

2020 Annual Report Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy



Despite fires, floods and plague, the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy has managed a productive year. Our focus is improving democratic government in the ACT. We have been working on this in two domains: working with community groups and academics to bring community voices into agenda setting and decision making in the ACT government, and in parallel engaging with current members of the Legislative Assembly and candidates for the 2020 elections to explore their relationship with constituents and their commitment to good governance. This approach to democratic representation we call ***governing with***.

Our work was undertaken by two Action Groups, whose reports are below.

The committee this year comprised Beth Slatyer (until March), Mark Spain as Treasurer and acting convener from March, Peter Tait Secretary, and committee members Bob Douglas, Petra Cram, Sue Ingram and Margaret Lee.

Action Group Reports

Genuine Citizen Participation

How to get citizen voice (citizen generated wisdom) into the ACT Assembly

This year:

- Beth Slatyer was one of the speakers at a panel discussion under the title **Deliberative Democracy Prospects? International and Australian experience** – a panel discussion at the Museum of Australian Democracy in December 2019.
- We participated in the Ostbelgian model workshop with Min Reuchamps. A [short article describing this is here](#). We are still in correspondence with Min and keeping up to date on the Ostbelgien Model.
- We are building more confidence in our aspirational goal of institutionalising participatory democracy in the ACT.
- We are aiming to build relationships and capacity to implement the OECD Report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave* (see below) and [Latimer report](#) to improve community participation in democracy in the ACT.

- We met with Jane Suiter when she visited the University of Canberra on 3/4th Feb to get latest information about deliberative democracy from Ireland and Belgium.
- Although it has been slowed by COVID, we continue to look forward to collaborative working relations with academics at University of Canberra (Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, NATSEM) and with ANU political science scholars.
- DeliberateACT has been in a holding pattern during 2020 with the bushfires and COVID-19.
- We are continuing to use our reflections on the four Deliberative Processes by the ACT Government in 2018 to deepen our understanding of citizen deliberation and how to measure it effectively with the aim to institutionalise these practices to build more trust in governance with the people.
- People's Assemblies using [Extinction Rebellion toolkit](#) on lawns of Parliament house was successful on 4, 5 & 6 Feb 2020. Topics included: Paths towards change: Democracy, activism, and community; How do we write humanity's restoration story? Wrap up and way forward.
- We contributed a presentation at the Centre for Christianity and Culture in November 2019 introducing CAPaD and reporting on the MLA interviews (see MLA group report below).
- We hosted Rob Salter's zoom session *Revitalising democracy: possibilities for electorate level mobilisations* to achieve better parliamentary 31 May 2020. [See the video here](#).
- We are continuing to collaborate with Rob about his "Our Democracy" project for improving citizens agency (power "with") in democracy across all Australian electorates.
- We are very pleased to be contributors to [OECD Report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*](#).
- Building on our experience with the ACT deliberative processes and the OECD report, we hosted Lyn Stephens' zoom session "Government with the people – building trust in deliberative processes" 26 July 2020. See the [paper](#), [video](#) and [slide show here](#).
- Lyn's paper also explains our further development of the "Principles/Criteria for the Trial of Citizens' Juries in the ACT, jointly prepared by CAPaD and ACTCOSS, August 2017". Lyn compares our latest version against the OECD good practice principles and we highlight some specific additions including the skills to be demonstrated by the facilitator and the need to communicate with, educate and engage the broader community.
- We hosted 2 x 2hr zoom seminars on [Empathy and Collaborative Meaning-Making: An Overview of Citizens' Councils - a taste of Dynamic Facilitation](#) as a process in the "operating system" of the

Citizens' Councils recently featured in the OECD's report on *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions* by Rosa Zubizarreta, Martha Cuffy, Andy Paice.

- An article about these matters "Citizens' Councils: What are they, and why are they so popular in Austria?" can be [found here](#).

MLA Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships

Defining the role and responsibilities of MLAs and active community members, and the ongoing dynamic relationship between them

Early in the year we followed up on our 2016 election Candidate Statements by by inviting all MLAs to take part in a semi-structured interview exploring their understanding of their role as representatives and their relationship with their constituents. This was a very substantial piece of work and our report synthesising and analysing the MLAs' responses is [available here](#). The major focus of the Group's work over the last year has been the development and promotion of candidate statements in preparation for the [2020 Legislative Assembly elections](#). As we did in 2016, each candidate was invited to complete a one-page questionnaire outlining why they are qualified to be an MLA, how they are going to involve us, the people, in policy development and decision making, and how they propose to strengthen democracy in Canberra.



