

Leading Issues Journal

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Richard Pratt

One of Australia's foremost business entrepreneurs, Richard Pratt, who made his fortune recycling paper into cardboard gave presentations to the Victorian Government Water Summit in May 2002 and the Melbourne Population and Immigration Summit in February 2002. In his speech, *People and Water*, Pratt discusses the two great and closely linked issues of 'people' and 'water' arguing that we can't plan for a greater population without a greater availability of water and we can't transform our water resources without a greater population that would make those efforts feasible and viable.

"I have come to the conclusion that while Australia may be the driest continent, we don't have a water shortage problem so much as a water management and distribution problem. I believe that the only way to address our water needs is to develop a national water policy. I've also flagged the idea of tapping a proportion of the floodwaters from our northern rivers before they hit the sea and piping that water to our drier areas. We could even run some of the pipes alongside the Darwin to Adelaide railway."

Richard J. Pratt was born in Danzig, of Polish parents, March 12, 1934, emigrating to Australia from pre-war Poland in 1938 via England. He graduated from University High School in 1952 and enrolled at University of Melbourne. At age 18, he was juggling study, theatre, and his position as company salesman for the family business, Visy Board. After a brief theatre career in London, he returned to Melbourne and the company. Upon the death of his father, Mr. Pratt took over the company in 1969. At

that time, it had annual turnover of about A\$5 million. In 2002, group turnover exceeds A\$3 billion (U.S. \$1.7 billion).

One of the features of the Pratt Group Expansion was waste reclamation. Its first paper recycling mill was built in 1979. In 1997, Pratt Industries opened the world's most advanced paper recycling facility on Staten Island, New York. Visy recycles more than 1.2 million tons of paper in the U.S.A. and Australia each year.

Currently chairman of Visy Industries, Mr. Pratt's public services include foundation chancellor, Swinburne University of Technology; chair of finance committee, U. S. Coral Sea Commemorative Council; president, Victorian Arts Center Trust; chairman, Australian Business Arts Foundation; and chairman, Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria.

Mr. Pratt received the AC, Companion of the Order of Australia in 1998, Australia's highest honor. He had also received the AO, Officer of the Order of Australia, in 1985. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Swinburne University of Technology and Monash University. He was named the Packaging Achiever of the year by the Packaging Council of Australia.

(Source: Pratt's Speech-www.leadershipvictoria.org; Pratt's Biography: Hall of Paper)

Speech by Richard Pratt:

People and Water

By Richard Pratt

At the Victorian Government Water Summit, May 2002 and the Melbourne Population and Immigration Summit, February 2002.

I believe that two great and closely linked issues facing Australia for the next century are 'people' and 'water'. How many people and how do we attract them? How much water and how do we manage it? We can't plan for a greater population without a greater availability of water. We can't transform our water resources without a greater population that would make those efforts feasible and viable.

The Question of Population

It has become a cliché to say that since September 11, the world has changed and that since the Tampa last year, Australia has changed. But I'd argue that the fundamental forces shaping Australia and the world have not changed at all.

I arrived in Melbourne in 1939 from Poland via London as a child aged four. I was literally tucked under my mother's arm as she fled the gathering storm in Europe. Our family was probably seen by many as a 'bunch of reffos'. But we found that Australia was indeed a real refuge.

It was also a land of great promise, just as it has proved to be for so many immigrants since.

I suppose my personal experiences as an immigrant growing up in rural Victoria were not all that different to those of other immigrants in the 1940s and 50s. My parents worked an orchard and growing up on it, I too learned the meaning of hard work.

I'll never forget the kindness shown to me and my family by our neighbours, the James family. Their son, known later as Digger James, took me under his wing and taught me English. Digger went on to become a Korean War hero and a National President of the RSL. Our very close friendship has lasted more than 60 years.

Way back in 1952 – as an 18 year old student – I started working part time in the small box making business which my parents had helped found four years earlier. This year I'll be celebrating the 50th anniversary of my starting work at

During those 50 years our small family company has grown from a handful of employees to a multinational enterprise employing more than 8000 people.

I'm proud to say that we grew through the efforts of hundreds of new Australians from Italy, Greece, Poland, England and elsewhere who had come to this country to build a better life. Today their sons and daughters – and in some cases their grandchildren – are among the 6000 Australians who are still building Visy today. And they've been joined by more recent arrivals; from Vietnam, Bosnia, China, India, East Timor, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

I'm sure that every industry in this country could tell you a similar story.

Indeed, the story of Australian business growth and development in the past 50 years cannot be told without including the story of immigration.

But in addition to my own personal and business experience over half a century, I have a third reason for supporting immigration – the national interest.

If our generation of Australians has one advantage it's probably the advantage of historical memory.

We can understand why 'lead time' matters in the destinies of nations. We know that Australia's improvements in economic prosperity, cultural diversity and lifestyle enrichment, didn't just happen. They are the results of decisions (and risks) which our political leaders took more than 50 years ago.

In the same way, the policies and decisions our generation makes will determine the Australia of 2050. Will we choose as wisely as those who came before us? I hope so.

All three parties of government from the 1930s through the 1970s understood the vital importance of immigration and population growth for Australia. There was a basic bi-partisan assumption which guided Australia's policy during those vital decades.

Just as importantly, the national leadership actually led on the issue and those leaders took the long view. They did not just follow the ups and downs of public opinion at any one time. The national leadership understood that we needed to grow our

population at the minimum rate of 2% per year. Roughly 1% would come from immigration, and 1% from natural increase.

