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FEATURE STORY

Who's being unfair on small business?

By Wes Ward, CSU

For the past five years, the Australian Federal Government has said it might make small businesses exempt from the current unfair dismissal laws, which were

introduced by the previous Labor government. The Coalition government says these laws are stifling jobs growth. But do small businesses really want this change?

Although Australian small businesses are familiar with current Federal unfair dismissal laws, support from businesses is evenly split over whether small businesses should be exempt from current legislation, according to two Charles Sturt University (CSU) researchers.

“Through the results of our study, we believe the Federal Government’s plan to water down unfair dismissal laws is based on ideological grounds rather than a sound decision based on the majority opinion of small business,” said Dr Bill Robbins from the University’s School of Business.



In Albury-Wodonga, 37 per cent of small businesses said they should be exempt from Federal Government unfair dismissal laws, while 38 per cent said they should not, and 21 per cent were unsure.

CSU business researchers Dr Bill Robbins (left) and Mr Gerry Voll.
Photo: Richard Williams

In one of the largest surveys ever carried out with Australian small businesses, Dr Robbins and fellow researcher Mr Gerry Voll have found that 37 per cent of small businesses in Albury-Wodonga on the NSW-Victorian border said they should be exempt from Federal unfair dismissal laws, while 38 per cent said they should not and 21 per cent were unsure.

“Small businesses are well aware of unfair dismissal laws, with 40 per cent of respondents having formal policies and practices in place to deal with job terminations,” said fellow researcher, Mr Gerry Voll.

“But the extent of problems cited by the Federal government with current unfair dismissal laws must be questioned. Only 17 per cent of the businesses surveyed have dismissed an employee in the past five years, and only 3 per cent have had an unfair dismissal claim lodged against them. Of these claims, over half of the employers were happy with the outcomes of the claim.



“Unfair dismissal laws affect relatively few small businesses. And with over half of those business owners affected representing themselves, the Federal government claim that the laws were too complicated appears unfounded.”

CSU business researcher Gerry Voll

Photo: Richard Williams

Current unfair dismissal laws - a summary

Employees can contest their dismissal under federal and state industrial relations law and to have cases considered by the State or Federal Industrial Relations Commissions (IRC). Employers can contest these claims. Federal IRC hears 7,500 cases per year.

A claim is processed by negotiation, conciliation or arbitration. Employers and employees can present their own cases or engage an agent to act on their behalf.

In the Federal IRC:

- *21 % of claims are settled before conciliation;*
- *55 % at conciliation; or*
- *3 % by arbitration.*
- *The rest are rejected by the Commission.*

Dr Robbins said that neither employers and employees seem more likely to win a case, according to the results of formal unfair dismissal cases.

Source: Charles Sturt University

“Unfair dismissal laws affect relatively few small businesses. And with over half of those business owners affected representing themselves, the Federal Government claim that the laws were too complicated appears unfounded.”

According to Dr Robbins, small businesses disagree strongly with the Federal Government’s claim that current unfair dismissal laws hinder jobs growth.

“Survey results show that ‘workload’ and ‘economic conditions’ were the overwhelming reasons for hiring or firing staff. Only 6 per cent of those surveyed said unfair dismissal laws were a factor in employing staff,” Dr Robbins said.

The results come from the responses of nearly 600 small businesses to surveys carried out in 2003 in the adjoining regional cities of Albury and Wodonga. The businesses surveyed represent over one fifth of the total small businesses in the cities.
world

World-wide vigilance to protect whale sharks

An international marine conference in Perth held in May 05 issued a plea for countries to work more vigorously at protecting the unique, migratory whale shark and its habitat.

In a communiqué released at the end of the 4-day conference more than 80 delegates from 23 countries stamped the world's largest fish as vital for the maintenance of biodiversity, the health of marine ecosystems, and appreciation by future generations.

The communiqué calls on all nations and governments to facilitate a rapid transition away from harvesting of whale sharks to sustainable alternatives, such as carefully managed eco-tourism.

The communiqué says: "... the evidence points to serious declines in the abundance of whale sharks in some parts of the world following even short periods of exploitation." The species is listed as 'vulnerable' by the International Conservation Union.

The conference was convened by Australia's Strategic Research Fund for the Marine Environment (SRFME). SRFME Research Director, CSIRO's Dr John Keesing, said that while there is cause for heightened concern over the state of global populations there is also cause for optimism.

"The whale shark's greatest asset is its enormous popularity. Time and again conference papers pointed to the species being worth far more alive than dead. The challenge now is to bring this fact to bear on those corners of the world where viable, sustainable alternatives to harvesting, such as eco-tourism, have not yet taken hold," Dr Keesing said.

A conference paper from Belize (Gulf of Mexico) valued a live whale shark at US\$34,000 a year as a tourist drawcard. The same animal would return US\$6000 if slaughtered for the Taiwan market. Whale shark tourism at Western Australia's Ningaloo Reef is valued at \$12 million a year.

The communiqué also calls for greater local, regional and international effort and collaboration in:

- researching such things as shark behaviour, life-history biology, genetics and ecological interactions with and dependencies on the physical and bio-geochemical environment; and
- whale shark conservation, including wildlife and habitat protection agreements, fisheries monitoring and management programs, education, community-based conservation projects, and economic feasibility studies.

