the 70's are declining, pricing out many in the population.\* Lack of separation between Church and State with the loss of qualified secular youth and welfare officers in high schools.\*
- **Critical Thinking:** Politicians are not recognizing the value of broad education, instead stripping down curriculum to an overemphasis on business interests.\* We need to remember that artists are often our prophets.\* Compared with many US students, Australian students have not always been taught/encouraged to express views that others may not be comfortable with, and to hear each other's views without polarising.\* People don't appreciate that there is always more than one side to things.\*
- **Lack of Australian investment in science:** Science funding has been cut.\* Government lacks the vision of what science can do for us.\* Government is shutting down scientific programs, substituting competition as economic driver.\* We don't have a federal Science Minister\* Not investing in environmental research is a missed opportunity to support an important industry.\* Australia needs to be innovative. Not much future for Australia as a coal mine.\* Relying on business funding for scientific research leads to further short-termism.\* Bushfire CRC had funding cut because it wasn't commercial.\* Our well educated people are going overseas for work.\*
- **Health and Healthcare:** Loss of universal healthcare; Medicare eroding; concern that government wants to follow US model of privatising all medical insurances, driving up the prices for services and medicines.\* Poor people have difficulty accessing health care.\* There is a view that in the first world: health and lifespan have peaked (now to decline due to obesity, lack of exercise and other health problems associated with affluence).\* Aged Care and Disability Care seem to be at the bottom of the barrel, with the workers very poorly paid.\* NDIS is in a state of confusion, with Government officials providing contradictory information to clients, carers and charitable organisations.\* Costs for healthcare increasing and becoming a huge problem. Many health problems caused by busy lifestyles, easy access to snack and high energy foods, and lack of early and continued physical activity.\* Increasing ineffectiveness of antibiotics from resistant bacteria with too little funding for research into alternatives.\*
- **Food and security in the food system:** Getting harder to eat properly as people are short of time. It is easier to eat ready made, nutritionally poor, industrial food.\* Food marketers are exploiting consumers.\* People do not appreciate food, how it is grown and how much is available.\* People have little understanding about where food comes from — no concern about paving over scarce arable land, diseases killing beneficial insects like bees, or the dark side of GM foods (e.g. herbicide-resistant weeds).\* Australians have lost the food culture exemplified by the French and Italians who enjoy their food.\* Looking after food at the community level can help stabilise communities.\* Current ACT government is supportive of urban agriculture.\* Climate change will put our food security at risk.\* Australia has very small transport fuel stocks and a major breakdown in the fuel supply chain could drastically interfere with the ability to transport food into Canberra.\*
- **Youth:** While there is an expectation that young people will participate in employment, many opportunities that used to exist (e.g. apprenticeships and entry level positions) no longer exist or are limited.\* Harder to find permanent jobs and to start on a career path.\* Tertiary-trained youth incur massive HECS debt which impacts upon the whole social structure of that cohort (e.g. staying at home with parents longer, getting married later, having children later than optimal).\* Nature of work is changing — contracts, part time and casual — bringing its own challenges.\* Do not like unemployment benefits being withheld from young people for 6 months.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Work:** Many people unhappy in their current workplaces — management attitudes are toxic to the health and relationships at work.\* There is a disrespectful culture in many workplaces.\* Hard for civil society mechanisms such as complaints to work at present; people are often placed at a great reputational risk if they complain, e.g. they can be portrayed as unstable or they may not be able to get another job.\* Under the new managerialism, people are rewarded for mindless sycophantic behaviour rather than for critical thinking. Whistleblowers often become the victims rather than the wrong-doers who should be held accountable.\* Fear of losing a job keep one from speaking up; but in other countries, people lose their lives for whistleblowing.\*
- **Work/Life Balance:** Employers are trying to do more with fewer resources so too often there is little scope in the workplace for work/life balance.\* Difficult to put limits on work hours due to employer expectations plus the need to work extra hours to pay off personal debt.\* Desire less busyness, but 'being busy at work gives one self-respect and a meaningful feeling'.\* Families are under pressure when two parents are working; there is a perception that both parents need to work.\* Mothers working affects the concept of the nuclear family.\* Churches once supported families but are now less important.\* We can talk about work/life balance but it is often difficult to achieve it.\* Switching to part-time can in reality mean more work, less time, less pay.\*
- **Family and Children:** People are time-poor and don't have time to think and talk. We can't expect people who don't feel loved or included in society to care about society and the environment.\* Reduced autonomy and independence for children compared to two generations ago, due to traffic, reduced common open space, screen-based entertainment, loss of trust in neighbourhoods.\* Concern that some young people want and expect everything now, and have no experience of delayed gratification.\* Concern that people are growing up without the ability to repair or make things.\* Lack of positive role models.\* Long work hours, increased living costs and the need for two incomes is bad for children.\* High childcare costs and inadequate income leads to neglect of children and lack of socializing.\*
- **Community Engagement:** People are disconnected from society around them, and instead are connected to devices.\* Disjunction between comfort and 'good life' in Australia as a wealthy first world place to live in, and deep angst/dissatisfaction of many people.\* Many institutions across society are suffering a decline in committed members and supporters.\* New (street or illegal) drugs are destroying communities.\* Many rural people distrust urban dwellers and vice versa.\* There is a 'vicious cycle' making society more mercenary: people in big cities in Australia are forced to spend increasing proportions of time paying for housing and for commuting, thus reducing their time for community involvement and for thinking about things that matter; this in turn makes people rely for news on trivialisation of issues by mass media, which leads to political solutions that make problems worse for communities but favourable for big business (i.e. more growth, more people, more houses, more traffic).\* Concern about rubbishing people's beliefs whether Christian or Moslem.\* Society is far too materialistic and our lifestyle profligate.\* Legal concerns (e.g. insurance) hamstring community events. NZ good solution of national accident insurance.\*
- **Sport:** Too much emphasis on it: over-capitalised with betting, etc. Media is obsessed with it.\* Over-emphasis on winning not good for us.\*
- **Ageing:** Concerns about the models for elders in our community — lack of services to allow people to live in their own homes, residential accommodation is very varied in quality and often very costly.\* Maintenance of income into retirement.\* Superannuation: Government claims it wants all Australians to fund their own retirement through superannuation, but then removes incentives.\* Pension age of 75 totally unrealistic both physically and mentally.\* Internet-only communication is sidelining a large number of people who are not on the net.\* Australia's good pension scheme is enabled by a limited migration.\*
- **Alcohol and Drug Abuse:** Alcohol and drug abuse simultaneously aggravate social problems and arise from them.\* People who drink alcohol in excess are at greater risk of death by accident or suicide.\* Advertising of alcohol in association with sport encourages young men to think getting drunk is manly.\* There are links between alcohol and other drug abuse and a lack of self-belief, self-respect and respect for others.\* There is a shortage of volunteers to help in this sector.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Current drug policies:** Are ineffective and stimulate an illicit drug market, with peer-to-peer marketing impervious to law enforcement.\* Fail to reduce availability of drugs, thus passing the burden on to young drug users who become victimized in the process.\* Results in vast amounts of drug money, which brings corruption and is destructive of social capital across the board from user-dealers to the large-scale entrepreneurial suppliers.\* Creates and perpetuates an underclass and its disadvantage down the generations — indigenous communities were mentioned in this context.\* At the local level drug dependency imposes stresses that tear families apart, and is implicated in virtually all of Australia's intractable social problems, e.g. poverty, unemployment, mental illness, suicide, domestic violence, child abuse, homelessness and crime.\* Incurs huge costs to health and law enforcement budgets (the costs are largely borne by State and Territory governments).\*
- **Social Justice and Equity:** Concerns were voiced in relation to the following segments of the society:
  - **Youth/University Students:** proposed changes to the education system will saddle students with unsustainable debts (Germany and Norway have abolished their fees).\* University students do not want debt at end of their studies.\* Do not follow the US model for education.\* Concerned that education will be priced out of reach for large sections of the population.\*
  - **Family and Children:** Lot of children don't have access to good education, handicapped by no breakfast or acting as carers.\* NAPLAN tests are ghastly and based on discarded US model.\*
  - **Work:** Those in work are working longer hours, whilst others have nothing.\*
  - **Indigenous Issues:** Canberra-centric ignorant solutions to 'aboriginal problem'.\* Australia has failed, seemingly intractable problem. Insufficient consultation with aboriginal people on what to do about their generally poor situation.\* Government presents solutions but issues are not presented with opportunities for long-term public engagement.\* Acknowledge there was a war between Aboriginals and the invaders (although no monuments).\*
  - **Gender Issues:** Young women in Australia are disadvantaged financially due to gender differences in pay rates, maternity leave, and reduced contribution to superannuation; consequently women are often not covered financially when they reach retirement age.\* Women under huge pressure to meet work obligations (e.g. keeping up-to-date with professional training), raise a family, take children to their activities, and be a 'superwoman' of sorts.\*
- **Fear and Distrust:**
  - **Fear:** is widespread in our community, e.g. media focuses on bad things and creates fear/dissatisfaction in the models it holds up; 'stranger danger' has been taken to an extreme where men feel inhibited and face social isolation. The strict 'hands off' approach can mean that male kindergarten/primary school teachers are not allowed to console an upset child by touch.\* Many institutional processes harm relationships and create fear, stress and distrust. Even processes that are supposed to be helpful end up doing harm.\* Turkey is a secular state, albeit 97% Muslim, about 1 million refugees, yet "I never felt unsafe or threatened when there on holiday. Returned to Australia to see outside Parliament House police with machine gun."\* Becoming a fearful society, for no good reason.\* Muslims seem just like any other people.\* Politicians creating a culture of fear, suspicion and unfair treatment of the Other and of the Stranger.\* We are losing our fundamental and long fought-for human, civil and political rights. Those who support these losses must be held accountable.\*
  - **Distrust:** People have low trust of governments and media as they feel they are kept in the dark or provided with biased or wrong information.\* Governments can be particularly abusive, often hiding behind secrecy or privacy; such organisational behaviour can have a long term negative impact on people's lives.\* Organisations seem less and less responsive to the people they are set up to protect or service.\* Dispute resolution: there seems to be no space for conversations that could resolve an issue or foster better understanding between the parties involved. Instead, it gives way to rapid escalation and precipitate actions/decisions which often cannot be undone.\*

