INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

Community and social indicators: How citizens can measure progress

An overview of social and community
indicator projects in Australia and internationally

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This paper provides a brief overview of the growth and development of community and social indicators in Australia and overseas. *Part 1* describes the history and context in which the global 'indicator movement' developed, and some of the key ideas that have driven it. *Part 2* gives a brief sketch of some current indicator projects in Australia at the local, state and national level, and *Part 3*, at the international level. In *Appendix A*, there is a more detailed review of the National Citizenship Project (NCP), an 'umbrella' community research project linking a number of organisations and indicator projects; some recent research findings from the NCP are discussed.

Part I: The context

> *The future is not a place to which we are going, it is a place we are creating. The paths to the future are not found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.* (Martha Cleary*)*
>
> *The idea of people taking charge of their own measurements of progress is a powerful and far reaching innovation that can bring about a new sense of civic engagement.*
> (Sustainable Seattle. 2000*)*

For three decades now, there has been a rapid growth in the development of community based planning projects using benchmarks and indicators to measure progress. These projects can be found in many countries and at national, regional and city level.

Typically, such projects have five features:

- they attempt to integrate economic, social and environmental goals around some overall vision of progress or well being, some 'path to the future' for that particular community;
- they set concrete goals or 'benchmarks' and develop appropriate 'indicators' to monitor progress in achieving them; some of these benchmarks and indicators are expressed in conventional policy and statistical categories; others (for example, those relating to social capital) are quite unconventional;
- the indicators and benchmarks are initiated, developed and monitored through some community participation process, sometimes across the whole community and sometimes through specialist panels with citizen participation;
- they are commonly long term (ie, over 5 years) and iterative processes;
- they have, or acquire over time, some relationship to the formal processes of governance in their community; this may vary from government support or even government initiation, to defacto acceptance as legitimate policy, or at the least, they become a political obstacle that politicians and bureaucrats have to confront.

For these reasons, many of these projects can be fairly described as 'community based planning' and as a potentially important development in democratic governance.

A 'social movement'?

In the USA and Canada alone, a recent study estimated that there are now over two hundred 'community indicator' projects under way in small towns, cities, states and provinces, from Jacksonville, Seattle and Oregon to Sacramento, Nevada and San Francisco: 'virtually a social movement' (Besleme et al. 1998). In Europe, Norway and Ireland have provided successful examples of integrated long-term planning with a strong community base, Norway with its 'Long Term Plan' developed in the 1970's, and Ireland's more recent national development plan.

In Australia, there has been a steady growth of activity in social and community indicator projects since the early 1990s, some of them drawing on and reinventing earlier movements in

community development from the 1970's. An important Senate Inquiry from 1993-95 recommended the establishment of new national indicators of well-being and citizenship. Subsequently, various applied research projects with university and community partners have tried to put these recommendations into practice. Community indicator planning projects have emerged at the local government level in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. In the past year alone, the State governments of Tasmania and Victoria have launched new state wide indicator projects, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has begun to develop new national and regional measures of progress and well-being. These projects are described in more detail below.

Origins

This remarkable growth reflects the convergence of three separate phenomena. First, it has been recognised that broad social and economic problems need community-wide solutions. 'Joined up problems' it has been said, 'need joined up solutions'. The projects in Ireland Norway, Jacksonville and Oregon were all to some degree triggered by a sense of actual or likely decline in economic and social wellbeing, and a desire to find integrated community wide solutions.

The second factor is a democratic problem. Democracy, community and citizenship have been perceived as weakening institutions, in Australia and many other industrialised nations in recent years. In the research literature, this is seen as a product of many factors: the size and complexity of government and society; globalisation and a perceived loss of autonomy in national policy; lack of trust in the main political parties; and the effects of a decade or more of government cuts in social and community infrastructure. This problem can be measured in a number of ways, in Australia and elsewhere: in voter apathy and public alienation from political processes, growing social inequality, a decline in social trust and civic participation, more corporate and commercially oriented models of governments that have brought fundamental changes in the language and culture of democracy. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of the latter is the gradual transformation of citizens into 'customers' (Saul 1997).

There is no single solution to compound problems like these, but there is some agreement on the most obvious remedies, such as:

- new local participatory processes
- an emphasis on social inclusion
- a holistic 'community health' approach, not just one based on formal equality of treatment or improved "customer service"
- the development of more meaningful and cooperative governance tasks that build social trust and stronger communities
- the need to create more open and democratic processes and forums, for resolving conflicting interests, creating greater accountability and extending opportunities for citizen participation in governance.

Better measurement of 'progress'

> *Progress to what and from where? ... the European talks of progress because by an ingenious application of some scientific acquirements he has established a society which has mistaken comfort for civilization.* (Benjamin Disraeli. 1847. 'Tancred')
>
> *When a country is as rich in GNP and as poor in social tranquillity as the United States, it makes no sense to purchase more GNP through deregulation and increased efficiency, at the expense of tranquillity. It's like a man with 24 ties and no shoes buying himself another tie.*
> (Edward Luttwak, US Centre for Strategic and International Studies)
>
> *Trying to run a complex society on a single indicator like the Gross National Product is literally like trying to fly a 747 with only one gauge on the instrument panel.*
> (Hazel Henderson. 1995. 'Paradigms in Progress')

The third and most potent ingredient has been a comprehensive challenge to the accepted ways by which government and societies have defined and measured 'progress' and 'well being'.

Debates about progress and its meaning and measurement are not new. Over 2000 years ago, Aristotle considered the definition of the 'good society' to be the central task of philosophy.

But it is more than a theoretical debate. Political economists from Hobbes to Marx have observed that 'the most powerful instrument of political authority is the power to give names and to enforce definitions' (Chorover 1979); and in western society since the Industrial Revolution, there has been no more potent idea to be defined (and thus harnessed) than the idea of progress. This idea, with its connotations of destiny and inevitability, has become almost 'the meta narrative of history' (McLintock 1992) – legitimating political power, elevating those who define and interpret it, and providing a unifying theme for the policies of nations.

Since the late 1950's, the debate about the meaning of progress has been carried on in more technical forms (such as statistics) but no less passionately, and through various phases and forums: internationally, through the United Nations, the OECD (the 'Social Indicator Project'), and the UN Development Program; and most recently, movements in at least six developed nations to develop general national indicators of wellbeing, such as the GPI, or Genuine Progress Indicator. (Eckersley 1998)

The prime mover in this debate has been a growing concern about the influence of economic output indicators, most notably the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as proxy measurements of human progress. (The GDP is essentially the total value of all goods and services exchanged for money in the national economy).

In the post-War era, statistical indicators have been increasingly influential in public policy: they 'frame debates, steer planning, affect budgets and motivate action. In an increasingly complex world, the search for indicators must be a continuous one' (Redefining Progress 1998: 42). Statistical indicators can become a kind of proxy measurement of society's values and goals, "structural DNA codes that become the key drives of economies and technological choices" (Henderson 1996).

Indicators like the GDP have become key instruments of modern political authority because of their power to provide authoritative definitions of 'progress' for whole communities. They therefore raise democratic issues (what should be measured? who should decide?) as much as technical issues (what does it in fact measure? how accurate is it?)

Opponents of the GDP have criticised it as both misleading (ie, a poor measure of the actual condition of the economy and the society) and excessively powerful (ie, too influential in shaping our everyday understanding of progress and well being).

These concerns came originally from many separate quarters – environmentalists, the women's movement, developing countries, human rights activists and even renegade economists. Over time, they began to converge into a powerful and broadly based movement.

The core argument that most of these groups agree on is simple: measuring the market value of economic production tells us very little about the broader health of the community or the environment, and nothing about the social costs of what has been produced in the economy, or about its usefulness or sustainability. As John Ralston Saul explains, 'steel producers have no incentive to cut down on pollution, insofar as they do not pay the laundry or health bills to which it gives rise. As a result the market mechanism does not accurately serve one of the purposes that it purports to fulfill – namely, presenting society with an accurate assessment of the relative costs of producing things'. (Saul 1997)

Robert Kennedy's eloquent critique three decades ago became the launching pad for one of the best known community indicator projects in the USA, Sustainable Seattle, and is still valid today. Kennedy highlighted the fundamental weakness of the GNP as a measure of 'progress'. It cannot distinguish between 'growth' (an increase in quantity) and 'development' (an improvement in quality) (AtKisson 2000).

> *The gross national product includes air pollution and advertising for cigarettes, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors, and jails for the people who break them. ... The gross national product includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm and missiles with nuclear warheads.... And if the gross national product includes all this, there is much that it does not comprehend. It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials.... The gross national product measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile; and it can tell us everything about America -- except whether we are proud to be Americans. (AtKisson 1995)*

It is now widely agreed that indicators like the GDP need to be set in a broader, more balanced framework of measurement, which more accurately reflects both the democratic aspirations of people and the things they value, as well as the inherently complex and multi-faceted nature of social, economic and environmental wellbeing. To do this we would need new measures and new processes.