Not bad national goals for then and for now. So when I helped launch the Australian Population Institute back in 1999 I tried to weave my personal, business and national perspectives together into a call to arms to my fellow Australians. The Institute's ideal is for an Australia which is greater in population, greater in vision and greater in striving for a fair and decent society. I supported the Institute because they understood that population planning is central to any discussion about Australia's future. And they also understood that you can't talk sensibly about population planning without considering the other economic and social initiatives that must accompany it.

The Australian Population Institute put five key areas at the forefront of their agenda:

- employment and training
- urban and rural planning
- a sustainable environment
- defence and security planning
- cultural harmony amidst diversity.

Some of those goals have been brought home to us by events like September 11, and by our own intervention in East Timor. These events have forced us to acknowledge that we're not isolated from the world on this island continent of ours.

For us, thinking both regionally and globally is a necessity, not an option. For my part I've been highlighting what I see as two critical goals. I call for a vision which looks ahead to the year 2050. It is a vision of a democratic, secure, prosperous, fair and pluralist Australia with a population of 50 million.

In trying to understand how far we've come, and where we still have to go, it helps to consider how we compare to others. If we consider the past 50 years, our record on immigration and multiculturalism has been mostly a great and positive Australian achievement.

Today most Australians – sometimes reluctantly – have come to acknowledge that our evolution into a prosperous, cosmopolitan, pluralist society has been worthwhile and they'll also acknowledge that we have immigration, in large measure, to thank for it.

But we don't learn from history unless we make history work for the future. We don't learn from the present unless we look at how comparable nations are planning their futures.

Taking Canada as an example: while the differences between Australia and Canada are clear, there are many similarities.

Highlighting just one aspect of Canada's long term thinking, their national innovation strategy, which they define quite simply as 'coming up with new ideas about how to do things better and faster'. As part of this strategy Canada has set itself some ambitious targets which include becoming one of the top five countries in the world in research and development performance by 2010. To that end, the Canadians are committed to integrating their immigration policies with their innovation policies. They want to modernise their immigration system, to maintain higher immigration levels, and to brand Canada as a destination of choice for skilled workers. They are actively recruiting foreign talent, including foreign students, by using permanent immigrant and temporary foreign worker programs.

Why is Canada doing this?

Because they say like most western countries, they're beginning to experience major demographic changes that will result in fewer workers. In the meanwhile the demand for high-level skills will continue to increase in all sectors.

Just to put the comparison in perspective, Canada has a population of 31 million compared to Australia's 19 million. Canada is planning to take around 225,000 immigrants this year, compared to around 85,000 expected arrivals for Australia. In other words, Canada's population is just over one and a half times that of Australia, but it's planning to take almost three times the number of immigrants that we are. Canada's motto could well be 'innovation means immigration'.

Is our Department of Immigration fulfilling its role as a vital player in the planning of Australia's future? Are we a strong competitor in the global market for those vital human resources?

In a world where free capital flows are considered essential to the creation of the developing knowledge economies, much freer people flows are becoming inevitable. We can be pro-active and move to ensure our share of those knowledge worker flows, or we can be passive and wait for something to turn up.

Like it or not Australian business has to run faster just to keep up. It has to sprint to stay even marginally ahead. As part of that accelerated change, I believe we need to adopt the Canadian model of competing internationally for human resources.

Australia cannot save the world. But massive population movements, combined with the movements of capital and labour in a global economy, are happening and they are changing the traditional ideas of foreign policy, immigration, and national sovereignty.

For Australia to pretend that we can continue our present low level of immigration intake as if we are indeed 'Home alone' on the planet is, at best, naive. At worst it's self-defeating and is also ultimately indefensible in the international community.

But whatever our past shortcomings, it's clear that when it comes to immigration, this region and the rest of the world will be paying us far more attention in the future. We had better be ready for it and the best way to be ready for it, is to ask ourselves one question of enlightened self-interest.

That question is simple: Just what kind of future Australia do we want our children (and theirs) to inherit? Once we define what is desirable, we can work together to help make it possible.

What should we do about water?

Water is without doubt one of the greatest challenges facing Australia this century. But many of us have very different views when it comes to what we should be doing about water.

Mark Twain said that the problem with the weather was that while everybody talked about it, nobody actually did anything about it. The same might be said about water.

Australians have long been aware of the unique challenges facing this country when it comes to our water resources. But historically we haven't done enough about it.

Australia has now acknowledged that rising salinity is a national problem. We're becoming aware that our long-term national growth is going to depend on water. We're realising that fresh water is going to become an extremely valuable commodity. And we may soon see that water will emerge as a highly politically sensitive issue.

I have come to the conclusion that while Australia may be the driest continent, we don't have a water shortage problem so much as a water management and distribution problem.

I believe that the only way to address our water needs is to develop a national water policy.

I've also flagged the idea of tapping a proportion of the floodwaters from our northern rivers before they hit the sea and piping that water to our drier areas. We could even run some of the pipes alongside the Darwin to Adelaide railway.

I've flagged these sorts of pipe dreams because I believe we need to think big about water if we're going to secure Australia's long-term standard of living. But I also believe there are a multitude of other ideas that we should be investigating as we seek to introduce better management of our water resources.

