Wellbeing: good policy or democratic keystone?

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Wellbeing the key goal of government

Our object in the construction of the state is the greatest happiness of the whole, and not that of any one class.

(Plato, 429 – 347 BC)

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.

(Thomas Jefferson, 1743-1826, Third President of the USA)

77% of Australians believe that government's chief objective should be to promote policies designed to maximise human happiness and wellbeing rather than greater wealth.

(Ipsos Mackay poll, 2006)

Wellbeing of people most important purpose of government

Question: What is the primary purpose of government?

Improve overall wellbeing of population	32%
Deliver and fund critical services and social infrastructure	31%
(*Government should deliver social services directly: 89%*)	
Ensure a decent standard of living	19%
Maintain public safety and the rule of law	11%
Create opportunities for children and future generations	8%

(Source: Essential Media, 'Essential Report – CPD', February 2022)

Democracy and wellbeing are linked

Most democratic (1)	Highest wellbeing (2)
1. Denmark	1. Finland
2. Norway	2. Denmark
3. Finland	3. Switzerland
4. Sweden	4. Iceland
5. Germany	5. Netherlands
6. Switzerland	6. Norway
7. Netherlands	7. Sweden
8. New Zealand	8. Luxembourg
9. Belgium	9. New Zealand
10. Costa Rica	10. Austria

1. Universitat Wurzburg 2020. 2. World Population Review 2021

Why defining and measuring progress and wellbeing is a democratic issue

1. How a society defines its goals and key progress measures directly affects the life chances of its citizens.
2. The wellbeing of its citizens is the most important priority of a democratic government.
3. A healthy democracy **both** improves progress and wellbeing generally **and is itself** a key element of society's progress.
4. Citizens need good information to make good democratic decisions.
5. Good progress measures make for more transparent and accountable government.
6. Genuine engagement of citizens in the task of defining and measuring progress strengthens their democratic capacity and their trust in democracy.