We would need, first, to include some important measures of social and community wellbeing that are currently overlooked in our national accounts: for example, social capital, environmental sustainability, community health, participation and citizenship, equity and social justice, and even the health of democracy itself. (In the UK and Scandinavia, indicators for democracy and participation, including honesty and openness in government and the bureaucracy, have been developed as part of broader 'social audits'.) Only by putting all these indicators together, these different dimensions of a complex whole, can we build an accurate measure of a good society.

We will also need to develop new and more democratic processes, because there is more at stake here than the accuracy of measurement tools. 'More and more, the process of choosing our measures of progress must be a collaborative process, drawing on the creativity of the whole community' (Redefining Progress 1998: 42). Ultimately, as both Hazel Henderson and John Ralston Saul have argued, the "democratising (of) indicators of human progress and sustainable development ... is essential to empowering citizens". (Henderson 1996; and see Saul 1997: 152).

Community indicators

While some communities develop indicators within the framework of sustainability, others use the framework of healthy communities or quality of life. Whatever the framework, project organisers - whether in local governments, the business sector, or community based organisations – are discovering that the process of developing indicators can bring many different sectors of the community together, foster new alliances, provide all citizens with a better compass for understanding community problems and assets, and be used to drive community change.   (National Resource Management, Massey University, NZ)

Many communities, inspired by the goal of achieving long term health and sustainability, are making good strides toward finding better measures of progress ... By convening citizens to consider how to measure their overall wellbeing, the community as a whole is spurred to create new visions of the future, develop new working relationships across old boundaries, and define its assets, problems, and opportunities in new ways   (Redefining Progress 1997).

Small communities need good measures of progress as much as nations do. The value of economic production may be one such measure for most communities; but a much better view of the overall health of the community can be had from looking more widely: at schools and parks; the state of local rivers and lakes; the quality of neighbourhoods; the kind of jobs the local economy generates; the level of participation by local citizens in voluntary activities; the degree of trust they have in their neighbours and their local council or government; the percentage of young people who are in work, or who are seriously depressed or leave for the cities or interstate; and even the condition of the main street. All these are actual indicators in some of the US projects.

Community indicators are an attempt to put ideas about progress and participation into action at the local or regional level. They are essentially tools for community development.

The task of developing community indicators, if done properly, provides an opportunity for meaningful participation in governance; citizens come together to decide what measures symbolise increased social well-being for their communities. Indicators require that 'people with many different backgrounds work together toward a common goal, one that they can all agree on, despite political or cultural differences. In fact, creatively drawing on their diversity – in professions, backgrounds, and life experiences – is what makes the effort successful' (Redefining Progress 1997: 8).

The process might begin with people joining together to articulate their ideas about what kind of society or community they would like to live in, in the future. This broad vision is then worked though into a series of concrete goals in key fields, which then need to be ordered in importance. The next stage is to define the standards that must be met for the achievement of the goals (the 'benchmarks') and the specific measures or statistics (the 'indicators') that will demonstrate progress in achieving them. The link between benchmarks and indicators is crucial: just as a traveller needs both a map and a compass, so communities need to where they are going (the benchmarks or 'map') and where they are now (the indicators or 'compass').

Community indicators and benchmarks are necessarily context-specific. In the process of developing them, citizens will have to select, from many possible choices, those that best capture the aspirations of their community. The key value of developing community indicators is that citizens work together to determine goals for their future and by participating in measuring progress toward those goals, they become better informed about the resources required and constraints confronted.

In these tasks citizens will often work with local government and perhaps with experts of some kind, but crucially, it will be a collaborative, not a dependent, relationship. There is usually no guarantee that community indicators developed in this way will be adopted into formal policy and governance processes, but by their legitimacy they will create powerful pressure for institutional systems to be bought into the service of community priorities.

Technocratic panacea or democratic process?

> *The indicators a society chooses to report to itself about are surprisingly powerful. They reflect collective values and inform collective decisions. A nation that keeps a watchful eye on its salmon run or the safety of its streets makes different choices than does a nation that is only paying attention to its GNP. The idea of citizens choosing their own indicators is something new under the sun - something intensely democratic'.*
>
> Sustainable Seattle. 1998. Indicators of Sustainable Community. Seattle, USA.

Community benchmarks and indicators should not be seen either as a new management tool nor as an end in themselves: they are ideally a means to improve democracy, community outcomes and governance.

The critical lesson from the US projects is that the process *is* the product. Successful community indicator projects should aim to create lasting changes in values and capacities, in the community and in government agencies. The outcomes should be, not just the benchmarks and indicators themselves, but increased community activity (local projects and strategies,

committees and meetings etc.); improved standards in government processes (why not 'world best practice' standards in community consultation and in whole-of-government and trans-disciplinary planning?); increased awareness and understanding (of government, and community priorities); and over time, an enlarged capacity for participation and thus more empowered communities. These larger goals are more complex and resource intensive than the narrow technical task of identifying specific benchmarks and indicators, but in the long run they are more important. Without attention to the processes, and to the underlying problems that benchmarks and indicators point to, there is a risk that the benchmarks and indicators end up becoming a new form of managerial tyranny or a mere political gimmick. At the end of the day, 'measuring progress is not the same as making it'. (Besleme et al. 1998: 245).

(An excellent guide to these issues is 'The Community Indicators Handbook: Measuring Progress Toward Health and Sustainable Communities', published by Redefining Progress, San Francisco.)

Local government

> *It is particularly important ... to avoid the pitfall of defining citizen roles too narrowly. It is true that by viewing citizens as customers, governments can enhance service quality. Yet, governments that view citizens only as customers lose tremendous leverage available by engaging private individuals and organizations to act in concert with government to achieve community goals. Communities can benefit by making a greater place for citizens in building the 'vision' or strategic direction for a community both in terms of problems to be minimised as well as aspirations to be striven for, and by extending a wider invitation for citizens or nongovernmental groups to act as partners to help bring about desired community results in partnerships whether by self-help, service delivery or volunteer efforts. Such efforts hold promise not only of building legitimacy of community measurement and improvement efforts in the view of citizens, but offer the promise of producing better results by mobilising a broader pool of resources and community support to go efforts.*
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> Epstein, P., Wray, L. et al. 2000. 'Engaging Citizens in Achieving Results that Matter: a Model for Effective 21st Century Governance'. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Citizens League
>
> *What unites us is that we are all citizens of this great city ... We make it great, and democratic, and humane, by playing our parts in this web of relationships, and by building and strengthening the network that we call community. Government cannot make a city good, nor compel people to act for the common good. Government can punish negative acts, and can encourage, exhort, educate and inspire people. But then citizens must choose to work for that good, and government must welcome and facilitate that participation, and that partnership*
>
> Seattle City Council Member Richard Conlin, in Sustainable Seattle, 1998, Indicators of Sustainable Community 1998, Seattle: 5

The idea of community indicators as a positive tool for community planning and local democracy is very relevant for local government in Australia at the present time.

The pointy end of the 'big policies' of Federal and State governments in recent years has been felt in smaller communities. Privatisation and small government, economic restructure and competition policy, corporate government and the new managerialism: they have mostly hit hardest in local communities and at local government level. In many communities, they have undermined community services and infrastructure, weakened local economies, and brought the flight of young people and the loss of local identity. For local governments, they have had multiple effects. On then the democratic side, there have been reductions in municipal powers and functions, forced amalgamations and increases in planning interventions, and the alienation of local citizens transformed into customers, but customers often left with fewer services and remedies. On the management side, there have been rate caps, income reductions and relentless pressure to achieve greater efficiencies through compulsory competitive tendering, 'business plans', performance indicators etc.

It is perhaps ironical that at the very time that many local communities have been stripped of powers and resources, and in some cases of their confidence and their identity, their local

governments have been increasingly forced by state governments to take more responsibility for community planning. State local government laws now commonly require Councils to develop municipal plans, social and environmental strategies and 'customer satisfaction' surveys.

But at the same time, local government is also obliged, at least morally, or so it is argued, to take a stronger political role in restoring the health of democracy *on behalf of citizens*. As we saw earlier, many commentators believe that the solution to a generally weak democracy lies in strengthening local democratic processes. If this is true, it would appear to add another heavy burden to the sagging shoulders of Australian local governmnent.

How well fitted is Australian local government for these demanding roles pressed upon it by circumstances? This is not a question that can be confidently answered. The democratic record of local government has been more one of dependency and lost opportunity, than innovation and community leadership. On the other hand, despite the general weakening of public confidence in government and democratic processes, local government still enjoys more citizen support than other levels; and it is still the most accessible avenue of political participation for ordinary citizens. It has been rightly said that weakening local government affects democracy at every level; logically the reverse should be equally true.

Putting all these trends together suggests that there is a compelling need for local governments to find processes to re-engage local citizens in democratic processes to rebuild local communities. Community indicators can be one important way to do this.

Part 2: Social and community indicators in Australia

In the last decade there has been a steady build-up of social and community indicator projects in Australia. This Part briefly summarises a number of these projects.

It aims to show a representative sample of activities at various levels, so as to give a sense of the breadth of these projects and the links between them. It isn't intended as a definitive survey, or a history, of the field; if it were, it would necessarily include many other similar and earlier community development processes. Inevitably the selection reflects the author's personal experiences[1].

