DISCUSSION PAPER

Trends in contemporary Australian values

How a society treats its most vulnerable – whether children, the infirm or the elderly – is always the measure of its humanity

(UK Ambassador Matthew Rycroft - 18 June 2018)

Introduction

Volunteers are the lifeblood of emergency services in Australia and are integral to the nation’s emergency management capabilities and overall disaster resilience. The concurrence of an increase in the risks posed by a range of climate change-related natural hazards and a decline in formal volunteering rates threatens Australia’s emergency preparedness. The Valuing Volunteers Study aims to provide a better understanding of both the primary motives for formal volunteering in Australian emergency services, and the broader policy and social contexts.

Consistent with the fifth research objective, this discussion paper explores the broader social and cultural contexts for volunteering, highlighting the implications of changing core values for future forms of civic participation, including formal emergency service volunteering.

The nature of values

Feather (1992, p.111) describes values as stable “generalised beliefs about what is or is not desirable” that motivate people’s actions. Halman and de Moor (1994, p.22) describe values as “deeply rooted dispositions guiding people to act and behave in a certain way”, while Longest, Hitlin and Vaisey (2013, p.1500) observe that values “direct human action and imbue it with meaning”. Schwartz (2005, p.1), the author of the Theory of Basic Human Values, defines values as an integrated set of “desirable,

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1 This discussion paper was included as Appendix F in a thesis titled Valuing Volunteers: Better understanding the primary motives for volunteering in Australian emergency services, submitted in June 2019 to the University of Wollongong as part of the requirement for the conferral of the degree of Master of Philosophy.
trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people’s lives”. As reflected in the literature review (Chapter 3), values are widely acknowledged as influential and enduring human motives, and extensive empirical research has demonstrated the efficacy of a values paradigm as a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary theoretical framework for interpreting and understanding such motives.

Core values are fundamental (strong) beliefs and guiding principles, and shared core values can represent important and enduring social norms that are the foundation for conceptions of a collective interest and common cultural identity. The nature of specific core values, and the extent to which they are explicitly articulated and reinforced, can vary widely between different societies. In some societies, core values are deeply embedded, highly formalised and publicly championed, while in others core values are largely implicit, fluid and subject to constant re-interpretation. A charter of rights and responsibilities that defines a nation’s core values can act like a code of conduct for a society, and the absence of explicit principles and norms can contribute to moral and ethical deficits in society.

The Common Cause Foundation (2016, p.27) is a not-for-profit organisation in the United Kingdom that is dedicated to the study of shared cultural values, described as being “of profound influence in shaping our motivation to engage with bigger-than-self problems”. The Foundation identifies three challenges confronting contemporary UK society: “to mount proportionate responses to profound social and environmental problems; to deepen public commitment to civic participation; and to rebuild social cohesion and trust in social institutions”. The Foundation utilises the Schwartz universal values framework to promote compassionate and altruistic (self-transcendence) values that emphasise the well-being of others.

Altruistic values, and their influence on traditional forms of civic participations, are a central focus of the Valuing Volunteers Study, and the literature reflects a diversity of perspectives on their origins and manifestations. Noting the Oxford Dictionary definition of altruism as “disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others”, the phenomenon is typically characterised as one pole of a motivational spectrum that represents the individual’s primary orientation towards and concern for
others. At the other-oriented (altruistic) end of the spectrum are concepts like collectivist, pro-social, helping and self-transcendence (a Schwartz higher-order cluster), while at the self-oriented (egoistic) end of the spectrum are concepts like individualistic, reflexive and self-enhancement (a Schwartz higher-order cluster).

In the absence of their institutionalisation and formal articulation, the degree of community and Government commitment to altruistic values (whether they genuinely represent core values and enduring social norms) can be reliably inferred by examining the policies and actions of Governments and the community towards the circumstances of those who are most disadvantaged. Contemporary economic and social indicators can provide clear measures of the extent to which altruistic values such as respect, dignity, equality, fairness, inclusion and compassion represent genuine social norms that are reflected in public policy.

**Interpreting Australian values**

Public discourse on Australian culture, core values and national identity has been highly politicised for many years, in part reflecting the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of Australian society. Acknowledging the tens of thousands of years of settlement by the traditional custodians of this ancient continent, the establishment of Australia as a British outpost/colony in a predominantly Asian region dates from the late 18th century, meaning that Australia’s European heritage spans only two and a quarter centuries.

Alluding to this relatively short European heritage in a paper titled *The Adolescent Country* for the Lowy Institute, Hartcher (2014) describes Australia’s “provincial reflex” where “big matters are commonly crowded out by the small”. Less charitably, Catsaras (2014) observes that “the roots of our adolescent behaviour lie deep in the lack of maturity of our national consciousness. The juvenile language of our leaders, our false bravado, and our burning need to constantly prove ourselves on the sporting world stage all reflect the characteristics of an adolescent: insecure, uncertain of their place in the world, reluctant to come of age and enter adulthood”.