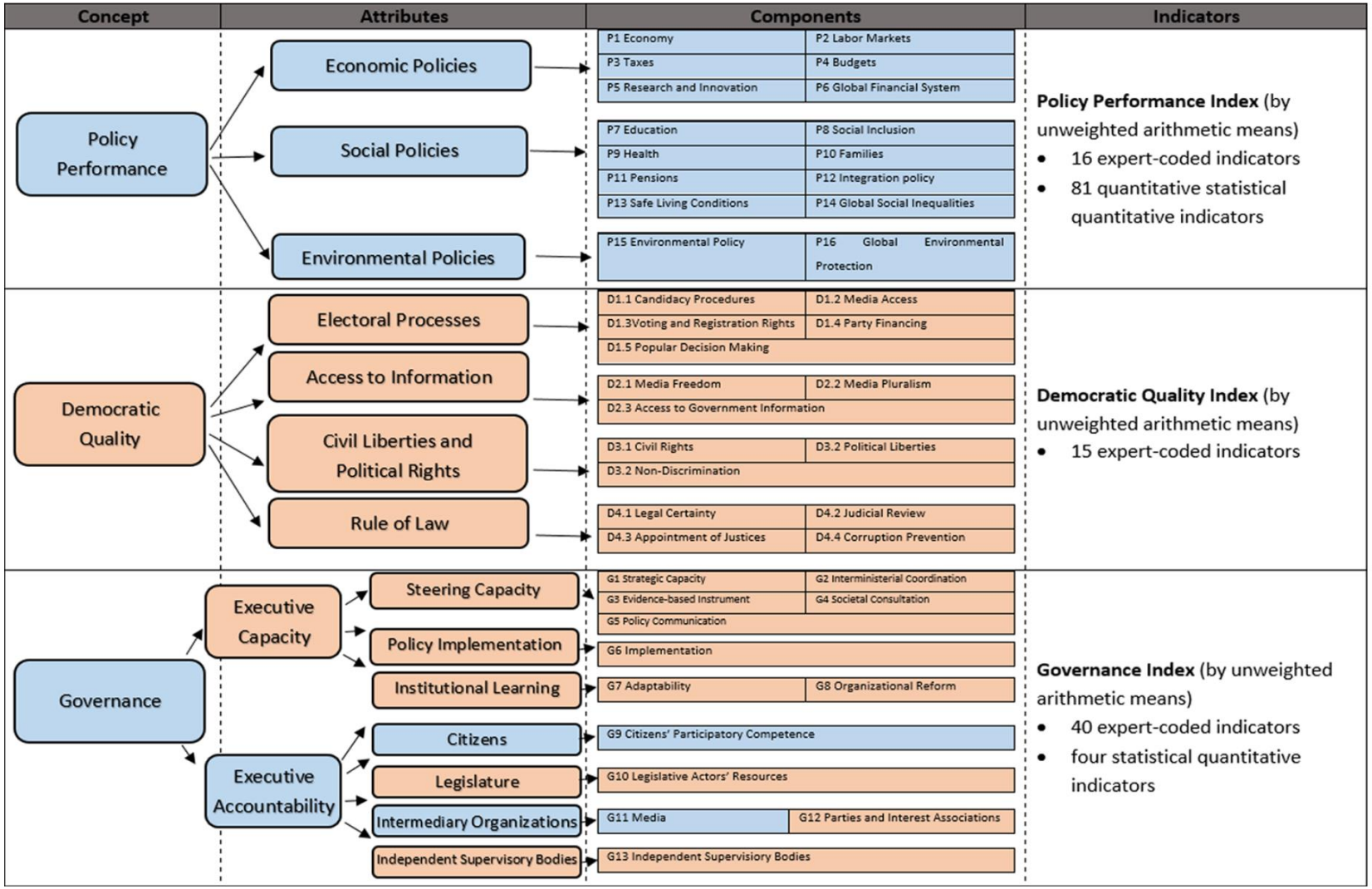


FIGURE 1 SGI Concept and Indicators (based on SGI 2020 Codebook, and Munck & Verkuilen, 2002). Light-blue shaded boxes indicate that statistical and expert-coded indicators are used. Light-orange shaded boxes indicate that only expert-coded data are used in this indicator/component/attribute/concept

Measuring policy, democracy and governance

Two greatest obstacles to democracy

The two greatest obstacles to democracy in the United States are, first, the widespread delusion among the poor that we have a democracy, and second, the chronic terror among the rich, lest we get it.

(Edward Dowling, 1941)

Australia's shrinking democracy: 10 warning signs

1. Low public trust in government and key public institutions
2. Decline in voting rate
3. Falling participation in political parties
4. Growth in corporate government and privatised or 'out-sourced' (less accountable) public services
5. Increase in corrupt influence (government advertising, political donations, cash for access, conflicts of interest, lobbyists)
6. Growing inequality in wealth and opportunity
7. Weakening of civil rights and privacy
8. Declining citizenship education levels in schools
9. Declining youth support for democracy
10. Internet impact on truth in politics and political outcomes

Many Australians believe our political system is broken

- 45% believe that ‘Australia’s society is broken’.
- 36% agree that the country is in decline.
- 63% agree Australia’s economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful.
- 57% agree that traditional parties and politicians don’t care about people like them.
- 58% agree experts in this country don’t understand the lives of ‘people like me’.
- 78% agree that the main divide in this country is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, 25-country surveys of political confidence in political and social systems, 2021, 2022.
https://www.ipsos.com/en-au/broken-system-sentiment-declining-australia-years-change-federal-government-likely-key-influence

(2) www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-07/GA%20-%20Broken%20System%20Sentiment%20-%20Populist%20Anti-Elitism%20and%20Nativism%20in%202021%20-%20Graphic%20Report.pdf

An increasingly polarized nation

“Australia is on a path to polarisation, driven by a series of macro forces that are weakening the country’s social fabric and creating increasing division in society. This year's report finds that almost half of Australians (45%) say the nation is more divided today, than in the past. The rich and powerful are identified as the major dividing force (72%), followed by hostile foreign governments (69%), journalists (51%), and government leaders (49%)’.

Edelman Trust Barometer 2023

Economic unfairness destroys democratic trust

Trust in democracy is broken. Even before COVID-19, governments presided over national economies and a global economic model that have failed working people and their families. … To rebuild trust, people must be able to see how the wealth of their economy is being used to facilitate jobs growth with a target of full employment, and equal economic participation of women and inclusion of young people.

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation and WEAll Ambassador

Only citizens can save a declining democracy

The citizen can bring our political and governmental institutions back to life, make them responsive and accountable, and keep them honest. No one else can.

John Gardner, 1912 – 2002, US activist and former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

More than customers: How citizens are partners in achieving public outcomes

Citizens are …	*How?*	*Examples*
Customers	Citizens are principal users and clients of public services and should be treated as valued customers by providers	Citizens' charters for service standards
Owners and shareholders	Citizens are owners: through their taxes, they invest in public service and assets. They are shareholders too: their votes, elect the 'boards of directors' who govern.	Community reps on public services and utilities boards. Federal, state & local elections
Issue framers	As 'vision builders': helping define desirable future, strategic plans. As advisers on government policy committees etc.	Community indicator projects; community advisory groups
Co-producers of services	Citizens and community bodies are direct providers of community services on both a paid and voluntary basis, in cooperation with government	Non-government community services. 'Healthy cities program.
Service quality evaluators	As primary users of government services, citizens are best placed to assess their quality and effectiveness	Service user assessment forms. Students interview park users.
Independent auditors	Grassroots measurement by citizen groups is more likely to be independent and oriented towards actual community wellbeing outcomes	Citizen environment monitoring

Source: 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.