What it does suggest, however, is a growing interest in a more community-based approach to the development of planning, policy goals and measures of progress and well-being that is reflected at different levels (national, state, local and sectoral) and from traditionally separate policy sectors: social, environmental, economic and governance.

National projects

Senate Inquiry into National Citizenship Indicators

In 1993 the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee set up an unusual and little known inquiry: to examine the feasibility of establishing a national system to measure, and set standards for, the well-being of Australian citizens. Why this particular committee? The answer lies partly in the committee's interest in citizenship and the possible entrenchment of well being standards in the laws or constitution of Australia.

The National Citizenship Indicators inquiry ran for three years and provided the first and most important national forum for the discussion of the idea of national progress measures, holding hearings in various states and receiving an unusually diverse range of submissions.

It produced a comprehensive discussion paper in 1995 (Salvaris 1995) and a final report the following year (Senate 1996) which urged the Federal government as a matter of priority to establish such a national framework, commission the Australian Bureau of Statistics to undertake preliminary work on the indicators, and support collaborative research on the theme, such as the NCP project below.

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[1] The author would be very pleased to receive details of any Australian indicator projects which readers of this paper are aware of and think significant, at local, state or national level. We are currently trying to compile a more comprehensive survey. See contact details in this paper.

The National Citizenship Project

The National Citizenship Project has been a long running community research project exploring related issues of citizenship and democracy, social indicators and community development. Initiated in 1995 by Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne (SUT) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), and with funding from the Australian Research Council and the Myer Foundation, it has brought together various partners in the community and from other universities including Deakin, RMIT, and the universities of New South Wales and Tasmania.

The project's broad goal has been to develop benchmarks and indicators for a 'good society' (nationally) and 'good communities' (locally) and to do so in ways that combine 'best practice' standards (such as human rights) with a strong democratic, community development and citizen participation element (i.e, communities and citizens deciding on the goals and priorities that they think important for their community) It is thus both a social research, and a community development and networking, project.

Appendix A gives a more detailed account of the ideas behind the project, the models it has examined and its strategies for creating greater community ownership of social and 'progress' indicators. It includes a summary of some key research findings of the NCP (e.g., on community views about social priorities and benchmarks) and some interesting tables (including a draft index of national 'social health' which compares Australia to other OECD countries).

Measuring National Progress conference and OzQoL

In 1998, a major national conference on how we define and measure national 'progress' was jointly convened in Canberra by the CSIRO, Swinburne University of Technology and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The conference brought together policy makers, researchers and community activists in economics, social policy and the environment. It was a great success and led to an important national publication 'Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better' (Eckersley 1998).

Like many others who attended the Measuring National Progress conference, the MNP convenor and report editor Richard Eckersley wanted to see some continuing project or activity to carry forward the enthusiasm and insights it had generated. Eckersley is based at the Australian National University's National Centre for Epidemiology and Public Health, and last year he convened a national workshop of indicator research and policy specialists to push forward ideas of measuring progress and the quality of life in Australia. From this emerged OzQol, the Australia chapter of the international association for quality of life research, with Deakin University's internationally respected quality of life researcher Prof. Bob Cummins as convenor. OzQol has agreed to act as sponsor for the NCP of a national survey of indicator specialists, that will help construct a national progress and well-being index around the framework that evolves from the NCP national survey and best practice models.

The Genuine Progress Indicator

A decade ago, a disgruntled environmental economist from the World Bank (Herman Daly) pioneered the development of a new national index of 'sustainable economic welfare' which later became the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). The GPI essentially works by making a series of adjustments and deductions to the GDP, and so aims to give a more accurate picture of economic, social and environmental well-being, and the real costs of development. It takes into account negative factors like environmental damage, the costs of crime and unemploy-

ment, and other external and unmeasured social and economic costs of what the GDP counts as positive economic activity; but it also adds in other factors like household work that are left out because they have no 'market value'. In 1998 Australia joined a growing number of European and American countries which had developed their own GPI, when Clive Hamilton and Hugh Saddler of the Australia Institute produced an Australian version of the GPI (Hamilton 1998). This has been regularly maintained, and gives Australians a more truthful picture of the costs and benefits of economic growth which is often treated as a largely unqualified positive in politics and public policy.

ABS National Project 'Measuring Australia's Progress'

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has been interested for many years in improving the criteria used to measure progress and well-being at a national level. It was an active participant in the OECD 'Social Indicator' project in the 1970's and early 1980s, and wrote an important discussion paper on the theme in 1989 (Giles 1989). The Senate Inquiry provided some stimulus to this work. The ABS is interested in indicators that reflect concepts like social capital, participation, community, sustainable development and environmental well-being – important, some would say essential, notions that are often left out of traditional national progress measurement systems.

The Bureau has been closely monitoring international and national developments, and was a generous funder of the 'Measuring Progress' conference. For the past two years, with the federal Department of Family and Community Services, ABS has been trialling new well-being measures, advised by a community and academic committee, the Living Standards Reference Group. A special ABS Branch (Analysis Branch) has now been set up to explore 'cross cutting' issues that don't fall into traditional categories, and a new project titled 'Measuring Australia's Progress' has been started at ABS Canberra in February 2000. Dennis Trewin, the ABS's recently appointed chief, is setting up a national Reference Committee for the project, and aims initially to publish 10-15 'headline' or key indicators of progress and well-being (economic, social and environmental) as the start of a wider process.

National Sustainability Indicators 18/9/00

The Commonwealth Government, along with all State and Territory governments is currently assessing a set of National Headline Sustainability Indicators, for use during the OECD's forthcoming environmental review of Australia. These have been developed during the last 18 months, and have had input from a range of stakeholders within and outside government. Those indicators are currently available for public comment, and the views of anyone who has a concern would be more than welcomed. The discussion paper is located at the link below.

Contact: Anthony Marinac, Assistant Manager, Environment Policy Section
Commonwealth Department of Industry Science and Resources. Phone: (02) 6213 7863
E-mail: Anthony.Marinac@isr.gov.au

The Australian Collaboration: Australian NGO's common policies and well-being measures: 28/8/00

Australia's leading national community organisations have recently joined to form 'The Australian Collaboration', to work together around a number of common social, cultural and environmental issues. These groups include: The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF); The Australian Consumers Association (ACA); The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC); The Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA); and The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA). The Collaboration's first project aims to establish a case for developing comprehensive national well-being measurements in social, economic and environmental reporting; and another key task is to establish a set of common positions for Australia's future to be part of the next federal election.

Contact: Prof. David Yencken, Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, Australia. E-mail: davidy@duvaust.com.au

State level projects

Tasmania Together: a long term community based state plan

Last year Tasmanian Premier Jim Bacon launched a far reaching project to develop a long term (20 year) plan for Tasmania's development. The idea of a state development plan isn't itself new, but other features of Tasmania's project make it unique in Australia. It is to be community based and 'community owned'; it will integrate economic, social and environmental well-being; it will not be merely indicative or 'aspirational', but designed to set real budget and policy priorities for all government agencies. Most importantly, it is to be anchored in a set of new and comprehensive, community-based indicators of progress and well-being, to ensure that it reflects the views of the Tasmanian community, and that its success can be openly monitored. By any measure, this is a remarkable commitment for a government, and a big leap forward in the practical application of community-based progress indicators. Swinburne University's NCP team (in partnership with the University of Tasmania) was given the task of advising the Tasmanian government on the best model and process for developing the new indicators. (Salvaris et al 2000)

Following Tasmania's pioneering commitment, four other States (NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA) have expressed interest in the Tasmanian model. Some State Premiers have visited Tasmania and asked their own departments to examine the possibilities of replicating the Tasmanian model.

ACT's State of the Territory Report: quality of life in Canberra

In 1999 the ACT government became the first state or territory government to publish an official well-being audit that includes a wide range of indicators of economic, social and environmental well being. The report, titled 'State of the Territory Report: Improving our

Quality of Life in Canberra' is user friendly, and not merely government propaganda, high-lighting areas both 'where we are doing better' and 'where we need to do better'. The report aims to provide 'a more rounded picture' of the quality of life in the ACT, and it builds on two initiatives undertaken in partnership with the ACT Council of Social Service, the Quality of Life Project and an inquiry into poverty in the ACT. (ACT 1999)

Victorian Government Social Benchmarks and Indicators

In March 2000, newly elected Premier Steve Bracks convened the 'Growing Victoria To-gether' summit, and a broad cross section of business, political, union and community leaders reached agreement on major initiatives to be developed by the state government. One of these are especially important for state-based community indicators: 'That the Government develop a consultative process to (a) set targets and benchmarks including health and well-being indi-cators, to measure performance in meeting social goals and (b) to audit existing levels of access to and adequacy of services and progress on other social goals'.