These ideas range from a much greater emphasis on domestic water saving strategies in the home to more drip irrigation and soil monitoring on our farms. They include making massive investments in desalination which new technology is finally beginning to make viable. They also include ideas like water recycling.

The conjunction of two facts has led to my next proposal:

- more than 70 per cent of Australia's water consumption is used in agriculture
- Australia's superannuation industry is awash with cash that is looking for a secure home.

Australia should establish a national fund to finance the piping of all our major open irrigation channels.

Open irrigation channels are a highly inefficient method of transporting water – especially over long distances. Losses through evaporation and seepage can account for up to 80% of water volume from the time the water leaves its source until it reaches its destination. This is a dreadful waste in a country which can ill afford it.

To this end the Victorian Government is to be congratulated for making funds available for the Wimmera Mallee pipeline. The benefits of this long awaited project have been well documented. Just imagine the multiplier affect from a multitude of similar projects around the country.

Laying pipes in all Australia's major open irrigation channels to help eliminate evaporation and seepage would result in a dramatic increase in the amount of water available. That water could be used to help restore some of our river's environmental flows as well as opening up hundreds of thousands of hectares for more irrigation.

A scheme to pipe all Australia's open irrigation channels would cost many billions of dollars. It would be a long-term project of Snowy-Mountains scheme proportions. By the time the Snowy was finished in 1974 it had cost more than \$1billion. Today it would cost more than five times that much. Some have now questioned its value. But at the time the Snowy captured our imagination. Piping our irrigation channels would do the same thing and while clearly benefiting the environment it would also send a clear message that the government is prepared to show vision and leadership in addressing our water management challenges. It would have significant and long-term economic benefits for rural and regional Australia. So how would we pay for such a grand scheme? The Federal and/or State Governments could raise billions of dollars through the issue of 'water bonds' or a similar financial instrument that carry a Government-guaranteed rate of return. The money could be administered by the Government through the existing water authorities. In turn those authorities could tender for private companies to supply the pipes and carry out the work. A Government issued 'water bond' which carried an attractive rate of return would be a highly sought after investment by Australia's superannuation managers.

While the Australian Government has taken justifiable pride in its policy of reducing public debt, the issuing of Government 'water bonds' would help keep more of Australia's superannuation fund money onshore. It would also provide considerable economic stimulus and job creation in rural areas. It would help address rural problems like high youth unemployment, shrinking towns and social ills.

Lower welfare payments from lower unemployment, and higher tax revenues from the economic stimulus would help the government fund the bonds. Even if they are not self-funding, the long-term environmental gains to the country are worth the investment.

I believe that a scheme to pipe Australia's open irrigation channels would be one of the most effective, far-reaching and imaginative steps the Government could undertake to address the water management challenges facing Australia. It would help

bring us together as a nation and it would send a clear message that water management is one of the greatest issues facing this country.

Obviously the financing, planning, administration and implementation of this and other water ideas requires a great deal more analysis. But let's make sure that over analysis of water doesn't lead to paralysis. Otherwise, like Mark Twain with the weather, we'll all be talking about water, but nobody will be doing anything about it.

Taken from presentations by Richard Pratt at the Victorian Government Water Summit, May 2002 and the Melbourne Population and Immigration Summit, February 2002.

Source: www.Leadership Victoria.org

The Challenge of Justice and Truth for our leaders by Sir William Deane

Former Governor-General Sir William Deane, Australia's 22nd Governor-General from 1996 to 2001, launched an attack on the Federal Government when speaking at the University of Queensland after receiving a Doctor of Laws honoris causa in recognition of his distinguished career and his outstanding contribution to Australia in his role as Governor-General.

He criticised the Government over the "children overboard" affair and the holding of minors at the Woomera detention centre. He said future leaders should avoid seeking advantage by "inflaming ugly prejudice and intolerance".

Sir William also criticised the Government for its approach towards the two Australian men being held in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

"The fundamental responsibility of a democratic government to seek to safeguard the human rights of all its citizens, including the unpopular and the alleged wrongdoer, in the case of two Australians indefinitely caged without legal charge or process," he said.

Prime Minister John Howard rejected any suggestion that the Government inflames prejudice.

Below is an edited extract of the speech by the **Governor-General Sir William Deane at the University of Queensland**

The Honourable Sir William Deane AC KBE

William Patrick Deane was born in Melbourne in 1931. He was educated at St Christopher's Convent in Canberra, St Joseph's College in Sydney and Sydney University, where he graduated in Arts and Law. He worked for a period with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department in Canberra before travelling to Europe where he studied international law and was awarded the Diploma (cum Laude) of The Hague Academy of International Law in 1955.

After his return to Australia, William Deane worked for a period with a law firm and lectured at Sydney University. He was called to the bar in 1957 when he was just 26 years old. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1966.

In 1977 William Deane was appointed a judge of the Federal Court and the President of the Australian Trade Practices Tribunal. In 1982, the Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, appointed him a Justice of the High Court of Australia, Australia's highest court. In his 14 years on the High Court bench, Sir William favoured the rights of individuals over governments and he sat in judgement over significant cases such as the 1983 *Franklin River* case and the 1992 case.

He retired from the High Court in November 1995 subsequent to the announcement of his appointment as Governor General by the Prime Minister, Paul Keating. He was sworn in as Australia's 22nd Governor-General on 16 February 1996.