The benefits of community engagement

A review of the evidence

by Ben Rogers and Emily Robinson, IPPR

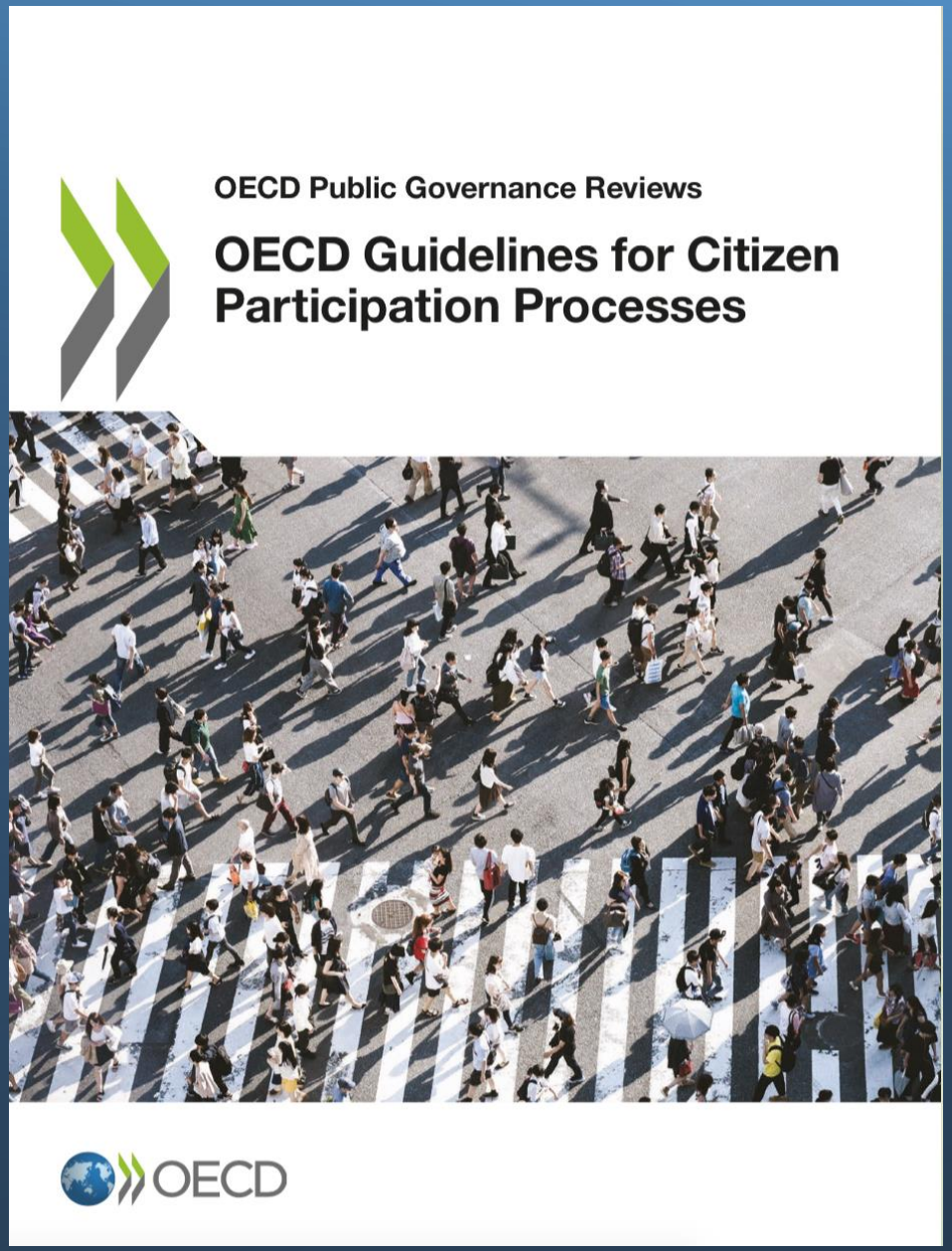
Four key benefits of community engagement

1. Improving individual and community wellbeing
2. Better programs and policies
3. Increased resources for governance
4. Stronger democracy and citizen trust