In August the first stage in the development of the Victorian state progress indicators was launched with the commissioning of a consultant report on models, implementation mecha-nisms and community consultation; this report was completed in December and is now available to be down-loaded at: http://www.sisr.net/programcsp/csppublishedpapers.htm

Queensland: State social development framework 13-10-00

The Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland is examining a whole-government social policy planning and evalution framework and agenda for Queensland, aimed to include social and quality of life issues, and economic well-being. The present Queensland government has already established a Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility, soon after it came to office. This requires it to report annually to Parliament on progress. It sets out seven priority areas. Currently the DP is wanting to develop the process further, and develop more detailed goals and performance and outcome indicators. It is interested in work done in other states (Tasma-nia, Victoria).

Contact: Mr Tim Redell, Social Policy Section, Policy Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet, PO Box 185, Brisbane (Albert Street), Queensland 4001. Phone: 07 3225 8052 Email: Tim.Reddel@premiers.qld.government.au

ABS Victoria: Regional Well-being Indicators for Victoria

The Victorian Regional Office of the ABS this year began a major project to develop indica-tors of regional well-being in Victoria. It will involve significant community input and consultation with the 'experts': the citizens, community groups and local governments of re-gional Victoria. The importance of this project is its focus on what makes for the health and wellbeing of *communities*, especially small and rural communities; obviously this means something more than the sum total of the health or wealth of individuals. In this project, the ABS will work with regional centres such as the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communi-ties at LaTrobe University, Bendigo.

Victoria: VLGA Victorian Indicators Network 30/8/00

The Victorian Local Governance Association has established a co-ordinating committee and network for Victorian government and non-government bodies interested in developing better indicators of progress and well-being, whether for the purposes of policy development, governance, or improved citizenship and democracy. Present membership includes: local and state governments bodies; environmental groups; community and welfare bodies; universities; and the ABS Victorian Office.

Contact: Ms Sally Isaac, VLGA, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000. Phone: 9654 0033

Community and local government projects

Community Indicators and Local Democracy: Victoria, NSW

Over the next three years, five local governments in Victoria and New South Wales will be working with Swinburne and NSW universities in a project aimed to put the idea of community based indicators of progress and well-being into practice in different local communities, city and rural, ranging from 30,00 to 170,000 people. The participating local governments are: Moreland, Surf Coast and Geelong (Victoria); and Waverley and Queanbeyan (NSW).

Here the key questions are: what does democracy mean at the local level, and how can we strengthen it? how can local citizens be actively involved in defining and monitoring the key goals and policies for a good community? To ensure the maximum 'cross-fertilisation', the COSS network and the peak national bodies for local government ALGA (Australian Local Government Association) and LGCSAA (the Local Government Community Services Association of Australia) are partners in the project and are sponsoring presentations at their state and national conferences etc. (the associations in SA, NSW and Tasmania have already done so, WA will do so early next year). Two SA Councils, and two more in NSW, have asked to join the project. Funders of the project are the Australian Research Council, the local government partners, and the ALGA.

Contact: Mike Salvaris, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology. Phone (03) 9214 8837; E-mail: msalvaris@swin.edu.au

Benchmarking Local Community Development: the LGCSAA

The Local Government Community Services Association of Australia (LGCSAA) has already made benchmarks for community development a national issue for its members in every State. Last year the LGCSAA produced a major report entitled 'Working together to develop our communities' (LGCSAA 1999), one of the best step by step guides to the issues and processes available in Australia.

NSW: Measuring the Quality of Life in Newcastle

The Australia Institute is working with Newcastle City Council on this project. Twenty seven 'local indicators' of the quality of life in Newcastle have been developed by a community based working group over nine months. The Newcastle indicators include: clean beaches; quality of community space; air quality; appropriate educational opportunities for all; unemployment levels; appropriate transport networks; conservation of local native plants and animals; resource consumption; availability of appropriate housing for all; community participation in decision making; social support networks; perception of safety; income levels; and the diversity of employment and industry sectors. The project launched its first report in May 2000. (Australia Institute, Newcastle City Council 2000).

Contact: Ms Therese Postma, Social Planner, Newcastle Council

Tasmania: Glenorchy Community Plan

Glenorchy (Tasmania) is an inner Hobart community of over 40,000 with one of the most interesting local governments in Australia. With a strong tradition of innovation and community participation, the city is a regular winner of local government awards. Glenorchy is currently developing a 10 year integrated plan (social, environmental and economic) driven by a community vision based on extensive local meetings. The plan is now at the point where specific indicators and benchmarks will be developed and a panel of local citizens ('Team Glenorchy') has been set up to oversee this process. (Glenorchy City 2000)

NSW: Sutherland Shire "State of the Shire Report'

Sutherland Shire in South Sydney, with a population of over 200,000, produces a 'State of the Shire' report which monitors well-being in 12 diverse 'life spheres': Community Safety; Community Issues; Decision Making; Economy; Education; Environment; Health; Housing; Land Use; Leisure; Neighbourhoods; Transport. These are drawn from a 1996 Community Priorities survey. The report aims to provide a baseline measurement of well-being to monitor and direct the long term 'Vision for the Shire' plan.

NSW: Measuring Social Capital in the City of Wollongong

Wollongong City Council launched this project recently to try to find out more about the health and well-being of its community and the part that social capital (the extent of trust, the strength of local networks and voluntary activity etc) plays in it. The Council is carrying out a survey in three suburbs, using indicators developed in an important 1997 study of five NSW communities by Jenny Onyx and Paul Bullen of the University of Technology, Sydney.

South Australia: Onkaparinga Council Strategic Indicators

In 1999 the City of Onkaparinga began the 'Strategic Indicators Project', aimed to develop community indicators for 'the ongoing measurement of the progress and sustainability of a local government area in terms of social, economic and environmental parameters'. The project was designed to have wider application to Councils in South Australia. All SA local governments, metro and non-metro, were invited to participate: 32 out of 60 have registered an interest, and about 15 have been active partners. The project has produced an excellent discussion paper and a practical guide to developing indicators.

Contact: Lisa Florian, Strategic Indicators Project Officer, City of Onkaparinga. P.O. Box 1, Noarlunga Centre, SA 5168. Ph: 08 8384 0562; Fax: 08 8384 0713
E-mail: lisflo@onkaparinga.sa.government.au

Victoria: Moonee Ponds Council: Democracy Plan

In 1998 Moonee Valley Council commissioned a plan for community participation which became 'the Democracy Plan'. The Council has established a set of goals or indicators for democracy that include democracy in: decision making; partnerships; education; accountability; and open government.

Contact: Moonee Valley Council. Phone 03 9243 8888.

Victoria: Hume Council: Social justice Charter and community research:

Hume Council has developed a Social Justice Charter and carried out research on community and social justice, leading to the development of social justice indicators. Contact: Mayor Gary Jungwirth and Social Planner Margarita Caddick ph. 9205 2376.

Victoria: Port Phillip Council, Melbourne (29/8/00)

Has developed a range of community planning and local democracy initiatives at local and neighbourhood level. (Details to be provided).

Victoria: Wyndham Council

Wyndham Council has developed a community based 'vision' planning process.
Contact: Corporate Planner, Emma Williams: e-mail: Emma.Williams@ wyndham.vic.gov.au
(update: 29/8/00)

N-E Victoria

Cr. Don Chambers, Rutherglen's Mayor, chairs a project to develop economic, social and environmental indicators for Victoria's north east region.
Contact: Jason Alexandra 9431 3426. (update: 29/8/00)

Victoria: Building a Future for the Country (BFC) Project

This project focuses on the cooperative economic and community development of five central Victorian towns (Newstead, Maldon, Talbot, Wedderburn and Dunolly, with two others joining later (Inglewood and Carisbrook). The project began in 1998 with a series of community consultations and town meetings, initiated by the Bendigo Employment Council, initially aimed at creating a regional alliance to strengthen each community's ability to achieve economic and employment outcomes.

In partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities (Bendigo) the aims of the project were later expanded to include: Building community; Population and participation; Employment industry and tourism development; Environmental sustainability; Improving infrastructure. Local taskforces have been established in each town which are actively developing projects on themes such as tourism development, youth involvement, education and training (i.e., shearing school), festivals and events, with some 30 funding applications in train. At the regional level, thematic working groups are bringing people from across the 7 towns together to find ways to add value and to build strength in unity. Common themes include: Business and economic initiatives; Project Management; Community Development; Youth, Streetscape and town identity.

Dr Maureen Rogers of CSRC is working on community development, with a group representing all seven communities. Her work is focussing on three issues: triple bottom line accounting; community revitalisation and capacity building; and the development of community-based progress indicators of wellbeing, environmental health, and economic security. These indicators are a key component of the strategy for sustainable community development.

Contact: Dr Maureen Rogers, Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities, LaTrobe University, Bendigo. Phone 03 5444 7523

Western Australia: Performance measurement and community development in WA Local government

This new collaborative project explores the use of performance measurement in five (4 metro, 1 rural) WA local governments.

In WA, as in other states, there has been debate about the nature and purpose of 'performance measurement' in local government. In recent years the emphasis has been on developing Performance Measures more as a tool for management, 'customer service' and quality control (e.g., through formal 'Key Performance Indicators' or KPI's); rather than as a means to set goals for, and measure, community development and improved local democracy: for example, where local citizens are involved in setting goals and indicators for the well-being of their community, working with their local government. (The project's sub-title 'Dancing On Shifting Sands' reflects the dilemma facing community workers when they attempt to meet the expectations of their communities, management and elected members, and cope with rapid changes in structure and management styles.)