As Governor-General, Sir William made Australia's disadvantaged his priority and he spoke out on his desire to see meaningful Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Source: Official website of the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Edited extract of speech by former Governor-General Sir William Deane at the University of Queensland

One sometimes hears well-intentioned suggestions that multiculturalism is divisive, I respectfully disagree.

I'm convinced that it is our multiculturalism which has made possible our national unity, notwithstanding that we Australians come directly or indirectly from all the regions, cultures, races and religions of the world.

For multiculturalism means inclusiveness not division. It's enabled us to blend the many into a pretty harmonious whole without bringing to this new land old hatreds, old prejudices and old conflicts.

It's our multiculturalism in that sense which inspires and sustains our modern Australia.

Our multiculturalism is not the only thing of which Australians should be justly proud. There is our land itself. This matchless continent, its islands, its surrounding seas - there is the commitment to democratic government under the rule of law which we have maintained tenaciously in war and peace.

Very few other nations can look back on more than a century of democratic rule, unbroken by dictatorship of the left or right, civil war, military coup or conflict and they are all the achievements of the Australian people.

Let me add a few words about what I see as the principal challenges which our country faces in the years ahead.

There's a challenge to reverse the damage we've done to our land, its rivers and its coasts and to make good our failure as a nation to do enough to help safeguard the world environment for future generations.

There is the challenge to face up to the completely unacceptable yet growing gap between the haves and the have-nots in this, the land of the so-called fair-go for all, for the plight of the disadvantaged even in affluent Australia is an overwhelming problem which no-one of us, who has a voice to speak or the means to help can, in-conscience, ignore.

And there's the challenge to achieve true and lasting reconciliation between our Indigenous people and the nation of which they are such an important part.

There is one challenge for the future leaders of our nation which I would particularly emphasise in this gathering. It is the challenge of justice and truth.

The challenge never to be indifferent in the face of injustice or falsehood. It encompasses the challenge to advance truth and human dignity rather than to seek advantage by inflaming ugly prejudice and intolerance.

Who of us will easily forget the untruths about children overboard or the abuse of basic rights of innocent children by incarceration behind Woomera's razor wire.

Or the denial of the fundamental responsibility of a democratic government to seek to safeguard the rights of all its citizens including the unpopular and the alleged wrong-doer, in the case of two Australians indefinitely caged without legal charge or process in the Guantanamo Bay jail.

Some may think that these and other similar unpleasant things should be left unmentioned. But if our coming generation of leaders refuses to honestly confront the denial of justice or truth which they reflect our nation will surely lose its way in the years ahead.

Source: ABC Public Record

PM's Senate Reform Plan

The Prime Minister, John Howard, has unveiled his proposal to change the deadlock provisions of the Constitution. Under the current system, if the Senate blocks government bills, the Prime Minister can call a double dissolution election followed by a joint sitting of Parliament to break the deadlock. Mr Howard wants to call a joint sitting of both houses without going to an election and he says it is not a radical proposal. But Professor and Dean of law at the University of Notre Dame in Western Australia, Greg Craven, says the reform plan would make the Constitution worse.

Below is an edited transcript of Prime Minister's John Howard's speech to the Liberal Party National Convention in Adelaide and Professor Greg Craven's response:

PM states case for Senate reform

We all know from our learning of Australian history that the Senate was essentially given the powers it was given as a result of the federal compact between the various states of Australia at the time of Federation.

The ideal was that it would be a state's house as well as a house of review.

The reality is that long years ago the Federal Senate ceased to be the state's house and in more recent times it's also dropped, certainly through the instrument of the Labor Party and the minor parties and has certainly also dropped the pretence of being a house of review.

Tragically for Australia the Australian Senate in recent years, so far from being a state's house or a house of review has become a house of obstruction.

As a result of the changes that were made in 1983 when the size of the Parliament was increased, I might remind you against the determined vote of the Liberal Party, it is for practical purposes impossible for the Coalition in its own right to obtain a majority of the 76 members of the Federal Senate.

Some people have suggested that the way of tackling the dilemma of a Senate which opportunistically blocks legislation that is important or necessary to our future, the way in which you respond to that is to do some kind of deal with the Australian Labor Party to alter the voting system for electing Senators and to make it harder thereby for minor parties to win seats in the Senate.

I have to say that I am against that and I'm against it for one very simple reason, I think it's unfair and I think it's undemocratic. And I think the innate sense of fair play

of most Australians would react to the big boys as they would describe them ganging up on the smaller parties.

The truth is that in the less tribal Australian political state in which we now exist people want the option, whether we like it or not in a major party, of voting for smaller parties in the Senate.

And if we look as though we are kicking against that choice instead of going on persuading them as to the unwisdom of that choice then I think deservedly we will suffer.

The deadlock provisions of the Constitution in section 57 were inserted way back at the time of Federation. And they contemplated the holding of a joint sitting after a double dissolution in order to resolve deadlocks between the two Houses.

The reality is that in a period of 102 years they have only been used to produce a joint sitting on one occasion and that was in 1974 after the double dissolution election halfway through that never to be forgotten three years of the Whitlam government.

Only one occasion in 102 years, that has got to say something about the relative unworkability of those provisions in a practical sense of resolving deadlocks between the two Houses. And unless we are to accept that a non-government majority in the Senate represents, absent a double dissolution, a permanent veto on the aspirations mandated at earlier elections of the serving government, unless we are prepared to accept that then perhaps another way of addressing in a moderate, non-radical fashion and in a fashion that is respectful to the role of independents and minor parties some other approach has to be found in order to resolve deadlocks.