ANDI National Survey 2018

1. To measure national progress, are health, social and environmental statistics as important as economic statistics?			Agree 87%
2. How important are the following areas in measuring our national progress (0 -10)?			
Children and youth wellbeing	9.09	Economic life and prosperity	8.67
Health	9.03	Work and work life	8.65
Education and creativity	8.98	General wellbeing	8.64
Democracy and governance	8.88	Environment and sustainability	8.36
Communities, regions, infrastructure	8.76	Indigenous wellbeing	7.45
Justice and fairness	8.70	Culture, recreation and leisure	7.45
3. Interested in participating in a national community engagement program to express your views on national progress measures?			Agree 76%

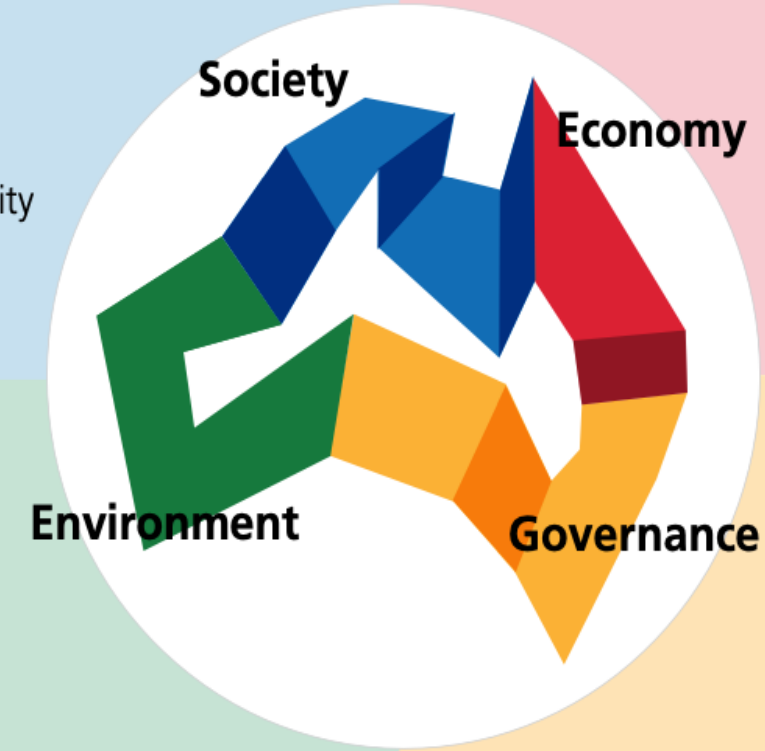
Source: ANDI- University of Melbourne-Social research Centre, ANU, *2072 Life in Australia Wave 17 Survey*, June-July, 2018. n 1853, with sub-samples of approx. 615.


OECD Public Governance Reviews
OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes
OECD

ABS Wellbeing and Progress Framework 2012

Health
Close relationships
Home
Safety
Learning and knowledge
Community connections and diversity
A fair go
Enriched lives

Opportunities
Jobs
Prosperity
A resilient economy
A sustainable economy
Fair outcomes
International economic engagement



Healthy natural environment
Appreciating the environment
Protecting the environment
Sustaining the environment
Healthy built environments
Working together

Trust
Effective governance
Participation
Informed public debate
Peoples' rights and responsibilities