The project was initiated in June 2000 by the Institute for the Service Professions at Edith Cowan University and its industry partner, the Local Government Community Services Association of WA. In addition to the five Councils involved, other project partners include the WA Department of Local Government and the WA Municipal Association (WAMA).

The first stage of the project involved interviews with local government executive managers and elected members to gauge their understanding of community development and community services, and the level of importance placed on performance measurement: what is measured, how and why. The second stage (currently underway) involves community workers in each of the five councils recording what performance measurement indicators are in place, who uses them and why. It is expected that strategies to assist community workers to develop meaningful performance measures will be presented at the LGCSA National Conference in March 2001.

Contact: May Carter, Project Manager, School of International Cultural and Community Studies, Edith Cowan University, WA. Phone: 08 9400 5687. E-mail: m.carter@ecu.edu.au

Queensland: Goodna (Ipswich) Community Service Integration Project. 26/2/01

This project is primarily focussed on improving the integration of community services in the Ipswich (Q) suburb of Goodna. It is funded by two state departments, Housing; and Families and Youth. Goodna is an old established area on the outer edge of the large municipality of Ipswich (population of around 200-250,000 people). Ipswich Council is a key participant, with the Council CEO chairing the project group.

The project team is keen to expand the project's development more along community development, community planning and participation lines. It is being substantially supported by the State government, as a possible model for wider service and community development improvements in Queensland.

Contact: Geoff Woolcock, University of Queensland. Community Services and research centre, Ipswich Campus, University of Queensland. Phone 07 33 811534. E-mail: g.woolcock@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au

Policy sector projects

Health: VicHealth's Victorian 'Wellness Index'

VicHealth, Victoria's dynamic health promotion agency, has had a long term interest in the links between good health and good communities. For over a decade the international evidence for these links has been growing steadily, and VicHealth CEO Rob Moodie has been at the centre of the issue through his work in developing countries, with the World Health Organisation in Geneva, and his interest in indicators. VicHealth's new 3-year 'Strategic Directions' plan includes a major commitment to develop a 'Wellness Index' for Victoria, which will provide a powerful new input into both the Victorian and the national projects for measuring well-being.

Justice: Law Institute Indicators of Justice

How can we measure the quality of justice? This was no easy question when it was most famously asked (about 'mercy', to be exact) by Portia in Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice', and it hasn't got any easier in the intervening years, if you talk to the Law Institute of Victoria. LIV Strategic Research Director Pam Wilson has herself had an impressive research record in human rights, equal opportunity and applied social policy, and was impressed with the 'Measuring Progress' approach. She is now working on the design of a project to develop indicators of justice which would examine issues such as costs, accessibility, understanding of rights and equal treatment.

Part 3: International social/community indicators projects

- Extensive listings and links are available through social and community indicator network web-sites such as Redefining Progress <rprogress.org>]
- Major projects are listed by name only in Section A below, with further details provided in some cases in section B

A. Main projects (summary)

USA

- Eugene, Oregon: Deliberative Democracy
- Jacksonville, Florida: Quality of Life in Jacksonville
- Truckee Meadows, New Jersey: The Quality of Life in the Truckee Meadows
- Orlando, Florida: Healthy Community Initiative of Greater Orlando
- (Alan AtKisson: Compass Index of Sustainability)
- Minnesota Milestones
- Florida Benchmarks
- Sustainable Seattle
- Oregon Shines/Oregon Benchmarks
- Vermont: The Social Well-being of Vermonters
- The Progress Project
- National Civic League Community Services Program for community change and development
- ISQOLS (US) (details Pt. B)
- USA: Citizen Driven Government Performance: US; 29/9/00 (details Pt. B)
- US Citizens League (see below)

Canada

- Alberta: Alberta Measuring Up
- GPI Atlantic
- Canada Well-being Measurement Act (details Pt. B)
- Canadian Index of Social Health: 4/9/00 (details Pt. B)
- CQOL: Asking Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life (see below)

Europe

- European System of Social Indicators: 19/9/00 (Pt. B)
- Norwegian Long Term Plan

B. Details of selected projects

Canada Well-being Measurement Act

On 5th April 2000, the Canadian Parliament passed the first reading of the 'Canada Well-being Measurement Act', a private members bill of Mr Joe Jordan MP. The bill provides for a legislative framework for the development and annual publication of a set of 'sustainable indicators in relation to our society, our economy and our environment'. It proposes a community advisory committee, the involvement of Statistics Canada, and the development of both detailed indicators in all key areas of progress and well-being and composite indices. These would be produced by an independent Commissioner and published in an annual report to Parliament.

Canada: Canadian Index of Social Health: 4/9/00

Canada since 1997 has had an Index of Social Health for Canada. Based on the US SHI (developed by Marc Miringoff of Fordham University), it was developed by the Applied Research Branch of the Strategic Policy Division of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

Reference: Brinks, S. and Zeesman, A. 1997. 'Measuring Social Wellbeing: an Index of Social Health for Canada'. Ottawa, Human Resources Development Canada . Research paper R-97- 9E

'Asking Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life':

The Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) is convening a citizen-based project to set up national quality of life indicators. The project's title is 'Asking Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life'.

The rationale for the project is that 'While there is much activity on quality of life indicators in Canada, there is no initiative underway of national scope that seeks input from citizens. CPRN is seeking to fill that void. It is leading and working with a Steering Committee representing a broad cross-section of organizations interested in developing a set of national indicators to track Canada's progress in quality of life, through a citizen engagement process'.

The project's goal is 'to create a prototype set of indicators which reflects the range of issues that truly matter to citizens. The indicators will also help create a common language for dialogue across the public, private and voluntary sectors, and thus lead to a more balanced debate on public priorities across social, economic, environmental and other dimension'.

The inspiration for the project came from a 'Leaders' Forum' convened by the Public Policy forum in June 1999 (aimed at) 'building collaboration between the voluntary sector and business and the voluntary sector and governments. The leaders concluded in June that they needed a 'common language' to gauge the progress of society..':

> 'there is a growing sense that traditional measures of economic performance such as GDP, employment and income data do not capture the full story of what is happening

in society. This has provoked a desire to monitor the state of social and economic well-being of society. To be legitimate, societal indicators require the explicit involvement of citizens to determine what matters to them. Then experts can try to devise the measures that citizens need. While there is much activity on quality of life indicators in Canada, there is no project that is national in scope, nor is there one that seeks input from citizens'.

Source: Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) www.cprn.com

USA: Life quality indicators predict political results: 9-9-00

ISQOLS, the International Society for Quality of Life Studies, runs a network for Quality of Life researchers. Recently, Prof. Michael Hagerty, of the University of California Davis, CA released a research report demonstrating dramatically the importance of well-being and QoL indicators for politicians, even the most cynical and short-term. This showed that QoL indicators tend to be better predictors of voter behaviour than political polls.

Ignoring polls that had placed George Bush ahead of Al Gore by up to 10 percentage points in the US Presidential election, and relying on his studies of American citizens responses to QoL polling, Hagerty correctly predicted in June that Gore would pull ahead of his Republican rival by 2 percentage points, as he did in September. As Hagerty explained it: 'My research shows polls don't predict presidential elections well a month or two before the vote -- with an average error of eight percent in June and declining to about two percent near the election. I used my background as a market researcher to develop an index of "citizen satisfaction" with the governing party. If citizens' quality of life has increased during the last four years, then voters will reward the governing party with another term'.

"My method takes President Clinton's maxim, 'It's the economy, stupid,' and adds to it other elements of quality of life that citizens value," Hagerty says. Based on the relationship between popular vote since 1972 and changes in personal income, violent crime and household inequality, Hagerty found voters consider the economy most, then closing gaps in inequality and changes in violent crime.

Regarding this year's election, Hagerty says, "It's not just that the economy has improved by 10 percent in the last four years, but also that crime has declined by 16 percent and that the gap between rich and poor is narrowing. "These are fundamentals that voters tend to reward, because they improve life for all citizens," he adds.

Hagerty's statistical analysis correctly forecast six of the seven presidential elections since 1972. He is a director of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies and chairs the society's committee developing indexes.

Source: Media release by Michael Hagerty, 7/9/00
Contact: Michael Hagerty, Graduate School of Management, One Shields Ave, University of California Davis, CA (530)752-7619. E-mail: mrhagerty@ucdavis.edu

Editor's note (10/11/00): With the US Presidential elections deadlocked, the jury are still out on this one!!

USA: Citizen Driven Government Performance: US; 29/9/00

The Citizen Driven Government Performance project funded by the large US Sloan Foundation aims to assess and improve 'how local governments perform their broad mission of maintaining and improving the conditions in the communities they serve'. Working through the Centre for Public Productivity at Rutgers University, the project focuses on the cities of Dayton, Ohio and Montclair, New Jersey. Its goal is to develop and lasting processes that involve community stakeholders in assessing performance and influencing how government service can be made more responsive to community needs and priorities.