## Question 2: What are your concerns?

- **Media, Information and Communication:** We're in an age of incredible information and yet diminishing knowledge; many think they need know nothing as they have the Internet.\* Growing tendencies to ignore evidence (e.g. climate change, inequality) and rely instead on individual opinion and information filtered through one's 'trusted authorities'.\* Decline of investigative journalism: pared back journalist numbers affect the quality and extent of analysis and investigation, and degenerates into 'easy' messages.\* The standard of education of journalists is poor; should have degrees in other disciplines as well.\* Media is often biased by big business (e.g. 'Murdoch press overly dominant and agenda setting') and powerful interest groups, and is politicised.\* Murdoch press was very biased before the last election.\* Newspapers seem to lack concern for good journalism.\* New anti-terror laws will adversely impact journalists.\* TV is a medium for oversimplifying and exaggerating: its repetitive themes lead to viewers 'tuning out'; it can reinforce stereotypes, promote stigma.\* Cuts in funding and programming in the ABC are concerning.\* Long-term policy changes need consensus-making processes, but today's short news and information cycle is not conducive to it.\* Talkback radio can have lots of influence; 'shock jocks' can promote jingoistic nationalism (e.g. disrespect for PM Gillard).\* Difficult to have a constructive discourse when we have biased press and radio 'shock jocks'.\* Failure even sometimes in quality media to separate extremist views from the rest.\* Concentration of media ownership: newspapers are polarised, e.g. The Australian fascist, *The Canberra Times* Labor.\* Consequences of journalistic errors can be far-reaching.\* Serious concern at the utility and wisdom of the current policy on the NBN.\* Concerns were expressed that there is uncertainty about the impacts of technology — both positive and negative — owing to lack of knowledge/skills to shape the online environment.\* Loss of face-to-face interactions — socially, educationally; a major concern was that many education/learning online interactions (such as lectures) are one-way, as opposed to bilateral/multilateral for shared learning.\*
- **National Security, Freedom of Information, Privacy and Personal Freedom:** Right to a free press is threatened with imprisonment of writers who publish information they think people should know.\* Potential loss of civil liberties, privacy, and rights arising from new terrorism laws.\* Lack of privacy due to use of Internet and smartphones; further, there is a proposal to put tracking devices in cars to track them and collect tolls. It will be more than tolls that are collected.\* Artificial intelligence security system networks are being implemented that can impact on our freedoms: these systems highlight what the machine thinks is out of the ordinary, and could lead to individuals being identified as a risk to society just because they are different.\* Should never give control of a part of Australia to Sharia, Jewish law or "special zones".\* The government withholds information claiming it is commercial-in-confidence or for national security.\* Secrecy stifles needed debate.\* The Government in its January 2014 legislation, *The Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013*, is making it worse for whistleblowers in the security environment. The Government while saying it protects public disclosure, makes very narrow grounds for disclosure and uses subjective tests that could lead someone making a disclosure to lose protection.\*

## **WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS?**

### **In Summary**

**Local:** Participants were concerned about the ACT's financial vulnerability, its dependence upon land sales, the role of builders and developers, the city's dependency on public-sector employment, rate increases, prospective cost of the light rail system, talk of a stadium at the Civic pool site, moving the Showground to Majura Valley, and the increasing encroachment on existing green spaces and reserves. They also expressed concern about the availability of car parking in residential areas, the lack of a police presence on the streets including Civic, the management of the homeless issue and of public housing, the cost of care for the elderly, the declining availability of charity bins, high-rise residential developments, poor street lighting in some areas, the need for multiple dwelling developments to have communal areas, and threats to native species by exotics.

**Democracy and Politics:** Many people felt disempowered and found it difficult to engage in the political system. The participants' concerns included that we don't have true democracy, and that politicians are more interested in power and listening to big business and other vested interests than the people. Some felt that politics is still sexist with too few females involved. Some expressed concerns that the country has gone from being progressive to uncaring, and raised concerns over dismantling the welfare system and cutting the aid budget. Some identified the shallowness of debate in Parliament and the media as an issue, and that the Government uses divisiveness and fear to get its policies adopted. Others said that the polarisation of the two party system meant politicians were concerned with ideology rather than the good of the country. Some wanted to see more public and parliamentary discussion before the Government commits to sending troops to war. It was felt by some that our involvement in recent wars exacerbates problems in overseas countries rather than solves them. Many objected to the inhumane treatment of refugees and wanted the mandatory detention centres closed, especially those overseas. Some felt Australia should take more refugees. The growing inequality between the rich and the poor was identified as a major problem as was the inequitable tax system: poor people pay taxes and the rich get tax breaks, one of the main causes of the situation.

**Economy:** A major concern was that we have a debt-based economy where the banks put money into the economy by making loans and then the economy must grow at an exponential rate to pay off the debt. Many of the concerns revolved around greed being the motivating factor with growth and consumerism being out of control. Corporations profit by marketing products that ruin our health and society. Many wanted to see Gross Domestic Product (GDP) removed as the measure of the health of the economy. Rather, we need a measure that takes into account social and environmental issues. Other concerns related to the widening gap between the rich and the poor caused by the unregulated free market in Australia and globally, that this gap will undermine society and democracy, and that measures need to be taken so everyone gets a fair go. Concerns were expressed that Governments are ceding power to corporations through trade agreements and Australia is losing its manufacturing sector. A number of participants warned that there would be tough economic times ahead as the growth needed to keep the economy going cannot be maintained as we have reached the limits of our resources (peak cheap oil, etc.) and consumption is slowing as a greater percentage of the population retires. Fears were raised over whether people had the skills and emotional resilience to cope with the likely major economic crisis.

**Environment:** Concern was raised that although steps are sometimes taken to minimise the environmental damage of our actions, these steps are inadequate because they do not take into account the complexity of the environment. A major concern was that we are consuming beyond what the earth can support, with dire consequences for the planet. Many expressed frustration over the Government's refusal to tackle climate change. It was felt that unless we act quickly to reduce our impact, the resultant climate change will have major environmental, social and economic impacts on Australia due to loss of agricultural land, property, danger of fire, etc. Over-population was listed as an important factor in both our failure to live within the earth's means and our failure to address climate change. Other specific environment issues included the decline in biodiversity, erosion of natural heritage such as the Great Barrier Reef, and the sacrifice of good agricultural land and natural ecosystems for mining including coal seam gas.

### Question 3: What are your hopes for the future?

**Society:** Concerns were raised that society is becoming less tolerant and social inequality is increasing. High on the list of participants' concerns was a perceived loss of meaning and purpose in people's lives due to pressures on time, excessive materialism and difficulties in work-life balance, leading to declining social contact and community support. There were also high levels of concern at the diminishing emphasis on 'critical thinking' in our education system and the effects it has on citizens at all stages of life; lack of investment in science and environmental research; erosion in healthcare and inadequate care for the aged and persons with disability; and the difficulties faced by young people getting established in life due to factors such as high HECS debts, not enough jobs in the trades or at entry levels, and difficulties in entering the housing market. Concern was expressed at the changing work culture where independent thinking was being thwarted, public interest disclosures being narrowed down and whistle-blowers being victimised. Concerns were raised about the Australian diet, lamenting the easy access to nutritionally-poor industrial food, and that while at the moment we have plenty of food for most people, a breakdown in the fuel supply chain could quickly produce food insecurity and food riots. There was serious concern at alcohol and drug abuse problems and the vicious cycle these create with respect to other social problems, and the ineffectiveness of current drug policies in addressing the situation. Concerns were also raised about biased press, the radio shock jocks and the role they both play in stifling constructive discourse. Finally, there was grave concern over the 'fear and distrust' that is now prevalent in our society, and the role the media and government play in creating and exacerbating it and how it is resulting in an increased emphasis on national security and a loss of personal freedoms.

### QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

#### Local Issues

- **ACT Housing:** Ability to stay in one's own home as one ages, more experimentation with housing integrated with shops and entertainment.\* Small, friendly local shops that you can walk to.\*
- **ACT Public Transport (including light rail):** Hope for light rail and reduced car usage. Cars very expensive to keep!\* Very Fast Train.\*
- **ACT Environment:** For the ACT liberal opposition to be stronger on climate change which Australians are ready to embrace.\*

#### Democracy and Politics

- **Government:** Australia becomes enlightened, egalitarian and the planet survives.\* A party or leader emerges to provide leadership in promoting a fairer, more just and humane society.\* A healthy democracy in Australia, honesty in politics, promises kept, less polarisation.\* That PM Abbott speaks coherently or not at all.\* Politicians make decisions based on the best long-term outcomes.\* Policies based on appreciation of scientific advances and on sound reasoning.\* Political focus is beyond the current term and towards the greater good.\* Greater bi-partisanship on progressive policies.\*
- **Refugees:** Attitudes change towards refugees and foreign aid.\* Australia contributes to a good global system (e.g. treatment of refugees).\*
- **War:** Less international conflicts and disputes.\* Resolution of global conflicts based on our common humanity, not tribal differences.\* Our children don't have to go to war.\* The UN will be more influential, no more nuclear weapons.\*

### Question 3: What are your hopes for the future?

#### Economy

- **Our 'growth' and 'consumerist' economy:** Consumption can be reduced.\* Growth today is mainly economic. This is narrow. Can't we grow spiritually and culturally? We can have all people employed.\* The key thing is energy. We could run the world using energy from the sun.\* We can benefit from the changes that technology has brought.\* To change what we 'want': 'desire less'; re-use; recycle.\*
- **Concern about inequality:** Some have so little, others so much. My vision is for equal opportunity in a sustainable way with some being given a hand-up rather than everyone given the same amount.\*
- **The future of the Australian economy:** Although there will be economic problems as we move from a growth-based economy, people can pull together as they did in the great depression and the London Blitz. People helping and bonding as a community — doing things together that didn't require lots of money. Remember that we learn the most during hard times, not during easy times.

#### Environment

- **Protection of the environment:**\* That environmental and climate changes don't happen too rapidly. That dealing with them becomes a priority.\* The next generation can enjoy life as we have.\* That people begin to recycle, reduce, and reuse — Transition Town mentality.\* More action on climate change.\* More solar energy and other renewable energy.\* Much lower environmental impacts, and for Australia and the world to live within their means.\* That the ACT reaches its renewable energy target of 80% renewables by 2020.\* States/Federal/local governments to follow ACT's example.\* People take responsibility to improve their own environment. It can be done.\* Greater political acceptance of climate change.\* Government sets renewable energy targets.\*

#### Society

- **To build a better civil society by:** developing a just, socially-connected and cohesive society.\* Developing good priorities that we can again be proud of, based on can and not can't.\* Being involved in positive change and living a healthy and ecologically sustainable life.\* Promoting a more sharing and tolerant society where there is respect for difference and changed attitudes towards refugees and immigration.\* Making education, healthcare and affordable housing available to all, nationally and globally.\* The emergence of leaders of character and vision who will hold to principles rather than the latest focus group, and who will be expert communicators able to bring people along with them.\*

- **Critical Thinking:** That work places focus on building critical thinking skills.
- **Health and Healthcare:** Greatest hope that this government might be voted out next election if it pursues loss of universal healthcare.\* Better access to information on food health, e.g. food health ratings.\* That euthanasia becomes legal.\*
- **Work:** To change the way work is structured, e.g. more flexible work, work from home.\*
- **Family and Children:** To have a peaceful, healthy, happy life, and then die quickly when the time comes, without causing disruption to others.\*
- **Community Engagement:** Restore a sense of community by humane connections with others, affirming everyone's contribution.\* Looking after neighbours.\* Being part of a community that cares not only for immediate family, but also welcomes others into the community.\* Innovating strong and resilient communities with everyone working together in practical ways for neighbours to share.\* Time freed up to let us 'get involved and do things'.\*
- **Social Justice and Equity:** That we become a more just and equitable society through welcoming and including people from diverse backgrounds, and enabling people to join in and feel part of systems (e.g. schools).\* Eradicating discrimination of all kinds — e.g. race, skin colour, sex, religion.\* Continuing feminism and improving lives for women, especially in relation to domestic violence.\* That we work out how to cope with a world of longer-living humans.\*
- **Media, Information and Communication:** Hope was expressed for a sea-change in mindset, which might be achieved through social media (e.g. GetUp, Amnesty International), by-passing the political system 'because it is so inept'.\*

## WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

### In Summary

**Local:** Some hoped for the development of light rail, a very fast train, ability to stay in their own home as they age, innovative housing, more experimentation with housing integrated with shops and entertainment, focus on the relationship between nature and lifestyle, and ACT Liberal Party attention to the issue of climate change.

**Democracy and Politics:** Some hoped that Australia becomes enlightened, egalitarian and moves towards a fairer, more just and humane society. Also that political decisions are focused on long-term outcomes and are based on science and sound reasoning. Some hoped for a change in attitude towards refugees and foreign aid. Some wanted less international conflict with resolution of conflicts based on common humanity.

**Economy:** Hopes included that consumption could be reduced, and that the economy would be based on sustainable technology. Hopes were expressed that there be equal opportunity for everyone with those in need being given a handup. Also it was hoped that people pull together to work through the problems we encounter as we move away from a growth-based economy.

**Environment:** Hopes included that dealing with environmental issues including climate change would become a priority and that effects due to climate change were minimised. Specific hopes included that people took responsibility to improve their own environment, that the ACT reaches its goal of 80% renewables by 2020, and that the Federal Government follow the ACT's example.

**Society:** Hopes were for betterment in all the areas of concern expressed by the participants. In particular they hoped for a better civil society based on "can and not can't", one that fosters an ecologically sustainable life, and promotes a more sharing and tolerant society, with respect for differences and a changed attitude towards refugees and immigration. Hopes were held that a sea-change in mindset could be achieved by leveraging social media (e.g. GetUp, Amnesty International), bypassing the political system.

## QUESTION 4: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

### Local Issues

- **ACT Government Consultations:** Public consultation is good but we want more feedback on what planners have learnt from public consultations.\* Improve advertising of proposals that impinge on local amenity and commit to take notice of the views of local residents.\* Create an email list of those who want to be notified of consultation opportunities.\* Forums are not a particularly good way of consulting — you only go if you have something to say — but if they are held, they need to have government there, not just opposition politicians.\*
- **ACT Housing:** More developments like Benambra Intentional Community Co-operative.\* More cooperative housing like Urambi works well, fosters a sense of community. It can work well for people as they age.\* Appropriate housing for older people (e.g. no stairs).\*
- **ACT Local Services:** In hospitals improve colour scheme and provide access to outside spaces for patients when appropriate.\* More funding and qualified professionals to cope with aged care, especially for those unable to afford private care.\* More input into the way the local library is run — you can give feedback but get no response.\* Introduction of green waste bins.\* Develop an 'Employment for the Unemployed' Program.\* Need for attention to nature and lifestyle.\* More effort to create community in local neighbourhoods, especially to revitalise local shops.\* Places to learn how to use 3D printing technology.\*
- **ACT Public Transport:** Change public mind-set to use public transport (through publicity and education) and offering incentives.\* Ensure bikes can be carried on the trams.\* High speed rail link down the east coast.\* Defer the capital Metro for at least a couple of years due to budget pressures from Mr Fluffy.\*
- **Public Service Jobs:** Greater appreciation of experience and expertise in current Government workplaces.\*
- **ACT Parking:** ACT Government needs to acknowledge consequences of infill and be more flexible with resident parking permits and more vigilant with parking inspectors.\* Authorities should review parking and forbid parking on garbage collection days and during peak hours in certain areas.\*
- **Federal Government:** We need an Independent federal member for ACT and greater ACT representation in the Federal parliament.\*