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The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia came into effect on 1 January 1901, providing an administrative framework for the federation of the States (formerly separate British colonies). The Constitution is largely silent on the attributes and values of the citizens of the constituent States, although it institutionalised a White Australia policy that maintained a European mono-culture for the first half of the 20th century. Political decisions in the latter half of the 20th century transformed an archaic social policy from cultural homogeneity to heterogeneity, and Australia has undergone significant social and cultural changes since multiculturalism and non-discriminatory migration policies were implemented in the mid-1970s. These relatively recent changes mean that many Australians over the age of 40 lived under the previous exclusory policy.

Any brief critique of Australia’s history would be incomplete without an acknowledgement of the various national character traits that are regularly mythologised as being part of the Australian cultural idiom. These character traits centre on narratives on conceptions of mateship (solidarity), egalitarianism (equality and scepticism of authority), a “fair go” (consideration), “she’ll be right” (complacency) and “the lucky country” (resource-rich) that broadly have their origins in Australia’s penal, colonial and gold-rush pasts.

One of the more enduring narratives from the early 20th century is the Anzac legend, and the idealisation that the national character is embodied in a spirit of courage, endurance, resilience, mateship, sacrifice, ingenuity and good humour. These sentiments are exemplified by fifteen stained glass windows in the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, representing: the personal qualities of resource, candour, devotion, curiosity and independence; the social qualities of comradeship, ancestry, patriotism, chivalry and loyalty; and the fighting qualities of coolness, control, audacity, endurance and decision.

In the last three decades Australia has undergone dramatic social, cultural and economic changes. The nation’s population has grown by more than 50% from 15.75 million in 1985 to 25 million in 2018, with the majority of that increase being attributed to overseas migration (ABS, 2017). In 2016 more than 25% of those living in Australia were born overseas, and “nearly half of all Australians were either born
overseas of had at least one parent who was born overseas” (ibid). Australia’s heterogeneity is reflected in the 2016 Census where 36.1% of respondents identified their ancestry as English, followed by 33.5% as Australian, 11% as Irish, 9.3% as Scottish, 5.6% as Chinese, 4.6% as Italian, 4.5% as German, 2.8% as Indian, 1.8% as Greek, and 1.6% as Dutch (ibid).

Average life expectancy in Australia has risen from 75.6 years in 1985 to 82.75 in 2014, and has been complemented by a rise in healthy life expectancy (AIHW, 2016). According to the ABS “by the late 20th century low fertility, declining mortality and the ageing of the large baby boom generation combined to see an increase in the numbers of older people” (ABS, 2017, p.4). According to the 2015 Intergenerational Report, between 1974/75 and 2014/15 the proportion of the population aged over 65 rose from 8.7% to 15%, and the number of people aged 15 to 64 for every person aged over 65 fell from 7.3 to 4.5 people (Treasury, 2015). Over the same period the employment of females aged 15 to 64 rose from 46% in 1974/75 to 66% in 2014/15 (ibid).

International comparative studies on core values and social norms provide limited insights on Australia relative to other nations. Eder (2017) reports on the results of an International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) that examined attitudes towards citizenship in 34 countries. The “good” citizen was defined as either individually righteous (self-oriented) or socially responsible (other-oriented), and Australia ranked second highest amongst the nations on individual righteousness. Deeming (2016) used data from the ISSP to examine community attitudes towards social welfare, finding (p.174) that “57% of Australians claim that it is not the State’s duty to ensure that everyone has a job”, and “many Australians oppose the unconditional welfare state model that provides social security for unemployed workers” (p.178).

In a similar vein, Gelfand (2012) used World Values Survey (WVS) data to examine the “tightness” or strength of social norms among 33 nations, with Australia ranking 24 out of 33 countries (not strong). Jiang, Li and Hamamura (2015) also used WVS data to examine the relationship between the strength of social norms and morally debatable behaviours, finding that Australia ranked 16 out of 20 countries (not strong). They observe (p.335) that “the strength of social norms in a society may
greatly influence whether individuals in the society are free to make personal judgements regarding morally debatable behaviours or obliged to follow the moral rules rigidly”.

In the context of major and relatively recent demographic changes, defining what it means to “be” Australian in a rapidly growing and evolving pluralist society is fraught with complexity. For many years Australia has been unique amongst developed Western nations in its reliance on amorphous politically-mediated narratives to articulate and sustain its core national values, in the absence of their formal articulation in a founding Constitution or Charter of Rights. Williams (2009, p.1) observes that “Australia is now the only democratic nation in the world without a national charter or bill of rights”, noting that “without a charter of rights, freedoms can be ignored or taken away too easily”. In a similar vein, Garnaut (2005, p.3) has written of a “great complacency” that descended on Australia in the new millennium, with Australians reverting “to their traditional preference for having popular politics in command of resource allocation and economic decision-making”, with a “return to traditional approaches to economic policy-making, favouring the ad hoc and expedient over the economically rational”.