Europe: European System of Social Indicators: 19/9/00

The establishment of the European Union had led to an expansion of comparative social indicators research and social reporting. The EU's Maastricht Treaty provides that improvement of living conditions and the quality of life of member states is one of the main goals of the EU. In 1999 (?) the 'EuReporting' project was initiated, aimed to create a European system of social reporting and a European System of Social Indicators. A considerable amount of work has been carried out in the past year to establish the concepts and framework for this system.

Reference: Berger-Schmitt, R and Noll, H-H. 2000. 'Conceptual Frameworks and Structure for a European System of Social indicators'. Mannheim, Germany: Centre for Survey Research and Methodology (ZUMA).

USA: National Citizens League:

Established in 1894, and based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the NCL's chief focus is on democracy, citizenship and community building. The League provides extensive local programs, and has developed good materials, in: citizenship indicators (including a 'Civic Index' for good communities); community planning and visioning processes and models; citizen involvement in performance measurement; and general measures for improved local governance.

Contact: www.ncl.org

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Web-sites for social and community indicators

Best general directories, networks and links:

Redefining Progress (International network)	www.rprogress.org
Social Indicators Launchpad (Canada Council on Social Development)	www.ccsd.ca/lp
IISD net (US and international)	http://iisd1.iisd.ca
North Central Regional Centre for Rural Development, US (NCRCRD)	www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/indicators
Social Indicators Network News (Duke University, US)	www.social.duke.edu/dept/sinet
World Bank: World development indicators	www.worldbank.org/data/wdi

Sites for specific projects

Sustainable Seattle (US)	www.scn.org/sustainable
Oregon Benchmarks (US)	www.econ.state.or.us/opb
Tasmania Together	www.tastogether.asn.au
Swinburne Institute for Social Research	www.sisr.net
Portland Multnomah (US)	www.p-m-benchmarks.org
Tucson, Arizona: Livable Tucson	www.ci.tucson.az.us/lt-indicators
Measuring Community Success (US)	www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/community_success
Alberta Government Performance (Canada.)	www.treas.government.ab.ca
Measures of Growth (US)	www.mdf.org/megc/growth00
Minnesota Milestones (US)	www.mnplan.state.mn.us
The Progress Project (US)	www.prgoressproject.org
Jacksonville: Quality Indicators for Progress (US)	www.unf.edu/faculty/clifford/jcci
Florida Benchmarks	http://fcn.state.fl.us/eog/govdocs/gapcomm
Hart Environmental Data (US)	Www.subjectmatters.com/indicators
Glenorchy Council (Tasmania.)	www.gcc.tas.gov.au
Moreland Council (Victoria.)	www.moreland.vic.gov.au
Waverley Council	www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/
New Zealand Standards and Indicators	www.mfe.govt.nz/monitoring/indicators

Appendix A
The National Citizenship Project

The National Citizenship Project has been a long running community research project exploring related issues of citizenship and democracy, social indicators and community development.

It was initiated in 1995 by Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne (SUT) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), following the establishment of a Senate Inquiry into better ways to measure progress and well being in Australia: the 'National Citizenship Inquiry'. With funding from the Australian Research Council and the Myer Foundation, it has brought together various partners in the community and from other universities including Deakin, RMIT, and the universities of New South Wales and Tasmania.

The project's broad goal has been to develop benchmarks and indicators for a 'good society' (nationally) and 'good communities' (locally) and to do so in ways that combine 'best practice' standards (such as human rights) with a strong democratic, community development and citizen participation element (i.e, communities and citizens deciding on the goals and priorities that they think important for their community) It is thus both a social research and a community development and networking project.

The idea behind the project

The idea underlying the project is that in contemporary Australian society (and many others) the most influential ways of describing 'progress' and 'well-being', and the indicators and benchmarks that most influence policy development, are those which focus primarily on economic output (such as the Gross Domestic Product). These indicators effectively set political and social priorities and define the terms of public debate, but they don't necessarily correspond with the values and aspirations of people in the community as to the kind of society they want – so there is a democratic problem. At the same time, they do not create an accurate or truthful picture of the state of health of the society as a whole, especially in areas like community health, equity and fairness, social capital and trust, justice etc., so they are of limited use for policy and public debate. We can have economic growth based on an increase in polluting industries, or in the costs of crime and family breakdown. The problem can be summed up in the title of a famous American article from 1995 (slightly adapted): 'If the economy is doing so well, why are so many Australians so unhappy?'.

Community based indicators can be an important vehicle to identify, and if necessary re-assert in concrete ways, what we think important and valuable in our society.

Examining other models

The project began with an extensive review of different policy models of indicators and benchmarks for a good society. Sifting through many examples at international, national, state and regional levels, we wanted to know: how they were designed (by committees or communities? by consensus or expertise?); what kinds of issues they included (social health as well as physical? environmental well-being too?); what overall values and concepts they were framed around, what were the key elements in their 'map' of a good society (are cultural and spiritual values weighed in the balance with material well-being? does 'gross national happiness' count as much as 'gross national product'?); how they have been applied (as management controls? planning tools? social change instruments? or simply for better reporting?); and how successful they have been in practice.

This study brought to light a very wide and diverse range of models, all the way from the United Nations Development Program to Jacksonville, Florida. We have not found a single model that meets all our needs exactly—for it must be comprehensive, democratically based and proved in practice—but we have found many ideas and components that we think will adapt well to an Australian model. These are to be summarised in a self-help community handbook to be published as part of the project.

Developing community ownership

In the first four years there was a considerable effort to expand the reach and ownership of the project in the community. We wanted it to be understood and supported. We wanted organisations and ordinary citizens to engage with its ideas and contribute to them, and if possible, to do something similar in their own communities or policy fields. Without realising it fully at the time, we were trying to change the paradigm of policy development, and build a national movement to support it (from a relatively small and fragile base).

This phase has meant working with many other people and organisations to explore and revive the meaning of citizenship and community, and the value of indicators as a positive democratic and policy tool to define these ideas. And there is a surprisingly large community of interest: state Councils of Social Service (COSSes), local governments, the Australian Bureau of Statistics; health and welfare bodies, community and civic action groups, environmentalists, community legal centres.

Many community groups and organisations providing health and welfare services are worried about the increasing dominance of narrow financial indicators. They see these as requiring them to focus on short term management issues rather than on whether health and education programs are actually producing stronger, healthier, better educated or fairer communities. This includes quite a few local governments too: they find themselves increasingly required to report success and 'satisfaction' on criteria that treat citizens as 'customers', and which forget that strong democracy starts at the local level. For community and civic action groups like People Together, Public First and Purple Sage in Victoria, ideas like 'public interest indicators' for privatisation, 'community audits' and 'democratic checklists' have been effective community action tools, and a dramatic way to demonstrate the value to the community of what is being taken away or 'downsized'.

Part 2 of this paper (above) summarises many current local, national and international projects based on the idea of community developed indicators of well-being. Swinburne and VCOSS have been directly involved in a number of these projects as initiators, partners or consultants.

Findings from the project

In June and July 1999, the NCP began the first stage of a major national survey ('Benchmarks for Australian Citizenship') carried out in three Victorian regions, with a stratified random sample across seven different socio-economic groups, identified from the ABS local area index of social and economic advantage ('SEIFA'). This study is to be reproduced in Queensland when funds permit. The survey is in three parts, each built on the one before: a two part questionnaire over a month (the first part on citizenship, community and social values, the second on national values and priorities, good government and the Constitution), followed up with qualitative focus groups made up of volunteers from survey respondents. This part of the project has been designed to provide us with the most important and legitimate input for our framework. It tells us what ordinary Australians believe to be the key elements of a good society, the basic framework around which we construct detailed indicators: see Appendices A-3 to A-6 below.

Draft International Index of Social Health

Earlier this year, we constructed a trial index we called the 'International Index of Social Health'. We did this as a possible model for a national Australian index, to show what a more comprehensive set of measures of a 'good community' might look like, using a wide array of international data that was available but not normally put together in this way, such as UN, OECD and World Bank statistics. We took 29 indicators of economic, social and environmental well-being for 23 nations including Australia (mostly the developed OECD countries), and devised a simple index in which all scores were standardised against 'best practice': ie, the country which was the best performer in that particular indicator. Australia's overall ranking was a not very impressive 16th out of 23.

At the end of this Appendix, we have set out some of the more interesting tables and findings that have come from the NCP project. They are explained below.

Appendices A-1 and A-2: Measuring the 'social health' of the nation

These appendices show: Australia's performance in the international 'Social Health' index benchmarked against 'best practice'(Table A-1), and the relative rankings of different countries. (Table A-2)

Table A-1 shows how Australia performs on 29 indicators which cover most of the factors that most people would include in judging the overall well-being and progress of a nation. We are limited in our choice of the actual data used by what is reliably available for all or most of the 23 countries in the sample: column 4 ('rank') shows the number of countries for which that data is available, and where Australia's performance ranks out of this total. Column 5 ('% best practice') shows how well Australia performs on this indicator as a percentage of the 'best practice' benchmark: ie, on a scale from 0% (worst country) to 100% (best country). By this test, we perform badly in income equality, numbers of people in prison, public and supported housing, poverty rates, numbers of full time students, environmental pollution and overseas aid. We perform relatively well in home ownership; life satisfaction, life expectancy, and television ownership.