Source: CSIRO

United Nations World Youth Report 2005

Main findings and recommendations

In 2005 it will be ten years since the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth in 1995. With over 200 million youth living in poverty, 130 million youth illiterate, 88 million unemployed and 10 million young people living with HIV/AIDS, the case for a renewed commitment to the goals of the World Programme of Action is clear.

In the World Youth Report 2005, an official report to the General Assembly, it is argued that too often, youth policy is driven by negative stereotypes of young people, including delinquency, drug abuse and violence. What seems to be forgotten that young people are a positive force for development, peace, and democracy.

These are some of the highlights of the World Youth Report 2005. A short official version, entitled "World Youth Report 2005 – Report of the Secretary-General" is available for download now in all official languages.

An extended version of the World Youth Report 2005 will be launched during the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action, which will be celebrated at the United Nations General Assembly, on 6 October 2005.

The full World Youth Report 2005 is currently a work in progress. It will provide a full overview of the ten priority areas of the World Programme of Action and the five additional issues that were identified in 2003. It will highlight three emerging issues of concern to young people and youth policy makers, namely:

- **Youth in The Global Economy: Young people living in poverty** This section will be based on the research and findings related to the Workshop on Youth in Poverty, held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in August 2004.
- **Youth and Civil Society: The emergence of a media-driven youth culture** This section is based on the findings of a Workshop on Global Media-Driven Youth Culture held in New York in May 2004.
- **Youth at Risk: Young people in armed conflict** Currently, collaborative research efforts are being undertaken for this section.

Overview of main findings

- **Poverty:** Over 200 million young people, or 18 per cent of all youth, live on less than one dollar a day, and 515 million on less than two dollars a day. It is unclear if the poverty situation of young people worldwide has improved or deteriorated since 1995.
- **Education:** Since 1995, the number of children completing primary school has continued to increase, and four out of five young people in the eligible age group are now in secondary school. Also tertiary enrolment has increased; it is estimated that globally, some 100 million youth are currently enrolled in university-level education. The current generation of youth is the best-educated so far. Yet, 113 million children are not in school; this compares with the current cohort of 130 million youth who are illiterate.
- **Employment:** Despite the fact that youth are receiving more education, youth unemployment in the world has increased to record levels. Youth unemployment, at a total of 88 million, is highest in the Western Asia, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. There is increased pressure on young people to compete in a globalizing labour market.
- **Health:** Globally, young people are reaching adolescence at earlier ages and marrying later. Premarital sexual relations appear to be increasing. Although early pregnancy has declined in many countries, it is still a large concern. HIV/AIDS is the first cause of mortality of youth, followed by violence and injuries.
- **Environment:** Young people continue to be concerned for the sustainable future, although there is a need to increase their involvement in decision-making processes that relate to the environment.
- **Drug abuse:** There has been an unprecedented emergence of the use of synthetic drugs worldwide, mostly used in recreational settings. Partial restrictions on marketing of alcohol and tobacco have not yet prevented higher use in developing countries; demand of illicit substances among youth in developing countries has increased to levels typically found in industrialized countries.
- **Juvenile delinquency:** Delinquency committed by youth continues to be perceived as a threat to society. In some countries this has led to an active

incarceration and deterrence policy, which may have reduced crimes committed by young offenders; this policy has however come at a high cost.

- Girls and young women: There has been greater awareness of gender issues among governments. However, equal access to higher education and labour markets continues to be a concern in some countries, negative stereotypes of women have continued to persist, both in old and in new media.
- Participation in decision-making: The past decade has seen a growing recognition of the importance of youth participation in decision-making. New efforts to include youth in decision-making must recognize the changing patterns and structures presently occurring in youth movements.
- Globalization: Youth are most flexible and perhaps best able to adapt to and make use of new opportunities offered by globalization. Yet many youth especially in developing countries, have not benefited. Globalization has had an impact on global youth employment opportunities, and on migration patterns; it has led to deep changes in youth culture and consumerism, and in different manifestations of global youth citizenship and activism.
- Information and communication technology: The proliferation of ICTs that has accompanied the process of globalization in the past ten years has presented both opportunities and challenges for young people. The global digital divide affects young people as well.
- HIV/AIDS: Ten million young people currently live with HIV/AIDS, mostly in Africa and Asia. The spread of the virus has had a devastating impact on young people's sexual and reproductive health. Young people are particularly vulnerable to contract the virus.
- Youth and conflict: Young people have been disproportionately involved in conflicts over the past decade. Despite the international legal framework to protect minors and prevent their engagement in conflict situations, there has not been an improvement on the ground.
- Intergenerational relations: The share of youth in the world's total population is gradually shrinking, and youth development will increasingly be viewed for the potential benefits it can bring to other generations. Despite its changing structure, the family remains the first social institution where generations meet and interact.

Twelve recommendations

1. With over 200 million youth living in poverty, 130 million youth illiterate, 88 million unemployed and 10 million young people living with HIV/AIDS, the case for a renewed commitment to the goals of the World Programme of Action is clear.
2. The dichotomy of youth in developed versus developing countries is becoming less apparent with urbanization, globalization, and the emergence of a global media-driven youth culture.
3. Too often, youth interventions are driven by negative stereotypes of young people, including delinquency, drug abuse and violence.
4. Investing in youth starts with children. Intensified commitment and investment now in the Millennium Development Goals (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>) will have enormous benefits for the young people of 2015.
5. There is a strong need to scale up the investments in youth.

