



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF  
PARLIAMENT GROUP  
(Queensland Chapter)***

**PARLIAMENT AND THE PEOPLE: PARTICIPATION,  
REPRESENTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**SATURDAY, 12 JULY 2008**

**Brisbane**

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### Conference met at 9.00 am

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Welcome to the first session of the second day. I think the two worst jobs to chair at conferences are the first session for the second day and the session after lunch. So welcome to the remnant weak and small. I hope if you revelled last night you revelled well, if you slept last night you slept well and if you did anything in between, I hope you did that well as well.

We are talking today in this session about engaging all the people—minority groups—in and out of the parliament. My name is Paul Reynolds and as of Friday, 4 July I retired as a reader in political science at the University of Queensland after 35 years. I am having withdrawal symptoms already, but at the end of the month I start work in an honorary capacity for the Speaker of the parliament. One of my colleagues said, 'You've died and gone to heaven. You have access to the best library in the state and no undergraduates.' That sounds like a good definition of heaven.

The first speaker for this session is John McCulloch OAM. I have known John for many, many years—so long, in fact, that I remember him as a tutor in classics and ancient history at the University of Queensland. He was then a very able and distinguished member of the library staff of the parliament and at his tender young age has embarked on a PhD. Well done, John. The other thing to note about John is that he is the author of two very fine books published in 2005 to mark the centenary of women's suffrage in Queensland. Perhaps without stealing any of his thunder, it is as well to reflect that of all the women who have sat in the Queensland parliament, only two are dead and 50 per cent of them are still sitting. That is how recent it was. Without further ado I will pass over to John and ask you to welcome him.

**Mr McCULLOCH:** Thank you very much, Paul, for that flattering introduction. If you would like to turn to page 55 of your book, there is a table there which you need to refer to so that my remarks will make a bit of sense. As far as the percentage of women in its parliament is concerned, Australia ranks about 30th among the countries of the world and has not really improved its ranking in the last 10 years. That table on page 55 shows Australia's ranking in terms of the percentage of women in its parliament 1998-2008 and also on the facing page the percentage of women in the eight parliaments around Australia in 2008. The comments that I will make I will restrict to examples from the federal and Queensland parliaments.

So have we made any progress over this decade? Over the 10-year period in question, Australia increased its percentage of women in the Lower House of its federal parliament by 11 per cent. That was just enough to maintain its world ranking at about 30th place but not enough to improve its position. This occurred because many other countries increased their women MPs much more dramatically, for example, Rwanda, from 17 per cent to 49 per cent; Cuba, 23 per cent to 43 per cent; Peru, 11 per cent to 20 per cent; Macedonia, three per cent to 29 per cent; Croatia, eight per cent to 21 per cent; and even Turkey went from 2.5 per cent to nine per cent—no doubt hoping this would improve its chances of joining the EU.

So who should we blame for Australia's static ranking? Blame the media. Although the media is an irritant inasmuch as it still has not completely come to terms with treating women MPs seriously—it is still obsessed by their clothes, their hairdos, their families and trying to take unflattering photographs of them—it is probably a minor player as far as blame is concerned. However, the media is guilty of moulding public opinion about members of parliament in that it portrays them as underworked and overpaid. Some indeed are, but the majority are extremely committed, hardworking individuals and most of the 66 women MPs I interviewed worked at least 80 hours a week, including weekends. Compared with workers in private enterprise, the media and, dare I say, even Kevin O'Connell's public servants, these women were overworked and underpaid. Unfortunately, the media regards serious parliamentary debate as secondary to the theatre and drama of the chamber.

Blame the parliament. Australian parliaments with their two-party Westminster system are inherently adversarial, because the chamber seating arrangements provide for rival teams to directly face each other. Women tend to find this arrangement more intimidating than men. There are other alternatives where MPs are seated by region, as in Sweden, or by lot, as in Iceland, or horseshoe shaped seating arrangements as in Scotland and some of the other European parliaments. Needless to say, there would be enormous difficulty in changing the seating arrangements of older style parliaments, such as in Queensland.

The Scottish parliament, formed in 1999, provides child-care facilities and has adopted family friendly hours: 2.30 to 5.30 on Mondays; 9.30 to 5.30 Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; 9.30 to 12.30 on Fridays and less confrontational seating arrangements. Some contend that late-night sittings shorten the parliamentary week and allow members to return to their families perhaps 2,000 kilometres away, but this supposed benefit clearly does not apply to the majority of Queensland MPs who mostly live between Noosa and Coolangatta and west to Toowoomba, nor to their political staff or the staff of the parliament.

Perhaps the problem could be solved if the government and the opposition negotiated at the beginning of each session regarding the amount of legislation the government wanted to push through in that session. In return, the opposition would be free to allocate its time as it saw fit on whatever legislation it liked providing that all the legislation the government wanted passed during the session was considered. Extra weeks, when required, could be allocated to sitting times. In conjunction with the abolition of late-sitting hours, the travel entitlements of MPs and their families should be reviewed so that the families of country MPs have more opportunities to travel to Brisbane to be with their spouse or parent.

Blame the women themselves. The women themselves have to bear some of the responsibility in that they tend to be more reticent about committing to a parliamentary career than do men. Many women simply cannot find the right time to take the plunge whereas men are much more likely to seize an opportunity irrespective of other considerations. Fewer women than men stand for political office and there has been endless speculation why. The way in which parliamentary proceedings are conducted is distasteful to many women—and many men, for that matter—because many parliaments have tended to be forums, and the word used in the Queensland parliament is bearpit, where an enormous amount of time is wasted on seeing who can shout the loudest, who can hurl the worst abuse and who can come up with the cutest Dorothy Dix questions. This is not to imply that women never engage in those tactics. Take, for example, 'Don't you know who I am?' Belinda Neal. But usually it is men who show greater enthusiasm for them.

Blame the political parties. The Labor Party has just about atoned for its early inaction but cannot improve Australia's ranking as far as women are concerned by itself. In 1981 the ALP decided to adopt a 10-year affirmative action plan. The aim of the plan was to increase both the number of women MPs and the number of women throughout its party structures. At this point the ALP took a completely different course to the conservative parties and positioned itself at the vanguard of the major political parties in terms of promoting women throughout its structures. The election of the Hawke government in 1983 enabled the ALP to set the scene by introducing innovative legislation designed specifically to improve the status of women.

Paul Keating, however, aided and abetted by ex-Victorian Premier Joan Kirner, was much more attuned to the importance of the ALP appealing to a wider audience. At the 1993 Victorian ALP women's conference he committed to draw up a plan to increase significantly the number of ALP MPs. This led to the historic decision at the 1994 ALP conference to aim to achieve 35 per cent of women standing in winnable seats by 2002. Keating described the result of all this as a defining moment in Australian politics.

Queensland, however, made little progress because Premier Wayne Goss was opposed to quotas. He spoke out against quotas, claiming there was no real evidence that under the current system talented women were being beaten by mediocre men. Incidentally, his favourite movie was *Eyes Wide Shut*. A sequence of events, however, was to swiftly push Queensland from having the fewest women in parliament to having the most. The Goss government lost office in early 1996 and Peter Beattie became opposition leader and Premier at the next election in 1998.

Beattie was a much stronger and more vocal advocate of more women MPs than Goss and set about ensuring that the 35 per cent of women by 2002 target was met as well as promoting women in the judiciary and Public Service. From this point on, Labor women in Queensland began to make significant gains, as shown by the huge influx of women MPs at the 2001 election. Nevertheless, the ALP still had a poor record for preselecting women at the federal level. As late as 1996 it only preselected 24 per cent of women compared to the Liberal Party's 27 per cent and the Nationals' eight per cent. In 2001 Simon Crean replaced Kim Beazley as opposition leader and was keener than his predecessor in advocating for more women MPs. At his instigation, the 35 per cent by 2002 target was raised to 40 per cent by 2012.

The enormous measures adopted by the ALP have led to huge gains for women. After the 2004 Queensland election, ALP women held 124 state and federal seats—more than twice as many as their coalition counterparts. In Queensland, South Australia and Victoria the 35 per cent target had already been met. It was not quite met at the federal level, however. After the 2001 federal election, ALP women only held 33.7 per cent of their party seats in the federal parliament. By 2008 the ALP had already reached the 40 per cent by 2012 target in the federal, Queensland and South Australian parliaments and was over 30 per cent in the others.

The Liberal Party must now shoulder most of the blame and preselect a lot more women in winnable seats at the federal and state level if Australia is to improve its world ranking. The Liberal Party has not achieved the level of success that Labor has in increasing the number of women. It has tended to rely on such strategies as mentoring, networking programs and seminars designed to improve the skills of aspiring women in readiness for the preselection process. The Liberal Party balks at any formal policy to explicitly increase the number of its women MPs. The historical traditions of facilitating the role of women within the Liberal Party organisation do not extend to helping them more than the men to win parliamentary seats which, in the true tradition of liberalism, has always been left to the individual.

Slogans such as 'We want a fair go, not a free kick' have been used in order to distance the Liberals from Labor's approach. These slogans are too cute by half and bear little resemblance to historical fact. Although the Liberals have not embraced quotas for aspiring women MPs, these women have benefited from the fact that the Liberal structure has always given Liberal women a much smoother path within its party organisation than has the ALP presented to its women members. Also, with women accounting for

about 50 per cent of the membership, the Liberal Party is better placed structurally than the ALP whose female membership is only about 30 per cent. The coalition maintains that the principle of merit should be the only criterion for preselecting parliamentary candidates.

I will now attempt to grapple with this so-called merit principle and give you three examples of coalition members of parliament—two federal and one Queensland—to let you pick which particular aspect of merit you think influenced their preselection. Merit may imply a range of possibilities. Therefore, should a search for the person richest in merit seek the candidate for preselection who proves themselves to be the most intelligent, the hardest working, the most articulate, the most honest or the one with the most experience? Clearly, if the major parties had defined the term this way, many male parliamentarians across Australia would be there under false pretences. Men might conceivably be outnumbered by women.

As former Democrat leader Janine Haines so eloquently remarked—

Nobody worries whether the blokes are the right blokes. Some of the biggest male dorks are hanging about, not just on the back benches but the front benches too. There are blokes who couldn't get up without somebody else having written a speech for them ... I'm not joking. But nobody says anything about that. They've got there because of their faction, or they're an old unionist or a businessman or a farmer. Where there is real perceived power, they're not going to let women in without a fight or without the law being changed.

In other words, merit in terms of candidate preselection has meant to both political parties cronyism, pedigree, wealth, faction, pecking order, favourites of the leader in drag. Both in and out of parliament it usually does not take long for MPs to unwittingly reveal their merit or lack thereof.

I put forward three coalition members who were presumably preselected for their richness in this quality. Take Ian Cameron, a previous National Party MP for Maranoa. In summarising the federal Nationals' view of women when speaking against the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity of Women) Bill in the House of Representatives in 1986 he said—

They should be encouraged to stay at home and to look after their families. That is what the National Party is on about; we are on about supporting the family and giving women incentives to stay home to look after the family and to bring up young Australians as they ought to be brought up, not in some socialised, ratbag, Russianised-type childminding centre set up at the factory door ... I have never seen such a wank of a Bill in all my life.

In 1999 the same man was charged with five counts of assault, obstructing police and breaches of domestic violence orders.

However, in order to see real merit at work plus insight into the then coalition's commitment to women, let us move forward a year to the debate in federal parliament on the Equal Employment Opportunities (Commonwealth Authorities) Bill 1987. There was nothing earth-shattering about this bill. It merely extended the provisions of previous bills in 1984 and 1986 to include Commonwealth statutory authorities.

Owing to the considerable efforts of Liberal senators Kathy Sullivan and Margaret Guilfoyle and the shadow minister for the status of women, Ian Macphee, in the House of Representatives, the Liberal Party had generally supported the previous legislation. The situation was very different in March 1987, however, when Australia's first female Speaker, Joan Child, called opposition members to speak to this bill and in so doing sorely put merit to the test. Take Michael Cobb, National Party member for Parkes, New South Wales, who probably rose with a dishevelled appearance—that crumpled suit from sleeping in your car look. The Speaker called the member for Parkes. He said, 'Thank you, Madam Speaker'—

This ... Bill is typical of the wimpish, trendy nonsense that has pervaded Western society generally and this country particularly in recent years ... Next we will see that so many homosexuals will have to be employed in schools, or Indians from Outer Mongolia, or one-legged, left handed lesbians, or whatever.

Michael Cobb was subsequently fined \$14,000 and given a two-year suspended sentence for fraud when he lied on 102 counts of claiming hotel expenses from the Commonwealth while sleeping in his car. Peter Baume resigned as shadow minister for the status of women over this bill and Steele Hall, a Liberal from South Australia, crossed the floor in the House of Representatives to vote for the bill. In the Senate, seven Liberal senators crossed the floor to vote for the bill and one abstained. Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of this was that all the Liberal senators who crossed the floor to support the bill were men and all six women Liberal senators opposed the bill—Guilfoyle, Knowles, Newman, Reid, Vanstone and Walters. They actually voted against it.

We therefore face a perplexing contrast when we recognise that in the ALP it was the women who fought tooth and nail for more women MPs, helped by a few supportive men, while in the Liberal Party, it was mostly men who took the action to increase the number of women MPs, helped by a few supportive women. Have the Liberals changed? Despite John Howard's boast about the record number of Liberal women elected at the 1996 election, he neglected to point out that most of them were in marginal seats they were not expected to win.

Finally, there are four possible 'third ways' to fix all this, to quote Tony Blair. One, perhaps a few simple measures for female friendly Australian parliaments, all of them having precedents elsewhere—installing creches for both MPs and staff on a subsidised basis, abolishing late sitting hours, ensuring there is a gender balance on all committees, and expecting the same standard of dress and behaviour from female and male MPs. Whereas a male MP can and does get away with continually wearing the same dark suit, a female is expected to wear a broader variety of appropriate, usually expensive, clothing and a different outfit every day. This brings me to the last example of dubious merit, this time from a previous Speaker of the Queensland parliament. While I was a research officer, I was asked by a senior National Brisbane

woman whether there was anything in the Westminster system forbidding the wearing of pant suits because the Speaker had said she could not do so. My answer was, 'No, there isn't,' and she then conveyed this to the Speaker and asked why. He said to her, 'Because I haven't got time to keep checking your crotch to make sure your pants aren't too tight.'

No. 2: the Constitution could be changed to require 50 per cent of seats are males and 50 per cent are females, a new voting system like New Zealand could be introduced, or perhaps the number of electorates could be halved with the requirement that each be represented by both a male and a female. Mind you, this one could be fraught because dare we risk the spectacle of John and Belinda, having just won the 2010 preselection for the federal division of Robertson, dancing the night away at Iguanas nightclub to the feral strains of that new popular dance, the 'Della Bosca Nova'.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** As usual, John says it all and with great wit and passion. The next speaker on 'E-petitions and engagement' is Dr Paul Williams, a colleague of mine. I had the privilege of supervising his PhD thesis. He is at Griffith and also writes features for the *Courier-Mail*. Paul, the floor is yours.

**Dr WILLIAMS:** Thank you, Paul, and good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am talking to you this morning about e-petitions or, more particularly, comparing e-petitions with paper petitions. This is an area I feel is very much under-researched—not just e-petitions, because it is a new technology, but petitions themselves. For various reasons. I think it is a fairly under-researched area and ripe for research.

I am choosing the period 2003 to 2007 for a couple of reasons. E-petitions were first introduced in the Queensland parliament in 2002, but the first full year of their operation was 2003 so that lends itself to a nice five-year time span in which to compare paper petitions and e-petitions. So the role of this research and the role of this presentation is pretty much a work-in-progress type presentation and I hope to publish these findings with your comments later in the year.

Let us refresh our memory as to the roles and history of petitions. Political science and history textbooks tell us that it is an opportunity for electors, voters and citizens to vent their grievances. It is an opportunity for citizens to connect themselves to the parliamentary or legislative process. It is almost as old as parliament itself, going back to the 13th century. In fact, petitions were an early form or at least an early trigger for legislation. So obviously parliament, particularly a parliament in any recognisable form that we would recognise today, and petitions have gone hand in glove.

There have been some really important petitions in history obviously—historically world-changing or democracy-changing petitions. Sir Edward Coke's Petition of Right in the 1600s tried to expand the provisions of the Magna Carta to include all free men, and there were the Chartists in the 19th century, who were really ahead of their time. Just as the middle classes were being enfranchised, it was probably the first workers movement trying to get universal franchise, secret ballots, paid MPs and so on. So petitions have a fairly strong history of reform, change and bringing about a revolution, as it were, in parliament. This has led some people to suggest that perhaps there was a golden age of petition in the same way some people argue there was a golden age of parliament and that perhaps for some reason or for a number of reasons we have lost that golden age of parliament and we have lost that golden age of petition.

Some of the reasons that are frequently cited for the loss of parliament's sovereignty, for example, in the 20th century have been obviously the rise of disciplined political parties from the late 1800s to now. That is the most frequently cited reason why parliaments perhaps are no longer in control of cabinets and that cabinets control parliaments. Some people also say that petitions might have fallen out of favour because there are plenty of other opportunities for voters to connect with their parliaments. This includes: improved communication and transport technologies; remote citizens can travel to meet their MP; MPs can travel from distant rural and remote constituencies more frequently to capital city centres; and the advent of telephones in the early 20th century and, more recently, emails and faxes. Some people say that petitions have fallen away because we have better communication technologies—that voters can connect with their MPs and ministers much more easily and more frequently and somehow the petition has fallen out of favour.