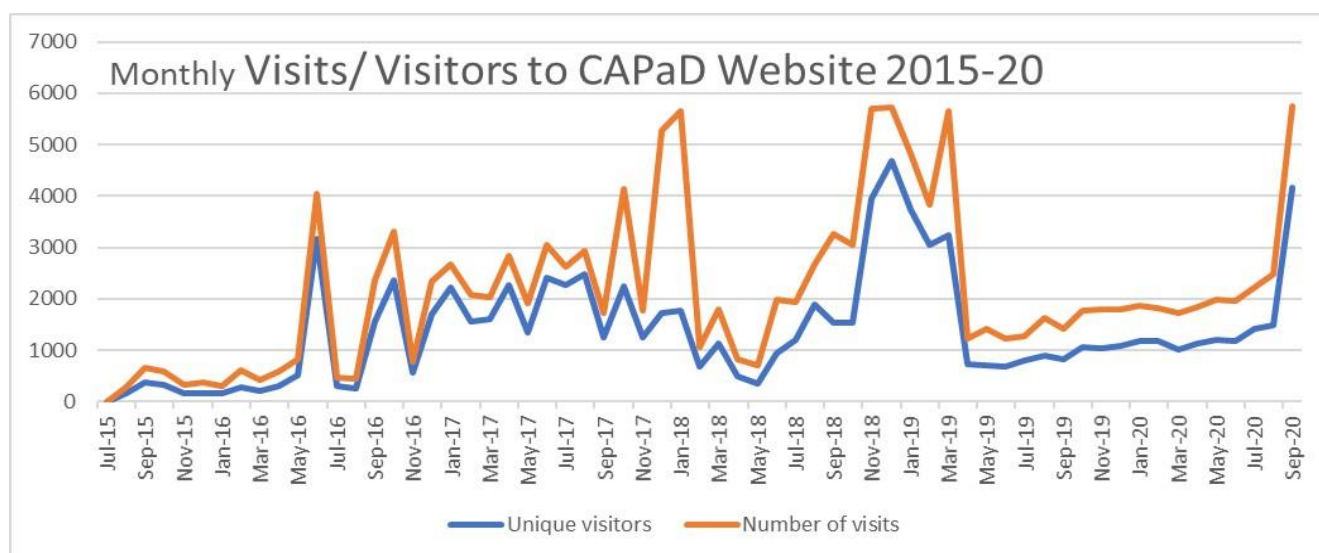
The underlying logic of the candidate statements is to help us, the voters, to know the candidates as people, rather than simply as ciphers for their political parties, and to emphasise the importance of the *relationship* between voters and candidates. This work has been a year-long endeavour with two critical strands: to elicit responses from candidates and to inform and enthuse the wider community about the candidate statements and encourage them to use them in making their decisions about whom to vote for. We repeatedly contacted candidates and party secretariats over some months. Disappointingly only 31 candidates submitted statements, Canberra progressives 6/7, Greens 11/15, Independents 3/8, Labor 6/25 and other minor parties 5/57. No responses were received from Liberal Party candidates, with the party's campaign director advising that their candidates do not sign individual pledges and that the Statement of Democratic Commitment referenced in the candidate statement related to matters that were outside the purview of the candidates.

To promote the candidate statement exercise to the wider public, op eds were written to try to encourage the populace to consider the full ramifications of democracy and to encourage thoughtful decisions; the website was significantly upgraded to make accessing this new information easier; with heartening crowd funding support from our members and affiliates, advertisements were placed in the *City News* and to the *Canberra Times* (where it memorably stood out at the lower edge of the front page of one issue); CAPaD secretary Peter Tait was interviewed for the ABC 7pm television news, on 1WayFM and and twice by 2XX. Flyers were designed and placed in cafes and some letterboxes, although it seems that few CAPaD members and affiliates took up the invitation to assist with letterboxing.

Several members of the Action Group addressed groups including *Christians for an Ethical Society* and Rotary and met with representatives of various community groups including the Community Councils, church bodies and the Conservation Council to discuss and promote our work.

We were very concerned by suspension of parliament federally but traction on action to reverse this decision despite wide support was not forthcoming. The Action Group drafted a [submission to the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation](#) for its inquiry into the exemption of delegated legislation from parliamentary oversight.

It was agreed in June that we would apply for a Nurturing Evolutionary Development (NED) grant to support upgrading the format and content of our Ideas and Resources Hub making it attractive and easier to navigate. Up to this point it has been Peter Tait's lot, along with all his other work, to endeavour to improve the old version, and it needs an expert to achieve our aims.



Preliminary analysis notes web visits and visitors have increased with a focus on candidate statements.