6. Young people should be seen as partners in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
7. Governments at all levels are encouraged to develop and implement integrated youth policies, making linkages between the different priority areas for youth development. There is also a continued need to pay special attention to various disadvantaged groups of young people in followup action on the World Programme of Action. These would include the special needs of young people with disabilities, young migrants, and indigenous youth, among others.
8. A set of verifiable indicators, some of which could be drawn from the Millennium Development Goals, would allow for better measurement of progress achieved for young people in the future.
9. On the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action, it would be appropriate to explore the possibility to provide a mandate for increased coordination within the United Nations system.
10. The General Assembly may consider formally adopting the five new issues of concern identified in this report and append those to the priorities of the World Programme of Action. The information provided in this this shows the case for doing so.
11. Young people should form part of the delegations to the special meetings of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session that will mark the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth in 2005.
12. Governments should continuously evaluate their youth policy, and involve young people in the evaluation.

Source: UN national

WHAT WOMEN WANT

In the first decade of the Twenty-first century, an Australian woman wants at minimum a room of her own, as Virginia Woolfe argued more than a hundred years past, even though we are once again in the grip of an affordable housing crisis.

The Australian woman in 2005 wants a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, as the late Edna Ryan argued, and as well to look forward to a living standard in retirement of reasonable dignity.

Most women combine family responsibilities with paid work. Only 4% of young Australian women aspire to be full time at home with family in mid-life. Australian research into the aspirations of young Australian women has demonstrated that, by the age of 35, 98% want to be in a relationship, 96% want paid employment, and 91% want children.

Public policy frameworks set the scene for the Australian woman to meet these wants, whether she is married, single, supporting children, living with a disability, from a migrant or refugee background, an indigenous Australian, a country or a city dweller.

The Commonwealth Budget of 2005 saw some very important changes in the policy frameworks affecting women of working age.

The entire range of income support programs to which women of working age might turn for assistance has been transferred from the Department of Family Service (FaCS) to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). The underpinning

philosophy is encapsulated in the rubric 'welfare to work'. The objective is to encourage (by means of both incentives and disincentives) a move into paid employment wherever possible.

As well, the Commonwealth Government has announced very significant changes to the Industrial Relations framework, including the proposed restriction of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, a move to the preferring of individual workplace agreements, and a forecast take-over through the Corporations Power in the Commonwealth Constitution, of the States' own industrial relations frameworks.

Without pre-judgement of the policy changes, the National Foundation for Australian Women, in collaboration with a strong alliance of national women's organisations, has decided to follow them up.

NFAW is part of a joint project of three of the secretariats for national women's organisations which are funded through the Commonwealth Office for Women, viz., the Australian Women's Coalition (AWC), Security for Women (S4W), and the WomenSpeak Network. Their URLs are below to assist background enquiries.

The project seeks to examine the potential impact on women of working age, and in particular on low income women, of the Budget 2005 changes to income security payments ('welfare to work'), the proposed changes to the industrial relations framework, and the likely interaction of the two sets of policy changes.

The project partners will develop a set of factual background papers. These will be posted here as well as on other relevant web-sites. We will hold a small invitational workshop, then summarise discussions at the workshop. Again, we will post that here

The workshop product will be made available as an information document for women's organisations, and used as a basis for any relevant input to the Commonwealth policy development process.

The following phase will involve submissions to the [HREOC](#) inquiry into work-family balance.

Source [NFAW](#)

Political Money Trail - The Greens democracy4sale Project

The Greens have taken a leading role in the campaign to reform political donations believing that donations taint the democratic process - 'they allow big business to buy a level of access to politicians that ordinary people don't have.' The democracy4sale project is an initiative of the Greens. The excerpts featured lists donations received by all political parties as well as the top 10 donors to the Liberal, National and Labor Parties for the 2003/04 election.

Controversial Reformer - Steven Schwartz

Steven Schwartz, one of the most controversial Vice chancellors in the higher education business in Australia, attracts debate. Currently vice-chancellor of Brunel University in London, he was an academic before, and then vice-chancellor of Murdoch University in
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Perth. Schwartz has been offered the job of vice-chancellor for Macquarie University, to start in 2006. He has authored 13 books and has won the Telstra National Employer of the Year Award.

Schwartz was recently interviewed by Michael Duffy for ABC's Counterpoint. The interview is at:

Controversial Reformer - Steven Schwartz

Monday 18 July 2005

Presented by Michael Duffy, for Counterpoint, ABC Radio

Transcript

Michael Duffy: I thought it would be interesting to get an overview of what's happening in higher education by having a chat to one of our best-known reforming administrators. Steven Schwartz was born in America but he's an Australian, and he is currently vice-chancellor of Brunel University in London. Before that he was an academic, and then he was vice-chancellor of Murdoch University in Perth. He's now been offered the position of vice-chancellor of Macquarie University in Sydney, which will start next year if he accepts it. Steven's done many other things; they include writing 13 books and winning the Telstra National Employer of the Year Award.

Steven, Welcome to Counterpoint. According to news reports here you had a sometimes rocky time with some of the staff at Murdoch and Brunel Universities. What was going on there? What sort of things were you trying to do, and what did they object to?

Steven Schwartz: I should say at the outset, only small numbers of people objected, but it's difficult when you want to change universities because they are places that change very slowly, and perhaps that's right...tradition is important. But sometimes, when you want to modernise, you do leave some people feeling a bit left out.

Michael Duffy: And can you give us an example of some of the changes that you've brought in?