Australian Bureau of Statistics

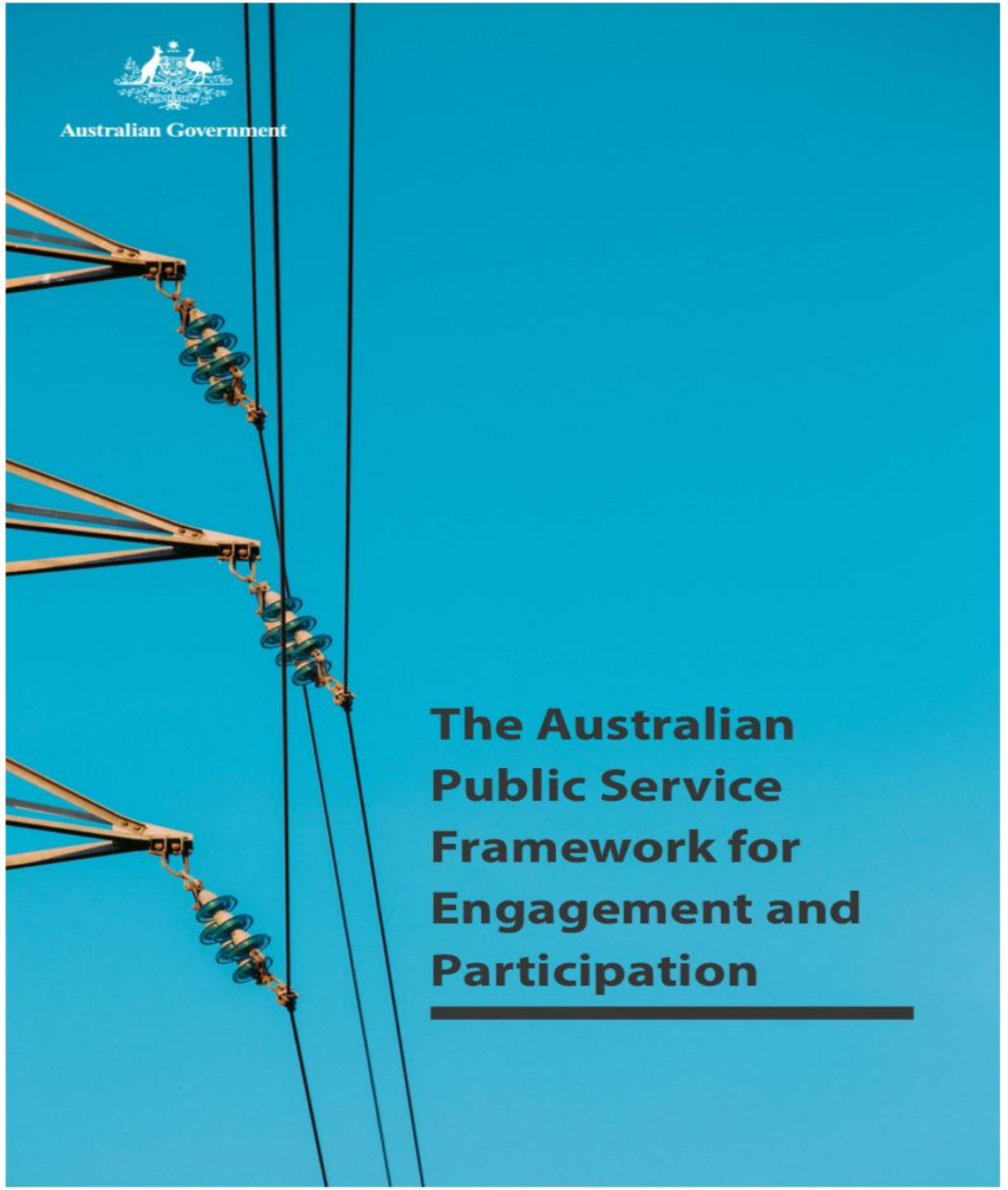
1370.0.00.002

MEASURES OF AUSTRALIA'S PROGRESS

ASPIRATIONS FOR OUR NATION: A CONVERSATION WITH AUSTRALIANS ABOUT PROGRESS

Treasury Strategic Review 2011 – Community Engagement

- ‘Treasury needs to have a greater understanding of stakeholders outside government’
- ‘There is much to be gained from focussed training on engagement and consultation techniques and skills’
- ‘Treasury people can appear at times to be arrogant and dismissive of other views’
- ‘Treasury could benefit from a greater interdisciplinary approach in our arguments and advice’
- ‘Treasury’s traditional economic framework may not be ideal for thinking about … emerging social issues.’
- ‘A key theme emerging from consultations … is that Treasury needs to improve its engagement skills (and) formal consultation processes … on a range of fronts’.
- ‘There is a perception that Treasury lacks a genuine commitment to consultation’.
- ‘Treasury consultations could be more effective if stakeholders felt that their advice had been listened to’.


Australian Government
The Australian Public Service Framework for Engagement and Participation

A democratic wellbeing agenda for action

- Launch a genuine and inclusive **national conversation** about the kind of Australia we want as the basis for national measures of progress and Wellbeing;
- Set up an **Australian Democracy Commission** with equal representation from community, research and government sectors;
- Institute comprehensive government/ABS **reporting on democracy and human rights** progress against clear standards;
- Base general wellbeing **measurements on clear targets and goals** not merely ‘snapshots’
- Campaign for **equitable and sustainable well-being as a national priority** in its own right not simply as good policy;
- **Broaden the base of our movement** to make common cause with community and indigenous organisations in all spheres relating to well-being, democracy and human rights;
- Vigorously **promote policy, legislative and budget options** to build equitable and sustainable well-being into government as a whole of government initiative based on
- Create mechanisms for **citizen participation in major resource or budget decisions**

Thank you for your attention!

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