There is also an argument that petitions might have fallen out of favour simply because people are disconnecting more from politics, particularly young people, and that is one of the points I want to raise today—that is, there is a sense of disenchantment and certainly disenfranchisement among a certain group of people who feel that politics is not for them, and that is particularly pronounced as we know among young people. This is reflected in declining party memberships and it is even reflected in declining voter turnout, and by-elections are particularly relevant here. At the by-election for Brisbane Central when Peter Beattie retired in 2007, only two-thirds of the electorate turned out to vote for his replacement—and that is in a leafy, highly educated electorate. So one wonders about voter turnout and how people feel connected to the parliamentary process.

A lot of people have said that one might naturally assume this disenfranchisement is reflected in a declining number of petitions, but from the study I have conducted I have not found any evidence of that. As a matter of fact, it is just the reverse—that is, petitions seem to be increasing. That does not necessarily mean more people are signing them, because if you check the petitions themselves sometimes there are multiple petitions on the same issue, but the raw figures suggest that petitions are still strong in popularity and in fact growing. Of course there is some evidence that, despite the growing number of petitions and maybe even the growing number of signatories to those petitions, governments are less inclined to listen to them.

What I am trying to do with this e-petition research study is to draw a link between voters' sense of connection to their parliamentary process through paper petitions or e-petitions and the provision of electronic communication, and to find out if the internet and other forms of electronic communication make people feel a little more connected to their parliamentary process. Some people have argued that e-petition, e-democracy and e-governance—there is a whole range of terms that are in vogue at the moment—are going to be some sort of panacea, that they are going to reinvigorate democracy and that people are going to feel much more connected to their electorate, particularly among the young. The jury is still out on that. We do not really know whether that is the case or not, but it is irrefutable that internet usage is soaring. Even as recently as 2000 just over six million people were connected to the internet, and in 2008 it is over 15 million. That is three-quarters of the population. My starting point is that there is obviously enormous potential for citizens to engage with their parliamentary processes through online petitions or other online mechanisms.

I think there is also a huge gap between what the internet offers and the potential that the internet has to offer voters in terms of civic engagement and what really happens. Ninety-five per cent of eligible voters being enrolled in Australia might not sound too bad, particularly among those from countries where voting is voluntary. But, again, 95 is not 100. It is a satisfactory figure that most people have come to agree is probably what we can expect or is the best we can expect.

When we look at youth voters, being those aged 18 to 25, these figures collapse dramatically and it is only 80 per cent of eligible voters who are enrolled. Come election time, not all of that 80 per cent will vote so the figure is lower still. As I said, come by-election time you are getting voter turnouts in the 60 per cent range. So there is a huge gap, in my view, between what the internet can offer and what is really happening. This is particularly pronounced among youth. Here is a graph that shows—and the most salient point is the third from the bottom, the internet—young people seem to get very little of their political information from the internet. They get lots from TV, lots from radio, lots from peers and adults but very little from the internet. Again, this suggests there is a huge disparity between what could be happening among young people in terms of engaging with politics on the internet and what is really happening.

Let us look in particular at this graph, which shows internet usage. For the 10- to 19-year and 20- to 29-year age group, the purple shows people who use the internet. I could not get any figures closer than 2001. This is ABS figures for Queensland. But internet usage drops away fairly rapidly thereafter. So in the 50- to 59-year age bracket and 60-plus, internet usage is pretty low. Again, this points to the fact that the most enormous potential for parliamentary processes and for politicians to reach out to young people is via the internet. It is an untapped potential I think.

I have a couple of arguments here that I want to put forward, as there are two theses for this paper. Again, there is an enormous disparity between youth engagement with parliamentary processes via the internet and the potential for that engagement. The second one is that, contrary to what a lot of people suspect, petitions are not in decline. They seem to be as popular as ever and in fact they may be increasing.

E-petition adoption is hardly a revolution. It does not seem that parliaments around the world or even around Australia are champing at the bit to get into e-petitions. It seems Queensland is something of a world leader in this. I rang and spoke to staff at parliaments of the territories and the states across Australia in preparing this paper, and the usual comment I got from staff was, 'We are looking at it. We are having a bit of an investigation and a think about it, but I do not think it is going to be a goer or at least just not yet. We are talking about it but nothing is really in the pipeline.' That is apart from Tasmania, which is running a trial as well. So Queensland, as I said, adopted it in 2002. 2003 was its first full year of operation. Tasmania adopted trials in 2004 but unfortunately it has had so few online petitions that statistically it is quite inappropriate for me to draw any strong comparisons. There have only been nine House of Assembly petitions and two Legislative Council petitions in four years, so very small numbers.

In recent years we have seen the UK House of Commons, the Assembly of Scotland, the National Assembly for Wales and I dare say a number of other parliaments adopt them. So they are slowly coming into common usage. Another interesting thing is that people outside of politics and people outside of the formal political institutions are enjoying and taking advantage of online petitions. There are plenty of sites on the internet where there are petition generators or petition templates that people can download or start their own. When they get a certain number of signatures they can download it and do what they want with those signatures. They are obviously non-partisan sites but it is just an implement or a tool to harness or garner some signatures that you can use for your own political ends. Interestingly, there is a number of these petition generators on the web, whereas they are not in the parliaments. As a matter of fact, there are so many of these that there is an online petition site to stop online petitions.

Let us recap some of the benefits that most observers or commentators believe e-petitions might bring, or the sorts of benefits or advantages that e-petitions might have over paper petitions. Obviously there is the idea that there is much more accessibility. The more accessibility, the more likely it is that you are going to enfranchise and encourage so-called minority groups or marginal groups that might have previously felt excluded from the parliamentary process. As we have talked about before, this might include youth; extremely remote residents whose doors people are not likely to knock on at a sheep station and ask for their signature; people from lower socioeconomic levels; immigrants, whether they be English or non-English speakers; the disabled; or the aged. Again, demographics like the aged have a very slow uptake in internet usage but the potential is there.

A second interesting advantage that e-petitions might have over paper is that e-petitions offer immediacy. Once someone signs a petition, it sort of disappears into the ether and they do not really know what happens to it. You often do not see it again and you do not see the process. With an e-petition both the principal petitioner—the person setting up the petition—and signatories can monitor its progress. In a sense it brings the petition alive. Not quite as exciting, I suppose, as watching the election via the internet on election night but at least you can see some sort of activity.

A third advantage it might have is that citizens have a place to go to seek out petitions 24/7, as opposed to the old paper petitions which really had to find citizens. Instead of paper petitions and petitioners having to seek out citizens, citizens can seek out e-petitions. Similarly, citizens outside the usual constituencies can add their voice to community concerns. Someone living in Brisbane who used to live in Cairns can see an online petition about something happening in Cairns and they might sign it as well. Whether or not it is going to carry any weight because they are no longer in that electorate might be another matter but at least it adds weight. We can extend that to interstate and overseas. Perhaps people who used to live in Queensland but who are now working in London might want to sign petitions.

What is my method in this research? As I said, comparing a five-year block, 2003 to 2007, I am going to look at the raw numbers. I am going to look at what sorts of issues and what sorts of portfolios people are writing petitions on, how many people sign these things, and whether we can identify any of these patterns.

The first table is interesting because it puts the lie to the argument that e-petitions were going to somehow revolutionise immediately or reinvent democracy. Clearly, paper petitions are still, even as we speak, much more popular than electronic petitions—and that might surprise some people—and the number of e-petitions is still quite modest. Even though in 2006 e-petitions constituted about 40 per cent of all petitions, for some inexplicable reason—I do not have an answer for this—just last year it has fallen away again. That might be an anomaly and this year might prove different. I have not, of course, included the current e-petitions. But you can see a general trend that is rising both in paper petitions and in e-petitions.

Just as an interesting aside, when the Tasmanians decided that they would adopt Queensland's model for their own trial, one of the laments that they expressed at the time was that Queensland's model does not have a compulsory ministerial response to e-petitions. Of course, there is no compulsory response to paper petitions, either. You can see that, out of all of those petitions, very few are left unresponded. So that is the good news for democracy—that very few are left unresponded. But the bad news is that the number that are left unresponded seems to be growing, even if only by a small number, and that is including e-petitions. That is something that MPs might want to look at, perhaps making some sort of compulsory element that ministerial response becomes compulsory.

This is perhaps the most laborious part of the research, I suppose. I was hoping that it would reveal stronger patterns than it did. Perhaps the time frame is a little too small in terms of five years, but we are not seeing any really strong patterns. I hope you can read that from the back. I will just point out the most salient points here. What I have done here is I have gone through very laboriously every single paper petition and every single e-petition and to the best of my ability tried to sort them into broad categories. There is a problem here because there is some degree of terminology overlap, but I have looked at the primary issue or the primary focus of each of these petitions.

Very quickly, we can see that certain portfolios stand out. Environment and heritage is obviously growing and strong. Health is obviously a strong one—these are paper petitions, of course. Transport and roads is obviously huge, and emergency services. So a few really stand out whereas things like industry seem to be collapsing—I will just let you take in those figures for a moment—in other words, the general service delivery types of services.

With e-petitions, there are similar patterns. Just have a look at the numbers. Strangely enough, most petitions fall in the 100 to 1,000 range, with quite a few in the 1,000 to 10,000, which suggests that most petitions are not huge but, by the same token, they are not insignificantly small and that people are signing them in solid numbers. That is paper petitions and that is the number of signatures on e-petitions. Again, there are similar numbers. You have people in the 100 to 1,000 bracket signing most prodigiously and 1,000 to 10,000 quite a lot, too.

Here are some quite amusing things with some of the most popular paper petitions. In 2003 there was one on paint sniffing that attracted over 10,000 signatures. One would suspect that is anti paint sniffing, not pro paint sniffing. The double jeopardy laws obviously is a very serious issue here, attracting nearly 30,000 signatures. There was a case in Queensland in which a person was accused of murdering a small child many years ago and was found not guilty. There was subsequent evidence that that person may be guilty and people are trying to overturn double jeopardy. Anti prostitution, 17,000; staffing Caboolture Hospital—a regional hospital—almost 10,000; no Traveston Dam, 15,000; no forced amalgamations of councils, over 12,000. Another one specifically for Redcliffe, 11,000. Here is an interesting one, people who were for short-term cash loans, who basically wanted to keep loan sharks alive—'Don't pass legislation that bans loans sharks.'

The most popular e-petition, probably not surprising to people south of the Tweed, was no daylight saving, 7,516; yes to daylight saving, 62,000. It is still our most popular e-petition to date. Some unusual e-petitions, 'Big Brother is bad,' and that we should make sure there is a Bible in every hotel or motel room bedside table—huge numbers. Old habits die hard in Queensland.

So what conclusions can we draw from all of this? Internet usage is high among the general population and near saturation among the young. So my conclusion would be that the internet is very much an underused resource for politics information among youth and there is enormous potential for parliaments to tap into or to stimulate youth interest in politics via the web—not just e-petitions, but a whole range of mechanisms. There is no evidence of declining interest in petitions, whether they be paper or e-petitions. You can see that the number of all petitions in 2006-07 far outstrips 2003-04, which suggests that the electorate is slowly—not rapidly as some people might have suspected, despite the internet now being in its second decade—it is still a very slow process, people's uptake of e-petitions. But unfortunately, there is a small but growing number of petitions that are ignored.

There is no discernable difference between paper and e-petitions regarding the issue. So it is not a question of people signing a paper one when they want to talk about education and people signing an electronic one when they want to talk about health. But we have seen a rapid growth in a range of portfolio issues: roads; natural resources, including water; health; the environment; and under the 'other' category was local government amalgamations. Why do we get them in these areas? It is no accident. Those of you who have watched Queensland politics would know that these are the exact issues that have plagued the Beattie and now Bligh governments. These are the most recent public policy crises. We had 'Dr Death' and hospital woes in 2005. We had water shortages in 2006 up until the present time. We had Peter Beattie's curmudgeonly approach to local government amalgamations, which no-one doubts actually assisted his early departure from politics, and we have a rise in general environmental awareness in the community, which would explain the rise in environmental petitions. So there is a direct correlation between the rise of petitions and the public policy crises of the day, which suggests that petitions are a true reflection of voter angst. In other words, petitions are doing their job and we should be grateful for that.

There is no discernable difference between frequency: 100 to 1,000 is where most petitioners fall. So e-petitions are no more beneficial in generating very small numbers or very large numbers. It makes no real difference. Yet intuitively—there is no hard evidence for this—we must assume that the more avenues for petitions, the better the democratic fabric.

My recommendation is that the Queensland parliament needs to do a bit of PR. It needs to sell its option of e-petitions. It needs to make more voters aware of the option of e-petitions and it can do this in a very sexy, groovy way to engage young people, even if it means commercial advertising on youth radio or what have you. It needs to engage young people in this way. Again, I would suggest that they do it by methods other than the internet, because, as I said, TV and radio are places where people get their politics news.

I would urge other Commonwealth and state and territory parliaments to adopt their own e-petition trial and perhaps five years hence that we do another statistical analysis to see how we fare.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Thank you, Paul. Just by way of quick comment, the New Zealand parliament has had a petitions committee since at least the 1950s where every petition that comes before the parliament is examined by the parliamentary committee. As far as e-petitions here are concerned, they were adopted because the Speaker at the time was very, very anxious that that be done.

Our last speaker is addressing the question of diversity of Queensland people in and out of parliament. Julie Copley is the Research Director for the Queensland parliament's Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. Before that she worked for the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. This is a bit of a Queensland flavour so I hope you interstate and international delegates get to learn a bit more about what happens here. Thank you.

**Ms COPLEY:** Thank you, Paul, and good morning, honourable members and members of the ASPG. I have distributed copies of my paper and they are on your seats. It is about the ideals of public participation and that parliamentary committees are a way of attaining those ideals. It actually picks up quite a few of the themes you have heard in the previous papers this morning, particularly Paul's that you heard just now. It also picks up themes from throughout the conference, in yesterday's papers and also in papers that will come today. I guess in a way this conference provides us with an opportunity to share our experiences and our learnings about engagement and representation. In that context, this paper attempts to share some of the learnings of the Queensland parliamentary committee system and in particular the legal and constitutional committee.

Just an acknowledgement before I start: I was the research director for the committee and I can speak about committee activities but I cannot speak for the committee. However, Dr Lesley Clark, who is on the program later today, is in the audience and during the discussion that follows she may choose to share some of her experiences as well because I think that would be incredibly valuable following on from this.

What I propose to discuss today is the engagement by the legal and constitutional committee of the last three parliaments with Queensland people, and in particular two inquiries that sought to engage with minority groups—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and young people—although you will notice that my paper does not refer to minority groups and hopefully throughout the discussion you will realise why. The committees of those three parliaments heard a lot during those inquiries about public participation, so that is I guess the most valuable thing I can share with you today. I also want to reflect upon the inquiry processes themselves as processes of the parliament. I will demonstrate that public participation, open to a diversity of people, meets legal and democratic imperatives as well as community expectations.

So to turn to the topic for the session—'Minority Groups'—I had hoped to have an image behind me today that would wake up those of you who might need it, because we have heard about the first session on the second morning after the dinner before. Unfortunately, technology has defeated me. My teenage children would be rolling their eyes about this, but for some reason I could not transfer the image from upstairs to down here so I will ask you to imagine it instead, and this will really wake you up.

Imagine, if you can, that fence you have walked past and the gates you have walked in and out of over the last two days. Imagine red bras of every shape and size festooned along that fence, and a group of women of all ages from different communities—and probably whose bras are the ones hanging on the fence—protesting outside the parliament about something they felt passionately about. That happened in May last year. A group of women protested about local government amalgamations in Queensland and they hung their red bras along the fence. It was actually great to see on the TV news and it would have been a good image here this morning.

The reason I am asking you to imagine that and I wanted to show you the image is that on any issue on any given day we might be in a minority or we might find ourselves in a minority. We may not choose to march on the parliament and we probably would not choose to hang our bras on the fence—it depends how passionate about it we are and whether your bras are as well-washed and as well-worn as most of mine. The issue is that legal and democratic principles affirm that we as citizens, as community members, should participate in the life of our community, and you will see in my paper that the majority of the High Court has actually suggested that we are obliged to do so, that we are obliged to take part in the life of our community.

A series of judgements that I have set out in the paper show that, in our system of representative government in Australia established by our Australian Constitution, we should be taking part in the life of our community by having a say. The decisions that are set out in the paper are also summarised succinctly in a paper delivered recently in Brisbane by Justice Keane of our Court of Appeal in Queensland. He was addressing the National Archives Commission about our Australian Constitution. He called it a 'small brown bird of a Constitution', but he said—

It was deliberately crafted to embody an ideal of responsible government and representative democracy in which each citizen participates equally with all others.

I will quote from his paper. He said—

The assumption of the Australian Constitution is that, as a matter of practical politics, the participation of all members of what they— that is, the Founding Fathers—

saw as a community of diverse interests was likely to ensure a practical respect for the rights of others on the part of those who, upon a particular issue or range of issues, might find themselves in the majority in the legislature. Our framers made the brave judgment that the prospect of a tyrannous majority, of so much concern to members of persecuted minorities, was a chimera in a polity in which there were no rigidly defined social strata and antagonistic societal groupings. In such an historical context, today's minorities will often coalesce into tomorrow's majority. And a majority on today's issue has a powerful interest in not dealing unfairly or disrespectfully with those who may form tomorrow's majority on a different issue.

Justice Keane concluded at the end of his paper—

But our constitutional arrangements mean that we must, as a community, recognise our problems and accept that solving them is the responsibility of all of us...

He said that 'we are all called to work' to deliberate together to solve our problems. He continued—

Since Aristotle, citizenship worthy of the name ... encompasses both individual privilege and civic responsibility.

As for constitutional law, if we approach democracy as, for example, Professor John Uhr and the Democratic Audit of Australia suggest as 'equal respect and equal voice for all citizens and not simply "majority rule"', the ideal of equality operates to protect the rights of minorities and in fact the right of each person to fair treatment. At the same time, that democratic principle, that democratic ideal of equality, moderates the rights of the majorities.

