

2020 Youth Summit

By Hugh Evans

From around Australia, 100 young people were invited to Canberra to attend the 2020 Youth Summit—to offer their ideas about the future of Australia—their future. This unique opportunity was met with great enthusiasm and commitment.

The 2020 Youth Summit was an outstanding initiative of the Australian Federal Government. It required the delegates to ask questions, with answers that have the potential to lay a strong foundation for future policy.

It aimed to harness the vision and ideas of Australian youth, to help lay the foundation of the future in both the local and global community. The challenges of tackling climate change, Indigenous health, mental health and global poverty were at the forefront of discussion.

Representation was broad, as the 100 delegates consisted of indigenous Australians, refugees, migrants, second, third and fourth generation Australians, young mothers, people with disabilities, exceptionally gifted students and young carers. The young people were from various faiths and cultures, and residing in both country areas and the city. They brought their voices, experiences and energy to the task of formulating a national vision for 2020.

There was, however, some cynical comment of the 2020 process. I believe that dialogue defines us, what problems we are facing and what kind of solutions we have for them. But the cynics are half right—though ideas without action are meaningless—action without thought is positively dangerous.

Through the Youth Summit many creative and practical policy proposals were developed,

addressing the critically important issues of: paid parental leave; sustainability and climate change; communities and families; and Australia's future in the world.

It was proposed that a national paid parental leave program be established for both working men and women that includes incentives to promote affordability and accessibility of childcare. This would help to address the challenges of workplace participation designed to increase productivity at work, provide incentives for employers to accommodate a healthy work/life balance, and to help address gender imbalances in the work place.

Climate change is a global problem but can have various local solutions. The delegates proposed 'The Australian Sustainability Challenge' to create incentives for local governments to improve their sustainability through competition. Councils would be accredited points on measurable improvements in areas such as: renewable energy; use of public transport (foot/bicycle); solar heating (water/gas); native vegetation and tree planting; and an improvement in sustainable building codes. The local government, with the most points, would win a substantial federal grant as well as communities with the most innovative approaches to sustainable development being rewarded.

Migration and refugee issues were also discussed, specifically, managing and accommodating the increasing levels of migration into Australia. Delegates stressed the need to develop a national migrant and refugee settlement strategy, providing essential services to help settle and include newly arrived migrants and refugees into Australian society. This strategy would also highlight the



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number of migrants using health, language and capacity building services, as well as evaluate literacy levels and measure employment rates and the length of employment. Importantly this holistic approach will help wider Australian communities accommodate migrant and refugee settlement through a process of widespread consultation with local migrant and refugee service providers, state government and relevant stakeholders.

Enhancing the participation of civic society in electoral processes is vital in ensuring our political representatives reflect the aspirations of the Australian people. Particularly important is achieving a greater engagement of disadvantaged and marginalised people in the electoral processes. To this end, the 2020 Youth Summit delegates envisioned an Australia where citizens are automatically enrolled to vote, a process crucial to removing existing barriers to electoral participation. Automatic enrolment would necessitate co-operation between the Australian Electoral Commission and national agencies such as the Australian Taxation Office, Centrelink and Medicare. The Australian Electoral Commission would therefore significantly invest in electorally disadvantaged Australians such as those people who are homeless or without a fixed address.

Some delegates proposed lowering the voting age to 16 to give young people a more participatory role in society in order to affect government policy and future direction. This stand is supported by the fact that they will then be enfranchised so they can have a say in Government policies that affect them.

It was agreed that voting via computers would both accelerate vote counting to save paper. The delegates at the Summit believed this aspect of our proposed electoral reform should be optional if we are to achieve a stronger, more democratic 2020.

Ideas can and do shape reality—good ones as well as bad. A powerful idea can radically change our nation's future. The ideas mentioned are just some of the hundreds discussed over the weekend—every idea was given time and consideration.

Over the course of the weekend we strived to move beyond mere sentiment and move towards practical ideas with real outcomes. I believe this was achieved.

Delegates embraced the possibility of new solutions, both to enduring problems and to emerging ones. The creative and practical policy proposals developed by the 100 Youth Summit delegates confirm they will be able to achieve those visions. In 2020, Australia will be in capable hands.