## Question 4: What needs to change?

### Democracy and Politics

- **Engagement in political system:** That expressions of reluctance to engage in armed conflict not be dismissed as un-Australian.\* People to participate more in politics leading to better decision making processes.\* Citizens' Parliament as well as usual Parliament, or even replace the Senate with a Citizens' Parliament.\* Community agreement to invest in the future. Use frequent referenda like Switzerland.\* Community engagement could involve a mix of kitchen conversations, frequent referenda and Get Up style engagement.\* Governor-General to sample 'pulse' of population via social media.\* We need more organisations like the Sydney Alliance and conversations like this.\* Young people to become more engaged and given information on their Civic duty. Civics is included in school curriculums (visits to Parliament House, etc.) but should also focus on 25 year olds as they have conceptual thinking but not the skills.\*
- **Constitutional and electoral reforms:** a Bill of Rights to protect vulnerable people.\* Australian Constitution needs a review — it is not serving our interests, referendum needs bipartisan support.\* Election cycles increased to enable parliamentarians to focus on long-term national benefit.\* Longer terms, e.g. as in Senate (only half face election each 3 years).\* Electoral cycles of only three or four years inhibits community input.\* A short cycle is good in that you can more quickly get rid of a government you don't like.\* The approval of **both** Houses of the Parliament required before 'engaging our defence forces in an area of armed conflict'.\* Political party funding reform including transparency.\* Refine the electoral system; allow a voice from future generations, control political duration, set up people's juries to look at government decisions.\* Divide parliamentary houses into men's and women's houses.\* Elect both a man and a woman from each electorate.\* Location-sensitive policy-making.\* Politicians elected to implement rather than come up with decisions.\* Multi-member electorates as in ACT — perhaps more willing to compromise and work together.\* People in government more representative — we could solve this by statistical representation, randomisation — like jury duty.\* Quota system for cabinet: globally quotas are effective for getting women into politics; quota system will require public pressure to set up.\*
- **Parliament:** Integrity from politicians, business and media, not hypocrisy.\* Far more women in politics and cabinet.\* Progressive parties represented in government.\* Leaders who lead by example and show strong beliefs.\* That politicians stand up for policies they really believe in.\* Place the interests of citizens before the interests of global capitalism.\* Government support for communities without taking over community projects.\* Change to an evidence-based approach.\* The Press facilitates debate based on the evidence.\* Less shouting in parliament — politicians should 'be more respectful, try to reach consensus'.\* Politicians become career people rather than career politicians.\* Political representatives selected from a much more diverse base (currently most are lawyers and political science graduates), and therefore have a much more detailed knowledge base to work from.\* Lead rather than following voter positions.\* Government shows leadership, e.g. other countries are looking to Australia regarding plain packaging of cigarettes. Why not on climate change policy?\*
- **Political Parties:** Major reform of political pre-selection and funding is urgently needed.\* More political bipartisanship with politicians who will listen and are accessible. Not simply follow a party line.\* Progressive parties in government.\* Need representatives who are objective, rational and principles-based, not necessarily from a national party.\* We should vote for policies rather than people.\* Need more Greens in Parliament.\*
- **Government Expenditure:** An end to widespread cuts to services and entitlements as these cuts can create public safety issues.\* Remove the profit motive from public policy.\* Stop cuts to progressive government programs in order to halt the process of wealth inequality.\*
- **Community engagement in democracy:** Participatory democracy, with kitchen-table-like conversations built into the process. A strong social movement is needed to transform government.\* Need better ways to find time for community led activities.\* More political engagement, making politics more relevant and drawing the links with everyday life (young people).\* Address Disempowerment through Better Civics education [in schools].\* People need to think more, look in the long term, analyse situations, "not just follow shallow slogans".\* Australian corporations together with politicians are destroying peoples' chances to be heard — Need a solution to this (e.g. ICAC).\*

#### Question 4: What needs to change?

- **Policy development/planning:** Long term national planning.\* Need 20–50 year plans.\* Accessible policy statements (attracts more female engagement). Political focus that is beyond the current term and towards the greater good.\* Policy co-designed with the people it impacts the most, so that by the time voting comes around, the co-designed policy has broad support across the community; but a community-based system must be sensitive to minority rights, for instance on indigenous rights, they make up 2% of the population.\*
- **Globalisation/International Trade Treaties:** National Interest policies: consultation on trade and investment policies and transparent negotiations; national interest test for foreign investment approval, and therefore less at the mercy of international corporations; keep national industry profits onshore.\* No further treaties like 'Trans-Pacific Partnership' (TPP) that give corporations the right to sue governments over trade disputes.\*
- **Changes to Laws and Regulation:** Fines for breaches of laws by companies or individuals commensurate with income.\* Need ways of making politicians accountable between elections. Greater regulation around political promises.\* Racial Vilification Act needs to be more powerful. Freedom of speech but without vilification.\* Media ownership laws to ensure adequate diversity\* Social systems, capitalist systems, cartels and groups should be regulated.\* Reintroduce a Commonwealth ICAC to replace the National Crime Authority covering all Commonwealth jurisdictions including the ACT.\* Need government regulation to support the grass-roots environment movement, i.e. take-up of solar panels etc.\*
- **Refugees:** Plan for [future] refugees who will be victims of climate change.\* Improved community education about refugees.\* Door-to-door exchanges with refugees and similar experiences are essential to good media.\* Research how countries with more refugees than us handle their numbers.\* Parliament/public service should be able to come up with workable but humane solutions.\* See people as the solution, not the problem.\* Build relationships and trust — accept responsibility for our own need to change.\* Redirect savings from shutting down current arrangements to more humane processes for refugees (and many others in our society) who have been demonised or dehumanised or held up as failures.\* End mandatory detention.\* Children should not be held in detention.\* Close offshore detention centres, orderly processing here or in country of transit.\* Treat asylum seekers with respect and kindness as 90% of claimant cases are confirmed as legitimate refugees.\* Country towns nominate skill shortages and refugees with those skills settled in those towns.\* Better conditions for child refugees, including education and activities such as gardening, music, dance, drama.\* Acknowledge the vulnerability of refugees and reduce the trauma caused to them.\* Don't demand asylum seekers come with papers — many flee with only the clothes on their backs.\* Racism can be addressed. See *Mary Meets Mohammad*, a film about small Tasmanian town with Muslim detention centre.\* More community-based detention.\*
- **Tax system:** Tax system needs to be seen to be fair: people will accept higher personal tax rates if companies are seen to be paying a fair share.\* Australia needs a larger tax base — we are one of the lowest-taxing nations.\* More tax for better services (such as education and health) as in Scandinavia.\* Tax system requires fundamental change.\* Areas requiring reform include tax avoidance, inequality in the collection base, balance between company and income tax, raising the GST rate, raising the Medicare levy, cutting back on negative gearing (perhaps limit it to one newly built property), and tax benefits on superannuation.\* Stop subsidising the wealthy through tax arrangements.\* Cut back capital gains tax concessions.\* Put a brake on the trend to bigger, increasingly expensive houses by requiring a percentage of smaller houses.\* Proper taxing of international companies operating in Australia.\* Prevent multinational corporations from shifting profits overseas. The issue of tax havens must be resolved.\* Corporations to pay the amount of tax that they should — some corporate welfare helps create jobs but too much simply exploits the tax system.\* A move towards the tax department collecting tax only and concessions (often justified) being provided as transparent grants by another body rather than as tax exemptions. This administrative change would result in a higher tax yield from the very well-off, while supporting appropriate development by transparent means.\* Change the law governing family tax.\*

## Question 4: What needs to change?

### Economy

- **Our debt based, 'growth' and 'consumerist' economy:** Need a new economic paradigm.\* Need a less consumption driven society.\* Steady State Economics is an alternative to the growth-driven economy.\* We need to transition to Zero Growth.\* Two types of growth: economic and consumption. With the right technology (e.g. renewable energy and materials recycling) we could have economic growth with much-reduced and maybe even zero growth in consumption of resources.\* Need to consider environmental and social aspects of the economy (the externalities).\* Need to view ourselves as a society, not an economy and be optimistic about the possibility of change.\* GDP as the measure of economic success is abandoned and replaced by a genuine progress indicator.\* Need to look for new models for measuring economic success (e.g. sustainable happiness).\* Need to think in the long term, e.g. sustainability, renewable energy.\* Stricter advertising controls, particularly on ads directed at children.\* Need to push back against the pernicious extension of marketing/advertising values.\* Start working out how to have a capitalist system in a zero growth world with finite resources, and to take responsibility for all our waste.\*
- **Inequality:** We need to do something collectively to overcome disadvantage.\* Need to address huge imbalance in wealth. Would death duties help?\* Correct the systemic drivers of extreme and unjust inequalities.\* Government needs to look after the disadvantaged.\* Adequate housing for all, based on need.\* End to austerity policies.\* No more tax breaks for wealthy corporations and individuals.\* Employment guarantee with decent wages, hours and conditions.\* Work accessibility: unemployment and punitive policies need to be replaced with access and support.\* Support for vulnerable groups, including internationally without compounding poor diplomatic decisions made during previous eras.\* Reinstate a robust overseas aid program promoting female education.\* Need to clarify our priorities for Government spending, e.g. more aid.\*

### Environment

- **Climate change:** Humans are part of a bigger system. We need to decrease our human-centric focus.\* Historically we thought only about needs of the day; now we need to think about the future.\* Stop using climate change as a political tool — arguing doesn't help — both sides are changing facts to fit their argument.\* Australia needs to do more on climate change.\* Need to price carbon.\* Need to find a way of making the Australian Government change its policy, stop the destruction of forests, stop wastage and stop emissions.\* Increased political pressure on our neighbours.\* Less influence by big mining companies.\* Greater leadership and commitment to renewable energy sources and funding of ongoing research.\* We need to be responsible stewards of the planet.\* We should take the opportunities clean energy offers.\* Renewable energy program with rapid transition away from fossil fuels.\* Regulation to make water tanks and solar power mandatory.\* Need good leaders to accept the science rather than divide the nation, see the future and learn from the past.\* An emissions trading scheme.\* Need government intervention on a global level to reduce carbon footprint (in addition to individual actions.)\* We need to better understand our carbon footprint and work on a budget. The UK system of 5 year targets is a good model as it allows a transition, but we need to get going or it will be too late.\* Transform transport with renewable energy.\*
- **Environmental sustainability:** Need to maintain the vision of environmental sustainability.\* In order to have a positive impact on the environment we need to address governance issues. We need environmentally sustainable policies.\* Slow the current human-driven rate of environmental change.\* The practice of planned obsolescence creates huge waste. Make things more durable and repairable.\*
- **Overpopulation:** There is a need for a Population Policy.\* We need to increase public dialogue and debate about Australia's optimum population.\* Population control in Australia could improve everything.\* Need a sustainable human population; exponential growth that we currently have is a fundamental component of environmental degradation, along with increasing consumption.\* Should accept drop in the standard of living which growing numbers of us are now enjoying.\* Established population sustainability thresholds based on trends in environmental indicators like access to and cost of water, sustainable fisheries, soil quality and survival of species.\* Aim for Zero Population Growth.\*
- **Lack of Australian investment in science:** Science funding needs to be more generous, particularly in 'blue sky' research.\* We need scientists who are able to communicate with politicians, and politicians need to be receptive to advice from the scientific community.\* Need a science minister.\*