So applying all of that to the parliament: the parliament is a critical link between the people and the government, and the parliament as we have heard already this morning must provide a forum for deliberation about the shared issues that we have as a community. In Queensland, these ideals that I have been discussing have been expressed by the people themselves to the legal and constitutional committees of the last three parliaments during the two inquiries that I am going to talk about.

The legal and constitutional committee is a statutory committee of the parliament. It has various responsibilities set out in the Parliament of Queensland Act and within those responsibilities it may commence an inquiry to deal with specific issues and report to the parliament. The two inquiries I am going to consider are, first, the Hands on Parliament process. It commenced with a report of the parliament of two parliaments ago—the 50th Parliament—in 2003. That report dealt with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and their engagement, their participation, in democracy. The second was the Voices and Votes inquiry of the 51st Parliament. That committee reported on that inquiry in 2006 and their inquiry related to the engagement of young people in democracy in Queensland.

The reason I called the *Hands on Parliament* report part of a process is that one of the recommendations made by the committee of the 50th Parliament was that there was a need for ongoing review of the implementation of the committee's recommendations. That was a recommendation that the government supported. It supported the recommendation that a review be undertaken after three electoral Brisbane

cycles, or nine years. In addition, the government requested that there be an interim evaluation after one electoral cycle, or three years. So the committee of this parliament in 2007 undertook that interim evaluation. The process, however, is ongoing and there will be that other full evaluation in two parliaments' time.

The purpose of considering these committee inquiries today is that the processes of the inquiries allowed a diversity of people, including those in the two minority groups that we have identified, to engage with parliamentary processes in a deliberative way. First of all, in terms of the Hands on Parliament inquiry, its terms of reference were to examine the barriers to participation in democratic processes, to identify strategies to overcome those barriers and, as a result, to enhance participation. During that inquiry, the committee heard from the people of Queensland that there were five broad factors that had limited their participation in democracy and, in particular, the participation of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. They were historical factors and cultural factors—and we heard about some of those cultural factors yesterday, about how deliberation in the Aboriginal tradition and Islander custom is actually quite different from our Westminster system of government and liberal democracy. There was an insufficient understanding of political and government processes; apathy and disillusionment with the political process; other factors such as racism; and far more urgent priorities in their daily lives, such as health, the lack of housing, criminal justice issues and remoteness in geographic terms.

The chair of that committee spoke of what the committee heard from Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders during the course of their inquiry in the forward to her report to the parliament. She said—

One of the most significant messages from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people put to the committee during this inquiry is that: 'We are not simply a minority group—we are the original inhabitants of this country'. As original inhabitants, Indigenous people established the first systems of government.

The chair of the committee said further—

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations are politically active and experienced in participating in decision-making and other democratic processes. Major advances in Indigenous rights and quality of life issues have been achieved through the tireless lobbying.

But that had not translated into participation by most Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in government at all levels in Queensland. The committee found and accordingly made recommendations directed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needing to be actively engaged in all levels of government in Queensland as a matter of priority.

Last year when the committee of this parliament conducted their interim evaluation they heard similar messages from the people of Queensland who identified as Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. They spoke of the five factors limiting their participation in democracy. They acknowledged that much work had been done in implementing the recommendations that had been made by the previous committee, but they still felt that they did not sufficiently have an opportunity to take an active and vocal part in the life of our community. The one recurring message was 'Noel Pearson does not speak for us'. The government should not just go to identified people who do have an active role and a voice. It should be possible for all people who feel passionate and want to have a say to be able to do that and to participate.

In respect of the second inquiry, the Voices and Votes inquiry, it was a parliamentary committee inquiry into young people engaging in democracy. The committee of the 51st Parliament, which was chaired by Dr Clark and which was made up of members who were, on average, younger than most of the other members of the parliament, were dynamic and they felt passionate about issues that affected people who were aged 12 to 25. That committee determined that it would examine young people's participation in democracy in Queensland and recommend practical ways to increase young people's interests and meaningful engagement. Specific matters that they intended to address during their inquiry included young people's enrolment and voting patterns and whether the voting age should be lowered. We have heard already this morning about some of the reasons the committee was concerned about those issues in Queensland.

The committee members determined that they wanted to speak to a diversity of young people. They wanted to speak to young people in their own spaces in ways in which young people would feel that they were genuinely being listened to. I will explain in a few minutes about how the committee went about doing that. What it was told during the course of its inquiry was that young people are diverse and they wanted to have their diversity acknowledged and respected. They did, however, have some shared experiences and the common themes that emerged are set out on page 7 of my paper.

Young people said that they were actively interested and often passionate and were engaged in a diversity of issues, not just young people's issues. They were not just interested in skate parks, but they wanted to have their voices heard about wider issues such as matters to do with our environment and the cost of living. They said that mostly they wanted to have a say, but not through formal channels. They just wanted to get in and do it. They just wanted to take action.

Young people said that they felt excluded, patronised and turned off by formal democracy and that they felt powerless within the process of formal democracy, including the electoral process, and that they did not know enough about democracy—how to take action—and did not believe that taking action would actually make a difference. In short, they did not think they would be listened to.

But they said that they would welcome opportunities to be actively engaged. They wanted to meet their MPs face to face in their own spaces. They wanted to be listened to. That was quite a confronting message for members of parliament who routinely visit schools and go to community organisations. But young people said to them, 'Look, when you do that, you are not actually there talking to us; you are there as a figurehead. We want to actually engage with you.' They also said that they wanted to make use of technology to improve their communication.

Dr Clark in her report thanked the young people who had participated in the inquiry and told them that their voices had been heard. She said—

I thank the many young people who gave their time to meet with the committee.

Dr Clark thanked them for their openness in sharing their thoughts and ideas, which were represented in this report. It was clear to the committee that young people are passionate about a wide range of issues and that they want their voices to be heard and acted on by government. But it was equally clear that they do not feel well equipped to achieve this or have confidence that the government will listen and respond to them.

I am not going to go through the specific recommendations that were made in those committee reports, because the focus of my paper this morning is more upon the processes. But I will just note that each report made recommendations for a greater role for parliamentary committees in terms of engaging with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and young people in Queensland. In fact, part B of the *Voices and Votes* report of the parliamentary committee inquiry reflected upon the committee's learning experiences, and documents that.

I turn to modelling best practice for parliamentary committees. If people are saying that they want to participate, if legal and democratic principles are telling us that there is a need for public deliberation about our shared issues, then there is a role for parliamentary committees. It is a quite clear. Professor Marsh has spoken about the promise of specifically Commonwealth parliamentary committees. Similarly there is growing literature about the role that parliamentary committees can play in bridging the representation gap or addressing the disengagement or disenfranchisement of people in our Australian system of government.

Four significant benefits have been identified. Firstly, parliamentary committees are accessible to everyone. Secondly, committees have more time and more flexibility. They provide the opportunity for a more deliberative process, and we all gain from that. Thirdly, they can produce better outcomes because they are more considered outcomes. It is an opportunity for putting on the record voices and information that might not otherwise be heard. It moves away from the usual suspects to a greater diversity of participants. Fourthly, by listening to a diversity of people, parliamentary committees can enhance their own legitimacy. They can be the honest broker. They can serve as the focus for people's activities.

Those benefits are often most obvious with select committees that deal with issues that are of primary concern to people. At the moment in Queensland we have two select committees: one is looking at the legalisation of altruistic surrogacy and the other is looking at organ donation. Those select committees serve as the focus for activity and attention. People have an opportunity to have their voices heard about those issues.

Throughout the committee inquiries that I have discussed the committee has sought to model best practice in terms of public deliberation. The Hands on Parliament process saw face-to-face consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their own communities—communities such as Mount Isa, Palm Island, Thursday Island and Badu Island. Committee members were assisted in terms of cultural and communication issues in those communities. They were trained prior to the event.

In terms of the *Voices and Votes* inquiry, the committee engaged a consultant to ensure that its engagement processes would allow for public deliberation. You will see that the inquiry processes set out in my paper actually build on each other. So the deliberative process did take time. The culmination was the youth jury—the first youth jury in Queensland and certainly the first jury held at parliament—that was held over four days. The youth jury recommendations formed the apex of that deliberative process. They then feed into the committee's recommendations. You will see the recommendations from those 12 young people reflected in the committee's recommendations.

Perhaps the most important thing about these committee inquiries was that they allowed many people who had not previously been engaged in the inquiry process to have a voice. The participants told the committee that they had not previously been engaged. These processes, the legitimacy and relevance of the inquiry process, independent of whether or not the committee's recommendations were adopted by the parliament, were derived from the capacity of a diversity of participants in the wider community to engage. If we are all called to deliberate and to solve our shared problems then these two committee inquiries demonstrate that the parliamentary committee processes are a way of attaining that ideal of public deliberation.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Thank you, Julie. That is a welcome reminder of the role of parliamentary committees. The last time we hosted this conference in the year 2000, which I had the privilege of chairing, the conference was on parliamentary committees. As Richard Herr once remarked to me, this comes around quite frequently in the ASPG cycle of concerns. Anyway, enough of that. We have 15 minutes for questions.

**Mr GRANT:** In WA we have a petitions committee where all petitions are automatically referred. I wanted to ask Paul a question about the potential for abuse of e-petitions. We find with a lot of our petitions in paper form that it is actually the electorate officers for members of parliament that are actually the principal petitioner. Even though we have no hard evidence to indicate that the committee is prejudiced against those petitions, you always wonder whether, at least subconsciously, maybe they are.

We recently had a petition where most of the petitioners were citizens of France. They were protesting against rock art in the Kimberley being destroyed by mining companies. Would e-petitions increase those types of petitions coming before the House?

**Dr WILLIAMS:** That is a very good question. That is the exact response that I got from parliamentary staff when I spoke to various state and territory parliaments. Their main concern was the potential for fraud. Talking to an American colleague at Griffith University about e-petitions in state legislatures in the United States, again it was the same sort of talk. He said that to his knowledge there were very few if any running and their main concern was fraud. I think that you have to acknowledge that the potential does exist and that as soon as mechanisms are in place to safeguard legitimate internet usage for signing petitions or whatever there is always going to be some hacker who comes along with better technology to overcome that. It is a question of leapfrogging. The IT staff of various parliaments are going to have to stay one step ahead of hackers. That potential is always there.

I suppose we should balance that with the potential for people to add bogus signatures to paper petitions. That has also been a longstanding practice. There is always the problem of multiple voting or dead people voting. That happens every election. As we all know, Australia's elections at state and territory level are extremely free, fair and frequent by world standards. We have a lot to be proud of in terms of our electoral and parliamentary system. But that does not mean that some people cheat. The point is that so few cheat that it probably does not change the outcome. But it is something that we have to think about in terms of fraud.

In Anna Bligh's ministerial office a year or two ago there were accusations that members of her ministerial staff were logging onto the opposition's web site saying they love Traveston Dam. About four people were signing about a thousand times. They all had the same ISP address. That potential is always there. I think it is up to technicians to stay one step ahead of that.

**Ms THORNTON:** My question is also addressed to Paul. I am wondering if he has considered in terms of the project whether petitions take place in the context of a campaign. Wouldn't the use of petitions then be contingent on the availability of other methods of getting attention? I am thinking particularly of organisations like GetUp. They use e-petitions but they use them fairly strategically and with other equally attention-getting mechanisms. The second part of the question relates to youth engagement in e-petitioning. My experience is that young people regard the internet and email as suitable for people like us and not their technology of choice. Possibly a creative way of going about engaging young people would be to invent a way of texting petitions.

**Dr WILLIAMS:** Another good question. Texting is something I failed to mention but, yes, those who talk to politicians know that this is an increasingly common form of campaigning. A couple of years ago during the Gold Coast City Council elections texting may have in fact changed the result of that election and saw the mayor, Ron Clarke, elected in 2004. They were texting a whole range of young people asking, 'Do you really want your nightclub to close at three o'clock? Isn't it outrageous that you can't get a drink after 3 am in the morning?' Tens of thousands of young people said 'too right' and they elected Ron Clarke. So SMS messaging is an extremely valuable tool for young people. I think you are right: that should be one of the options explored.

The first part of your question, if I can recollect, was about other organisations—pressure groups or lobby groups—organising e-petitions and then presenting them to the parliament. I think that is also a way of the future. As I said, organisations outside of the parliament seem to be ahead of parliaments themselves in making available a whole range of electronic petitions. The point, however, is that it is not an officially sanctioned parliamentary e-petition, which is what I am looking at, in which people would have to go through a parliamentary web site portal in order to engage with it. If an organisation like GetUp or some other lobby group has an e-petition running, it prints out the results, hands it to the sponsoring MP and it is then tabled in parliament. It is just another paper petition; it is not technically an e-petition. Again, intuitively we must think that the more opportunities there are for voters and citizens to have their say, whether it is on paper, SMS or online, it can only enhance democracy.

**Ms CRAWFORD:** My question is to John McCulloch. Thank you for your paper, John. I enjoyed it enormously. I, too, am writing on women in parliament. Much of the research would suggest that the real barrier to women's entry into parliament in terms of those women who are interested and who want to participate is basically the parties' preselection process. You cited some cases where men without merit had found preselection relatively easy. I am just wondering now, in the context of the coalition parties being in opposition across Australia, whether there is any movement within those coalition parties to move to a more proactive view about electing women. In Queensland we did see the Santoro Senate vacancy filled by a very capable and highly able woman, Sue Boyce. I am just wondering if at times of desperation we normally see women come into parliament—to wit Joan Kirner as Premier of Victoria, Carmen Lawrence as Premier of WA, and some people would suggest that Quentin Bryce may well be the last Governor-General, because she is a woman as well. I am just wondering if you see this as an opportunity for big changes. Sorry to be so longwinded.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** You are an ex-politician!

**Mr McCULLOCH:** Thank you for your question. It was interesting that when Mary Crawford tried to get preselection she accused the ALP backroom boys of being old men in cardigans; is that right, Mary? They did not like that very much. Anyway, to answer your question, the Liberal Party in Queensland has done two things. It has elected some astonishingly clever women to the parliaments, both federal and state—Annabelle Rankin and Joan Sheldon and so forth—and I think Sue Boyce will be an example of a current one, too. The only trouble is that it has not done it often enough. That is the problem.

**PANELLIST:** Three times in 50 years.

**Mr McCULLOCH:** Yes. Even way back to Rosie Kyburz. It was an enormous time for her. The Nationals did not like her much but that is another matter. I think it is an opportunity for the Liberal Party throughout Australia. They are against quotas, and that is fine. I have no objection to that. But there are other ways they can do it. The Victorians have a great set-up. Since Menzies founded the party in 1944 they have had equal representation behind the scenes—on the state council, in the preselection panels and so forth. But for some strange reason they did not elect too many women in the early part. There is that sort of structure. When I asked Chris Pyne that question yesterday, he indicated that they have something similar in South Australia. We certainly do not have that in Queensland but it would be nice if we did have.

**Mrs MILLS:** My question is to Paul Williams. Paul, thank you for your valuable paper. My question relates to new media and social networking sites. The issue of new media is one considered by parliamentary educators in trying to relate to young people. I am wondering, Paul, if you are aware of any work that has been done on reaching young people through social networking sites such as Facebook, because it seems to me from your presentation today that, if we could capture the interest of young people in e-petitions, in civic action, and link it to all those friends that they have in their Facebook sites then they would really catch the vision. I am wondering if you have any comments on that.

**Dr WILLIAMS:** Again, that is a very good observation. No, I am not aware of any research, but obviously it is a huge potential that should be opened up. Politicians are aware of it, as we saw with Kevin Rudd's engagement with YouTube last year. He seemed to be very comfortable with it. I think there is a paper coming out soon by Ian Ward about how Kevin Rudd garnered this very young vote, 18-to 24-year-olds, from YouTube. When we saw John Howard try to replicate that, he did not come off at all well. He is not of the internet generation. It seems the politicians are aware of it. I am not sure the scholarly analysis has caught up yet.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** We have time for one more question.

**Mr MAXTONE-GRAHAM:** I am really grateful for attending this conference over the last couple of days. The more I listen to speakers, I notice that I am learning that the people of Australia and the institutions here are trying to connect. People who are involved are trying to connect your people with your government and your parliament. I am a chairman of a parliamentary committee, and there are a number of parliamentary committees. There are only two committees that are active and have resources, but unfortunately most of us do not have resources. We do not do much at all. It appears that leaders or decision makers are doing the opposite of what you are doing here. Parliament is trying to remove itself further and further away from the people, and even government. I can be very frank about that. I am sure some of you have been to PNG and would have noticed this. I feel there is a lot to be done. I just want to ask a couple of questions. I have so much to say.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** And so little time.

**Mr MAXTONE-GRAHAM:** I know. John, you mentioned that Ian Cameron made a statement that the role of a woman should be confined to the house or the kitchen and the rearing of children. In PNG we are very conservative and traditional and that is why the women representation in parliament is 0.009 per cent. Am I correct, Dr Clark?

**Dr CLARK:** One in 109.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Would you please ask the question, because we do not have time.

**Mr MAXTONE-GRAHAM:** My question is—actually, I have forgotten my question now.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Do you want to make a quick comment?

**Mr MAXTONE-GRAHAM:** Yes, I just want to leave it at that. I agree with Ian Cameron. Oh, I remember my question now. I notice during your election or preselection you have problems with branch stacking, blue-ribbon seats and some sitting members who have been there a long time who are unceremoniously dumped by young guns. Through your electoral reform, did you prevent this from happening?

**Dr REYNOLDS:** As far as I know, no branches have ever been stacked in favour of a woman.

**Mr McCULLOCH:** I think in PNG, if the party sort of met together in a plenary session perhaps and worked out that they really did need more women members of parliament—because I tell you one thing, if you have women members of parliament, I think you will find the committee system will work well with even fewer resources.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Thank you for your attendance and participation and thank you for your attention. We have had three excellent papers and quite a diverse range—John continued his theme about women's representation, Paul is breaking ground with e-petitions and Julie had some practical examples of committees in action. Would you please join together and thank the speakers, and then morning tea awaits us.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.31 am to 10.58 am**

**Dr SOLOMON:** This session has the title 'Reconnecting Parliament and the People'. The first speaker is the Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, the Hon. Margaret Wilson.