And not surprisingly when you look back through the history of constitutional examination you find some nuggets and I found a nugget back in 1959, it was a joint parliamentary committee on constitutional reform and it has impeccable bipartisan credentials.

One member of it was the then member for Werriwa, Edward Gough Whitlam, and the other was Sir Alec, or later to become Sir Alec Downer, that well known South Australian Liberal, the father of our present Foreign Minister, a former minister in the Menzies government and former Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

And what that committee essentially recommended was that the Constitution should be altered by referendum to provide that if legislation were rejected on a number of occasions by the Senate in the way described in section 57 now there could be a joint sitting of the two houses called without the necessity to hold a double dissolution.

And that if the legislation were passed that joint sitting then it would become law. I think that could offer some years into the future a way of providing a more modern and contemporary and workable method of resolving differences between the two Houses.

And it is the Government's intention to prepare and issue for public debate a

discussion paper on such a proposal, we have not made a decision as yet to commit ourselves to the holding of a referendum, at this stage we have made decision to commit ourselves to the issuing of a discussion paper and the initiation through it of public debate. We have to find a way which is moderate and non-threatening and which respects the desire of the Australian people often to differentiate their vote between the House of Representatives and the Senate to resolve the deadlocks that we are facing.

The proposition that every time a bill that is important to a government that in our case has been elected on three consecutive occasions, the proposition that the only way you, for years into the future, are going to solve that dilemma is by going to the expense of having often a premature double dissolution of Parliament, is I think increasingly unacceptable in the modern Australia in which we now operate.

I know that constitutional referendums are notoriously difficult to get passed, we tried to break the nexus between the size of the House of Representatives in the Senate back in 1967, and that was overwhelmingly defeated, even though it had the support of both the Labor Party and the Liberal Party, and we all know the history of more recent constitutional referendums.

But that doesn't absolve me or the Government of the responsibility of trying to find a way around this challenge.

Conditions could exist for a double dissolution of the Parliament, in fact technically they exist now, although let me repeat my view that the current Parliament ought, absence special circumstances, run its full term.

No Prime Minister responsibly forswears his right to call an election if the circumstances are required, but I have the strongest possible view that the Australian people rightly visit electoral judgment on prime ministers and premiers who go expeditiously on an earlier occasion than they might to the polls without a proper reason based on public policy. But double dissolutions in the present circumstances would not produce as good an outcome in the Senate for us as would a half Senate held at the normal time towards the end of next year. And they are all the circumstances that I have to take into account.

So I take this opportunity of saying to you very frankly that we do need to look at whether the time has come to alter the deadlock provisions of the constitution.

And if after that process of three months consultation we thought there was a reasonable prospect of community support the likelihood is that the Government would seek to run the referendum in conjunction with the next general election, whenever that occurs.

Now let me repeat this is not a radical proposal. It is a moderate, practical, sensible, long ago thought of idea to resolve what in some circumstances is a legislative nut without the necessity of the constitutional hammer of an expensive and of course inappropriate double dissolution.

PM's Senate reform plan under fire

By Professor and Dean of Law at the University of Notre Dame in Western Australia, Greg Craven

John Howard's idea to amend the Australian Constitution to scrap double dissolutions has two outstanding qualities: it is bad and it will fail.

This is an amendment the Constitution does not need.

One of the biggest problems in Australia's constitutional system is that governments are too powerful, not that they are lacking in power.

A rare restraint on an ascendant government is the Senate. Because of the way it is elected, the Senate is not normally dominated by either of the major parties.

This means that the Senate does not automatically do the Government's bidding. This is very frustrating for governments and there are plenty of irritating ratbags in the Upper House. But in a democracy, a certain amount of irritation is good for a government.

If a government could ram through legislation blocked by the Senate without an election, the Senate would stop being a strong house of veto. It would be nothing more than a pathetic house of delay.

This is an odd proposal for a conservative Prime Minister, given that conservatives traditionally defend the Constitution and support checks and balances on power. If anything, this proposal reeks of Whitlam, not Menzies.

Conservatives also value federalism and yet this proposal will hurt the states. A weak Senate reduces the influence of the smaller states in favour of New South Wales and Victoria.

In any event, the proposal will go nowhere fast.

In the first place, no referendum passes without bi-partisan support. Labor has not had a good year, but it would have to be exceptionally stupid to support a proposal that provided John Howard with a hamstrung Senate.

Even if Labor lost the plot and supported the idea, however, it would still fail.

First, the proposal is about giving even more power to the party and prime minister in government. A country deeply suspicious of politicians will be unimpressed.

Second, the smaller states know full well that a strong Senate is in their interests. The proposal will never get up in the required four states.

The question must be why Australia's most brilliant politician is backing a certain loser.

One answer might be that Mr Howard has a lot of important legislation coming up to the Senate. From his point of view, a frightened Senate is a good Senate.

Or, if he is thinking about a double dissolution of his own, he would like everybody thinking about Senate obstructionism.

Both objects are now achieved.

Source: ABC Public Record

Proposed Amendments to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act

The Senate Committee considering the amendments to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission legislation produced its report at the end of April 2003 in relation to legislation, now before Parliament that provides for restructuring HREOC and renaming it the Australian Human Rights Commission, creating a structure of a president and three commissioners, requiring the Commission to obtain the Attorney-General's consent before seeking leave to intervene in court proceedings, and removing HREOC's power to recommend payment of damages of compensation for certain complaints.