## Question 4: What needs to change?

### Society

- **Building a better society:** Need long-term vision. Ask: where do we want to be in 50 years? What standard of living do we desire? What will life be like for our children?\* Become a beacon of human rights.\* Shift towards a plant-based diet.\* Government should create institutions to socialise people in transformative directions.\* Change the institutions that are currently invested in keeping us divided and consuming harmful ideas and values.\* Utilise the existing data and research on what communities need.\* Energy viewed as a public service, with greater control of the infrastructure to build smarter, greener systems. This could handle the fluctuations and build excess capacity — less profitable but more sustainable.\* ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ is the basis of all social success. Take responsibility for decisions. If you’ve done the wrong thing, admit it and try to do it better next time.\* Animal welfare improved due to CCTV in all abattoirs and better enforcement by independents.\*
- **Gift Economy:** Support for Non-Profit Organisations through free Garden Schemes, where the community have access to planned food gardens open at specified times and may provide service in return. Free meals could also be provided with a return service.\*
- **Meaning and purpose in people’s lives:** To build a better society through more time to give thought to significant issues.\* Supporting people in need.\* Putting a stop to anyone preaching extremism — on all sides\* Need for meaningful activities, simpler lives, smaller communities.\*
- **Education:** Improve the education system through:
  - **Schools:** Adequate resourcing to fulfill their diverse roles. Better early-intervention and remedial programs.\* Improved salary scales and improved quality of teachers, discipline-based.\* Quality and equitable early education important to bring people up to speed and reduce barriers to further study.\* Intelligent national curriculum, rather than a curriculum that entrenches white privilege.\* Education needs a secular philosophical basis to help people deal with everyday life.\*
  - **Trades training:** Greater depth and rigour.\*
  - **Tertiary training:** More liberal arts education.\*
  - **Women’s education:** Promote it in the developing world so that women can be community leaders.
  - **General:** Instill positive cultural attitudes in society.\* Learn from Indigenous people that we belong to the land, not vice versa.\* Better programs to deal with racism. Education led by affected people, but involving support by privileged ethnic groups.\*
- **Critical Thinking:** Formal training in critical thinking throughout the education system.\* Broad view of the world, not just ‘specialisation’.\* Education to parents and children together on key health issues (e.g. obesity) and key societal issues (e.g. reducing the competitive nature of Australian culture in sport, academia and other arenas).\*
- **Education to develop community-building skills and environmental awareness:** Belief in people’s ability to collaborate.\* Problem solving skills.\* Evidence-based decisions.\* Better discernment in media consumption.\* Reasoning that applies basic knowledge, principles and experience.\* Environmental and landcare education.\* Continuing education for adults to offer deeper engagement, learning and critical thinking as opposed to ‘quick and dirty’ one-day courses.\*
- **Health and Healthcare:** Better support and pay for aged care and disability carers.\* Medicare should be protected, universal health care preserved, not follow the US example.\* More regulation around antibiotics fed to animals as growth promoters. More support of research into alternative therapies and developing new antibiotics.\*
- **Food and Food Security:** Particular attention paid to distribution methods and incentives for enhancing depressed rural areas.\* Less control by the dominant supermarkets.\* Regional Development Australia (NSW Southern Inland and the ACT region) are developing plans to link regional producers and consumers.\* Concern about food waste including waste caused by an over emphasis on perfect appearance of fresh food.\* Generate enthusiasm for school gardens.\* Better food labelling.\* Food advertising must be banned if it conflicts with the interests of public health.\* Need to help the community to connect with its food supply.\* Need more farmers’ markets and community gardens (the ACT government supports both).\*
- **Youth:** Further enhance youth engagement, as they are tomorrow’s custodians of the world.\* Help young people navigate the difficult and changing job market and career structures.\*
- **Art:** Opportunities for creative artists to be funded to reflect public good interests and the diversity of views in the community.\* Funding for artists to pursue art without shame and punitive measures.\*
- **Work:** Need to innovate new ways of young and old working together, where young people can gain experience and older people’s work can be valued.\* Greater flexibility (e.g. part-time, working from home), so people can have time for family/community.\* More needs to be done at the policy level.\* Shorten the working week.\*

#### Question 4: What needs to change?

- **Family and Children:** Instead of maternity leave, Government money should be invested in childcare benefits to ease return-to-work for mothers.\* Maternity leave needs to be means tested.\* Child care centers should be funded like primary schools.\*
- **Community Engagement:** Need to develop a good community spirit.\* Need to work together on future challenges of global warming and food supply.\* Need for moral leadership from churches and shame about distraction of child-abuse evils.\* Lucky to have a few *spearheads of moral leadership* like Bob Douglas, Bob Brown, Tim Flannery, Tim Costello, Richard Dennis, Michael Leunig, Jenny Goldie. Not enough women and some disappointments with former GG expressing her hopes only on the side and accepting the knighthood. Some like leaders to show more outspoken anger, but others notice the quiet achievers.\*
- **Ageing:** Greater number of services for elders and people with disabilities to enable them to live in the community for as long as possible.\* Innovative housing and care models are needed for the future.\* Higher levels of support needed for rising incidence of dementia.\* Superannuation contributions encouraged by maintaining reasonable tax concessions.\* Not to adopt Internet-only information policy, as older people may not have access to the Internet for various reasons.\*
- **Consumerism and 'Want':** Reduce 'want': reduce, re-use, re-cycle, Developing countries are catching up with demand for consumer goods.\* Government should pay attention to the class aspects of consumption. For example, certain classes of people live unsustainably due to inaccessible or culturally-specific unsustainable practices.\* More consumer awareness programs like ABC's Checkout.\* The application/enforcement of codes of practice/conduct in advertising.\*
- **Globalisation:** Need to develop tools to deal with population movements. Populations have been connecting for over 3,000 years but travel has accelerated greatly in the last couple of centuries, and we are not fully prepared for this quite new phase of integration.\*
- **Alcohol & Drug Abuse:** Better and more targeted education to youth, and constructive alternative activities to those affected, to give them hope.\* Make cannabis available to those whose medical condition is ameliorated by use.\*
- **Social Justice and Equity: Indigenous issues:** Greater emphasis on Indigenous history in our education system and formal acknowledgment of Indigenous Australians.\* Greater economic opportunity and self determination.\* Greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture (they suffer poverty and fragmented culture, and have a right to equality and better life outcomes).\*
- **Gender issues:** Education programs in schools and workplaces on financial planning for girls and women.\* Need to reinstate the Equal Employment Officers (EEO) and run cultural awareness programs so a person's accent does not matter.\*
- **Fear and Distrust:** Build greater trust between citizens and organisations by designing relationship enhancing processes that are fair and respectful.\* Dispute resolution through negotiation.\* Ability to access simply presented accurate information — as distinct from 'pushing a line'— to facilitate informed and honest communication on important issues.\* Clear knowledge of what sources of information are actually likely to be truthful.\* Include the dissenting voices and widen the circle of conversation.\*
- **Media, Information and Communication:** Achieve an open society where debate is encouraged, through: a better relationship between media, public policy, and learning about actual issues as opposed to 'diluted' forms of dissemination e.g. 'entertainment' and 'voting for personalities'\* Need debate and in-depth discussion; ABC's Q&A does get discussion but is not watched by many people.\* Greater funding for independent programs such as ABC 'Media Watch' to promote awareness of trends in and impacts of advertising (e.g. community-funded advertisements being banned).\* No more cuts to the ABC, and more control over the honesty and ethics used in news reporting.\* Fast internet connection to rural areas.\* Press and shock jocks held accountable.\*
- **National Security, Privacy and Personal Freedom:** Have decentralised security, as opposed to big centralised national security agencies eavesdropping on citizen's communications. It is the people in the local areas who are best placed to identify individuals at risk.\*

## **WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?**

### **In Summary**

**Local:** A number of comments related to the need for more genuine two way consultation between government and community members; the need for possible deferral of the capital Metro for at least two years; commitment to a high-speed rail link and intentional community cooperative development and a review of car parking possibilities, especially in residential areas. Also mentioned were the need for a change to the public mindset about public transport and having an independent federal member for the ACT as well as greater ACT representation in the Federal Parliament.