**Ms WILSON:** Thank you very much, David.

*Ms Wilson gave a traditional Maori greeting.*

I would like, first, to thank the organisers of the conference. It has been a very stimulating and informative conference, not only the dinner but the papers as well, so I thank you for that. I also want at the outset to acknowledge Kate Stone, who is a graduate student at Victoria University and is this year's Speaker's intern. We did a *kuia*, which is a term for an older woman, and a young woman's approach to trying to connect to parliament. I will talk to the paper because you have had an opportunity to read it or you can do so later at your leisure.

I want to pull out a few points from the paper. The first point is that it is a paper that really centres on the institution of parliament—not even so much what happens inside parliament but parliament as an institution, if you like, in its own right. While it is obviously difficult to separate it from the political activity that takes place inside it, I sometimes think that overwhelms what is important about the institution as such. I have come to have this perspective since I have been Speaker and I have realised more and more, I suppose, some of the responsibilities of Speaker since I have been taking that role of a custodian, a promoter and occasionally an enforcer of parliament. Therefore, at the end of the paper—and this is not in the written paper for perhaps obvious reasons—I might make a few observations about the role of Speaker and how in many ways under-researched it is. I know we are lucky that your president has written about it, but the books are really few and far between, as is political analysis.

I will start by noting that New Zealand does have one of the oldest, continuous democracies. The first representative Assembly was in May 1854 in Auckland, but it obviously did not become representative until women got the vote in 1893. While we are very pleased about that, we did not go as far as to give us the right to actually stand for parliament. We had to wait until 1919 for that. I think the Finnish government has the honour of doing both at the same time in 1907 as a country.

Another interesting thing about our Constitution is that very little distinction was made between Maori and Europeans. It was basically, first, all about property and then when universal suffrage came it was universal suffrage. There may have been issues of language et cetera. It is also interesting in that context to note that whether or not Maori should have a full suffrage was an issue when the Australian Federation was being discussed and there was a possibility that New Zealand would join you. One of the issues according to the papers at the time was a certain reluctance to acknowledge Maori with full citizenship, whereas in New Zealand by then it was just beyond question that they would have full citizenship.

It is also important to say this is a looking-forward paper. Sometimes, rightly so, we are quite critical about our parliament, its performance and those within it, but it is also true—at least in New Zealand and I am sure in Australia—that parliaments have maintained the confidence of the people. This has been partly I think because there has been a capacity to evolve, to change and to try to search for new ways of trying to not only reconnect with the people but also make parliament relevant to the people. That is why we have in the paper, and I will mention this again, the importance of technology, and that has already come through as a theme in the conference. I thought the last session with the paper on petitions was particularly interesting. We can get carried away with how influential it is, but we are all moving in that direction so there is still time I think for us to develop what happens there.

I also in particular wanted to say a little bit about, if you like, the physicality of parliament. I do not only mean the occasional fisticuffs that members indulge in, unfortunately, but the actual institution of parliament as such. Sometimes this is overlooked, though not in the academic literature. I think it is extremely important for the future for people to connect with parliament and, using context, that parliament becomes an integral part of what might be called a New Zealand citizen's identity, or our identity as New Zealanders, and what makes us particularly distinctive will be our commitment to parliamentary democracy. So in the paper we have raised questions; of course, we would not dare to provide answers, but I do see it as a start of a conversation, in a way, and hopefully it is some work I will continue with in the future.

The first section in the paper deals with the physical connection between parliament and the people. From the literature, you can see that the shape and the form of parliament becomes quite distinctive. Those who have had the privilege of going to Samoa and seeing their parliament will understand that having windows and seeing the outside world and the circular shape of the whole institution does create a very, very different atmosphere than our shut-in and you would only know what happens outside if you can feel the earth quake. So it is a totally different approach I think, and certainly ours is an inward-looking physical institution as far as its chamber is concerned as opposed to an outward-looking one.

More importantly, when we looked at the history of our parliament buildings, which everyone is very proud of since it has been restored, I think it is a wonderful museum and a terrible place to work, and I am a minority view in that. It is an unfinished project in many ways, and I think it shows in its development an ambivalence that New Zealanders have had over a period of time to actually seeing their parliament as an institution of significance. I will not go into the detail but you can see throughout the years everyone thought it was a good idea but there was never any money and it was not seen as a priority to be able to finish the building. So it is a little lopsided in terms of its historical architectural construction, but when the time came to do something we had a fit of being modern, so modernity took over.

We wanted to show as a people that we were forward-looking and therefore we got this structure that has come to be known as the Beehive. Again, quite interesting in itself, it is a terrible place to work and, as a health and safety expert, I can assure you it is an awful building in which to work and as a minister I refused to work in it. It does, however, show a certain symbolism I suppose of how people do see their parliament. We have got this disjointed collection of buildings in which the activity takes place. While there is some symbolism, if you photograph it well for just the old part of the building, it does look like it has roots of some significance.

The truth is that we have learnt nothing from our past. We have just been notified that there is going to be a large commercial building built right beside the parliament that will totally overshadow the parliament in just about every respect. This was not an application that was publicly notified, but they had to tell parliament because we were the closest next-door neighbour. They were a little surprised when I put in an objection and that is now in mediation, but I have no doubt at all that building will go ahead and all we can do is try to ameliorate its effect. In terms of the outside presence our building has, I think it probably does not do justice to the whole notion of a representative parliamentary democracy and the activity that takes place, but it does reflect to some extent our adolescence and our emerging understanding of who we are as a country and as a people.

In the paper, we looked at how art can in fact contribute to the identity of a parliament as well. I will let you read that but for any of you who have been lucky enough to visit the Mexican parliament or the German parliament—and your own parliament in Canberra and some of the state parliaments as well—you will really see and be able to understand that they do provide a showcase actually and an understanding and a connectiveness with the people and the culture.

The bit of the paper I really wanted to say a bit more about is the branding of parliament. After a discussion, we thought that if parliaments were to avoid being marginalised if we cannot have a significant physical presence, then we have to acknowledge in our post-modern world that image is of utmost importance. So if we cannot have it in that way, how else are we going to have it? Certainly, the proliferation of qualitative identical products through economic globalisation has fuelled the whole expansion of the notion of brand. So consumers now are guided to make decisions based on symbolic value rather than the material value of the product.

What we are faced with here when you look at that literature and you see that it is important for image, reputation, trust, customer satisfaction, perceptions and expectation is that these are all factors in the commercial world but they are also factors in the political world. It seems to me that we ignore them at our peril. So branding, if you like, personalises, because it attaches emotion, trust and loyalty that become all important to the protection and promotion of the institution. In constructing a particular aspirational lifestyle, there is an argument that branding does replace what is considered by many to be outdated ideologies.

It can be argued in New Zealand that no longer do many of the younger generations associate their New Zealandness with the romanticised images of the Protestant work ethic, egalitarianism or even being pioneers of female suffrage, because those issues have already been addressed—some people, unfortunately, seem to think. So in order to compete, if you like, in the identity formation stakes of parliament, it is very important that we give more consciousness to how we are going to brand parliament. By reinforcing that relationship, which is the theme of the conference, between the citizens' sense of self and their perceptions of the institution and how this is a positive sense for them, we believe that it is a way for parliament to reconnect with the people.

Of course, to achieve that parliament must convey coherent messages. Frequently, the messages that come out from various political parties, quite rightly, are different and sometimes confusing. So we need somehow as a parliament, as an institution, to get some cohesion and unity of purpose—that is the core business of what parliament is about—and to have a consistency in that message. That is where—and I will come back to this—Speakers have a particular responsibility not only to ignore and affirm differences that take place within our political system but also not necessarily having the institution, the place where it takes place, associated with the sometimes negative connotations that go with that.

The next section of the paper we have called 'Engaging Diversity'. I think to some extent that has been dealt with by my colleagues. New Zealand, as you would have noted, is an increasingly diverse society. One in five New Zealanders in the 2001 census was born overseas. We have increasing numbers of people from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In four years the number of multilingual New Zealanders has increased by 20 per cent, with one in six people now in New Zealand being able to speak more than one language, which in New Zealand terms is quite an increase. There is also an increasing number of

New Zealanders who practise non-Christian religions or do not have any religious affiliation. The median age has increased from 31 to 35 years also, which I think is something else to consider when you are looking at age as being a dominant driving factor.

We believe that parliament has an obligation to respond to these changing demographics and to engage all of society's distinctive communities so that we can meet those needs. The political parties obviously endeavour to do that, but as Speaker there is an obligation on the institution itself to go out there and try to do this. One of the ways we have tried to do it is through being very open and by trying to connect with the public in terms of access to parliament. This is a constant issue with security. While the major increase in staff in parliament has been in the security services, it is extremely important that that does not act as a barrier to people getting access not only to their members but also to observe the workings of parliament.

We have also tried within our parliament to acknowledge and represent the diversity that is within it. The paper points out that we have an acknowledgement of Maori through specific select committee rooms that are designated to display that presence in the parliament. So we have a Maori select committee room. We also have a Pacific Islander select committee room and next month I will open the Asian select committee room. Who knows where it goes from there. These are seen as quite important manifestations, if you like, of public acknowledgement, that there is a space and a place in parliament for these groups.

The other way to do it is not just through people coming in and us trying to be as open as we can—and the parliamentary education service, I think, does a wonderful job—but it is also reaching out with television and the internet et cetera. I know your Speaker in the Queensland parliament and I shared similar experiences in trying to open up parliament to the people through televising parliament. This is not easy, because it does provide competition to existing media coverage of parliament.

While the argument is always structured in terms of mainly Speakers trying to suppress the freedom of speech, for me it was an argument of trying in fact to dumb down competition. We have now the televising of parliament for all of the proceedings in the chamber. We hopefully will go to select committee proceedings shortly. We have our own dedicated channel. We also have a feed through Sky television. Occasionally, if you are really interested, you can get Australian question time and New Zealand question time.

Some people send me a comparison as to what they think of both. We have found that is extremely important, and while the compromise—and life is full of compromises—is that the media can still have their own cameras, they are there for question time but not for all of question time any longer because they can take the feed directly and it does not cost them anything. So with some luck, over time perhaps we will just have the official parliamentary feed. However, it is still a source of some contention, and we are yet to see the full development of it. So that is another way in which we can engage diversity. We can in fact enable them, and we are trying to get simultaneous translation now of English to Maori and Maori to English through both the radio broadcast and the television broadcast. It is really only a technical question now. The question and principle has been accepted and we are working our way through it.

I will not go through in the paper what the effects of proportional representation have been, because Charles Chauvel's paper did that particularly well. But it is undoubtedly true that MMP made the difference. I do not think there is any question of that. As a former party president who sat on all the selection panels for candidates, I know you can make change that way as an organisation and through a democratic process, but the truth is that it is slow and it is not necessarily sustainable, whereas that combined with MMP—and while the Labour Party did have a policy of trying to promote women the other parties did not, but now they do—and with the Greens in parliament as well, the number of women across the parties has increased too.

The paper then moves on to trying to look forward in terms of how the institution of parliament can promote, through direct democracy, ideas. We mentioned there, as many people have, the use of ICT and e-democracy. With our parliamentary committees and our select committees we are trying to get all the documents et cetera accessed online. There are some issues there but they are more technology issues than anything else.

The truth is I do not think we have even started to explore the opportunities. At the presiding officers conference in Adelaide that I have come from there was a little bit of discussion about question time, which tries the patience of all Speakers. It occurred to me that if the technology was good enough, why can't the people put their questions to both the opposition and the government? There may well come a day where, in fact, we could have direct access and feedback in that sort of way. That might do something quite radical in terms of changing the whole culture of that very adversarial process.

But it is extremely important that we continue down this track and that we are as open as we can be, because it is very difficult to get information out there about parliament. Unmediated information seems to me to be the biggest challenge we have. We can no longer rely upon the normal media sources. There is no point complaining about them; we have to develop our own means of doing so.

The paper does mention citizen assemblies and the example that has been mentioned also by Tim Barnett and Charles about how there might be some experimenting that goes on there—and certainly I think that is more an expression of a desire for more participation. Finally, the paper concludes that while in New Zealand there is a concern about people becoming a little disillusioned and not voting in the high

numbers that they did, they still vote between 80 and 90 per cent in our elections in a voluntary system, but for that to continue we cannot be complacent. Therefore, we must go out of our way to ensure that the parliament is seen as relevant to the people.

As the Speaker who is responsible for that—the leaders of political parties will put their programs out there and will engage on one level—it does seem to me that there is an increasing role for Speakers to take in ensuring that the institution of parliament is clearly understood as being distinct from the institution of government or the institution of a political party—in other words, introducing that complexity. One of the difficulties we have is that we have the language of independence of the Speaker but no independence of a substantive sort at times for Speakers or, when Speakers exercise their independence, it is often at some considerable risk. I feel that is an office that does now need to be looked at perhaps in a slightly different way but in the context of how parliament can reconnect or continue to connect with its people. Thank you.

**Dr SOLOMON:** Thank you very much. I must say I am fascinated by the idea of people being able to put in questions. Of course, it would be the job of the Speaker to select the questions.

**Ms WILSON:** Absolutely—no ballot.

**Dr SOLOMON:** The next speaker is Professor Janette Hartz-Karp and she will speak on institutionalising deliberative democracy.

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** I have a proposition for you today and the proposition is that I think we need some radical improvements in the sense of getting to the roots of our representative democracy. As citizens, we have the role of going to vote every three or four years, but as citizens we do not really have a role at all in terms of public policy development and decision making. That is really handed over to technocrats and elected officials. This is supported by views of citizens that they are apathetic—and we heard that yesterday—that they are uninformed and that they are focused on self-interest, hence really I guess we feel that they are incapable of effective power over policy.

Our institutionalised forms of public consultation are really based on this view of citizens. But what if we had a different view of citizens? What if we had a view of citizens like they did in Athens at the time of Pericles where a couple of thousand randomly sampled citizens got together in the Agora and they deliberated the important events of the day like whether they would go to war or not? It is true that those citizens did not include women, they did not include slaves and they did not even include younger men, but it is the concept of participation that I really want you to be thinking about. Or imagine the view of citizens in the earlier years of democracy in New England in the USA where in the town hall hundreds and sometimes thousands of people would get together and discuss in a collective way community decisions about what they should do and trying to find consensus.

Why do I think it is important that we envisage such an alternative scenario? Because it seems to me that without the participation of ordinary citizens, without their ability to reclaim collective control over their lives, democracy does not any longer serve as the means by which people can be the rightful authors of their own lives. It stops being a way of life in which people live in right relations with each other. In discussion with David Black yesterday, it is like we are talking about the body of democracy but not its soul.

I am the author of this paper with David Brand, who is actually in the USA, and we are part of a nascent social movement called deliberative democracy and it is gaining momentum globally, probably because of some of the issues that we are currently facing with our democratic systems. It is not an intention to replace representative democracy; it is an attempt to supplement it, to enhance it, to enable our democratic systems to more accurately and effectively reflect and respond to the desires, the values, the aspirations and the priorities of the people that it serves.

We hear the term 'deliberation' a lot when we are talking about the reasoned discussion, the decision making of juries, of councils of legislatures, but we do not hear it as much when we are talking about the discourse of citizens. But deliberative democracy is referring to a problem solving sort of discourse. It involves a problem analysis—trying to understand issues from different perspectives, from different ideas and expert views and values, trying to establish evaluative criteria upon which to decide, identifying and weighing options and then from whatever comes forward for that to actually influence policy and decision making and to be seen to influence policy and decision making and that we get to those end points through a respectful, through an egalitarian, through a conscious process that the deliberative body—and that is whether or not the deliberative body is citizens or a legislature—aims for reasoned, understandable and hopefully communitarian outcomes.

I think we can all think of times when this has happened in an ad hoc sort of fashion, but what we are proposing in this paper is that it needs to become institutionalised. We need to enable a representative, inclusive, deliberative, influential public to be the norm rather than the exception in our democratic life. We want them to be part of our legally constituted, political decision-making structures and processes.

We can think of examples that happen in Australia—and indeed I have been part of an example that has happened in Australia. I worked for four and a half years out of the office of Minister Alannah MacTiernan, the Western Australian Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. My job was to find innovative ways of getting to joint decision making with citizens. Over the four and a half years we did something like 35 deliberative, influential processes.

In what way were these different from what we are calling community consultation now—and repackaging to community engagement? They were different in three ways. Firstly, because the decision maker, being Alannah MacTiernan, really believed that she did not have the answers to all the questions. Indeed, we had an agreement that I would not take part in any sort of deliberation where she, or the party, or the cabinet had answers or even had preferences. We also had an agreement that at the beginning of every deliberation she would state the extent to which this deliberation would influence public policy.

So at the citizens jury—and Kate Hodson-Thomas, who is in the opposition and who is here, was actually an observer there—the minister stated to the jurors that she would trial whatever they came up with providing it did not cost any more than \$100,000 or more than she was already going to spend on it. Because she was able to be in dialogue with the citizens—and I am hoping if we get time during question time I can show you a five-minute video and I can give you a sense of what it was like to be at—she was there all the way through except in the in-camera sessions, which meant that her CEOs and her senior staff needed to be there all the way through, and she invited her members of parliament to be facilitators at tables. Jaye Radisich was a facilitator at several of these events. Jaye was one of our stars. We did have some members of parliament who are not terribly good listeners and it was a very scary thing getting them to be facilitators at some of the tables, including some of the ministers.