Steven Schwartz: One of the things that we've had to do in universities around the world is become a lot more business-like in our operations, and sometimes that means that the old consensual way of making all the decisions through committees is not always possible. It's okay, I suppose, and it's important to get input from everyone involved but sometimes managers have to make decisions, and when that happens sometimes others feel that they should have been making the decisions themselves, I guess.

Michael Duffy: Is it possible to generalise about the sort of response you get from staff to this reform, which I know is going on all over the world? Do most people accept it in the end, or is there a majority opposition?

Steven Schwartz: I think it's quite important to know that universities have always changed, and universities are very old social institutions; they've been going since the Middle Ages, some even before that, and they are unrecognisable today from what they once were. The curriculum in the Middle Ages might have been astronomy, rhetoric, algebra...our curricula today are completely different. Universities have always adjusted

and made themselves relevant to the communities in which they operate, and I don't think that will change.

Michael Duffy: Much of the public discussion of universities in Australia involves money and, in particular, its inadequacy. I'd like to ask you a few questions about that; first of all, do you think that is one of the main things we should be talking about here?

Steven Schwartz: I think so. I think money is always important in universities, and I should say there is never enough money because there's always more that you can do. The levels of excellence that universities strive for are quite expensive.

Michael Duffy: So how would our financial problems compare with British universities, for example?

Steven Schwartz: I don't think they would be very different and, again, for American universities for that matter, or universities anywhere else. All universities are, by their very nature, trying to be as excellent institutions as they can, and that means more money. Universities are seeking that through international students, through trying to commercialise their intellectual property, in a variety of different ways.

Michael Duffy: Do older universities tend to have more money?

Steven Schwartz: I think older universities do tend to have more money, precisely because they're older and they've had more time to accumulate it.

Michael Duffy: What about HECS? I understand that's an Australian invention. If that's true, has that been copied anywhere?

Steven Schwartz: It is true, and it's about to be copied in a slightly modified form here in England. In 2006 students will be eligible to take out income contingent loans and repay their fees through the taxation system, essentially the same idea as the one brought in in Australia in the 1980s.

Michael Duffy: Has it had something of the same resistance, the initial resistance?

Steven Schwartz: I think the resistance in the UK might actually have been stronger. On the final vote in the House of Commons, the government, with a 160 seat majority, only got it through by five votes.

Michael Duffy: Just looking at Australia again, what are some of the things that you think we might be exploring in regards to coping with the financial issues in the coming years?

Steven Schwartz: One thing that I'm sure that Australian universities are exploring is the commercialisation of their intellectual property, and I think there's two reasons for doing that; one is that a lot of the research discoveries that go on in university are subsidised by the tax payer through research grants, and therefore universities have a duty (and the desire, I should say) to give back to the public something for the money they invest. The other reason, of course, is the universities hope to make money out of inventions and everybody knows that they need the money.

Michael Duffy: Someone like me who is outside the universities has got a vague

impression that this commercialisation has been going on for a long time. Is there still a lot more to be done?

Steven Schwartz: No, I think the great majority of universities do seek to give back to the public the benefits of their research and at the same time try to make some profits that they can use for teaching and research. I think what's probably changed is the intensity of it, and we have a lot more commercial activity going on in universities than perhaps we did once before. Most universities are plunging headlong into commercialisation.

Michael Duffy: This is another general question for someone who's a stranger to much of this; where does this leave the humanities? Is there a cross-subsidy going on? Is there a reluctance to do that?

Steven Schwartz: I think universities have always cross-subsidised, and I think that there are genuine and legitimate arguments for doing so, particularly when it means that subjects won't be able to be taught unless there is some cross-subsidy. But, yes, there's always that tension between the people who are earning the money and the people who are receiving it, and somehow those tensions need to be managed.

Michael Duffy: And who does that? Who makes those decisions?

Steven Schwartz: Almost always that's the decision for university managers.

Michael Duffy: In Australia, of course, we seem to be becoming increasingly financially dependent on foreign students. Do you see any issues or problems involving that?

Steven Schwartz: Well, I think it's true in Australia that most of the universities have been very successful in attracting students from around the world, and that's because the quality of the universities are so high and the universities are held in such esteem that people are willing to pay large amounts of money to study there. But the downside with dependence on international students is that international events can perhaps scare them off from coming, and we've just seen something like that a couple of weeks ago in London where violent acts can make people quite nervous and that can leave universities vulnerable.

Michael Duffy: I suppose another problem is that the students might stop coming one day. I understand China's putting a lot of money into its tertiary education sector.

Steven Schwartz: Indeed, and China will in fact continue to grow its tertiary education sector quite deliberately to try to educate students there. It may be quite a while before they are actually able to meet the entire demand, and of course one of the new developments is that universities in Australia and universities in the UK and the USA are setting up operations in China, often in partnership with Chinese universities, so that their reach is becoming more global. Students are just not coming to study in Australia, but Australia is actually coming to them.

Michael Duffy: As higher education has expanded we've seen a debate about the necessity of this link between teaching and research. Do you see any role in the future for faculties, or indeed universities, that don't do research?

Steven Schwartz: Well, I think it's a diminished experience for the students. When you

study with teachers who teach out of textbooks it's not the same as when you've studied with teachers who write the textbooks, or the teachers who are quoted in the textbooks, because these are the people who are working at the cutting edge of their discipline, they are pushing forward their disciplines, and that excitement that they get from their research is often transmitted to the students. So it would be a great shame if all universities couldn't do research and transmit that excitement to the students.