**Democracy and Politics:** A number of comments related to the need for people engaging in the political system. They included not labeling people as un-Australian when they don't support a particular policy (such as involvement in armed conflict) and use of processes such as Citizen Parliaments, referendums and kitchen table conversations. A number suggested constitutional and electoral reforms such as a Bill of Rights, longer election cycles, approval of both houses of Parliament before sending troops to an area of conflict and the need to make Parliament more representative. A number of comments referred to the need for politicians to have integrity, place the interest of citizens before global capitalism, and use an evidence based approach to making decisions. Other changes participants wanted to see included less shouting and more political bipartisanship. Some did NOT want Australia to sign treaties that give corporations the right to sue governments over trade disputes. A number of comments were about reforming the tax system to make it fairer and ensure that everyone including rich people and corporations pay their fair share of tax. A number of the comments referred to changes in how we treat refugees; that off-shore detention centres should be shut down and refugees should be treated with respect.

**Economy:** The need for the following changes were identified: a new economic paradigm that moves us to a less consumption driven society; that GDP as a measure of economic success be abandoned and replaced by a genuine progress indicator; the social and environmental impacts of production and consumption be factored into the cost of production; using more renewable technology and materials recycling; stricter advertising controls; corrected economic drivers of inequality; improved working conditions and accessibility; adequate housing and support for vulnerable people; and globally that Australia have a robust overseas aid program.

**Environment:** A number of changes necessary to deal with climate change were identified and included not using it as a political tool, accepting the science, taking a longer term view, pricing carbon, setting up an emissions trading scheme, accepting less influence by big mining companies, and implementing a renewable energy program. Other changes recommended included reducing waste by making things more durable and repairable, developing a population policy based on sustainability indicators and more science funding.

**Society:** Some of the key changes that participants felt the need for were: for citizens to be prepared to assert their views, as part of building an engaged society and critical thinking be made part of formal education as well as life-long continuing education. Changes were also deemed necessary in our attitude towards people from different backgrounds i.e. those 'not in our tribe', and to develop tools to deal with this; and for governments to promote freedom of speech without vilification.

## QUESTION 5: HOW CAN WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN?

### General principles to consider before embarking on a process of change

- **Impediments to change to be aware of:** 'It's so hard to actually do anything'. For example, I feel locked in to having a car but would rather not.\* We can do very little on a personal basis, feeling helpless.\* Politically, effecting changes as an individual is difficult — hard to get the attention of federal parliamentarians.\* Not enough is being done at the top (especially the political) level to drive change.\* Some people don't want to discuss, only to hear what they already believe.\* Some retreat into fundamentalism and an unwillingness to see other points of view.\* Life is too busy, no time to think of survival.\* Scientists try to use facts to influence change but it is not facts that drive political decisions.\* There is a tension between economic and scientific claims.\* People don't respond rationally but emotionally.\* People don't like change — economics provides an excuse not to.\* Special interest groups have entered the climate change debate and have been able to win the argument.\* Humans generally do not adequately deal with distant threats. Threats can be distant in time or geography.\* We have too many "victims".\* People should achieve the best they can be but may need a prod.\*
- **How to influence others to take action:** Use the same principles of persuasion that advertisers and politicians use.\* Help people connect on the heart/emotional level. Most decisions are made on an emotional level and **then** justified on the grounds of logic. For example, Nicola Roxon supported plain packaging of cigarettes because her father died of lung cancer.\* Tap into people's basic relationships. In explaining the need for change use personal stories that will connect with others.\* The arts can play an important role in public discourse, e.g. poetry.\* Sell the benefits: WIIFM (What's In It For Me).\* Explain how it will improve social cohesion.\* Listen to people with different views and perhaps introduce them to more/better information when we understand where they are coming from. Learn how to continue the conversation when someone says "Well, that is just what I feel."\* Talk to people in a non-judgmental way.\* Be encouraging, remember the past successes and the reservoir of goodness in most people (e.g. willingness to help in tragedies such as floods and bush fires).\* Some people aren't prepared to listen — concentrate on those who will listen but be prepared to work with others as they come on board.\* Somehow involve very rich people in the environment movement as they can support the cause financially.\* Many people depend on fossil fuel extraction for their livelihood (e.g. Queensland). We need to bring these communities along with the changes for the common good.\* Think how change will affect others and not be blinkered by our own personal interest.\* Get message across to those in power about what we want changed — focus on specific areas of policy change rather than general wish lists.\* Learn from the mechanisms and pressures used by the Divestment Campaign\*. Focus on what you can change.\* Change starts with us making changes in our lives and then demonstrating to others that the changes work.\*

## Question 5: How can we make change happen

• **Empowerment:** Changing governance is difficult. We need to look at what we can tackle. Change is already happening — economy is going to have to change to adapt to this; could the method of Kitchen Table Conversations lead to empowerment?\* Need to be empowered to be aware of issues and how to engage.\* Do we want to focus on young people? Or on everyone who is not currently engaged?\* Empowerment is necessary before engagement in governance; governance is a ‘top-down’ concept which has to be met with ‘bottom-up’ processes; this is especially relevant for young people.\* Something needs to be done: need motivation then you have power.\* There is the idea of changing our own patch first, then a bigger patch and so on, bit by bit.\* There is a way to break away from biological programming, e.g. serving self-interest as the primary goal.\* Hard for the individual to contribute; politicians are polarised and public engagements are not available.\* A small group of committed people can achieve results. Changing governance is possible through empowered citizenship.\* It’s people coming together and compassion that count.\* Often a huge crisis like a war leads to greater co-operation between people in order to survive.\*

### Processes and Tools for Creating Change

• **Kitchen Table Conversations:** Kitchen table conversations (KTC) can have influence and are useful in exploring ideas such as how to entertain democracy in our own lives and bring the big policy issues into the way we live.\* Regular KTCs might be good; they fit in with getting people involved.\* KTCs are good in democratising communities.\* Encourage SEE-Change to repeat this style of community discussion and to help to spread KTCs more broadly.\* Meet again (in KTC group) to hear about projects and maybe communicate with members of parliament.\* The accomplishments of the KTC approach in Victoria have been the stimulus to this initiative but we cannot predict where it will lead.\* This (KTC) is **not** a special-interest group, but just citizens. It is important that people can have opinions and act on them — foundation of democracy.\* Purple Sage project was interesting — showed that a small group of committed people could achieve results.\* Could take the KTC notes to local politicians.\*

• **Volunteer with and Support Existing Groups:** Volunteer in organisations with the same agenda/active in change.\* We can participate in various groups: Conservation Council, Australian Conservation Fund, Climate Council, Get Up, Refugee Action Committee, local church.\* Go to rallies, e.g. marching for refugees.\* Conservation volunteering.\* Sign petitions.\* Contribute to the Greens.\* Support Non-Profit Organisations.\* Could go to SEE-Change and look at projects to see how people in your group could fit in.\* Organisations such as Get Up seen as ‘left leaning’ but effective for specific issues-based campaigns.\* Single-issue projects run by organisations like SEE-Change can be successful, e.g. the environment-proofing homes project and the development of Jerrabomberra Wetlands park.\* Volunteer or support night shelters for homeless people or emergency relief organisation such as St John’s Care.\*

• **Speak out:** Citizens need to speak out.\* Individuals can make a difference by protesting.\* Talk/visit/write letters to your local politician/MP.\* Contribute feedback to government policy documents when they are reviewed.\* Write letters to the editor.\* Phone talkback radio.\* Organise a community campaign using the community section of Get Up.\* Write to a politician instead of complaining.\* It’s incumbent on people with ideas to share them, including different and effective ways of putting them to government.\* Do senators take notice of petitions, letters, etc., signed by constituents? Yes, provided there’s enough, e.g. 10,000 or more.\* We need to be guardians of democracy and tirelessly assert our views. Find out what your local MP’s party is doing.\* Organise meetings at home, put up posters, fill in surveys.\*

• **Small Group Action:** Start local with little steps; recognise that great achievements can be made with little steps.\* Individual strategies can have incredible effect — it takes only a small group to change something if the members are passionate about it.\* It is important to be with people who hold different views to allow a more creative discourse.\* Regular Speakers’ Corner with a range of people represented, entertaining and creative.\* Picnics rather than protests, more suitable when the issue requires a less confrontational atmosphere.\* Hold small group discussions where people can have a voice.\* Displays at local shopping centres to advertise community groups (e.g. Landcare, Scouts), emphasising that You Can Make a Difference.\*