We also had members of the opposition and the Greens who were also seen to be neutral people who could be at tables and help people to deliberate to determine the future. These were different because they were not using the usual suspects. The minister felt that she was only ever listening to the same sorts of people, and they are the stakeholders or they are the outraged. They are the people who are incredibly informed, or incredibly articulate, or incredibly incensed about some issue. But what about ordinary citizens? We keep talking about getting to minorities but ordinary citizens at such engagements are becoming a minority. How do you get to ordinary citizens? Well, it is not that difficult. We just use the same thing that social science polling uses all the time: we randomly sample—just like the Greeks did. You randomly sample. You say to people, 'We want you to be a citizen for the day.' While we do not get 100 per cent—in fact, we are lucky if we get 10 to 25 per cent—nonetheless, we get people who will come and be citizens for the day. It gives you a better idea about what an informed public would want.

It is not only who is in the room but also what happens when they are in the room. When these people are in the room we take pains in trying to get both sides of any issue. In fact, we have a stakeholder group of antagonists, protagonists and experts who tell us how to get all the voices in the room, and they hear from different people and they hear from each other. At one of them we spent a whole half-day where they had to do empathetic listening to understand one another before we moved on. That was partly because I had got a death threat before that one. People were so angry about what was happening. So we get people to really understand that, if we are going to live together, somehow we have to come to some sort of communitarian decisions together where we can take account of each other's views. And they were different in the sense that they were influential. Every single one of these issues resulted in changes of policy and major changes in infrastructure.

So it is not institutionalised. One minister does not mean that this is institutionalised. The huge hopes I had that this would spread did not really happen. The minister got pounded by, amongst others, Katie and the opposition, and by the media. We had these wondrous articles. Liam Bartlett: this is an example of too much democracy. This was when we were running 'Dialogue with the City'. We had Paul Murray asking, 'What are we paying this minister for? To be somebody who is simply an in between? She ought to be paid as a moderator or as a mediator but not as a minister.' We had the opposition saying, 'Can't this minister make decisions?', which if you know Alannah MacTiernan is a bit of a joke. It has been incredibly difficult for one person to be sustaining this.

We also had a department that was really very put out—or many departments, because she has a megaportfolio—by all of this. It was really being run from her office. It is not usual. With the example of 'Dialogue with the City' that you may well see later on, Alannah wanted to get the people to care about what was happening about the future of the city. We had this grand plan that the experts came up with, and nobody knew about it and nobody cared about it. And she was spending all her life fighting rearguard battles of 'no high-rise here' and 'no bus stop outside my house'.

How do we get people engaged and involved? We came up with this notion of doing this 21st century town meeting, which had been used in America with 5,000 people on the Ground Zero site about what to do. We got 1,100 people. But when I took this notion to the department it unanimously said that this was a bad idea—and for good reason. It is high risk. Why would you want to do something no-one has done before? What happens if nobody turns up? People will come and they will say outrageous things and the department will not be able to do anything about them. We do not have the money. We do not have the technology. One can understand why they would not want to do it.

The interesting thing is, having done it, they now do not remember that Alannah or I were involved in it at all; it was all their idea—which is just fine. But one can see why departments go back to doing the same old thing because doing something new, doing something innovative is fairly worrying. None of these are institutionalised, but across the world there are examples of institutionalised deliberative democracies. One is the Danish consensus conferences. Any time they are putting forward legislation that is contentious, often technological, they get a random sample of citizens in a consensus conference. It is like a citizens jury, with 10 to 25 people. They sit for eight days over a three-month period. They have an independent expert group comprising academics, experts and practitioners who ensure that these people really thoroughly grapple with the issues. They put forward recommendations.

In that system it does not have statutory authority but it is clear that the legislation changes as a result. Parliament would be seen to be really abrogating its responsibility if it did not take it into account. Another example is Hampton, Virginia, USA, where they have been identified as an exemplar of how you might get a deliberative society. The officials there passionately believed that they had to do something differently if they were really going to engage their citizens, and they have. They have really deep reform in a way that the citizens have become an integral part of the continual decision-making processes. The neighbourhood councils are a case in point. Both officials and elected community members sit together. They do not only make recommendations; they have their own budget and they have their own initiatives. The interesting thing about all of this, though, is the city officials said, 'If we do not have both our elected and our public servants absolutely believing this, this will not work.' One public official said, 'It is like dancing with a bear. You do not stop until the bear wants to.' And that is difficult because it is sometimes messy, it is sometimes slow, it is sometimes uncertain, it is sometimes resource intensive as a way to conduct community business, but the community is forever different as a result.

Another example that has been mentioned several times by New Zealand is the citizens assembly. This was held in British Columbia as well, in Ontario. They wanted to change their electoral system. What did they do? It was interesting because that government had a huge majority. So it did not need to do something as innovative as this, but nonetheless Campbell did. So they got a random sample of one person from every rider—there were 160 people in this Assembly—and a couple of Indigenous people as well, and they met over nearly a year. They got the most extraordinary experts from all over the world to talk to them about different systems. They talked together, they used email and they used the internet. What did they come up with? They came up with a single transferrable vote model, which is what we talked about yesterday, and that went out to a referendum.

The pity was that they created a very high bar for the referendum. The bar was a 60 per cent majority in every single rider. It got way over a 60 per cent majority, and it got over 60 per cent in all but two riders, and so it did not pass. However, because it was so strongly supported, the government is looking at other ways to introduce it. The interesting thing about that is that when they surveyed people after the vote and asked, 'Why did you vote for this?', people said overwhelmingly, unfortunately, that they did not really understand the single transferrable vote terribly well but they figured that, if a bunch of citizens like them had spent all of this time and energy learning about this, and coming forward with this as a decision, then they would be happy to support it. So the process in itself was seen as the reason for supporting it.

There are other examples I can give. I am not sure if Paul is here to talk to you about it. Nevertheless, he actually went there to see it and it is a bottom-up budgeting process where right from the bottom level you have representative people deciding on the priorities and the rules of the game, right through to the district and regional levels.

There is a similar sort of process in Kerala, India. Both of these places really came about because of the endemic corruption, but this has been a way to really get rid of that. In Kerala, India you have millions of people participating in exercises that have come up with something like 100,000 projects which the people themselves are designing and being part of. These people are then becoming far more interested in the whole democratic process. In fact, after citizens juries in America, Gastil did this 10-year study—not citizens juries; regular juries. He found that people who participated in those juries were more likely to vote. He found that people who participated in juries that went over a long period of time were more likely to get involved in civic life. Interestingly, he found that those who actually found someone guilty were more likely to volunteer for civic duty. But the issue here is that there is something about taking part in public life that encourages people to become more interested and more involved in public life.

How could we do it here in Australia? It is not very hard. The suggestions that I have are anything but revolutionary. Maybe they are radical in the sense of going to the root. The first one is that each time it would need to use not just the same old people but at least a large proportion of randomly sampled people so we get to ordinary citizens. They need to deliberate. They need to understand that life has trade-offs. They need to be influential.

What would we do specifically? Some ideas would be that at the time of every election both parties would agree to go on with this. This would be bipartisan. Each party would come to the election with the big issues that it is prepared to go out to the people on in terms of collaboration. They would use random samples of people and people would be called to jury duty just like they are for juries and they would participate and be paid for their participation. A design team could come up with the sorts of ways that you might best do this. You could have an independent deliberative democracy grouped to frame it so that no-one could say, 'We are being manipulated here'. They would frame it and would get people from all sides to make sure that this is bipartisan.

Government would state up-front the extent to which it is prepared to be guided by this. The deliberations would be resourced; they would be supported. There would be time given to them. The political parties would be judged at election times by how effectively they actually listened to the ideas and recommendations of the people. Why do I think that this would be important? Because it seems to me that unless we get ordinary citizens back taking collective control over their lives we are really losing the soul of our democratic system. I have presented a couple of theoretical ways of doing this, but what we have to get are some practical ways of experimenting in citizen-government participation and public deliberation so we can draw on best practice and we can transform our democracy into an institution that is more relevant and more effectively responsive to the will of the people.

**Dr SOLOMON:** Thank you very much. There is something to think about. Finally, I would like to call on Hugh Mackay, social researcher, who seems to get phenomenal results from asking different questions and gives us a great picture of what people in Australia really think and of developments in our society. Hugh will be talking on 'Advance Australia: the turning tide of popular political engagement'.

**Mr MACKAY:** I want to describe what seems to me to be two very significant tidal movements in the mood of Australians over the past decade. Both of these movements have been reflected very directly in Australians' level of engagement with the political process and even I would go so far as to say their level of engagement with the idea of democracy itself. Both of the movements I want to describe are really about the community's sense of control; about Australians' sense of having some control over their lives and over what is happening in their country.

The first turning of the tide happened in the late 1990s—there had been many others previously; I am just talking about the two most recent ones—at a time when Australians seemed overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness. It was common in my own research—described by David as asking different questions; the essential feature of my research is that I ask no questions, I just invite people to talk in a very spontaneous and unstructured way, a very informal way about issues that are on their minds—to find Australians overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness that led to comments like, 'I feel as though I am on a runaway train', 'I have no idea where this is all going but I know it is beyond my control, I know I cannot jump off because I will be left behind, so I hang on but I really wonder where this is taking us.'

That sort of comment was really a reflection of three driving factors. One was the extraordinary extent and rate of social, cultural, political, economic and technological change over not just the previous six or 12 months but over the previous quarter century. By the end of the 1990s Australians were suffering, as many other countries particularly around the Western World had suffered, from this thing we now identify as reform fatigue which drives people to the GP saying things like, 'I feel vaguely crook but I am not really sure what is wrong with me. I feel anxious but I do not know what I am anxious about.' They are classic symptoms of people who are being destabilised by too many changes happening in their lives or in their community or in their society. That seems to me to have been the first driver.

The second was a feeling of a rising level of external threat certainly beyond our control. Whether the threat was expressed as international terrorism or border protection or environmental degradation, this was big-scale stuff that seemed as though it was crowding in on us, casting shadows over our present and our future, again beyond our control.

The third thing that led to this feeling of powerlessness was a sense that we had too many disenchantments, particularly in the political context. At times when we thought something significant was going to happen—and I will mention a couple of examples in a moment—it did not happen. That left the voters in general feeling, 'It does not really matter what we say, it does not really matter whether we march or demonstrate, write to the paper or to the local member, nothing much seems to happen.'

Let me expand very quickly on those three factors to illustrate the extent to which people were driven into this sense of loss of control, of powerlessness. Let me talk very quickly about a very big subject—namely, the extent and the rate of social, economic and technical change over that 25-year period. In a sense, the best way of capturing this is really just to flash a few demographic statistical snapshots that will illustrate the extent of these changes.

Let us begin, for example—and there are many that I am not going to mention—with the institution of marriage. There is a paradox about many of these changes, by the way. They are changes we have done to ourselves. They are changes that we have welcomed and yet, as they have begun to become almost institutionalised, we have wondered where this is all taking us.

The institution of marriage: 30 years ago almost all Australians were married. Some 90 per cent of them were married by the age of 30. Today the marriage rate is the lowest it has ever been and only about 45 per cent—half the number of Australians—are married by the age of 30. In fact, you look at our marriage statistics and you wonder whether marriage has gone out of fashion until you look at our remarriage statistics and then you realise that there is a core group in the community who love getting married and want to keep on doing it.

So we can safely say of the rising generation that the marriage market is going to divide as many consumer markets now divide into roughly equal components—about a third the non-users, that is about a third of the rising generation of young Australians will never marry; about a third light users who will marry once; and about a third heavy users who will marry two or more times. Thirty years ago divorce was stigmatised—only about seven or eight per cent of Australian marriages ever ended in divorce. Today about 45 per cent of contemporary marriages are ending in divorce. This is not just a trend. This is the fracture of a trend. This is a fundamental social change reflected in many things.

I will just pluck a couple of quick examples. It is reflected in the fact that now almost a quarter—somewhere between 20 and 25 per cent—of the population of dependent children live with just one of their natural parents. Thirty years ago, that was almost unheard of. Twenty-five per cent of all families with dependent children are single-parent families. This weekend about half a million dependent kids will be involved in a mass migration, going from the home of one parent to the home of the other for their weekend access visit. This is all radically new stuff for us—destabilising, troubling, anxiety-producing for all of the parties involved.

Another quick snapshot: the birthrate. Here is one of the most astonishing things about Australia. In the late fifties and early sixties, we were creating, relative to total population, the largest generation of children Australia had ever produced, the so-called baby boomers. The birthrate at the time was about 3.6 babies per woman. There is talk of a mini baby boom at the moment, which is an extraordinary expression to describe a birthrate of 1.8—exactly half what it was when we had a real baby boom. So we do not have a baby boom; what we have is a little blip and why we have it is another subject which we do not have time to explore this morning.

But our birthrate is heading, as are the birthrates of most western democracies, inexorably downwards. Goodness knows where ours will bottom out. Europe, Spain and Italy have birthrates around 1.3, 1.4 babies per woman. There are a lot of disobedient Catholics in Italy driving the birthrate to almost the lowest in Europe. We are down to 1.8 at the moment and we have been 1.7. We do have a little blip at the moment.

Why has the birthrate plummeted? We know the reasons. The rising education level of women is a primary reason. If you really want to get the birthrate up, just ban women from universities; it is very straightforward! The most highly educated female population in Australia is in Canberra; Canberra has the lowest birthrate in the country. That is not just a coincidence, that is the pattern.

The other thing that drives the birthrate down of course is something that we really need to understand if we want to understand Australia's future or the future of any country—that is, the ethos of the emerging generation of young adults, those in their late teens and their 20s. This is the generation of Australians who have been born during this period of what, for us, feels like revolutionary social, cultural and economic upheaval. If you have been born in a society where things seem as if they are constantly changing—if you get a piece of technology in your hand and you know it is in your hand and it is on the market because it is obsolete because the next thing is already being developed and the next and the next—that creates a mindset, and the mindset of the rising generation of young Australians is, 'Keep your options open, hang loose, wait and see, don't get too committed too soon.' This is not a generation that will be rushing into marriage. It is a generation that I am prepared to bet money on will drive the birthrate significantly lower than it is now.

Look at that generation, look at a generation that is constantly saying, 'What else is there? This is fine'—whether they are talking about a sexual partner, a job, a course of study, a set of religious beliefs, a fashion label or a musical genre—'I enjoy this, but what else is there?' That is a generation that is going to reshape our society as they move into positions of power and influence in the future.

Another quick snapshot: the Australian household is shrinking at an alarming rate. Of course, we are shrinking it but we are just alarmed when we see how it is happening on a large scale. By the way, the household is shrinking but the houses are expanding, and that is another curious feature about Australia. The Bureau of Statistics is estimating now that, by the year 2026, 34 per cent of all Australian households will contain just one person. It is already the case that the single-person household is our most common household type and that if you are living alone or just with one other person, in terms of household demographics, you are now positively mainstream. The eccentric fringe consists of people who are married to each other, have only been married once and are currently living with three or more of their very own children and no-one else's. We used to think of that as normal but that is now quite eccentric.

There are a lot of implications that flow from that. What happens to the old herd instinct when the domestic herd is no longer large enough to satisfy that instinct? The answer to that question is not one for this morning, but it is an answer that leads us into further speculation about how Australian society will change. In the short term of course the shrinkage of the household has led to a greater sense in the community of isolation, loneliness, fragmentation, et cetera.

While all of this has been happening, we have been through a major restructure of the Australian economy. I will not even get into the details of that, except to say that we have moved from a society living with a sense of job security as our birthright to the contemporary sense in the Australian workforce of job insecurity, of feeling that the axe could fall anywhere at any time—'Not just my job, but my company or indeed my industry might no longer exist in the near future.'

As a result of the economic restructure, we have got used to the idea or are getting used to the idea that, at least in economic terms, this sense of Australia as the broadly comfortable, middle-class society is yesterday's story; the middle is shrinking. The top 20 per cent of Australian households now have an average annual household income of \$225,000, and the same number of households at the bottom of the heap—the bottom 20 per cent—have an average annual household income of \$22,000. We are not used to such growth in rich and poor in Australia.

Many people have already mentioned the IT revolution. It is important to understand what the IT revolution is doing to us. Again, we do not have time to explore it in depth, but let me just say two things that I think are fundamental that in terms of our democracy we need to understand. The first is that, for the rising generation, the IT revolution has already blurred the traditional distinction that we used to make between data transfer and communication. For this generation which has grown up with SMS, email, chat rooms and social networks—Facebook, MySpace, et cetera—that distinction no longer makes any sense. You do not have to be present to be communicating.

The other thing that the IT revolution is doing to the rising generation is more or less destroying the traditional idea of privacy. In Australia, we have just enacted a whole lot of privacy legislation in time for a generation who could not care less about privacy, a generation who will demand the sort of reforms that David Solomon is involved in with the freedom of information. The idea of anything other than freedom of information is both alien and absurd to this rising generation. And of course we have even been through a revolution in our sense of who we are, of what it means to be an Australian, of what a multicultural society is, et cetera.

So those are the changes at lightning speed. The threats are well known—international terrorism, border protection, environmental degradation, economic uncertainty as Australians begin to get a sense of a world economy over which we have virtually no control. The disappointments in the late nineties were two: disappointment over the fact that, after all the marching and all the talking and all the prospect, Aboriginal reconciliation did not take a great leap forward and an official apology was not made; and the republic referendum is now said, and was then said, to have been hijacked and was led to a no result when it was clear that the vast majority of Australians do want their own Australian head of state.

So all of that led to this sense of, 'It doesn't really matter what you think. It doesn't matter what you say. Things are happening. Things seem beyond our control. Everything is changing too quickly.' During the nineties, our consumption of antidepressants was a good symptom of how we were feeling. It tripled during the nineties. By the end of the nineties, some cynics were saying, 'If by now you're not on antidepressants, it's because you haven't actually understood what's been happening to you.'