Michael Duffy: What about the model of the US liberal arts college that we don't have...I don't think we have any experience of it in Australia yet. Do you see a role for that in the future?

Steven Schwartz: It's a different sort of education because it's a more broad education, and traditionally in Australia and in the UK it's been seen more of the province of schools than it has been of universities, where specialisation has been more the norm. I think there probably is a small market for students in both the UK and Australia for that kind of education, but experiments that have tried to do it in the past haven't been very successful.

Michael Duffy: Steven, you recently chaired a national taskforce in Britain on university admissions. Now, as I understand it, over there a student's final school mark is not the only criterion used for admission; other factors are taken into account. But, of course, in Australia that mark is usually all-important. Do you think the British method is better?

Steven Schwartz: Well it's certainly different. Both of the methods have pluses and minuses. As you say, the Australian system is primarily almost entirely dependent on marks, and can pretty much be done by a computer. It's quite efficient, it's transparent and every student knows how it works. It seems to have the confidence of everyone involved, and those are all pluses. From our point of view in the UK there are also minuses and that is it's very mechanical and there's no real opportunity to take into consideration things like personal background, teacher statements, experiences, what the student had to go through to get whatever marks the student had, and also perhaps just as important, trying to shape an entry class. The view here...because many more students live at university than they do in Australia where many students tend to stay at home...but you want a community that has musicians, that has athletes, that has actors, that has all different people living together because you learn from one another, not just from professors. And a mechanical system doesn't allow a university to form that sort of community.

Michael Duffy: So why was the review set up?

Steven Schwartz: Like most things, the review was set up for political reasons. There was some concern that universities in this country were not as welcoming to students from working class backgrounds as they should be, and with the advent of the HECS-like system in 2006 the government wanted to ensure that students from poor backgrounds wouldn't be disadvantaged in any way in the admissions process, particularly for our most competitive universities.

Michael Duffy: Did you make any recommendations that might be able to address it?

Steven Schwartz: I hope so, yes. Of course, the whole central bone of contention in this argument is whether students can be admitted to a course with perhaps lower marks

than students who were rejected, and that's always a difficult one because, on the face of it, it appears quite unfair. There are also some attempts, I think, to make sure that students from working class backgrounds had all the attention that they desired, and some students who didn't come from those backgrounds found it unfair. So our recommendations really were mainly addressed at this issue of merit and whether student's backgrounds should overrule their mark.

Michael Duffy: You're also involved in a university ethics review in Britain. I think it's still going on. What's that all about?

Steven Schwartz: The Council for Industry and Higher Education, which is a combination of our biggest companies and universities, began this project about a year ago with the support of the government because, as I said earlier, universities are all plunging into commercialisation for good reasons that we've already discussed. But sometimes the other aspects of commercialisation are left behind in the rush. For example; conflict of interest, acceptance of corporate hospitality, what universities might invest in, what they might not. And although profits are important, even in business they don't override everything, and we found that most of our largest companies had codes of ethics that guided their dealings with suppliers, their dealings with their employees, their purchasing policies, and we thought that universities could benefit from thinking about developing codes of ethics of their own. And so the project is concerned with showing universities...in fact, developing a handbook for universities that want to develop their own ethical codes.

Michael Duffy: Do you think that's something Australia's going to have to look at a bit more further down the track?

Steven Schwartz: I think it's useful for every university in every country to look at it. Sometimes these are issues that people have already had ideas about but they've never really been raised in the context in which they could be debated, discussed, and a policy formed, and I think it's quite important that they do so. For example, sometimes academics enter into confidentiality agreements with companies who sponsor their research. These confidentiality agreements make sense from a business point of view, but for a student looking for a career who wants to publish that research, it may not make sense. And these are issues that need to be brought out, debated, and policies formed.

Michael Duffy: Steven, just one last question; government involvement in higher education is increasing all the time and we often hear complaints from academics that this has led to bureaucratisation, even micro-management by administrators which can be detrimental to academic work. Do you think that's fair criticism?

Steven Schwartz: Yes, I do. Government involvement in higher education is inevitable, of course, because they pay at least part of the bill, but their tendency to micro-manage, their tendency to try to interfere in the detailed aspects of university working can only result in a kind of grey uniformity across the system in which all universities look alike. I don't think that's in the interests of government or the universities or students.

Michael Duffy: And is this a problem anywhere? I suppose it's the job of people like you to try and fix that?

Steven Schwartz: I think universities are not quiet, and when they feel that they're being micro-managed by government, they're normally not too shy of saying so, and I don't think the Australian universities will be shy either.

Michael Duffy: Okay. Thanks very much for joining us from London. Steven Schwartz was vice-chancellor of Murdoch University and he's now vice-chancellor of Brunel University in London. And he's been offered the same job, starting next year, at Macquarie University in Sydney.

Statement on Drought for the 4, 6 and 12-month periods ending 30th June 2005
ISSUED 1st July 2005 by the National Climate Centre at
http://www.bom.gov.au/announcements/media_releases/climate/drought/20050701.shtml

New Australian Government arrangements in indigenous affairs

From 1 July 2004 the machinery of government has been redesigned and new structures put in place.

The Government's Indigenous programs are now administered by mainstream agencies, but under a 'whole-of-government' approach.