## Question 5: How can we make change happen

- **Engaging the Local Community:** Consider opportunities to get together and maintain contact: be proactively involved with neighbours, hold a street party pre-Christmas, support the local shop.\* Community gatherings that bring individuals and local businesses together, with an ethos of looking out for each other (e.g. young helping old and vice versa) and sharing knowledge; find time for community-led activities.\* There is a wealth of knowledge and potential in communities.\* Build up community gardens.\* Attract people by letterbox drops, door-knocking. Approach the local Men's Sheds.\* Developing strong communities won't **make** change happen, but it makes it more likely.\* Vocalising our concerns is good and makes us feel better and less lonely.\* Fundraising brings people together.\* All children need to be loved and to feel secure; that could be helped if families are actively involved with the community.\* The community also needs to reach out to those who are alienated or on the margins (e.g. employing people with disabilities, including those with mental health problems, or talking to those who are lonely and isolated).\*
- **Financial Tools for philanthropic activities:**
  - **Micro loans:** Philanthropy by ordinary everyday people through the use of micro loan financiers such as KIVA (<http://www.kiva.org/home>).<sup>1</sup> Loans have traditionally been used to start small businesses. Could explore if non-profit organisations could use micro loans to provide a humanitarian service such as setting up a community garden: a loan provided for soil is paid back when enough vegetables have been sold.\*
  - **Crowd Funding:** Explore whether there is a Crowd Funding Broker.\* Consider using as a way to bring about change (e.g. [pozible.com](http://pozible.com)) For example, as a means to replace the axing of local ACT Stateline Report on ABC or as a way to fund a one-off documentary similar to one done on Voices for Indi?\*
  - Dick Smith is offering a prize for a young person who promulgates a way for the world to work without growth.
- **Modern media (excluding Social media) as a tool:** Community funded advertising directed at age groups 'tuned out' from climate change, e.g. on community radio.\* Informing people about issues can make a difference. For example, Alexander Downer almost lost his seat when one person publicised the issues around the negotiations with East Timor over the oil fields; and in WA the doctors wives' demographic changed the vote about chopping down the South East forests.\*

- **Social media as a tool:** Use social media (Facebook, Youtube) to pass on ideas.\* If we don't have the skills to identify and broadcast matters then work through existing groups that do.\* Use video cameras against people misbehaving.\* Young people may connect and pressure for change outside the formal political system through social media and targeted campaigns.\* Young people's use of social media can have a revolution via social media. For example, Obama was elected by social media; many \$20 donations raised over \$1 billion for his campaign. Social media are giving new means to advance democracy (e.g. Get Up & Change.org).\* Use social media to spread messages re campaigns and rallies; it's the way to reach young people.\* Use the Internet to get independent viewpoints, e.g. *The Conversation*.\* Fun community conversations that are also meaningful; this could include proportional representation according to who gets affected most.\*

### Taking specific actions to support change

- **Take Personal Action**
  - **General:** Different actions will work for different people.\* Challenge when you hear sexist or racist jokes.\* Try to live according to your values.\* People often become blinkered to other views. We need to 'broaden our beam of compassion' to seek inclusive solutions.\* Re-engage with our local communities and encourage others to do so (e.g. joining SEE-Change, community groups such as Friends of Aranda Bushland, Neighbourhood Associations)
    - Encourage greater philanthropy: make known what has been achieved through bequests, and praise local organisations that give significantly.\*
  - **Reduce carbon footprint:** Reduce, reuse and recycle as a means of reducing personal consumption.\* Use less electricity, wear warmer clothes inside etc.\* Set up a workshop that allows you to fix things.\* Use solar technology (e.g. photovoltaic panels, solar water heaters, solar cars).\* Build as much resilience in your life as you can
    - make changes that are good anyway. Get fitter, grow your own food — it tastes good!\* Look at ways to reduce bills. When an appliance stops working don't replace it with the cheapest but with an eye to reducing future bills.\* Install a water tank to keep veggie garden going.\* Identify skills that will be useful in helping others through difficult times. As examples, growing and/or preserving food, solar cooking, mechanical repairs. Be prepared to help others.\* Become involved in community schemes such as renewable energy, solar farms.\* Opportunity to get offsets with own solar also important.\* Be prepared to install solar panels whether cost-effective or not — the principle is important.\* Support the 90% reduction in emissions target the ACT has committed to.\*

<sup>1</sup>Websites such as Kiva enable individual Australians to fund micro loans to people overseas.

## Question 5: How can we make change happen

- **Ethical Investing:** Use ethical investing as a way of influencing — change bank accounts if your bank persists in environmentally damaging loans. (But also be aware that free trade agreements can thwart such intentions).\* Most of us are share holders through our superannuation schemes — perhaps we can have some influence through this by moving our money or by making our views known.\*
  - **Engagement in politics:** Encourage all generations to be interested in politics.\* [Work to] improving the standard of public discourse.\* Be politically aware and engaged and understand key policy positions so we are informed voters.\* Be guardians of democracy and be prepared to constantly assert our views; tools that we can use include Get Up, change.org, avaaaz.org, 350.org, Kitchen Table conversations, referenda, and writing to our political representatives.\*
  - **Engagement in changing the economic system:** Educate self and then others to the real nature of the economic system. Steve Keen is doing that now in London (University of Kingston).\* Use commercial and business opportunities created by the Internet economy.\* Ensure that corporations keep their word.\*
  - **Food and food security:** Support Farmers' Markets and locally produced food. We can make a difference by supporting Farmers' Markets, butchers and greengrocers with our purchases.\* For example, a big chain supermarket offered an orchardist a price well below his cost of production. Instead he remained economically viable by selling his oranges at Farmers' Markets.\* Grow your own food and get involved in community gardens.
  - **Specific Community Actions:**
    - Parking:** Get delegation together of local residents to meet with the relevant ACT Department on resident parking.\*
    - Young driver experience:** Need for young driver experience could be addressed at local level: NRMA “vetting” parents and friends as supervisors who can then volunteer as drivers' supervisors to “get their hours up”.\*
    - Car share:** Implement a car share scheme similar to ‘Go-Get’ in Melbourne.\*
    - Denigration of Canberra:** consider starting a campaign to let people know that politicians are visitors and they are not Canberra. Approach Andrew Leigh, Gai Brodtmann to pass on this message.\*
    - Consumerism and want:** Forums and discussions are needed to discuss modifications to the capitalist and consumer society with an emphasis on ‘Less is best’, e.g. fewer cars, luxury goods, technological gadgets; grow your own veggies.\* Explore community-oriented avenues such as Rotary bike program (ships bikes overseas to countries where they are needed).\*
    - New way of young and old working together:** to pursue this idea, we need good data discussed publicly on what's the reality of economic policies, e.g. some of The Australia Institute's work on mining, taxation and consumption.\*
  - **Overpopulation:** Forums and discussions are needed to oppose the push for a higher population with an insatiable appetite for resources.\*
  - **New Structures/Organisations:** Develop ways of promoting better neighbourhood level support to keep up with changing community care models (without imposing help where it is not needed).\* Platforms (online and real world) and innovative governance structures for fostering greater community connectivity to share information, resources, or link needs with skills and capacities in a way that ensures trust and reduces transactional friction, e.g. collaborative consumption platforms.\* Citizen Panels to deal with specific issues.\* Concept of “hive minds” — this could be explored further.\* See “Empowering Public Wisdom — a practical vision of citizen-led politics” on <http://empoweringpublicwisdom.us>\* The community organising movement is trying to find new methods for influencing political decisions that match and exceed traditional methods. So far in Sydney (the Sydney Alliance) they have had some small wins at a local level. Perhaps we need a new kind of people power.\* Develop community organising processes that can take the concerns raised during the Kitchen Table Conversations further.\*
- ### Some additional questions/thoughts
- **Questions to ask before undertaking action:** How do we engage with people who have different views from us? How do we not get fixed in our ways of thinking? How far am ‘I’ prepared to go/act to address the big issues? It is too easy to give money, talk about things, but not do much more, e.g. am ‘I’ prepared to open up my own home to refugees, the homeless, etc.? How to balance own interests and not feel the needs of others are a threat to own interests.\* How do we work with our neighbours? “Should we all join a political party?” [The group that raised this question said there was broad agreement that they should find and use channels other than conventional politics.]\* Are community organisations suited to big issues like climate change or more suitable for local issues like light rail? Should a community organisation look at national issues or only at local ones.\* And if they did would they effectively become a political party? Is ‘working for the common good’ an ethos that has diminished? A focus on the common good would influence a range of policies from climate change to inequality. A Fair Go is often misinterpreted as an ‘entitlement to oneself’, but it actually means that everyone has the opportunity to succeed.\*

## Question 5: How can we make change happen

• **Political:** Should we become more directly involved in politics? Approaching our Local ACT and Federal Government Members would be a start.\* Maybe if we want to change politics we should join parties and stand for election. For that you need money or union backing. It's easier to get into the Senate than into the House of Reps and you can have influence in the Senate. More independents maybe? In our system Independents can have influence and act with integrity — e.g. Senators Nick Xenophon, Tony Windsor, Andrew Wilkie.\* More political engagement, making politics more relevant and drawing the links with their everyday life.\* Should we oppose the main parties and form an independent ACT first party?\* We could become a powerful independent force by winning both ACT senate seats, then use this platform to promote the issues we want addressed nationally as some of the new senators are doing.\* It may be that some good ideas might come from surprising places; for example, the Australian Sex Party manifesto is surprisingly comprehensive — perhaps they should be taken more seriously.\* A Facebook group recently proposed founding a new political party, but there was concern about dividing the Left vote. Politicians are largely from Liberal staffer or trade union backgrounds, but we need wider membership of parties. Human rights interests of conservative members seem to be squeezed out by 'Tea Party' types, and both major parties have moved to the right.