Of course offsetting all of these things that I have been describing was all the sweet-talk of the resources boom: 'All this stuff is out of control, but we're having another resources boom and everything will be fine.' It is the Donald Horne story all over again. We are going to be the 'lucky country' courtesy of our coal, gas, minerals and so on. So how did we respond to all this? It seems to me this was the great tidal movement of the late nineties. We switched off, we disengaged. We narrowed the focus and turned it inwards. We turned away from the big picture because it was too daunting.

We stopped watching news and current affairs on television in droves and began instead to watch programs that reflected our narrow and inward focus. Home renovations—there was a ratings bonanza for home renovation programs. You could not stop people talking about their home renovations. This became a kind of national epidemic because here, of course, was something we could control—'I can control the colour of the bathroom tiles even if I don't know what to do about Aboriginal reconciliation.' What was the best selling book in Australia just three or four years ago while we were still in this period of disengagement? Do you happen to know? *Spotless*—a book about home cleaning hints. Australians are great book buyers. This is what we buy—*Spotless*. The second bestseller was a book called *Speed Cleaning*, the sequel to *Spotless*.

It was a period when we became obsessed about our bodies, because that was something we could control—the CSIRO diet book, the cosmetic surgery craze, body piercing and tattoos. All of these things were saying, 'I can't control all this other stuff but I can control my own body.' It was a period also where our sense of disengagement, particularly political, was reflected in the fact that we just kept re-electing governments. People change a government only if they are engaged and if they are disengaged, politicians will be seduced into thinking that this is some kind of golden era, that the community thinks there is some kind of utopia that has occurred. It is exactly the opposite. Whether out of disgust, or apathy, or disenchantment, or disappointment, people turn away from politics and, ironically, keep on electing the governments that might have disgusted, or disappointed, or disenchanted them.

Federally, at the state level and locally, we saw not just re-election after re-election but often with increased majorities, which oddly—paradoxically—was a reflection of our disengagement, as was our lack of outrage about things like the Pacific solution, the civil liberties implications of our anti-terror laws, and even WorkChoices, when first enacted, we were still asleep then. The AWB kickbacks, suggestions of lying in high places—all of these things that would once have engaged us and got us angry essentially passed us by because of our mood of acquiescence.

For the health of our democracy, this was a very bleak period, and the label I have given it is the dreamy period—the period when we were in a kind of a political torpor of disengagement. We were more prejudiced, as people usually are when the focus turns inward. We were less tolerant, we were less compassionate, we were tougher, we wanted mandatory sentencing for just about everything. It was the period when the rise of fundamentalism in religion, in economics, in feminism and in environmentalism occurred as people were looking for simple black-and-white solutions that would get things back under control.

The good news was that it was a time of reflection. It was a time when we were talking more about personal values, about getting the balance right between our working lives and our personal lives, when the idea of getting some meaning into our lives was getting more currency. So perhaps it was a kind of societal retreat in which we were not just self-absorbed but we were also a bit more reflective. It is true, of course, that we were extravagant in that period. We were self-absorbed in the retail sense. We racked up record levels of personal and household debt in order to fund our furious desire to distract ourselves by spending, whether it was on the renovations, or the fashions, or the cosmetic surgery, or whatever it was.

But then something else happened. Around about—and it is hard to pinpoint it, but I would say around about the middle of 2006—the early signs emerged of the second great turning of the tide. The mood began to change. A flicker of evidence that some re-engagement was occurring began to emerge.

What did it? I wish I was clever enough to be able to say what did it. There are perhaps a dozen things that did it. Maybe the main one was the water crisis—the drought—which caused people to say, 'We really are running out of water in Brisbane and in lots of other cities and towns around Australia. Perhaps that means there is something to this story of global warming and climate change.' Even if it was not the drought, perhaps there were other things about that whole climate change story that got people energised and activated with the thought that something very serious was going to happen and that we would have to do something about it.

Of course, once you wake up to one issue, you are awake, and the dominos start to fall in the same way as they do with prejudice. Once you are given permission to be prejudiced against asylum seekers, then you can be prejudiced against anyone. Once you have woken up to an issue, then you start to wake up to WorkChoices, or David Hicks in Guantanamo Bay. The list goes on. Gradually people started lifting their heads and saying, 'This is not right'—almost retrospectively saying, 'We should have been angry about some stuff back there. We should have been alert and now we are going to start being alert.' Maybe it was our debt that got to the point where we said, 'The rampant materialism of this decade has got to be reined in.' Or maybe there is just a turning of the tide in the mood of society and that is what happened around about 2006 and into 2007.

Whatever the reason, certainly by the end of 2006 the tide was clearly turning. John Howard seemed, in a way, to demonstrate the extent to which he had lost touch with the electorate when he said just before the September 2007 election, 'If you change the government, you will change the country.' I hope he did not think it was original. I hope he knew he was quoting Paul Keating. But that is what he said—'If you change the government, you will change the country.' Of course, that was not the story at all. The country had changed. The tide had turned, which was why a change of government was inevitable and which is why, incidentally, no incumbent government today post this second tidal movement should feel secure. Even a newly elected federal government has no grounds now in a newly re-engaged electorate for feeling as though a second term is inevitable. No state or local government should feel as though incumbency has the magic power that it seemed to have during the dreamy period.

People are talking about a new order. They are saying those words—extraordinary. They are talking about a new way of doing things—things like the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, the apology to the stolen generations, even the calling together of the 2020 Summit, although I think perhaps—echoing Janette's point—it might have been a more enjoyable phenomenon for the community if they had been randomly selected rather than the usual suspects. But that is another issue. The arrival of so many impressive women on a federal government front bench, the withdrawal of the troops from Iraq—all of these things feed the idea that something really significant is going to happen and is going to change which, of course, leads to a new hazard, the hazard of the euphoria of re-engagement. Euphoria, of course, is almost always the precursor to disappointment. So we will have to watch that. Certainly, we are looking at a community not just newly engaged in politics but wanting to be newly engaged, and not just in politics—engaged in conversations about everything from their rights as consumers to the democratic process.

It seems to me, to summarise this, that there is a new willingness to act, whether globally in relation to things particularly like climate change, or nationally, particularly in relation to public education and public health, or locally, in our own local community, where increasingly people are saying, 'I want to connect. I wish I felt more like part of the neighbourhood.' The desire for control, the desire for participation, the desire for reconnection is back. The sense that real change is possible is back and the only question is: do the governments—federal, state and local—understand the depth of this desire for re-engagement? Because if they do not, and if they do not respond to it very quickly, it will be squandered. Thank you.

**Dr SOLOMON:** Comments and questions?

**Dr COGHILL:** I have a question for Janette. I want to draw on what Janette said and Hugh's comments. I am really interested, Janette, in the extent to which your ideas are confined to making policy decisions and the extent to which they can be adapted and extended to the interpretation and implementation of policy at the ground level. I am thinking particularly of the enormous changes that we are facing at the community level in response to climate change and whether there is the opportunity to use these sorts of mechanisms maybe in a similar way to the way in which landcare operates throughout Australia—through something that colleagues and I have coined climate care. Is there some mechanism of involving the community in the way in which these policies are going to be interpreted and put into effect at the community level?

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** Climate change is really becoming a large thing locally and globally. We started doing some things with local communities in Western Australia using online deliberation. What sort of good ideas can you come up with that could make your community more livable? They have come forward as simple as communities wanting to get to Perth and not wanting to use public transport or a street of people actually starting to talk together and put trees in. It is also happening globally. I am co-leading a group in Edmonton in Canada. The idea is to see whether we can get people in the world who are doing things like this together and use the brain power we have in the room together with the community to decide what to do. Their issue there is the tar sands which is really a horrific local problem.

If we figure that we can combine the local and the global, we have an enormous opportunity of energising people instead of them feeling powerless. As we heard from Hugh, there is that awful sense of 'This is all too big for me and I cannot do anything about it.' We need them to feel like they can. It is up to us. It is much easier if we can get a local group together to do something. I see deliberation as a wonderful opportunity to start implementing locally what we can do already, as well as doing it globally.

**Ms STONE:** My question is for Professor Hartz-Karp. I think it is pretty uncontroversial to say that in Western democracy our parliaments are fairly monocultural. As Julie Copley was saying this morning, young people are not really interested in the processes and just want to get involved. If we want, through deliberative democracy, to engage these groups of people, how can we prevent institutionalising deliberative democracy and just recreating those institutional barriers?

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** It is indeed a huge fear. The fear is that what we would create is basic minimum standards all over again—like we have done with community consultation—as opposed to constantly seeing how we can raise the banner to get better at this. I talked to you about the things we have done but we could do them so much better. We could be so much more innovative. It is so hard to get young people in the room. We have tried everything to try to get them in the room. We have got to use virtual spaces better. We have to create arenas for them. They need to tell us how we could be engaging with them.

I guess that notion of institutionalisation is at least changing the bar from where it was to where it could be. But also we should not put a lid on it so we can let people innovate about how they collectively engage. I imagine it would be very different to what we have so far. How could they do it? We need to constantly raise the bar and not get into the trap that we fell into with community consultation.

**Mr NARDELLA:** I have a question for Janette. It follows on from the previous question. How do you connect, consult or involve people who are disengaged? You talked about the young just before. What about the poor, the illiterate, the Indigenous, the migrants? What were the lessons learnt in WA? My parliamentary committee's—the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee—last volume was about building social capital. We do not want to just talk to the usual suspects. What were the lessons?

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** The biggest lesson for us was thinking that we had the answers and we did not. We got much better at asking the young people what we needed to do to be able to attract young people. We would need to do things very differently. A young person who turned up to one of these things two years later found me and said he had put in to be the Australian representative on the United Nations. He said, 'I am not likely to get it—I am social worker; they always choose lawyers—but if I were to get it, would you run a dialogue with young people?' I said sure, and sure enough he got it.

The dialogue that they ran was extraordinary. They had bands. We had 300 or 400 young people in the room and their task was to come up with what the United Nations should do. What should its future be? This is huge stuff. At the end of the day they were saying, 'No-one has ever asked us this before.' The best part was that this young man got DVDs of himself standing up there saying what they said in front of the United Nations. He sent them out to all the participants who were there.

The answer for me is that we have to be much better at trying to use what exists, use the wisdom of the people in the room and not have advisory people who we ask to represent the young people or represent the Indigenous people but skill them in how to get back out to their community. We need to support them. They use local area forums in England. We need to provide them with the ability to do that work and stop feeling like somehow we should have the answers and we should know how to do it. I do not think we do. I do not know that we ever will.

**Ms WALSH:** I also have two questions for Janette. One of the most effective community participation novels that I have ever read about is the seven healing circles—the justice program in one of the native Indian communities in Canada. That is a justice model, not a political model. It is a model that starts with small groups of people and tracks through the ripples of how it affects everybody else in the community. It has been really effective in reducing the sexual assault of children in that community. I was wondering whether their quite cumbersome but incredibly effective approach can be extrapolated across to political change.

My second question is slightly related. I read an article by Noel Pearson earlier this year saying that, in his opinion, one of the things that had caused a problem in Indigenous communities was that the number of communities which now gather has got too unwieldy for the effective working of the old networks. Is there a cap on community consultation? If the numbers of people you bring together get bigger, do you give them more time or do you break them into groups or what do you do?

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** I will try to be brief with both. I think the example you gave is exciting. I rarely call things by their copyrighted name because Americans get terribly perturbed because I am forever adapting, adopting, taking a bit of this and doing a bit of that. I create a different name. I think we have all got to do that. I think you have found a great example. What we want to see are some examples of on-the-ground. If you hear about something then find a place where you can give it a go, do it in a small way, why not trial it and see how it works? That is the first one. When it comes to scale, I think the two big things we have to do with deliberative democracy are scaling out to involve more and more people and scaling up to start taking it out of local issues and into the much bigger global issues. Because of technology, we have enormous opportunity for doing that.

One of the things that I started negotiating six years ago on the Murray-Darling was the notion of doing a 21st century town meeting at the same time all the way down so people could get to feel, experience and see what it was like, the impacts of what people did further upstream to people  
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downstream. It is all possible. They did this in America where they linked it up with the White House right across America when they were talking about health. We have the ability now to really scale up and we have to keep things local, otherwise it loses its context. So no, I do not think there is a cap. On the contrary, I think we are constantly going to need to find ways to do that scaling up and scaling out. Thank you.

**Mr LARIS:** I am Hilary Laris, a member of parliament in Bougainville. This question goes to you, Hon. Margaret Wilson. Can you elaborate a little bit on your multicultural society? In my place where I come from there are something like 100 languages and there are something like 100 cultures and one Upper House. It is a totally different culture. Can you elaborate a little bit on that so I can take it home and think about that?

**Ms WILSON:** That is called a real challenge and not one that we face. I suppose each society has its own challenge in that respect. In New Zealand, as far as the parliament is concerned, it certainly has helped having dedicated seats for Maori representation. I think it has helped because it is an acknowledgement not just of the numbers in originally a Westminster type system or an MMP system that we have now but it is an acknowledgement that is much deeper than that. It is not just a numbers game. As that has evolved and changed—and now, as Charles's paper said, I think 18 or 19 per cent of the members of parliament are Maori—that starts that perspective. That view—a bit like a woman's view—comes through into all decision making and therefore has to be taken account of no matter what it is. So while there are some issues that are specific to Maori, all issues actually involve Maori. But it is important that how they do, and what the consequences are, are seen in every select committee, are seen in every policy decision and in every discussion.

The challenge, interestingly, in New Zealand at the moment is, of course, a sovereignty argument. The Maori Party has advocated a form of sovereignty—a little unclear—but certainly for some of its party leadership it does mean separate institutions, separate Maori parliament, separate decision making. I guess if that continues to evolve, that will be a real challenge in all sorts of ways, because while statistically 15 or 16 per cent of the population identifies as Maori, the truth is, because of interfamilial relationships, probably 30 or 40 per cent actually have some connection of a family sort. So a separation out, if it were to happen, I think would be quite divisive in some ways and would have to be incredibly carefully managed. So we do have those issues.

The Pacific community also, I think, is really a challenging community as it is growing—for New Zealand born Pacific people as well as for immigrant people. I think that is evolving into quite a unique contribution to New Zealand society and culture. Where it is all going to end we do not know and we cannot know and we should not know. It is probably part of that change process that we have heard about that sort of reaches a critical point and a critical mass, and I think in New Zealand it has. There is now an acknowledgement that diversity does actually mean difference and it actually has to be dealt with. Parliament tries to lead with that by a constant acknowledgement of it in a public affirming sense. I probably did not answer, but we will talk about that later.

**Mr WHAN:** Steve Whan, member for Monaro in New South Wales. My question is for Hugh Mackay. In the area that I represent, which includes the Snowy Mountains and the south-east of New South Wales, the re-engagement that you were talking about seems to me to be driven a lot by climate change. There has been this really amazing grassroots movement called Clean Energy for Eternity which has come through and driven the issues. What I am wondering—and asking for a comment on here—is do you think that the climate change movement, which seems to have re-engaged people, is going to be set back at all by things like petrol prices becoming an issue and perhaps pushing people back into that more insular and self-focused mode which they might get into? Given the sort of argument that is on at the moment about the form that carbon trading is going to take, with some people obviously now trying to appeal to the instinct that says, 'We don't want any rises in prices,' how are we going to see that go? Backwards or forwards with engagement?

**Mr MACKAY:** Thanks for that question. I think the short-term, the immediate answer is forwards rather than backwards. In fact, my reading of the mood at the moment is that rising petrol prices are regarded as an inevitability, not to be controlled by governments but to be accepted as probably the spur we needed to change our behaviour. Most people are now saying, in relation to car use and oil dependency in general, 'It's going to be taken out of our hands. It's just going to be not realistic. We're not going to be able to afford to say "Let's go for a drive" or even to drive when we could take the train.' This is going to raise huge issues for governments about public transport and, of course, all the big issues about a society that moves away from oil dependency.

My reading of the mood at the moment is that people are looking for strong leadership and very specific guidance about this, as they have about water use, and they have responded, of course, around Australia—especially in Brisbane—magnificently to the appeal to being much more conservative about water use. If governments wanted to introduce petrol coupons, or odd and even numberplates tomorrow, there would be a huge rate of compliance in this community. But to do nothing for two or three years until we kind of figure it all out and then start asking people what we wanted them to do, by then the moment might have passed.

**Dr SOLOMON:** We will have two more questions. I think the water reaction in Brisbane has been absolutely fantastic and I think it will continue even after it rains.

**Mr HANNA:** Kris Hanna, South Australian parliament. Thank you, Hugh, for your insight. With this post-2006 mood that you described, does it have particular significance in politics for the major parties—or, one could say, the old parties—on the one hand and the Independents, the appeal of Independents, whether they would be left, right, or single issue?

**Mr MACKAY:** Thanks for the question. I find it hard to be confident in answering this, because I think it is much more about a feeling of responsiveness to what the issues are that is troubling us rather than whether it is this or that party. In the present climate it is very likely, for example, that support for the Greens will continue, but I would not therefore say we were looking at the Greens becoming a major party—very unlikely.

Our adversarial Westminster system really continues to favour—and there are enormous vested interests involved, of course—the classic two-party model which, by the way, the electorate at large is not particularly happy with. One of the things they dream of with greater female participation is that politics day to day would be managed in a different way, would be less aggressive, less blokey, less adversarial et cetera. They see little sign of this so far, but they keep hoping. It is more that kind of thing. Could we handle it? Could we be more bipartisan? Could we be more collaborative? Could we be more engaged in both directions? When people see the two-party system in full cry, they often feel left out of it and, indeed, feel devalued. They feel as though they are being insulted by the insults being traded across the chamber. There is no assumption, though, that if we had more Independents that would solve this problem. My time has gone.