The legislation will eliminate the positions of separate Commissioners (Human Rights, Sex Discrimination, Race Discrimination, Disability Discrimination, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice).

Will the proposed changes impair the effectiveness of the Commission to protect human rights in Australia? If the Commissioners are 'generalist' in focus, will the expertise in, areas like racial discrimination and Indigenous justice be diluted? Will the proposed changes compromise the independence of the Commission?

To read the Senate's Report and submissions made to the Senate Committee, see ***Inquiry into the Provisions of the Australian Human Rights Commission Legislation Bill 2003 in the Bills Reports Table*** at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/reports/index.htm

Professor Mick Dodson calls for action to stop brutality in Aboriginal Communities

A respected Aboriginal leader has called for extreme action to stop what he calls the increasing brutality against Aboriginal women and children. Professor Mick Dodson is the head of the Australian National University's Institute for Indigenous Australia

and says violence in Aboriginal communities is getting worse. Professor Dodson says there would be community outrage if the same thing was happening in white communities and it is time for action to be taken.

Speaking at the National Press Club in June 2003, Professor Dodson has called for a national approach to the problem, which he says is devastating communities.

Below is an edited transcript

An edited transcript of speech to the National Press Club by Professor Mick Dodson - newly appointed Indigenous Chair at the Australian National University in Canberra

Violence is a difficult subject to talk about, but we all must.

I want to talk about the different forms of violence afflicting Aboriginal communities and about how we (collectively) let this situation get so bad. I also want to mention what we are doing about it and what I think we should be doing.

And importantly, I want to make the point that violence is not and never was part of Aboriginal tradition.

I am going to begin by talking about the different forms of violence that are shattering our communities and if this level of violence continues we will not be able to realise our potential or achieve our aspirations.

In saying this, I acknowledge that violence is not just an Aboriginal problem, but unfortunately seems to be endemic in all societies, including the broader Australian society.

It manifests itself differently in different societies, it may be more or less visible, and it evokes different responses in different societies. Violence is common in impoverished, depressed and marginalised communities everywhere. There are no exceptions.

However, I am not talking about violence generally, I am talking specifically about Aboriginal experiences of violence.

Violence is undermining our life's very essence, it is destroying us, and there are very few Aboriginal families that are not struggling with the debilitating effects of trauma, despair and damage resulting from their experiences with violence.

I am talking about violence between Aboriginal people, and against Aboriginal people, about domestic violence between partners, sexual violence against men, women and children by individuals and groups, violence by groups against other groups, self harm and suicide, and all forms of psychological and, what I call 'historical violence' experienced by individuals and families over generations.

I am talking about violence that is now so entrenched in our relationships that the victims become the perpetrators of violent acts which continue to the next generation

of children, so that even before those children reach adulthood, they in turn become perpetrators of violence against members of their own families.

I am talking about violence that traumatises entire families and communities that is sometimes referred to as 'dysfunctional community syndrome'. Where people are traumatised even by association and the knowledge of, and the witnessing of acts of violence.

I am talking about alcohol and drug induced violence, and the sheer madness of communities supporting clubs and wet canteens where alcohol related violence and dysfunction dominate the rhythms of life for everyone.

And I am talking about psychological violence experienced through racism, through misguided public policies, through exclusion and limited opportunities for economic integration and participation in Australian life.

We are overburdened by our experiences of all these forms of violence.

To read the many reports detailing violence in our communities is to make one weep.

While we have endured and survived cultural ravages, violence and abuse beyond the comprehension of the colonisers and their descendants - our friends and critics - we cannot and must not refrain from taking individual responsibility for our actions - especially our actions of abuse against others less powerful than ourselves - namely our women and children.

We have no cultural traditions based on humiliation, degradation and violation.

Let me make this point abundantly clear.

Most of the violence, if not all, that Aboriginal communities are experiencing today are not part of Aboriginal tradition or culture.

The kinship system in Aboriginal communities is and can be a powerful force. Social relations between people are among the most important aspects of Aboriginal life and have a huge impact on what Aboriginal people do.

Family ties and extended relationships underpin how people interact, including which individuals have obligations toward each other, and individuals they should avoid. There is a strong sense of reciprocity between Aboriginal people. Adults have ongoing commitments to one another, and to other younger and older members of the community. All disputes are resolved by kinship structures of reciprocity and in most Aboriginal communities, senior lawmen or elders receive great respect.

Some of our perpetrators of abuse and their apologists corrupt these ties and our culture in a blatant and desperate attempt to excuse their abusive behaviour.

Physical punishment is not unknown in Aboriginal culture as it is in other cultures. However, in Aboriginal culture it was highly regulated and governed. Carried out by and witnessed by people with particular relationships with the perpetrator and the

victim.

We all must acknowledge that the level of violence in our communities is totally unacceptable. It is extreme and requires extreme action. Our behaviours of silencing is no longer sustainable and can no longer be excused.

The statistics and descriptions of violence are well known and well documented.

In 1998 the Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce estimated that family violence affects 90 per cent of Aboriginal families living in Aboriginal Trust areas and that Aboriginal women experience violence at a rate of 45 times higher than for the non-Indigenous women .

The Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Inquiry found that in Queensland in the period 1980 to 1989, 27 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died in custody. Recent research by Atkinson has found more women have died from family violence in one community in Queensland than all the deaths in custody in that State. This is devastating for any community.