## HOW CAN WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN?

### In summary

**General principles to consider before embarking on a process of change:** A number of the comments outlined some general principles for people to be aware of that would help them become an agent of change. A number of impediments to change were identified which are helpful to better understand why change isn't happening. The impediments included feeling helpless, change being too difficult, special interest groups hijacking the debate, tension between economics and scientific claims, and the tendency to focus on the near term rather than future threats. A number of techniques to influence others to take action were also identified. These included connecting with people on the emotional level, selling the benefits of change, listening in a non-judgmental way to people with different views, and being encouraging by acknowledging past successes — don't make it all Doom and Gloom. Finally, a number of comments dealt with the need for people to feel empowered. Using some of the processes and tools listed in the next section should help people feel empowered.

**Processes and Tools for Creating Change:** A number of processes and tools for making change happened were identified. These included Kitchen Table Conversations, volunteering with and supporting existing groups, speaking out, forming small groups to undertake actions, engaging with your local community by looking for and creating opportunities to get together, providing philanthropic support through the Internet (using Crowd Funding and Micro Loan websites), and using modern media including social media to get the message out. Ways of speaking out included talking or writing to your local politicians or relevant government minister, providing feedback on policy documents out for public comment, writing letters to the editor, and signing petitions.

**Taking specific actions to support change:** A number of specific actions which would support change were identified. In the case of the individual there were actions that involved challenging wrong behavior (such as a racist joke), becoming involved in your community, reducing your carbon footprint, building resilience in your life, ethical investing, engagement in politics, learning about alternative economic systems, improving food security through supporting Farmers' Markets and locally-produced food. A number of actions to support change that required community involvement were also identified: specific local issue (such as car parking); setting up a way for young drivers to get driving experience, car sharing, campaigning to deal with Canberra's poor image, and larger scale issues included changing the economic system, reducing consumerism in the community, and overpopulation. A need for new structures/organisations to create change was also identified. The Sydney Alliance was identified as an example of the kind of structure/organisation that might be needed.

**Some additional questions/thoughts:** A number of questions which assist in focusing efforts and prioritising actions were also identified.

# 4. REVIEW OF THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE PROJECT

As part of the evaluation of the project, hosts were asked to complete an online survey. Sixteen people completed the survey. The respondents were asked to answer a series of questions and rate the value to them of being a Kitchen Table Conversation Host. 50% rated the value as excellent and 50% rated it as good. The responses to the other questions also showed overwhelming support for the KTC methodology. Examples of responses include:

Under ‘What was your greatest insight?’ and ‘any or other comments’

- “People who don’t know each other can soon become engaged and get on well if they have a theme to discuss that they feel strongly about.”
- “I am reluctant to impose rules and processes on others, but I saw that there are such benefits from ensuring that all have an equal voice, and not simply letting the most vocal people do all the talking.”
- “People loved talking about big issues and wanted more of it.”
- “Just about everyone had talked about the KTC with someone else and they wanted to either host their own KTC if opportunity came up again or participate in another one; Terrific community building activity.”

Under ‘What actions will be taken as a result of your conversations?’

- “One of my neighbours and I hope to host a street party. This wasn’t decided in the conversation, but it is an outcome from it.”
- “None specifically planned at this point but new channels are open”
- “Not sure. In the second meeting we got to know what activities others in the group were involved in — some we knew about, others we didn’t. Some group members may well network together more as a result.”

On 3 December 2014, 25 hosts, scribes and organisers held a debrief on their experiences with the trial. It was agreed that the KTC method opens new doors to communication with friends, neighbours and new acquaintances. In sharing their experiences, the hosts and scribes described their satisfaction with the process and their keenness to move to the next stage of discussion and action both within their own groups and in the broader Canberra Community.

We found that the process helps people to feel that this is their world and that their views are important. This has been, furthermore, an enjoyable social activity, which provides the opportunity to consider topics that may not otherwise be a part of everyday social conversation.

We think that KTC’s could become building blocks for reinvigorating Australian democracy and suggest that they could be used on many topics to strengthen the capacity for individuals and community groups to work with others to effect change on those issues which matter to us.

We encourage people in Canberra to test this approach for themselves as an enjoyable social activity. It can help to build community as well as identify issues that need attention.

# 5. WHERE TO NEXT?

## WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE RESULTS OF THESE CONVERSATIONS?

The logical question is, “What can and will be done about the issues that people identify in these discussions?” Each person and each group is obviously free to use the outcomes of kitchen table conversations as they see fit, and a number have already reported actions taken or intended as a result of their involvement in the process. We hope that many of the groups that met last year will consider reconvening and using this document to carry their own discussions further and into action.

By circulating this report widely in Canberra we think that others will see, as we now do, the potential of these conversations to enrich social and democratic life. The conversations can provide the authority of community thinking to help promote essential change in the way our society is currently operating.

SEE-Change exists to provide Canberra citizens with opportunities for changing our Society, Environment and Economy in more sustainable directions. It offers the framework for people to work together on desirable change. The Executive Officer of SEE-Change will be pleased to hear from Canberrans who would like to work with others on some of the issues that have been identified as requiring action. In addition, SEE-Change is willing to run training sessions and to provide host kits for groups in Canberra who would like further to develop Kitchen Table Conversations in their communities or workplaces. SEE-Change can be contacted by emailing [office@see-change.org.au](mailto:office@see-change.org.au)

## A CANBERRA ALLIANCE

Several of the participants when discussing the question ‘How to make change happen?’ referred to the need to develop new structures and organisations to influence political decisions. Some referred to the Sydney Alliance as an example of the kind of organisation we need. The Sydney Alliance and a similar alliance they are developing in south-east Queensland are coalitions of community organisations, religious organisations, unions and schools that are trying to make the city a better place to live. It uses the tools of community organising developed in the mid 1970s. Community organising is a well-developed process where people who live in proximity to each other support a non-partisan organisation which employs expert facilitators and organisers to act in and defend the public interest.

A slightly different process has been developed by the *US Center for Wise Democracy*. It uses three techniques. These three techniques are “choice creating”, “dynamic facilitation” and “wisdom councils”. Like KTC’s they utilise ordinary people but unlike KTC’s they depend upon trained expert facilitators building on the diverse expressed concerns of ordinary people and helping them to reach what is often described as “remarkable consensus” about action to resolve issues that are seen to be recalcitrant and seemingly impossible to solve. A wisdom council is a one time, randomly selected group of stakeholders who, through special facilitation, produce a consensus statement, which is made available to the larger population for further dialogue and action. *The Land* (State) of Vorarlberg in Austria has adopted this methodology and regularly uses Wisdom Councils. Further information can be found on *The Center for Wise Democracy’s* website (<http://wisedemocracy.org/>)

We agree that there is a need to develop new structures and are proposing, for consideration, that we collectively develop a Canberra Alliance of Civil Society Groups. It would be a non-partisan public interest group comprising NGOs, faith groups, unions, and community action groups, to work together to press for action on issues of broad concern and to hold political leaders and policy makers accountable. We are ready to assist in establishing the framework for a Canberra Alliance that, like the Sydney Alliance and a developing Queensland Alliance, could have as its central objective, holding politicians and decision-makers accountable for the future welfare and well-being of our population. KTC’s, and the techniques used by other groups around the world, such as the *Center for Wise Democracy* in the US, could be important building blocks to help set the agenda for such an alliance.

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## **USE OF KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS IN SCHOOLS?**

We are also suggesting to schools across Canberra, through the SEE-Change 2020 Vision Project, that the method could be tried in the classroom among children of all ages, as a means of sharing knowledge and understanding about key issues in preparation for a 2020 Youth Parliament on Sustainability that is planned for June 2015. At the parliament, each school is being invited to send a parliamentary team to speak to their school's green paper on climate change action. For further information please see our SEE Change website ([www.see-change.org.au/ParliamentofYouth](http://www.see-change.org.au/ParliamentofYouth)).

Example: The teacher presents a session on "The science of Climate Change", informed by the Academy of Science Report of that name concentrating on "What is climate change? How has climate changed in the distant past? How has climate changed during the recent past? Are human activities causing climate change? How do we expect climate to evolve in the future? What are the consequences of climate change?"

The class is then divided into groups of say, between 5 and 8 students, who appoint a host and scribe from within the group and hold a kitchen table conversation on the topic. "What is the most important thing for us to do as individuals and as world human society about climate change?" The collected reports of these KTC's might then be used to identify the topic for the school's green paper presentation to the parliament.

# 6. CONCLUSION

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This experience with kitchen table conversations has been a very positive one. We have found, as have Victorian groups who have used it, that the method enables small groups of people to engage positively and enjoyably in discussions that are not normally part of the Australian scene. Further more it has identified among the 180 people who participated in this experiment a significant number of concerns that range from the local to the national and global. Participants also showed an appetite for taking action to address these concerns. The Victorian experience and our recent experience have established that the KTC methodology can be effectively used both for focused specific topics as well as for broad-ranging explorations.

This experience leads us to believe that KTC's could have very wide application and could help to address the malaise that we detect in Australian democracy at present.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Mary Crooks, CEO of the Victorian Women’s Trust, for assisting us to run this trial. KTCs have been used in Victoria recently to identify issues for consideration by political candidates and to promote broad community inputs to technical issues like water policy. By synthesising the reports of KTCs across groups, the Victorian experience has led to a fresh sense of empowerment by communities and in some cases, powerful political outcomes.

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