**Dr HERCUS:** My question is for Janette Hartz-Karp. The things you were talking about in relation to deliberative democracy were very exciting. My question though is spurred by some discussions I had over lunch yesterday with two politicians—and I will just describe them as people who are independently minded, regardless of whether they are currently affiliated with a particular party—and I suppose our awareness of what goes on in parliament and even in committees. There is not necessarily a lot of deliberative democracy actually happening in our parliaments where I think it is supposed to happen because of this party discipline. Do you have any suggestions as to how we might actually reinvigorate deliberative democracy within the parliament as well as out there with members of the broader community?

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** I think it is absolutely crucial. It is the same thing for the parliament; it is the same thing for the public sector. When people behave to you one way, which is that you really have no ability to collaborate with others and have an influence on decision making and come up with innovative solutions, it is very difficult to then say, 'Now you must go do this with other people.'

It seems to me that, unless we do something internally both within the parliamentary structures and within our public sector structures, I do not see that people are going to do it. They do not get it half the time because they have not experienced it. You really have to experience it to get it. Yet when I talk to politicians, I do not think most of them really enjoy the constant adversarial nature that much. I think a lot of the time they would not necessarily choose the other side but they feel that they are indebted, that they are honour bound to do that. I do not think we inevitably have to be that way. Not all parliaments are this way. I do not have specific suggestions. I would be really happy to sit down with anyone who is interested and we could innovate together. I think it is really important.

**Dr SOLOMON:** Thank you very much. That is all we have time for. I ask you to thank the three speakers and the people who asked questions as well. We did not have time to show Janette's video. Would you like to show it during lunch time perhaps?

**Prof. HARTZ-KARP:** For those who feel like staying, it is a five-minute video, it is a 'Dialogue with the City'. The reason I thought it would be interesting is to just get the sense of the different feel of this and that it is not a one-off event, that it is over a period of time. If anybody feels like staying for five minutes, you are welcome.

**PANELLIST:** I have a couple of announcements. Firstly, there is a program change for this afternoon. The Hon. Bill Shorten will not be participating in the debate but the Hon. Michael Lavarch, former Attorney-General, will be participating in his place. I am anticipating the debate will be very, very enjoyable and we are very grateful to the Hon. Michael Lavarch for stepping in at the last moment.

The other announcement I would like to make is that a number of you have asked for lists of the participants in this conference. The lists are at the back of the room. Please help yourself on the way out if you would like those. Enjoy lunch.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.33 pm to 1.36 pm**

**Mr HAMILL:** Good afternoon all. I used to haunt these places in days gone by, but I have been asked to be the chair or moderator—I think chair is the better term—for this debate this afternoon. It is an interesting exercise indeed, the topic being, 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark and it is the media wot done it'—with all due respect and apologies to William Shakespeare. We have two teams. For the affirmative, we have some very well-known faces and by-lines. The first speaker for the affirmative will be Quentin Dempster, a well-known face on—I was going to say 'face of', but I should say 'face on'—the ABC. The second speaker will be Dennis Atkins, who is a bit like a wayward Jedi Knight—

**Mr DEMPSTER:** It is Tony.

**Mr HAMILL:** Sorry, Tony is the second speaker for the affirmative. They cannot even sit in order, this lot! Tony Koch is a four-time Walkley Award winning journalist who these days is with the *Australian* but of course for many years was with the *Courier-Mail* here in Queensland. He is a well-known commentator on matters political, with a range of interests in Indigenous affairs and social justice. Now I can come to my crack about Dennis. Dennis is sort of a wayward Jedi. He moved to the dark side and back and seems to have survived the experience. Dennis, who has written for a number of newspapers around the country and over a long and distinguished career, is back here in Queensland. That is your affirmative team.

For the negative today, we have got the Hon. Margaret Wilson, who has already performed in a somewhat different role earlier today. I think it is wonderful to have the Speaker of the New Zealand parliament actually being able to speak this afternoon, which is not the role that Speakers often get to enjoy. The second speaker for the negative team is Lesley Clark, who is a person I had the honour of serving with in this place over a number of years. Lesley, like me, has wandered off into doing other worthy things. We asked each of the participants to send in a bit of a bio note and I have to share a line from Lesley's with you. Lesley wrote that she is very well qualified to join the team for the negative defending the media as she has the distinction of serving five terms as an MP without becoming a household name, associated with any of the dubious activities said to occur in the state of Denmark. She thanks the media for that.

The third speaker for the negative team is another old mate of mine. I remember actually having him on a team when we debated in the red chamber many, many years ago in a mock parliament with the Young Liberals and the Young Nationals. They could not agree then either, could they, Mike. The Hon. Michael Lavarch is someone who also has a distinguished parliamentary career in his background and is a former Attorney-General—indeed the first speaker for the negative team also had that role. Michael these days is back in academia as professor of law and dean of the law school at the Queensland University of Technology.

So the ground rules for this debate are broadly Marquess of Queensberry, although as an old mate of mine would have said, dog and goanna would not go astray, either. My role is simply to chair and to moderate. So if you can get away with it, good luck to you. Each speaker will have up to eight minutes in which to address you. There will be a warning bell at six and a final bell at eight. That is the point where I will bring the shepherd's crook out and drag you off the stage. So without any more ado, I give you the first speaker for the affirmative team.

**Mr DEMPSTER:** Your Excellencies, honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, delegates. There is something rotten in the state of Denmark when our elected representatives are treated with such contempt. This is a dynamic which exists. We live in the wonderful democracy of Australia, but as this conference has been determining, there has been disengagement. The media is part of that process, because I have to break some news to you that the media is deeply superficial. You may not have realised this as you go about your daily business of consuming the media and shouting at your television sets, but from a parliamentarian's point of view, the media has made a blood sport out of holding up to contempt and ridicule the parliamentarians of Australia—state and federal—and it is to a distracting degree and it is there as entertainment.

I have other news for you and that is that the media exists in a commercial environment. Nowadays, the newspapers, which are increasing their circulations, are doing so on the basis of what they call campaigning journalism. So a little pothole is elevated to the failure of government. Bob Carr in New South Wales perfected this technique of manipulation—I am starting to talk on a media basis. Anybody who had stubbed their toe and had a bad experience in a public hospital, he would bring them out to a press conference and they would vent their rage at the public hospital system and Carr would use it as an example of systemic failure.

Let us get back to the parliamentarian's point of view. Under this media regime, the government is to blame for absolutely everything. Oppositions exploit this dynamic mercilessly to get the Newspoll traction. The media forces the parliamentarians into this 24-hour news cycle and governments—whoever is in government, and sometimes the opposition if they are under the gun—are forced to engage in quick responses and smart lines to try to damage control. There are things that are changing now about damage control that I will get to shortly.

It is no wonder governments have become reliant on taxpayer-funded advertising in the guise of public information. It is the only way that governments can get around the maligned media and have their own messages to indicate to the public that while there are instances of incompetence, governments generally in Australia deliver very good services and when they meet in their cabinets and in the parliaments they are mindful that their primary role is the public interest.

Let us look at the media's tactics and tricks. In TV, it is no longer the 20-second grab or the 30-second grab—that is an extremely long period of broadcast time—it is the two-second grab. I saw one news report that said that the reaction from Treasurer Costello was 'Ha, Ha.' That is about one and a half seconds. That is the shorthand that the media has been forced to adopt in the 24-hour news cycle. We have media minders now and the Americanism of spin doctoring is now adopted in Australia. Huge staffs of spin doctors, once journalists in press galleries, are now engaged all over the place from two-bit councils all the way up to state and federal governments. So we are in the game of spin doctoring, of damage control, of rehearsing people—whether you are in opposition or in government—in this process of holding

to your message, because in your press conference the media absolutely demands that you give this two-second grab or this three-second grab, which is all you rehearse for with your minders, your spin doctors and your damage controllers. All you have to do is get that down. You can rehearse in the mirror in the morning to try to get those messages over. This is what we have become because of the imperatives of the media.

It is a terrorising thing, the media. The other side will say, 'The media is a wonderful thing to have in a democracy. It is all free press' and all of that sort of thing and that it must be held to account. But where is the good governance that comes out of this dynamic? Where is the good governance that comes out of holding parliamentarians up to this sort of terror and ridicule and contempt, and the added layer of self-righteousness in the editorials and the inconsistency and the hypocrisy? It is really tough to have to deal with that degree of self-righteousness.

We have the daily doorstep, where players—any player—are expected to have an opinion on everything. The media will sit in wait and ambush you as you go through the doors of the parliaments and the forums of Australia. They will demand some Solomon like judgement—David Solomon like judgement—from the players. Look at radio—the prejudices of the shock jocks as they try to exploit their audiences through the tried and true formula of playing to stereotypes and prejudices and to again hold the politicians up to ridicule. That is a great thing in Australia now, because—no, it is not a great thing; it is a damaging thing—there are elements of destructiveness in that.

So things are rotten in the state of Denmark and the media has produced this, because there has been no pause for thought about what the media should do and the way it should contribute. I am not talking about development journalism that you might have in South-East Asia where everybody has to report what Mr Lee Kuan Yew says with great reverence. We are not talking about that; we are talking about maintaining a perspective and an objectivity in the way the media operates and not to become just a medium for celebrity journalism and entertainment. So things are rotten and I do not know what we can do about it.

**Mr HAMILL:** Thanks, Quentin, some interesting insights there. For the first speaker, I call to the podium Margaret Wilson. Thank you, Margaret.

**Ms WILSON:** Thank you, David. What a lot of codswallop. There they are again, taking advantage of what they think are a sympathetic audience. Yet you, of course, know as you are working with them every day. So it seems to me superficial is not really the criticism that should be made of us on the media side; they should look to themselves.

In leading for the negative, I want to point out that in fact we have been gathered here today under some false pretences. There is absolutely nothing wrong in the state of Denmark. I intend to actually answer the question. Denmark—wherever—but I went to Denmark because, being in the media, I am here to give you information and facts. The facts are: I direct you to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site where a journalist—that is right, a member of my profession—reveals that the highest economic growth in Denmark for 10 years has just been experienced. You would not have known that if that journalist had not compared the Danish economy to that of a multicylinder engine of a racing car—in other words, getting the message through with facts and using the sporting analogy, which we all know is at the heart of politics—winners, losers.

What I want to do today, however, is point out that we in the media are in fact protecting the state of Denmark—any state, for that matter. I look for my evidence of this as to what has been happening with the management media in New Zealand recently. For non-Kiwis in the audience, you might not be aware that this bastion of free press, one of only two major chains in New Zealand, has made one of its rare inspirational and, I must say, commendable decisions as it grapples with how to make a buck across the Tasman. It will do so by creating subbing hubs—hubs are very fashionable—that are going to carry out subediting for features and international and business pages in their New Zealand newspapers.

But the real news is not that 190 staff will be reapplying for their jobs and 40 will not get them. No, no, no. The real inspirational decision is to exclude the sports pages from these centres of excellence because sporting journalism is already excellent. That will remain with the editors and the subeditors. The reason for this inspirational decision is recognition that that is what we need more of in this country, and that is what the media is giving you. That is why there is no problem. It is recognition of the pre-eminence of sports journalism.

I must say that credit has to be given for this inspirational move to a New Zealander—you will probably claim him as one of your own—David Kirk, who has not only brains but brawn behind this decision. You might remember that he was the captain of the All Blacks when we managed to win the World Cup but, more importantly, we also won the Bledisloe Cup, the most important cup. I should say also that this man was Oxford educated, was a medical doctor, worked for a former Prime Minister and came close and is still touted in New Zealand as being a list candidate for the National Party. So do not say that the media is not contributing to the political welfare of this state—it certainly is with a man like that making those sorts of decisions.

What I want to assure you of, however, is that those who have expertise in sport are not only seen in those management positions. We have in New Zealand our famous Colin Meads, who is arguably filling the vacuum left by the death of Sir Edmund Hillary. He has managed to maintain his image, not a dent in Brisbane

his reputation at all, even though he is fronting for a finance company that has gone broke. Also, we have many sportspeople who are very interested in foreign affairs and contribute to their country and to sporting journalism and political journalism accordingly. There we have from New Zealand Stephen Fleming, Martin Crowe and Scott Styris on the swimming pools of India and in between time playing the odd stroke of cricket. Not very good—your Shane Warne at least won his matches while he was in between swimming and pools and other things.

Of course it is a very great, great attribute that in fact you can have the media producing these multitasking and multiskilled people. It is probably only in New Zealand that a university could do a quiz on how many All Blacks have also been politicians. I may ask you: do any of you know? No. Well, they only ask you to name three. In fact there have been five quite distinguished people. We have had Tony Steel, never heard of him; Ben Couch, probably never heard of him; Bill Glenn, probably never heard of him—all excellent players. But then there was Chris Laidlaw. Chris Laidlaw had diplomatic skills as well and he was a member of parliament for a very short period of time before he went back to the media and is on our national radio on a Sunday morning. The fifth one was Graham Thorne. He not only contributed to being a member of parliament, an All Black, a fellow law student of mine still completing his degree, but his claim to fame, culturally as well, is that he permed his hair. He in fact therefore launched the whole metro male on to the New Zealand cultural scene.

You cannot tell me these are not multiskilled people. They have all been members of the media. They all make a contribution to their state and to their country. I must say I thought it was a rather cheap shot from the member who opened on the opposing team—not that I want to appear adversarial in this debate at all, you understand—to suggest that making a profit is a problem. That is what the country is about. That is what the media does so well: promoting competition and profit and, if competition does not make profit, then profit must prevail regardless. I would say it is through this attitude that we can say without doubt that of course there is nothing wrong in the state of Denmark or any other state and it is the media that in fact is giving you the state that you deserve.

**Mr HAMILL:** After that stout defence, or offence—I was not quite sure what—I would like to invite now the second speaker for the affirmative team, Tony Koch, to address you.

**Mr KOCH:** My preceding speaker gave me a real in with the element that I wanted to emphasise to you today—that is, the cynicism of journalism. It could be no better demonstrated than by my learned friend talking about linking up ‘something is rotten in Denmark’ with New Zealand and Queensland and leaving out the most famous connection of all—in her lack of research, which was so ably demonstrated—one Johannes. The cynicism of journalists, particularly in Queensland, to this former New Zealand born person who was in Queensland for many, many years can be ably demonstrated in myriad things. Most recently, we have the debate about greening Australia. Johannes was very cynically dealt with in that regard because he is the one who actually developed scrub pulling and journalists in this state treated him very poorly. He was always very cranky because in the years of the Vietnam War they used agent orange and napalm, but it was not humanly discovered before that and he could have just nuked Queensland and you would not have had to pull scrub and have the arguments. You could have just thrown a match in it.

**Mr DEMPSTER:** And they denigrated him over the—

**Mr HAMILL:** Order! This is not the parliament.

**Mr KOCH:** My preceding speaker would have done well to speak to the speaker following me, Dr Clark, and complete her research, because when Dr Clark was an aspiring member and first campaigning, I spoke to her and some journalists, and there was cynicism from this other journalist who said to her, ‘Dr Clark, have you been nominated because it is a case of who you know, not what you know?’ She said, ‘Listen, I’ll tell you in the Labor Party in Queensland it’s not who you know or what you know. It’s what you know about who you know.’ The reason she did not become a household name is because she adhered to the policy—that she also enunciated to this cynical journalist—that you don’t get too close to journalists. She said, ‘If you’re going to invite a tiger to lunch, there is no sense pouring sauce on yourself.’ The cynicism of journalists in Queensland in particular is something that is taught at universities. One of the members here taught most journalists the political sciences they know, and part of any political degree course that Dr Reynolds emphasised was that you had to be not only critical but cynical.

The best example of the cynicism of journalists that disgusted me and no doubt will disgust you occurred back in the Goss Labor government days when they came up with the idea that they could win the seat of Warrego and wanted something for the school of arts out there. We had an arts minister at the time, a former professional boxer, Bobby Gibbs, who said, ‘We will give them something. What will we send them? Have a look on eBay; there must be something there.’ They came up with a statue of Venus de Milo. It arrived out there.

There was an investigative journalist out there, Glenn Milne. You would have all read Glenn’s columns. He was a protege of Quentin’s in the *Telegraph*. He was there when it arrived. He got in touch with the then transport minister, David Hamill, and he revealed that this statue had arrived and it was appalling because the railway department had treated it so poorly that when it got there it did not have any arms. Mr Hamill urged him not to write the story on the basis that they would pay the compensation, which they did. One has to really doubt the cynicism of journalists who have that attitude to politicians.

There is not one politician—and I have known hundreds of them, as you all have—who does not contribute mightily when they are paid members of parliament but they do in a wonderful way when they leave. We have never known a member of parliament yet who has not left to spend more time with their family. That is the reason they all leave. What could be more noble than doing that?

We were having a fact-finding lunch at the Jubilee Hotel the other day. I was surrounded by all these cynics. One said, 'You call yourself a news medium but you're really only a medium because you are neither rare nor well done.' The subject came up of a very honourable and decent politician who retired recently but it was not enough of a contribution to his own family that he spend more time with them. He accepted, against all protestations, a position of trade commissioner in Los Angeles. Australia has 28 trade commissioners throughout North America. But what we needed was somebody who was apparently a really good gladhander and party person.

The fact-finding luncheon came up with, 'If that is all that they wanted, why would we not have Dennis Atkins appointed to it because his parties we can assure you would be much better than those thrown by Peter Beattie.' The message I want to leave you with is this: what really has to be addressed is the cynicism of journalists because politicians are doing God's work.

**Mr HAMILL:** I could not help but note the pre-emptive strike on the second speaker of the negative team who I will now call to address you—Lesley Clark.