A tacit approach to the articulation of core national values was reflected in then Prime Minister John Howard’s 2006 Australia Day address, which argued that the strength of Australia as a cohesive multicultural society is founded on a balance between tolerance of diversity and respect for our European cultural heritage. Howard described Australia’s “dominant cultural pattern” as “Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment, and the institutions and values of British political culture”. Howard praised that “no institution or code lays down a test of Australianness”, and warned of the potential constraints on the Parliament of a legal instrument like a Bill of Rights.

Less than a year after Howard’s 2006 address, the Australian Government moved to articulate and progressively formalise a set of core national values. This development occurred in the context of growing community and political concerns about the integration of migrants into the Australian community, and a broader environment of terrorism-inspired fear and insecurity. In 2007 the Federal
Government introduced an *Australian Values Statement* accompanied by a booklet titled *Life in Australia – Australian Values and Principles*. These were widely promulgated to encourage those seeking to travel to or settle in Australia to “gain an understanding of Australia, its people and their way of life”.

The *Australian Values Statement* identifies Australia’s national values as:

- English as the national language and an important unifying element
- Respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual
- Freedom of religion
- Commitment to the rule of law
- Parliamentary democracy
- Equality of men and women
- A spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good
- Equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their race, religion or ethnic background.

The accompanying *Life in Australia* booklet restates Australia’s national values as:

- Respect for equal worth, and the dignity and freedom of the individual
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion and secular government
- Freedom of association
- Support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law
- Equality under the law
- Equality of men and women
- Equality of opportunity
- Peacefulness
- A spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion for those in need.

On 20 March 2017 Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull launched *Australia’s Multicultural Statement* that asserts that “the glue that holds us together is mutual respect – a deep recognition that each of us is entitled to the same respect, the
same dignity, the same opportunity”. The statement lists a range of shared values that “unite us and create social bonds between us”, including:

- Respect for the rule of law and allegiance to Australia; respect for the liberty and dignity of all individuals; valuing diversity and embracing “mutual respect, inclusion, fairness and compassion”
- Support for the equality of men and women; belief in equality before the law; belief in equality of opportunity for all
- A fundamental commitment to freedom; support for freedom of thought, speech, religion, enterprise and association; a commitment to parliamentary democracy; responsibility for fulfilling our civic duties.

**Contemporary forces for change**

A key contention of the Valuing Volunteers Study is that declining altruistic values are increasingly challenging the volunteer resourcing of essential emergency services in Australia. As reflected in the literature review, a range of authors have highlighted the implications for traditional and formal modes of volunteering of a rise in self-oriented motives (Rochester et al., 2012; Clary et al., 2016). Haddara and Lingard (2017, p.839) explore the phenomenon of “lost altruism” amongst doctors in Australia and Canada, with a longitudinal study of the values embodied in professional codes of ethics. They find “a gradual and uneven loss of altruistic content over time”, concluding that “loss of altruism is not merely a current generational issue but extends through the past century and is likely due to political and social forces” (ibid).

Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003, p.180) apply *Modernisation Theory* to explore the implications of a shift from collective to reflexive styles of volunteering, observing that “modernisation theorists predict a progressive erosion of traditional group belonging, and thus a weakening of the collective roots of volunteering”. They contrasts “classic volunteers” who identify with traditional social norms, demonstrate predominantly altruistic and idealistic motives and commit long-term to formal organisations, with “new volunteers” who identify with and selectively pursue various personal interests, often concurrently and informally on a sporadic basis. Recent Government reports have also acknowledged the implications for emergency service
volunteering of major changes in individual and social contexts (Productivity Commission, 2016), and the ABS 2014 General Social Survey reports a decline in formal volunteering rates for people aged 18 years and older in Australia from 34% in 2010 to 31% in 2014.

Consistent with Modernisation Theory, this thesis contends that the unprecedented convergence in the 21st century of powerful disruptive global forces is fundamentally reshaping human conceptions of individual and social reality, catalysing a shift from altruistic to egoistic values. These disruptive forces are largely facilitated by major advances in new technologies that are progressively transforming all aspects of humans’ physical and intellectual lives. The nature and influence of each of these disruptive forces is worthy of further academic examination, and the following precis is not intended to be exhaustive.