Table A-2 also includes the wealth rank for each country (GDP per head), and thus gives us a (very approximate) measure of the link between wealth and social health (it varies greatly

from country to country). Subtracting 'social health' (col. 1) from 'wealth' rank (col. 2), tells us whether and by how much each country is performing better in social health than wealth creation. Note the extreme contrasts: Sweden is relatively a much healthier society than it is wealthy; USA is much less healthy than it is wealthy. Australia's ranking is poor: 16th of 23 countries, and slightly more wealthy than healthy.

Appendix A-3: What makes a good society? How do we rate?

Table A-3 'What makes a good society ...' summarises findings from the national survey 'Benchmarks for Australian Citizenship'. Columns (a) and (b) show how people ranked the importance of 37 wide ranging attributes of 'a good society' on a scale from 0 to 10. 'High standards of honesty in politics and public life' and 'everyone (being) treated equally by the law' are seen as the most important attributes of 'a good society with very strong and broad support averaging 9.3 out of 10, closely followed by 'basic human rights of all citizens (being) strongly protected' and 'good quality basic services (health, education etc) for all'. 'Putting a strong economy before equity and environmental goals' and 'people having similar social values and lifestyles' are seen as least important, of the 37 possible attributes, with average support at 5.2 and 4.5 out of 10 respectively.

Column (c) shows how well people think Australia actually performs in achieving these goals or qualities in practice. The results show that as a nation we are seen to perform worst in the goals of '(not having') big differences in wealth and power between people', 'eliminating crime and violence' and 'everyone paying tax fairly, according to (their) income and wealth' (average performance ratings for these were around 3.4 out of 10, or 'quite bad'. We are seen as most successful in 'the protection of religious freedom', '(having) freedom to do what we like if we don't harm others', 'people who work hard can succeed in life' and 'putting a strong economy before equity and environmental goals' which scored around 7 out of 10 ('quite good').

Column (d) shows the difference between importance and performance and thus, by implication, the seriousness of the problem. By this test, the most serious problems (ie, the most important issues in which we performed worst) were, in order, 'eliminating crime and violence', 'everyone paying tax fairly, according to (their) income and wealth', 'high standards of honesty in politics and public life' and 'eliminating poverty'. In all these case, the importance rating was around 9 out of 10, and the performance rating was around 5 out of 10. Interestingly, in only two cases was the national performance in practice rated positively, i.e., at a higher level than the actual importance of the issues (although in both cases the original 'importance rating' was not high); these were: 'people having similar social vales and lifestyles' and 'putting a strong economy before equity and environmental goals'.

The final column (f) ranks these 'problems for a good society' in order of perceived seriousness after allowing for their original importance. Crime and violence, human rights, basic health and education services, environmental issues and fair distribution of the tax burden figure very high on the list.

Appendix A-4: What should be in Australia's constitution?

Table A-4 ('What Australians want in the constitution') is particularly interesting in the climate of the recent Republic debate. What it clearly shows is that the constitutional protections that Australians feel most strongly about were not part of the recent debate at all: such as the protection of basic human rights, guarantees of good public health and education, and codes of conduct for honesty in public life. Most interesting of all is the fact that while support for

'establishing Australia as a Republic' is fairly tepid, if this question is asked in a different way (stressing Australian independence and sovereignty of the people), it draws very strong support. This suggests that most people felt alienated from the terms and the process of the public debate and confirms the high levels of distrust of politicians shown in other parts of the survey.

Appendices A-5 to A-7: A framework for national progress and well-being indicators

These show some of the questions used in our survey and focus groups, and the draft framework developed from them.

A-5 shows the questions used to establish the broad elements or priorities that people believe make up the components of a good society. This is the start of the process of developing a 'framework' of national progress and well-being.

A-6 is the form we used at the end of focus groups, asking people (hard as it is!) to try to rank these different values or priorities, so that we can then start to develop more detailed and concrete indicators that reflect these broad goals.

A-7 shows the draft national framework we have developed from our surveys and pre-survey discussion groups. Subject to further analysis of the survey and post-survey focus group responses, we expect that something like this will be the basis for our national index: ie, the main elements of a 'good society'.

Appendix A-1

Social health in OECD countries: Australia

Field		Indicator	Australia		
			actual	*Rank (total)*	*% best practice*
Income	1	Real GDP per head (US$000)	19.6	14 (*23*)	52
	2	Population below income poverty line (%)	13	15 (*17*)	46
	3	Real earning growth by employee p.a.1980-92	0.5	12 (*19*)	28
Work	4	Total unemployment rate (%)	8.5	13 (*21*)	73
	5	Long term unemployment (12 months+)	2.6	10 (*20*)	83
	6	Labour market participation %	51	7 (*23*)	69
Housing	7	Home ownership rate %	70	2 (*12*)	93
	8	Proportion of public & supported housing %	5.7	10 (*12*)	11
Health	9	Life expectancy at birth (yrs)	78	5 (*23*)	75
	10	Spending on public health (% GDP)	5.8	14 (*23*)	48
	11	Life satisfaction/happiness (index/100)	76.7	7 (*23*)	96
Education	12	Fulltime students per 100 ppl aged 5-29 yrs	55	19 (*21*)	19
	13	Public education spending (% GDP)	5.6	11 (*23*)	41
	14	Population with higher education (%)	24.3	7 (*18*)	42
Culture	15	Ownership of TV per 1000 ppl	641	3 (*23*)	71
	16	Telephone lines per 1000 ppl	510	11 (*23*)	46
	17	Daily newspapers copies per 1000 ppl	257	13 (*22*)	39
Social stress	18	Suicides per 100,000 ppl	19	7 (*18*)	66
	19	Prisoners per 100,000 ppl (excludes USA)	120	19 (*19*)	0
	20	Intentional homicides by men per 1000 ppl	2.5	18 (*23*)	83
Equity/democ'y	21	Income inequality (top 20% by bottom 20%)	9.6	17 (*18*)	1
	22	Women in Parliament	24	4 (*23*)	47
	23	Central gov spend social security % total CGS	1.0	11 (*17*)	12
	24	Comply w. UN human rights conventions %	91	16 (*22*)	65
	25	Perceived corruption (Transparency Internat.)	8.7	10 (*23*)	76
	26	Develop't aid (ODA) $ per cap. donor country	62	13 (*20*)	13
Environment	27	Energy use (000 kg. oil equiv. per head)	5.3	18 (*23*)	42
	28	Environm't pollution (CO2 emissions kg p. cap)	16.2	21 (*23*)	28
	29	Protected areas as total land area	8.7	14 (*23*)	25

Indicator sources: *OECD, World Bank, UN and country data*

Appendix A-2

Social health and GDP in OECD countries

	Social Health rank [a]	GDP per head rank	Difference [b]
Norway	1	3	+2
Sweden	2	16	+14
Denmark	3	4	+1
Iceland	4	10	+6
Netherlands	5	13	+8
Canada	6	6	0
Switzerland	7	2	- 5
Finland	8	17	+9
Germany	9	11	+2
New Zealand	10	19	+9
Japan	11	5	-6
Austria	12	8	-4
UK	13	15	+2
France	14	9	-5
Belgium	15	7	-8
Australia	16	14	-2
USA	17	1	-16
Italy	18	12	-6
Israel	19	20	+1
Ireland	20	18	-2
Spain	21	22	+1
Greece	22	23	+1
Portugal	23	21	-2

Notes: (a): Based on unweighted basket of 29 key indicators in: income; work; housing; health; education; culture; social stress; equity and democracy; environment; (b) GDP per head ranking minus 'social health' ranking.
Indicator sources: OECD, World Bank, UN and country data

Appendix A-3

"What makes a good society? How well does Australia perform?"