**Dr CLARK:** Ladies and gentlemen, now that you have been told by our first speaker how the media are in fact helping to power things along in the state of Denmark and indeed, of course, also New Zealand, let me turn to Australia, our wonderful host nation. I will convincingly refute the scurrilous claim that we, the media—the relentless and fearless seekers of the truth—have single-handedly created the impression that all is not well in the state of Australia. That accusation that we have conspired to invent, omit, exaggerate and twist the actions and words of all those so-called hardworking, honest, upright and humble leaders of the people will be seen to be blatantly false. Who calls parliamentarians that? It is only themselves, isn't it? I will demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is in fact those leaders of the people themselves who are responsible for the rot that is even now eating away at the soul of the nation. We the media are in fact shining examples of goodness and light that is saving Australia from itself.

So let me start with invention. We the seekers of the truth have no need to create false illusions. Those morally upstanding leaders of the people have confessed their sins. True, it sometimes takes a little encouraging and urging by the media, but we seekers of the truth are only helping them to do what they know in their hearts is the right thing to do, and confess they have.

Consider, for example, the headline in the *Australian*—that font of all knowledge—on 27 June, 'Everything's rotten in this state'. Yes, Tony Barrass selflessly summarised what had been happening in Western Australia, for anyone who had been in a coma and missed it—

Stop the presses! Western Australians appalled by antics of bra-snapping, chair-sniffing, Liberal leader who wears crushed beer cans on Viking helmet during drinking sessions.

But here is a man who is politically unbiased, as is, of course, the home-grown print media in that state too. He continued—

News flash! Back-biting Labor MPs, who eat their own in bloody preselection slaughter, accuse Premier of shirt-lifting—

was it skirt lifting?

during drunken knees-up ...

As Tony quite rightly said, while the leaders of the people blame the innocent souls in the media—those were his words—for the current chaos in the state of Denmark, in fact the blame lies with the ranks of the people's representatives themselves who practise the dark art of leaking.

Now what is a seeker of the truth to do faced with such a dilemma? Publish and be damned of course, and all for the sake of Australia. I will admit, though, that the media sometimes does pre-empt—that we sometimes get a little overeager—and anticipate confessions that could be forthcoming, such as the one that we thought a certain ex-Premier might make because his life was supposedly a bed of roses. Now I am sorry if that is too subtle for some of you, but I do not want a call from Los Angeles in the middle of the night.

But since when do we condemn eagerness and a flair for the dramatic when in service of the great other public good—exposure and humiliation? Take, for example, that gun reporter from the *Cairns Post*, where I hail from, who told readers how he had sent a mole to record the conversations of newly elected councillors who were on a retreat to begin the arduous task of saving Cairns from the evil developers. His heroic mole recorded their conversations and a transcript duly appeared in the *Cairns Post*. Thus the good people of Cairns read what they always knew to be true: work was the last thing on the minds of their councillors. No, they were there in fact at their upmarket resort for the spas, for the sumptuous food and wine, and stunning ocean views. Just because this fine seeker of the truth had made the whole thing up does not matter. It could have happened. In fact, this fearless reporter, I maintain, probably prevented it from happening because those councillors knew the seekers of the truth would root out and rightly expose any bad behaviour.

Enough of the seekers of the truth who use the pen. Let me now turn to those who use the camera to merely record the behaviour of the leaders of the people in our hallowed parliaments, allowing the people to judge for themselves who is truly responsible. The words they use to describe each other are so well known they hardly need repeating, but I will. The *Hansard* record surely clearly supports our case so well.

I could start by referring to Mark Latham's contributions, but any evidence from him could be challenged on the grounds of insanity so I will not go there. Keating will do much better. He is the true and undisputed master of invective. We all know of his insightful and incisive use of those endearments 'scumbag' and 'sleazebag'. Howard was often the recipient of Keating's invective. Once he said, 'What we have got is a dead carcass swinging in the breeze'—remember that one?—'but will nobody cut it down and replace him?' I doubt that even Keating imagined that task would be left to our mighty media heroin Maxine McKew—without a doubt the only bright spot in those halls of Canberra darkness. He also took aim once at Hewson. His quote was, 'I was implying that the honourable member for Wentworth was in fact like a lizard on a rock—alive but looking dead.'

Speaking of lizards, had it not been for the cameras in the New South Wales parliament we would never have known how a stuffed iguana played a starring role in the deadly power struggle going on in that state. Hamlet could have learnt a thing or two from Della Bosca. But, honestly, if members will bring their toys to parliament, who can blame us for thinking of them as children?

How wrong is it for people to wrongly suggest that we, the seekers of the truth, make power-hungry leaders of the people look aggressive because we report only on their fights? Why was the parliament designed all those hundreds of years ago to ensure that there was little more than two rapier lengths separating government and opposition? As you know, the media faithfully recorded the sight of Kevin Rudd lovingly including Brendan Nelson in that bipartisan embrace during the apology to the stolen generation. Imagine, if you can, Brendan saying this to Kevin during the debate on petrol prices: 'Mate, you are right. World oil prices are going up and they are going to keep going up, so reducing the price of the petrol excise by 5c will not make a jot of difference. You are right. It is just so obvious.' Would you have seen that on TV? Of course you would! Think about all the media coverage of those miracles 2,000 years ago that you hear about every Christmas and every Easter—yes, we record miracles.

Finally, you might have wondered why as a Queensland MP for so many years I have not drawn—at least not much—on the deep reservoir of irrefutable evidence here to support our case, particularly since our ex-Premier Beattie was renowned for his love of the media. I will conclude with a Queensland example—one involving the member for Barron River—that provides absolute, irrefutable evidence to back our case that the media are innocent. I put it to you: did you ever see or hear about the member for Barron River dancing on the billiard tables in this wonderful historic building where we are meeting? No, you certainly did not. Not ever, not a hint, not a whisper was there in those newspaper columns that can be counted on to tell what is really going on. If the media were guilty as charged, surely we would have used this minor, though colourful, indiscretion, blown it out of all proportion, labelled it as outrageous and grossly disrespectful behaviour and we would have brought the government to its knees. Surely we would have. And we did not. Mind you, when the Premier found out he thought he might. But you could have read about it in the *Sunday Mail* because the media were there. They were there!

I can now reveal that the sisterhood closed ranks. This was a time when female members of parliament and the press gallery used to celebrate the end of the year, and indeed we did. So now you know the truth—as we see it, anyway. It is not we, the media, who are responsible for what is rotten in the state of Denmark. It is, as you know only too well, those reprehensible politicians and parliamentarians.

**Mr HAMILL:** Just because they come down from Cairns they think they can be longwinded. Shame on you for going so long! To conclude the case for the affirmative team, I will ask the third speaker, Dennis Atkins, to come forward.

**Mr ATKINS:** They say that politicians go on too long. That was extraordinary! I was a bit stunned to hear our last contributor take the name of the great politician Paul Keating in vain. He is a man who is still contributing to public life. I was up in Noosa recently on a panel with Stephen Loosley and a couple of other people. The former senator remarked that, while you see Bob Hawke out there on the golf course, you do not see Paul Keating enjoying himself like that. He is sitting in his lounge room still filing the sights on his rifle.

It is extraordinary that we hear this sort of defence of the media from these people. It reminds me of the old Fox News defence: 'We report; you decide—fair and balanced.' It is all cliches, isn't it? Anyone who has worked in politics or in the parliament knows that the hardest working people in these institutions are the politicians. But you would not know it from reading the media. People get up and they make very learned speeches. They put hours into researching them, getting into the nub of some of the crucial challenges facing our state and our nation, debating legislation which is going to make a lasting impact on the community, and then some minister stands up in question time and makes a goose of himself and what do the media concentrate on? None of that really hard work and none of those really brilliant speeches that all of the politicians make. They just go there for the gaffs and for the slip-ups in question time.

I remember one incident in these very buildings some time ago when there was a prison break one night at one of the prisons. It used to happen quite a bit, but this one was a particularly big prison break. The minister was attending to the business. He was taking calls, keeping in touch with what was going on, Brisbane

giving orders for people to do this and do that, and making sure that everything was under control. The problem was that he was doing all this from the Strangers Bar. The media found out about this. Did they report on his hard work and on all of the orders he was giving? No, all they cared about was the fact that he had a glass of beer in his hand at the time. This just shows you the sort of cynicism and the shallow nature that the media bring to this. It is the reason why there is something wrong in the state of Denmark. When you look at any of it, it is the media who are behind it.

Look at what the media invent. They invent scandal and misbehaviour all the time. Being someone who enjoys politics, I do not read the media much—like most politicians, unless of course it is about myself. But to prepare for this debate I decided to do some study, so I got out last month's worth of *Daily Telegraphs* from New South Wales. I came across something about a cafe in Gosford called Iguana Joe's. I read about this, about a couple of politicians having dinner there with some friends. They were asked to move, there was a bit of a debate and then they went home. Now, I cannot believe that this has dominated the *Daily Telegraph*, and I am told by friends in Sydney that some of the other media have picked it up as well. This has dominated the *Daily Telegraph* now for four full weeks. Surely the media have invented all of this! You just would not have a simple thing like someone being asked to move tables at a dinner to dominate the national discourse for four weeks unless the media had invented it.

The final speaker will no doubt refute all of this. He will refer to the shallow, cynical, manipulative nature of politicians—something which I am sure he probably knows a bit about. I was reminded of that during the week when I was watching a news show on the ABC called *The Hollowmen*. Sitting there, I was absolutely shocked by what I saw on the television—this cynical, shallow, indulgent group of people. I noticed two things about it. One is you never saw a politician. What sort of representation is that of public affairs? The other was: where did it all appear? On the television and in the media. That just goes to show the lengths that the media will go to denigrate politicians and denigrate the people who are trying to do great things for their country.

The other thing that the media invented—and they invented it with such vigour that the Prime Minister has now had to create a national war against it—is the blame game. It was the media that started blaming everyone. If there was no front-page story, there would not be anyone to blame. Now Kevin Rudd quite rightly is trying to end the blame game. Hopefully that will involve putting the media in their place as well.

I was interested by the first speaker referring to David Kirk. David Kirk came over to Australia, and he has taken over what was once many years ago I think a fine media organisation—Fairfax. He might have once played football, but he came over here and he has devoted himself to two things. First of all, he devoted himself to bring down that great Australian, John Winston Howard, and he achieved that, didn't he? Now from what I hear he is trying to do the same to another great giant on Macquarie Street, Morris lemma. I am sure he will not stop until he does that either.

Finally, I would like to finish by demonstrating—and it was actually raised previously when referring to events in Western Australia—how the media just concentrate on one thing. As I said before, when they cover parliament, they do not care about the great speeches that politicians make; they just look for the gaff. In Western Australia, we have a Liberal leader, Troy Buswell. The media do not care about anything else he has done in his life. To paraphrase an old joke, 'You just sniff one chair.' I would like to finish by saying that there is absolutely something rotten in the state of Denmark and, if anyone knows it, it is the debating side I am on.

**Mr HAMILL:** Thanks, Dennis, and may the force be with you after that performance. I will ask the third speaker for the negative, Michael Lavarch, to conclude the debate for his team.

**Mr LAVARCH:** Thank you, David. Ladies and gentlemen, it falls on the last speaker in a debate to draw it all together so you, the audience, can come to a final conclusion as to the proposition, so let us recap just a little bit. We are debating whether there is something rotten in the state of Denmark and whether the media is to blame. Given the theme of the conference you have been attending, this is about the parlous state of public engagement and public support for our fine democratic processes and we have to make a decision about who is responsible for the public's cynicism in relation to parliament. Is it the politicians, or is it our noble, truth-seeking media?

The topic draws some inspiration from *Hamlet*, which is a play about treachery, revenge, madness, incest and moral corruption. You may find it difficult to make a judgement because that certainly describes any political party you know, and obviously it also describes, I have to confess, any media organisation we all know. That of course shows us, and it has come through the debate, that there is a symbiotic—one might even say parasitic—relationship between politics and the media. We just have to work out who the tapeworm is here. Is it the media on politics, or are politicians really the tapeworm trying to get into the fine body of the Fourth Estate?

Given it is a symbiotic relationship, there is a degree of commonality between these two fine professions, and that has come out from the contributions you have heard. It seems that the first common characteristic between politics and media is alcohol. We heard Tony Koch refer to fact-finding long lunches—in other words, getting on the piss. You have heard from my second speaker, Lesley Clark, about nights of dancing on billiard tables—in other words, fuelled by getting on the piss. There is bad behaviour obviously from both politicians and journalists. For politicians, you have obviously a night with a little bit too

much Johnnie Walker leading to a certain confrontation involving Belinda Neal. Equally, on the media side, who can forget Glenn Milne—and he has already been referred to—who has gone into Australian lexicon by his performance at an awards night.

**Mr DEMPSTER:** He was provoked!

**Mr HAMILL:** Order!

**Mr LAVARCH:** He was probably provoked by about 25 Johnnie Walkers, Mr Dempster. So we have the commonality of alcohol between the two professions.

The second thing which has become clear from the contributions is this idea of cynicism. I know this is hard to believe but there seems to be accepted by both sides a certain amount of cynicism in the way in which politicians operate and a certain amount of cynicism in the way in which the media operates.

I was startled a bit today. In doing my very extensive research, I actually bought today's *Courier-Mail*. Do not laugh. I do actually buy it occasionally. Often I pick it up free if I can out of a garbage tin, but sometimes one has to buy it. There was a fine story in their international coverage, which always starts at about page 46—you get the first 45 pages about Dennis Ferguson, whoever he is—with the headline 'Obama woos women'. You have to love the sense of humour of this newspaper. We have 'Obama woos women', and immediately underneath it is 'Free breast implants back by popular demand', 'as seen on *A Current Affair*', 'genuine offer'. It is not enough that we have Hillary and Obama looking like they are about to engage in a bit of tongue kissing; we actually have to juxtapose the news story with the free breast implants.

This leads to the third common thing between politics and the media—that is, cold pitiless sex. Both of course are driven by the way in which the political and media processes operate. If you take Canberra: you get 3,000 people—basically half of them involved in the political process and certainly a good proportion of them involved in the pursuit of journalism—and lock them away in this environment and mother nature, as it is, will make certain things begin to occur. We have had numerous examples. At least one responsibility on behalf of the media is to generally play a relatively decent role in terms of the reporting of these things—because they are up to their eyeballs in it themselves. Self-interest is another common theme between politics and the media.

We do have some examples. Ross Cameron, who was defeated at a federal election—I think it was the one before last—was a moral crusader but he somewhat came adrift in terms of his particular sexual appetite. But sometimes these things are not always bad. I well remember a federal member in the Wollongong area got caught in a compromising situation in a toilet block before the 1993 election. He got charged about a month before the federal election and his vote actually went up three per cent. I was getting a bit desperate before the 1996 federal election, but I decided to draw the line there. I did only lose by three per cent, I have to say.

So you have to work out how we determine between these very compelling cases as to which level of alcohol, cynicism and cold pitiless sex between the two professions is really most to blame. The answer of course again comes from the media. I looked at it today and again in the *Australian* various pages and the editorial are devoted to World Youth Day. If there is one organisation that knows a bit about staying on message—because they have been doing it for 2,000 years—as well as knowing a little bit about the exercise of power, then surely it is the Catholic Church.

So to answer our question, I went to the World Youth Day web site and there you can find the theme for World Youth Day set out. It gives us the answer as to who really is to blame for the poor state of the public support for our processes. The theme for World Youth Day is this: 'You will receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses'. The 'holy spirit'? It is obviously referring to Johnnie Walker again. That is obviously a big recurring theme in the Catholic belief. One of the best known miracles is turning water into wine. It was not water into soy milk; it was water into wine. Catholics know about the importance of alcohol. They also know about the importance of cold pitiless sex—but we can add a little bit of guilt in there just to flesh it up—and maybe a little bit of cynicism. But the answer comes with 'and you will be my witnesses'. It is of course the media who are the witnesses. There it is, ladies and gentlemen. It is declared by God himself, as articulated by Archbishop George Pell, that it is the media who are the guardians, whom we are to take as our safeguarders, and it is the politicians on that side of the debate who are responsible for the parlous state of Denmark.

**Mr HAMILL:** Ladies and gentlemen, have you ever heard a more sincere debate? Dripping in sincerity! I think we have been very much entertained here this afternoon. We had only just a few lapses from either side where they would slip into other roles and forget their stout defence of whoever they thought they were defending at the time. I think it was interesting to note that if the politicians had removed bull-baiting, bear-baiting and cockfighting the media, according to the affirmative team, would be able to substitute other blood sports for public entertainment.

We had a very stout defence of not only Denmark but also sports journalism from the negative team and I thought that was terrific. Of course, we finished on a high note where I thought the third speaker was delivering a pox on both houses. He seemed to substantiate that quite fulsomely with a number of quotes and observations. I think we should all join together in thanking both teams very much indeed for their efforts this afternoon. As to which is the winner, you will all have your own idea. You can no doubt discuss that later this afternoon over perhaps a couple of libations, which I think Mr Speaker here is facilitating in this place.

Can I just leave you with one thought and that is, as I said, with a topic like this—and all apologies to Shakespeare—something rotten in the state of Denmark, I would have thought that all of those of you who are readers of *Woman's Day* and *New Idea* would know the absolute fallacious base or premise on which that proposition was put because, with our Princess Mary in Denmark, clearly Denmark is certainly on the up and up. Nothing is rotten in Denmark. Thank you.

**Ms MALONE:** Ladies and gentlemen, please applaud again for all of the debaters and for David Hamill for moderating. Ladies and gentlemen, there is a slight program change. We will not be holding the rapporteur session this afternoon, so I would like to now invite you to take a short break. For those of you who are attending the meeting, it will commence in 15 minutes at 2.45. So if you would reassemble here at 2.45, please everybody do join us for drinks or join the Speaker and Ms Mayes for drinks in the Lucinda Bar at approximately 4 pm. We might run just a fraction early, so please be on stand-by for that. I apologise for any inconvenience that this might cause, but we will have a break now of 15 minutes and reconvene for the meetings. Thank you.

**Conference adjourned at 2.33 pm**