Recent research by Paul Memmot and others for the Federal Attorney-General's Department concludes that the rates of violence is increasing and the types of violence are getting worse in some Indigenous communities and regions.

[Author] Peter Sutton describes a scene of devastation among the newly placed crosses in the cemetery of a small remote community.

"The cemetery there reminds me of the Australian war graves cemetery at Villers-Bretonneaux in France, white crosses, many of them fresh, stretch away seemingly for hundreds of meters. In my time with this community eight people known to me have died at their own hands, two of them women, six of them men. Five of these were young men. From the same community in the same period thirteen people known to me have been victims of homicide, eight of them women, seven of them men, and twelve others have committed homicide, nine of them men and three of them women. Most of these again were young people, and most of the homicides occurred in the home settlement of both assailant and victim. As far as I knew there was only one homicide and one suicide in this community between 1960 and 1985. A wet canteen was opened there for the first time in 1985. Most of the homicides and suicides I refer to here have occurred between 1986 and 2001."

Child violence includes neglect, incest, and assault by adult carers, paedophilia, and rape of infants by youths. Our children are experiencing horrific levels of violence and sexual abuse beyond comprehension.

I cannot bring myself to relate the extent and the detail of some of the violent encounters endured by children and babies that I have read in the process of writing this paper.

Others also have written about how this is 'threatening the future of the community as a viable social entity'.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce Report said that: "When a community has to deal with the tragic deaths of 24 young men in one year, most of which were suicides, there can be no stronger cry for help. Indeed, it is a deafening roar that something is desperately wrong. When the same community reports three men raping a three year old child, who was raped by another offender ten days later, there is a crisis [of] huge proportions. This same community has a \$6 million tavern."

How did we get to this point in our history?

There are various causal theories about why violence in Indigenous communities has reached this crisis point.

These theories have been debated and developed for years and all direct our attention to the complexities of the specific Indigenous experience in this country.

Not many allude to the manifestation of violence and abuse that are common in all communities who are impoverished and marginalised both socially and economically.

There was of course, our violent colonisation; over two centuries of discriminatory and damaging social policies often enforced or imposed with violence resulting in trans-generational trauma.

There have been our own individual experiences of violations and violence as children; our continued collective social marginalisation and economic exclusion and impoverishment, all of which combine into a volatile cocktail of despair, anger, powerlessness, and a sense of hopelessness.

Our collective experiences form deep scars within each of us individually. And we become over-whelmed by emotions of insecurity, hurt and shame that often manifests itself in silence, sickness and isolation, or violence.

We must find ways of moving beyond the silence, we must find a way of moving beyond the shame and numbed acceptance.

Many of us are trying, but many of us are not trying hard enough.

We are not trying as individuals, we are not breaking through the silent shame to confront our violent brothers, and are not supporting others who, despite their own traumas, are trying to help themselves and others to come to terms with their own violent experiences.

And, I don't think those of us who are said to be leaders are providing the leadership that is so desperately required in these circumstances.

We are not calling on governments at all levels to support us, to support community initiatives and to work collaboratively to combat violence and to service our communities with counsellors and other resources as a national priority.

I propose that the Aboriginal leadership in [this] country, men and women together,

call on the Australian Government to work with us in partnership, to acknowledge the centrality of violence induced trauma and its debilitating effects and to combat family violence as a national priority.

The unacceptable levels of violence have not gone unnoticed by Aboriginal communities, or by States and Territories and the Federal Government.

Indeed there are reports after reports at federal, state, local government and community levels detailing the extent of violence in Aboriginal communities .

There are dozens of small community projects around Australia being funded under these and other small grants programs from many sources.

Some of these small projects are creating headlines with their determination, direction and results at the community level. But many lack long term, coordinated, sufficiently resourced and networked support.

Some of these programs include: night patrols; community justice groups; therapy camps for victims and offenders; youth services; violence education; family violence prevention; women's shelters and resource centres; suicide prevention; counselling services; men's anti-violence services and sobriety groups; and substance abuse programs.

Aboriginal women have been crying for help and have gathered themselves together for support and healing in many forums.

Despite Aboriginal men's general silence and our inability to collectively embrace discussions about violence there are also many notable people and programs developing.

Extreme situations require extreme responses.

While there are certainly issues of structural change, recognition of past wrongs and influences of violent histories that require attention at the Federal level, so too are drastic, overarching responses required at other levels to address the fear and terror that many Indigenous people are experiencing now.

Most of the above mentioned reports and initiatives have acknowledged the complexities of the Indigenous experiences of violence and most have called for 'whole of government - whole of community' responses.

However, despite some national level directions and inter-governmental committees with responsibilities for domestic violence programs there remains no centralised national policy direction and commitment within a framework of shared responsibility.

This is not just our problem; this is everyone's problem.

It is not only the Indigenous leadership that should be tackling these issues, it also requires strong political leadership from the Prime Minister and from state and

territory premiers and chief ministers to properly prioritise policies addressing domestic and other violence in Indigenous communities.

Addressing the violence in Aboriginal communities is central to underpinning the success of all other Aboriginal programs.

Despite the national void in national Aboriginal violence policy, many people and groups around the country are trying to develop initiatives to deal with violence.

Unfortunately, this support appears to be lacking any sense of cohesion, across state and territory boundaries and between on the ground initiatives.