Important terms and concepts underlying the new approach include:

- 'shared responsibility'—governments alone cannot fix Indigenous problems. Both governments and Indigenous people have rights and obligations and all must share responsibility;
- 'partnership'—shared responsibility requires real partnerships involving government and communities, as well as non-government organisations (NGOs) and the private sector;
- 'whole-of-government'—all government policies and funds must be coordinated and used efficiently and strategically in cooperation with local communities;
- 'regional focus'—service strategies must be shaped by the needs of particular regions and communities, not dictated nationally;
- 'flexibility'—services and programs must become more flexible, so they can be adapted to local needs; and
- 'outcomes'—the operation of policies, programs and service-delivery organisations will be scrutinised and judged on the results they produce for local Indigenous people.

These changes follow on from the Government's decision, announced on 15 April 2004, to abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the associated service-delivery agency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). Further information is at: [New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs](#)

Source: Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

A Changing Climate for Australia and our response

The Australian Government is planning for the potential impact of climate change on vulnerable regions throughout the nation with a Report released in July 05 by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell.

'The Report, *Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability – promoting an efficient adaptation response in Australia* by The Allen Consulting Group was commissioned by the Australian Greenhouse Office, which is now part of the Department of the Environment and Heritage.

The document shows how early planning could help governments, industries and communities plan for the effects of climate change, adapt to the impacts and exploit any opportunities.

"The report tells us that some degree of climate change is inevitable because of the greenhouse gases already emitted to the atmosphere and the strong growth of global emissions," Senator Campbell said.

"We know that our climate is already highly variable, making us vulnerable to future climate change caused by global greenhouse emissions. We need look no further than the economic and social impacts of prolonged periods of drought to understand the importance of climate."

"What governments, industry and communities need to do now is think more strategically about how to respond to the changes in climate that are likely over the next 20-30 years. This report is an important part of that process," said Senator Campbell.'
(Source: DEH Media Release)

According to the Report CSIRO has identified a number of possible outcomes such as an increase in annual national average temperatures of between 0.4° and 2.0°C by 2030 and of between 1.0° and 6.0°C by 2070; more heatwaves and fewer frosts; possibly more frequent El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events — resulting in a more pronounced cycle of prolonged drought and heavy rains.

Australia: 'The Tampa' Four Years On -

Amnesty International Australia Campaign

Amnesty International Australia calls for an end to the indefinite detention of the 32 people who remain on Nauru, and the closure of the island's detention facility.

The 'Pacific Solution' also includes the excision of Australian territories from the migration zone. Under legislation introduced in 2001, following the Tampa incident, people reaching Australia but who arrive at an excised territory are taken to an offshore detention centre and are excluded from the regular process of seeking refugee status. While initially covering only 4 specific islands, at present the Australian Government is attempting to pass new legislation for further excisions covering thousands of islands.

- The excised territories are those islands most likely to be reached by people forced to flee their home countries by boat. Article 31(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention requires that refugees shall not be penalised solely by reason of unlawful entry.

- By signing the 1951 Refugee Convention Australia signalled its intention to introduce fair and transparent refugee status determination procedures that would apply equally to all asylum seekers. By excising certain islands Australia is particularly targeting a small group of vulnerable asylum seekers, who are then processed with less rights and scrutiny than asylum seekers who reach Australia's mainland.

Amnesty International Australia calls for the excised territories to be returned to the Australian migration zone.

Facts and Figures

- Of the 1547 asylum seekers detained on Manus Island and Nauru, 1043 have been found in need of protection and resettled. So far 581 of these have been resettled in Australia.
- It took the Australian Government over 2 years to accept the first refugee from the Tampa.
- The New Zealand (NZ) government however promptly accepted 186 asylum seekers from the Tampa; including 40 unaccompanied minors, all approximately 16 years of age. NZ immigration officers traveled overseas to track down over 360 immediate family members of these refugees and offered them refugee status.
- The 32 people presently held on Nauru do not all share a common language, making the isolation for some even more intolerable.
- A migration agent was not permitted to visit Nauru for 2 years after The Tampa incident.
- The detention facility on Nauru will cost an estimated \$30 million to operate in 2005.
- The 'Pacific Solution' has cost \$218 million since its inception in September 2001 to May 2005.
- On 23 June 2005 the last family on Nauru was resettled to Australia.
- In April 2005 a UN representative visited Nauru and called for all remaining detainees to be granted visas permitting their lawful stay in Australia.
- On 22 July 2005 the Minister for Immigration announced further legislative changes resulting in more islands being excised from the Australian migration zone.

Source: RAR

Report on Women in Detention Centres

By Eva Cox

This has been prepared so that people can understand how so many problems can arise in an area of public administration. We have collated material that we have collected from both informal and formal sources which show how the bureaucratic and political systems can create injustices. Where governments create closed systems with little outside scrutiny or supervisions, the best of intentions can be undermined; when these systems serve vulnerable people who are not politically powerful or popular, they suffer serious risks.

It is mainly official government sources that have provided evidence that women in Immigration Detention Facilities are at risk. Even though many of these have been released, some remain in detention, and, as the system remains, others will join them. The attached report details ways in which their risks of being abused by the system can be reduced. If women are to be detained, which we question, we should at least ensure

that, at minimum, their treatment should comply with the government's own stated policies. This is not the case now!