	Importance		Performance			
	Rating 0 – 10 **(a)**	Rank 1 – 38 **(b)**	Rating 0 – 10 **(c)**	Discre-pancy **(d)**	Weight-ed **(e)**	Rank 1 – 38 **(f)**
High standards of honesty in politics and public life	9.3	1	4.3	- 5.0	46.5	3
Everyone treated equally and fairly by the law	9.3	2	5.4	- 3.9	36.3	9
Basic human rights of all citizens strongly protected	9.1	3	6.6	- 2.5	22.8	24
Good quality basic services (health, education etc) for all	9.1	4	5.5	- 3.6	32.8	14
Eliminating crime and violence	9.1	5	3.4	- 5.7	51.9	1
Protecting the environment, resources and wildlife	9.1	6	5.6	- 3.5	31.9	15
Equal opportunities for men and women	9.0	7	6.4	- 2.6	23.4	23
Everyone paying tax fairly, according to income and wealth	9.0	8	3.4	- 5.6	50.4	2
Justified confidence that public institutions act fairly	9.0	9	5.1	- 3.9	35.1	12
Local communities having good quality public facilities	9.0	10	4.8	- 4.2	37.8	7
Looking after vulnerable and disadvantaged people well	8.8	11	5.6	- 3.2	28.1	17
Cut environmental pollution, develop renewable energy sources	8.8	12	4.8	- 4.0	35.2	11
People feeling responsible for each other and to the community	8.7	13	5.1	- 3.6	31.3	16
People who work hard can succeed in life	8.6	14	6.8	- 1.8	15.5	27
Encouraging family life and family values	8.6	15	5.8	- 2.8	24.1	21
Young people are valued, and have secure future prospects	8.6	16	4.3	- 4.3	37.0	8
Eliminating poverty	8.6	17	3.8	- 4.8	41.3	4
Respect for, and strict enforcement of, the laws	8.6	18	5.5	- 3.1	27.7	18
Secure, satisfying, fairly paid jobs for all who want work	8.6	19	4.2	- 4.4	37.8	5
Strong social protection (age, sickness, unemployment etc)	8.5	20	5.4	- 3.1	26.4	19
Ability to trust other people, including strangers	8.4	21	3.9	- 4.5	37.8	6
Special care to protect rural and remote communities	8.4	22	4.2	- 4.2	35.3	10
Attractive and well planned towns and cities	8.3	23	6.6	- 1.7	14.1	29
Protection of religious freedom	8.2	24	7.5	- 0.7	5.7	33
Fair and independent relations with other nations	8.2	25	6.1	- 2.1	17.2	26
High standards of technology and scientific progress	8.1	26	6.8	- 1.3	10.5	31
Respecting the culture of indigenous peoples	8.1	27	5.5	- 2.6	21.1	25
Vigorous freedom of speech, diverse public opinions	8.1	28	6.3	- 1.8	14.6	28
People participating in decision-making that affects them	8.1	29	5.1	- 3.0	24.3	21
Diverse ownership and control of the media	7.9	30	3.7	- 4.2	33.2	13
Strong local communities and local organisations	7.8	31	6.0	- 1.8	14.0	30
Freedom to do what we like if we don't harm others	7.4	32	7.1	- 0.3	2.2	36
Generosity in helping disadvantaged countries	7.0	33	6.2	- 0.8	5.6	34
No big differences in wealth and power between people	6.8	34	3.3	- 3.5	23.8	22
Accepting refugees, even at some cost to ourselves	6.7	35	6.3	- 0.4	2.7	35
A strong free-enterprise economy, minimal government	6.7	36	6.1	- 0.9	6.0	32
Putting a strong economy before equity and environment goals	5.2	37	6.8	+ 1.6	(8.3)	38
People having similar social values and lifestyles	4.5	38	4.6	+ 0.1	(0.5)	37

Appendix A-4
What Australians want in the Constitution

"The most important things that should be in the Australian Constitution are.."	Score /1000	Rank
define and guarantee the basic human rights of all Australian citizens	**920**	**1**
guarantee good quality public health and education as a right for everyone	**888**	**2**
ensure that in every election for government, every person's vote must have equal weight	**887**	**3**
define the powers of the Federal government	**883**	**4**
establish, as basic national values, fairness, equal opportunity and justice for all	**882**	**5**
establish, as a basic national value, that Australia is an independent and democratic country in which all political power comes from the Australian people	**873**	**6**
include a code of conduct to ensure honesty and accountability by politicians and public officials	**868**	**7**
establish that everyone must pay tax fairly according to their income and wealth	**865**	**8**
define the role and powers of the Parliament	**864**	**9**
protect the independence of the legal system	**859**	**10**
give the Federal government comprehensive duties and powers to protect Australia's environment	**831**	**11**
guarantee a free and diverse media, including public networks like the ABC	**813**	**12**
provide national standards for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the people that governments must try to meet	**796**	**13**
require automatic fixed term elections for all Australian governments	**787**	**14**
guarantee the right to work	**780**	**15**
set up a process for regular review of the Constitution	**774**	**16**
require the Federal government to provide accurate and comprehensive reports each year on the condition of Australia and its people	**756**	**17**
establish, as a basic national value, that Australia is a multicultural nation	**755**	**18**
make sure that the national flag cannot be changed except by a referendum of all the Australian people	**734**	**19**
define the duties of Australian citizens	**729**	**20**
protect the role of local governments	**697**	**21**
provide that government cannot engage Australia in any war without a referendum of the Australian people	**658**	**22**
recognise special status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including their prior occupation and custody of the land	**654**	**23**
require government to set public limits to new migration	**631**	**24**
establish Australia as a republic	**620**	**25**
retain the present monarchy as Head of State of Australia	**404**	**26**
abolish State governments	**401**	**27**

Appendix A-5

Priorities for a good society (1): Questionnaire for Focus Groups

1. Recently, there has been a lot of public discussion about Australia's future in a changing world, as we approach a new century and a new millennium. Questions often asked are: 'What kind of society do we want Australia to be?' or 'What kind of country do we want our children (or grandchildren) to live in?'. Others would call it the 'vision' or 'ideal' they have for Australia or 'a good society'.

People have different views about the broad model or type of society that they would consider a 'good society', and the kinds of priorities that such a society would have. Below are some statements that describe the broad kind of society that different people might want Australia to become or to be more like in future generations.

Please tell us how important you think each of these broad priorities is by scoring each statement from 0 ('extremely unimportant') to 10 ('extremely important'). please use the 'opinion thermometer' to show which is more important to you.

How important?	Score
Extremely unimportant	0
Very unimportant	1
Definitely not important	2
Quite unimportant	3
Probably not important	4
Not important or unimportant	5
Probably important	6
Quite important	7
Definitely important	8
Very important	9
Extremely important	10

"The kind of society that Australia should become is …

1. **an efficient society**: for example: government, businesses, communities and towns that are orderly, well planned and managed, spend money wisely, and provide efficient and responsive services and community facilities.

2. **an ethical society**: e.g., emphasises honesty and ethical values in government, business, personal relations; respects human rights, religious and spiritual beliefs, knowledge, learning; encourages responsibility for others and the environment.

3. **an economically strong society**: wealthy, industrially and technologically developed, with a strong and productive domestic and international economy and extensive natural resources.

4. **a secure society:** stable, law-abiding, values traditions and families, has low crime and violence, strong social and welfare protection (unemployment, sickness, retirement etc.)

5. **an environmentally responsible society**: protects and enhances the environment, natural resources and bio-diversity; reduces waste and pollution; encourages global responsibility, sustainable development and renewable energy sources.

6. **a contented society:** generally high levels of happiness, health and satisfaction, low levels of stress, crime, violence; good relations and trust between different people and communities.

7. **a creative society:** promotes innovation, enterprise and imagination in business, government and society; values education, culture and arts, new ideas and opinions, lively public debates.

8. **an internationally responsible society:** in foreign policy is independent and fair, promotes peace and good relations, and is a 'good neighbour' in its region; respects international law and human rights; helps disadvantaged countries.

9. **an 'inclusive community' society:** enables everyone to develop, to be valued and to participate in society; has healthy and well-resourced local communities; active and responsible citizens; high levels of trust and mutual support between people.

10. **a politically powerful society**: a society that is influential in the world or its region, secure from external threats, with strong armed forces or military alliances etc.

11. **a diverse and tolerant society:** encourages different cultures, lifestyles and opinions, freedom of speech and religion; supports multiculturalism; respects indigenous people.

12. **a 'high-technology' society**: emphasises innovation and development in science, technology, research, education, computers and communications; has advanced, versatile industries, highly-skilled work-force, modern towns and cities.

13. **a fair society**: shares wealth, power, work and opportunities fairly; values equality and human rights; has fair, honest government and laws; gives everyone a chance to develop their potential; protects disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

14. **a competitive society**: encourages and rewards competition and individual initiative; values personal freedoms, self-reliance, self-development, strong leadership and strong 'free enterprise' markets.

15. **a democratic society:** strong and open democratic institutions, effective and accountable government, equal laws, strong rights and freedoms, people able to share in decision-making that affects them.

16. **a 'high living standards' society**: achieves high national standards of living and well-being in income, health, education, housing, work, recreation, town planning, transport etc.

Appendix A-6

Priorities for a good society (2): Questionnaire for Focus Groups

2. Now we would like you to rank these broad priorities for a good society in order**, by giving each a number from 1 to 16**. If you need to, please refer back to the previous question (blue form) for a more detailed description of what each priority area means

Note that even if you think that many of these are important, the aim here is to put them in their order of importance relative to each other.

"The most important priorities for the kind of society that Australia should become are, in order, ….

Priority	*Order*
an efficient society	
an ethical society	
an economically strong society	
a secure society	
an environmentally responsible society	
a contented society	
a creative society	
an internationally responsible society	
an 'inclusive community' society	
a politically powerful society	
a diverse and tolerant society	
a 'high-technology' society	
a fair society	
a competitive society	
a democratic society	
a 'high living standards' society	

Appendix A-7

A framework for national well-being indicators

1. Individual health and well-being

2. Good work opportunities

3. A fair society

4. A secure and crime free society

5. A productive and responsible economy

6. Good government and laws

7. A healthy, sustainable environment

8. Healthy communities and active citizens

9. A vigorous cultural life

10. Good international relations