The fact is that the effectiveness of all programs and services to Aboriginal people are undermined by the extent of violence in Aboriginal communities.

Violent encounters within houses cause untold, unmeasured damage to housing and infrastructure, it hinders people's ability to work, and it affects children's ability to engage in the education system.

It creates such stress and physical trauma in our bodies that many health initiatives are pointless. All these major programs are ineffectual without acknowledging the extent that violence infiltrates daily activities and encounters.

Violence must be tackled as a priority, not part of some other secondary program, but as a central feature in Aboriginal social and economic policy across all of government - all of community priorities.

If having established commitment and partnership at the national level by Aboriginal leaders, communities and governments for allocating top priority to address violence, we must focus on establishing safety and security in our communities.

People cannot talk about violence while they are still living in fear and terror. Once safe, the issues of silence and shame and hurt can be discussed by families and communities with governments and organisations.

The silence around domestic or family violence is deafening.

Silence takes on many forms in the context of violence. Let me explain.

There is silence because of shame.

There is silence because people are scared about revisiting painful memories.

There is silence because of intimidation and fear of reprisal.

There is silence because of the fear that the violent perpetrator may be locked up, or that of not wanting to hurt others in the family or community by exposing violence.

There is also silence because people continue to live in fear, that they have no safe place to go to express this fear or to seek help where they are confident it will be dealt

with appropriately. Worse still there are too many places in this country where our people live where there is nowhere to go for help.

People are also silent because they fear the interrogation of the police more than the fear of repeated violent acts against them by their relatives.

And there is silence because 'it is not our business to talk up'.

I was very shaken by Peter Sutton's remarks when he wrote, in his paper I referred to earlier, that: "On my return to the city I felt unable to give comfort to the view that a non-Indigenous person should leave public statements on these questions to Indigenous people alone...The tragic circumstances I refer to are not alone the business of those who suffer them."

Paul Memmot in his recent report to the Attorney-General's Department quotes David Martin, who says there is a need to encourage the "muted voice to express".

However, the muted voices - often the victims of violence - will not and cannot break that silence if they are not safe.

Publicly admitting the problem of violence in a community and acknowledging the need for collective action is the first step towards healing and combating such violence.

And it is impossible for me to emphasise this enough.

The violence occurring in Aboriginal communities today is not part of Aboriginal tradition or culture. It is occurring principally because of the marginalisation of Aboriginal people, the economic and welfare dependency, continuing high levels of unemployment, the dissolution of our culture and tradition and the breakdown of societal and community values.

Violence is devastating our communities and destroying our futures. I call on all of us to take responsibility now to work together to combat the violence. And because too many of us for too long are either unwilling or incapable of taking responsibility.

What we now need to do is to build the safe places so the muted voices can be heard. This is so vitally important to start the healing process in local communities.

This requires individual, family, community, state and federal governments to commit to working collaboratively against violence and to place these issues at the top of the policy agenda as a national priority.

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Source: ABC Public Record

Three Stage Plan to Halve Child Poverty in 10 Years - ACOSS

In a public hearing before the Senate Poverty Inquiry held in Canberra today, the Australian Council of Social Service will present proposals for a three-stage plan that would halve child poverty and reduce overall poverty in Australia by a quarter in ten years.

"One in six Australian children - around 740,000 kids - are at risk of poverty today. Overall, there are more than two million Australians in income poverty," said ACOSS President Andrew McCallum.

"While the level of deprivation that poor people face in Australia is not worsening, there are more and more people who are forced to go without the necessities that others take for granted."

"In a country as rich as Australia there is no excuse for the level of poverty and hardship that surrounds us today. We need a long-term anti-poverty plan with firm targets that is supported by all major political parties and which involves the whole community.

"ACOSS proposes a new national Anti-Poverty Commission that would set targets and monitor progress in wiping out child poverty and substantially reducing overall poverty through three stages:

1. Adequate incomes and improved living standards

The risk of poverty for around 1.5 million unemployed people, students, sole parent families, and jobless families with teenagers would be quickly reduced by rises in social security benefits and reductions in poverty traps. A \$30 a week rise in the unemployment benefit of \$190 a week - up to the frugal Age Pension payment - would make a good start. Better health, housing and community services would also immediately improve living standards for disadvantaged families and individuals. For example, with 90,000 social security recipients currently spending over 50% of their income in rent, providing affordable housing in areas where there are jobs would lift many out of poverty.

2. Jobs and employment assistance

Over the medium-term, generating more jobs and helping jobless people better compete for the jobs that are available by providing them with work experience and skills training would further reduce the number of jobless families in poverty. Current policies are failing to make substantial inroads into long-term unemployment. The number of people receiving unemployment benefits long-term is higher now (380,000) than seven years ago (350,000).

3. Education and capacity building

People with limited education, skills and full-time employment experience are more likely to fall into poverty. A cost-effective anti-poverty strategy for the long-term is to invest in education for disadvantaged children and 'second-chance' education & training for adults. We also need to address the social and economic problems of severely depressed communities such as some Indigenous communities, large housing estates and areas of regional decline.

"Where governments have a will to reduce poverty there is a way. Research shows that the Hawke Government's commitments helped reduce child poverty by one third. The Howard Government has helped reduce poverty among older Australians by indexing pensions to rises in average earnings."

"Beating poverty will take longer than the life of a single government - that is why we need a comprehensive strategy that has the support of all major parties."

(Source: ACOSS)