We hope that people will both read this report and be prepared to raise the issues and solutions with their local members and any other people with power to make changes. This happens in our country and is paid for with our taxes by our government so we have the responsibility to ensure it at least conforms with our laws.

Any comments or questions, please contact me on eva.cox@uts.edu.au

Resources

just ASk

Lifeline's Just ask has produced a new six page tool kit for the many people who find themselves caring for a relative or friend with a mental illness. **Carers of People with a Mental Illness** contains practical tips and information for carers including where to turn for help, communication skills, and taking time out. **Just ask** is Lifeline's rural mental health information service. It's an Australia-wide service provided by Lifeline South Coast.

The Toolkit is at: **Just Ask**

Lifeline has also released their latest Aboriginal Social And Emotional Wellbeing Information Tool kit in partnership with NSW's Shoalhaven Aboriginal Safety Promotion Program. .

After an extensive consultation process, the Aboriginal depression tool kit, "Help When You're Feeling Down" was developed and launched April 2004. The tool kit was then disseminated to Aboriginal services nationally. The depression tool kit was well received by the Aboriginal services and the evaluation showed that the majority of services contacted identified suicide as a topic they would like to see future Aboriginal-specific tool kits address.

This led to the development of the "Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Information" tool kit. The tool kit has been designed to help people recognise the warning signs of suicidal behaviour, to know what to do when someone they know is at risk of suicide, and how they can continue to help that person once they are accessing care. The tool kit emphasises connecting with other community members as well as health services and professionals, both Aboriginal and mainstream.

The tool kit has been designed to be appropriate to NSW's Illawarra and Shoalhaven Aboriginal communities, but will still be available to Aboriginal communities Australia-wide, with the offer that if other communities would like the tool kit to be adapted to suit them specifically. If you are interested in this option, please contact Just Ask.

View the **Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Information**

Source: <http://www.justask.org.au/>

Depression and the Drought

beyondblue's CEO, Ms Leonie Young says: "In these tough times, when rural families are facing extreme hardship as a result of the ongoing drought, we need to get the message

out that that help is available. It's as close as the telephone, internet, doctor or health centre. Country people in Australia are typically tough, resilient and resourceful. These are qualities that have enabled generations of country families and men in particular, to tough it out in hard times. These same qualities also prevent many men from seeking help - particularly for depression -because seeking help may be perceived as weak or shameful."

In 2002/2003 *beyondblue* funded a project, Depression in Farmers and Farming Families. The project aimed to examine the relationship between place (farming environment) and mental wellbeing and disorder (depression, anxiety and substance use) and to develop an understanding of the ways in which individual characteristics, such as personality, might interact with aspects of place. The project was undertaken in rural Victoria (Central and NW Victoria). The Project is at [beyondblue](http://www.beyondblue.org.au).

As part of *beyondblue*'s rural depression awareness campaign to help people recognise the signs and symptoms of depression, *beyondblue*'s CEO, Ms Leonie Young says, "Country people should seek help from a GP or health professional if they think someone is depressed, but it's important to get advice early."

So look, listen and act.

- Look for the signs and symptoms of depression.
- Listen if a friend or family member wants to talk about how they feel.
- Act by seeking help from a GP or health professional for yourself or someone else.

Source: <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Lifeline's Toolkit for Getting Through the Drought:

Getting Through the Drought

Research

The NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition (the Centre) was established in 2000 as an initiative of NSW Health, in collaboration with the Sydney University Nutrition Research Foundation. It is located on campus at Sydney University.

Here is an excerpt of the Centre's recent report, Best Options for promoting healthy weight and preventing weight gain in NSW 2005.

The promotion of healthy weight and the prevention of weight gain in adults are key international, national and state health priorities. This report on interventions to promote healthy weight follows and complements the *Report on the weight status of NSW 2003*, produced by the NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition. The monitoring report provided detailed information about population weight status, the burden of illness associated with overweight and obesity, the rationale for addressing overweight and obesity and the range of factors contributing to the problem in NSW.

This report on promoting healthy weight focuses on prevention and applies a structured planning framework as the basis for proposing the adoption of multi-faceted interventions at local level, and a broad portfolio of actions at state level.

Context

At state level, the recent *Prevention of Obesity in Children and Young People: NSW Government Action Plan 2003- 2007* and *Eat Well NSW: NSW Health's Strategic Directions for Public Health Nutrition 2003-2007* each endorse healthy weight as a public health priority and signal the commitment by government to take action.

This report fits with the national framework for the prevention of obesity (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 2003). Further, it builds upon national initiatives related to the promotion of physical activity and nutrition, including *Getting Australia Active* and *Eat Well Australia*.

There is also a significant international context for addressing obesity. Recent reports, such as *Obesity prevention: the case for action* (IOTF 2002) and the World Health Assembly *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health* (WHO 2004) are calls to action, and particularly to reduce the prevalence of obesogenic environments which have become endemic to western countries and lifestyles.

Framework for addressing the problem of overweight and obesity

There are several important reasons to address the prevention of obesity, rather than its treatment and/or management. The prevention of weight gain (or the reversal of small gains) and the maintenance of a healthy weight are likely to be easier, less expensive and potentially more effective than the treatment of obesity after it has fully developed.

The report proposes that the objectives of plans to tackle the problem of overweight and obesity in NSW should focus on prevention of weight gain in adults and the promotion of a healthy weight in children. Prevention of weight gain is a simple message of relevance to all adults in NSW, regardless of current weight status.