Other activity

CAPaD in the Media

We achieved some media presence this year mostly around the election to explain our reasoning for the candidate statements and to try to promote them to candidates and the public. Unfortunately the mainstream media (radio, TV and print) were unresponsive. Twitter was active but is of limited broadcast range.

- October 16 Article in the RiotACT by Genevieve Jacobs: [What do all those candidates really believe? Here's how to find out](#)
- October 8 Peter Tait's [Opinion piece in the City News](#) explaining why we run candidate statements.
- October 6 Canberra Times [front page advertisement](#) for the candidate statement.
- *October 2*: Peter Tait [interviewed on 2XX](#), updating voters on the election and candidate statements, democracy, and lots more.
- September 17-23 [City News Advertorial](#) on our election program.
- We had a number of letters by members of the committee published in the Canberra Times.
- *2020 August* Peter Tait was interviewed on 2XX on Friday 28th August about democracy, our upcoming election, the candidate statements and more. [Hear the wide ranging interview at this link.](#)
- *2020 May* Peter Tait was interviewed as part of an ABC piece, [Amid a coronavirus pandemic, ACT election candidates are preparing for a very different campaign](#). "The alliance hopes this year's campaign will force candidates to use such options {candidate statements} to connect with voters. And Dr Tait says that, with the usual campaign tactics suspended and politics out of peoples' faces, voters may turn to candidates' statements to figure out where their vote should fall."
- 2020 May: ACT Media coverage: letters to editors about our candidate statement exercise in [a letter published in the Canberra Times](#) in mid-May and [the City News](#) in late May.
- March 2020: We have explained our broad 2020 Election strategy in [Awakening Democracy by Robust Representation](#) in John Menadue's Pearls and Irritations and a copy is [in our website](#).
- 2019 Dec: See Beth Slatyer's [piece in ACTCOSS journal](#) about CAPaD's thoughts on **more accountable representation**.
- 2019 Nov: Rebecca Vassarotti reports on our **MLA interviews report**, [Exploring political representation in the ACT](#), piece in RiotACT.
- 2019 Oct: City News, Peter Tait's [Neat summary of CAPaD's position on ideas to change ACT democracy](#).

Awakening Democracy

CAPaD - The Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy

Our newsletter had a revamp this year with a name change and to make it more informative and newsy. Back copies are [on the website](#).

Our Website

The website had a major overhaul this year to make it more attractive and easier to navigate. This included, as mentioned above, reworking the election pages to improve appeal and functionality.

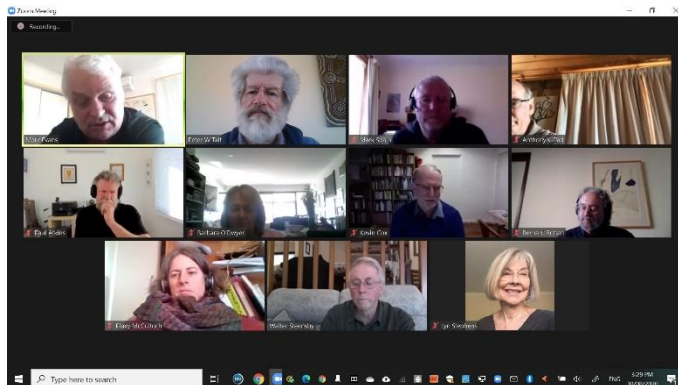
Views

In the absence of media attention to our media releases, we reactivated [our blog site, Views](#). This enabled a post and tweet strategy to get our word out.

Supporter Activity

Following the survey of our members and supporters in 2019 we sought to more proactively involve them in campaigns and as necessary actions.

- We alerted readers to Zali Steggall's *Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Action) Bill 2020* and invited them to contact their MPs for their responses. This was deferred because of COVID.
- We put a call out for donations to provide funds to run a number of advertisements in the City News, and we were also able to run one across the bottom of the front page of one issue of the Canberra Times. We received \$2225 in total from members and supporters.
- We successfully ran five Zoom Events (general meetings) during the year:
 - May 2020 Revitalising democracy: possibilities for electorate level mobilisations to achieve better parliamentary representation.
 - June 2020 ACT Election - Choosing the candidate who will deliver government *with* we, the people.
 - July 2020 Citizen Review of 2017-18 ACT Deliberative Processes.
 - August 2020 Mark Evans, Democracy 2025 – bridging the trust divide .
 - September 2020, 2nd and 9th Empathy and Collaborative Meaning-Making: An Overview of Citizens' Councils.



Looking forward

2021 looks to be another busy year. Building on the past two years activity we are looking to develop the idea of an active electorate working with our ACT MLAs and federal MPs. Don't just watch this space, come and join in to see what we can do.