The maintenance of a healthy weight for children ensures issues such as respect and body image are considered as part of the objectives.

An analysis of contributing factors, and identification of factors that are amenable to change, is the basis for identifying potential points of intervention in efforts to prevent weight gain. Research has consistently shown that numerous and diverse factors, including environmental and social factors, influence behaviours that in turn can lead to excessive weight gain. As the environments become more 'obesogenic' (obesity-promoting), the behaviours that lead to obesity are increasingly the default or automatic ones.

The report reflects and reinforces the 10 key principles for efforts to prevent obesity at a population level, promulgated by the International Obesity TaskForce (Kumanyika et al 2002).

Evidence of effectiveness

This report applies a structured planning framework to identify potential interventions to promote healthy weight and prevent weight gain, and synthesises findings from published studies of evidence on the effectiveness of different interventions.

In seeking to produce an evidence base of information from controlled trials, detailed reviews of the scientific literature have been conducted. These revealed a number of systematic and non-systematic reviews of reported programs addressing the prevention of obesity.

Key findings were that only a limited number of evaluated programs were addressed by each review and that a small band of studies formed the basis for most reviews; and there was too small a body of research to provide firm guidance on consistently effective interventions for adults or children. **mmar**

Ultimately, a broader approach to evidence of effectiveness has been adopted. It is argued that evidence of potential effectiveness may come from a range of sources.

The portfolio model proposed by Hawe and Shiell (1995) allows the selection of interventions to be based on the best available evidence, whilst not excluding untried but promising strategies and offers particular appeal for the selection of the best options for the prevention of weight gain and promotion of healthy weight because of the limited body of well conducted and evaluated studies.

On this basis, the report considers the level of potential health gain and level of uncertainty or risk associated with different interventions, as a basis for decision-making about programs, and adopts the concept of 'promising', to allow a more accurate description of the judgements that are being made. It is proposed that the term 'promising' presents the suggestion that an intervention is deemed worthy of systematic implementation and evaluation. The term creates links rather than opposition between the urgency to get on with implementation, and recognition of the value of building further evidence.

In this approach, the basis for expectations explicitly involves consideration of effectiveness, appropriateness and feasibility.

Settings-based action areas

Settings-based approaches provide a sound, integrated way of reaching specific target groups and influencing behavioural and social/environmental factors.

Thus, potential interventions are organised in terms of the following settings and target groups: families and communities; early childhood care; school community; worksites; and health services. For each action area, the report describes:

- The rationale for interventions in this action area
- A summary of evidence of effectiveness of interventions
- Ratings of selected promising interventions.

Global enabling action areas

There is a range of global enabling actions that can underpin or support actions in other settings-based action areas. Interventions in these enabling action areas can serve to build the capacity of systems, in ways that reinforce, strengthen and potentially multiply the effects of community-based actions. The three enabling action areas covered in this report comprise: community attitudes and capacity; environmental, system and policy; and service capacity. The report discusses specific actions that can be applied within these enabling action areas, including mass media and social marketing, monitoring and surveillance, changes to food supply and physical environments, leadership, workforce development and collaboration.

Conclusions and recommendations

At a national, state or regional level, action plans need to be broad, comprehensive and multifaceted to address the wide range of factors which are influencing energy balance in the community and contributing to continued weight gain. The portfolio approach offers a useful model for achieving this objective. The report recommends that NSW Health pursue the range of identified enabling actions, including social marketing campaigns, a media information and briefing strategy, a broad workforce development strategy for government and community sectors, and collaboration with food industry groups to address food supply, labelling and food marketing issues.

At the local or area level, interventions within the broad action plan could target single issues or behaviours in a comprehensive and multifaceted manner. This would ensure that these interventions had sufficient intensity and reach to positively address energy balance. Using this approach may be more resource efficient, provided the whole portfolio of action is addressed over time.

New initiatives should build upon existing systems and programs, as there is already a wide range of nutrition, physical activity, chronic disease prevention and other public health programs in NSW. However, tackling the problem of obesity in a truly comprehensive fashion by addressing the wide range of environmental factors that influence energy balance is beyond the scope of the health sector alone. It will require partnership within government and across all sectors of society. The health sector is well placed to take a leadership role and provide the management, coordination and specialised expertise to enable this to occur.

The entire report is at: [Best Options for promoting healthy weight and preventing weight gain in NSW 2005](#)

Tell your local MP that you care in 3 quick steps

This year Parliament will consider legislation on payments for the poorest Australians. This includes rules that mean after July 2006 up to 300,000 people could have less money to live on. [ACOSS](#) invites you to take action online now in three quick steps and tell your Member of Parliament that you care about jobless people.

STEP 1 Type in your postcode

STEP 2 Letter to local Member of Parliament appears, choose to send this letter to your Senators

STEP 3

Register your name and address, to make your letter count, you will also then receive 4 email updates per year about disadvantaged Australians, SEND

GetUp Action for Australia

GetUp (<http://www.getup.org.au/>) is a new political movement to build a more progressive Australia. GetUp was founded by Jeremy Heimans and David Madden, two young Australian graduates of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government who have worked at the vanguard of the new online organising and campaigning techniques in the US. In 2004, David and Jeremy helped start a national campaign on the decline in America's standing in the world under George Bush. This campaign gathered thousands of online supporters and millions of dollars in donations to support a national television advertising campaign. Prior to this, Jeremy and David worked on issues of global poverty, conflict, and development.