*Advances in communication technologies*

The first disruptive force is new communication technologies that facilitate the process of individualisation and social atomisation by enabling the autonomous individual to construct and sustain their own unique and highly personal paradigm. Communication technologies allow the reflexive individual to control and focus their interests and efforts on relationships and activities within a narrow realm of direct personal relevance, effectively filtering out unwanted external influences and contradictory broader perspectives. Educational psychologist Borba (2016) has referred to an “epidemic of self-absorption” that has been accompanied by a decline in empathy amongst youth in the United States. Likewise, as the author of a controversial article titled *Have smartphones destroyed a generation?*, Twenge (2017) documents changes in behaviours amongst teens in the United States and has written extensively on the negative implications of the obsessive use of technology by the “me generation”.

Makarovic and Golob (2013) explore the fluidity of identifications and fragmentation of social meanings in the European Union, noting (p.291) that the “complexity of information has an impact on perceptions of the self in relation to external referential frames, which have undermined traditional conceptions of social reality”. They
observe (p.292) that “social context has lost its continuity and stability and the complexity and ambiguity of information-encouraged individual reflexivity”, and conclude (p.301) that “the role of individual imagination and self-categorisation has thus gained an increased influence in attaching the meaning to the world around”.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) have explored the manifestations and implications of transformative social change, and the processes of individualisation and reflexive modernisation in a globalised world. They observe (Preface, p.2) that “neoliberal economics rests upon an image of the autarkic human self” who “alone can master the whole of their lives, that they derive and renew their capacity for action from within themselves. … The ideological notion of the self-sufficient individual ultimately implies the disappearance of any sense of mutual obligation”. They observe (Ch.2, p.1) that “we live in an age in which the social order of the nation state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline. The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human beings who aspire to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of individual identity, is the central character of our time”. The Becks’ analyses have proved prescient given they predated the pervasive influence of information and communications technologies on the process of individualisation.

Farrugia (2015, p.17) examines youth homelessness “as a late modern form of inequality which emerges from the individualisation process”. He attributes the rise of contemporary secular individualism to the process of structural fragmentation that weakens “social bonds that formerly provided collective sources of meaning and resources for identity”. He explores (p.19) de-traditionalisation and dis-embedding processes “that break apart the coherence of these ways of life leading to the dissolution of collective sources of meaning and identity”. Farrugia explores (p.23) the implications of growing subjectivity and reflexivity where “subjects take themselves as the authors of their own biography, constantly reflecting on the kind of person they have become and wish to be”, and concludes (p.25) that “despite the cultural emphasis on choice and rationality in late modernity, the individualisation process may actually erode young people’s capacity to exert control over their environment”.

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In a report prepared for UNESCO titled *Ethical and societal challenges of the information society*, Mukherjee (2013, p.40) observes that “social media have created new forms of virtual community, but they have also redefined classical visions of society. These networks, while allowing many people to accumulate millions of connections and ‘friends’, have also given rise to new forms of solitude”. The report notes (p.41) the “increasing destabilisation of our notions of nature and the natural. The ethical question is whether such a destabilisation also means rethinking the normative and ‘natural’ frames that we have used to inform our values systems and beliefs about the world”. The report concludes (p.46) that “for all its strengthened social connectivity, the information society has also given rise to new forms of narcissism, personal branding, network capital, and consumption of the self and ‘status’”.

*Advances in information technologies*

The second (related) disruptive force is new information technologies that provide the individual with virtually universal and instantaneous access to limitless quantities of often complex, contradictory and intense information from a vast array of sources. A virtual crescendo of information “noise” can make it increasingly difficult for the individual to distinguish between fact, opinion and emotion, creating incentives for intuitive sentiments to displace the rigour of logic, reasoning and empirically-based science in the creation of knowledge. In a highly competitive and volatile information environment, the dominant public discourse is often framed around simplistic and populist narratives or confected short-term crises, marginalising reasoned, dispassionate and evidence-based discussion. As alluded to in the report to UNESCO, this dynamic can give disproportionate influence to those who can shape a distorted perception of “reality”, with the control of dominating images representing propagandising by the State, the media or those individuals seeking fifteen seconds of infamy (such as extremists).

In such a chaotic and distorted information environment, established science (such as climate change) can be depreciated as ideology, and long-standing “traditional” ethical values (such as dignity, loyalty and honour) can be denigrated as anachronistic and “politically correct”. Tellingly, the terms post-fact [era] and post-
truth [age] have entered the lexicon of the Oxford dictionary, both described as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. At a 2017 Harvard University-organised conference in the United States on media disruption, Baum, Lazer and Mele (2017, p.3) observed “recent shifts in the media ecosystem raise new concerns about the vulnerability of democratic societies to fake news and the public’s limited ability to contain it. … An abundance of information sources online leads individuals to rely heavily on heuristics and social cues in order to determine the credibility of information and to shape their beliefs, which are in turn extremely difficult to correct or change”.

Marshall (2017, p.3) argues that “human reflexivity is one factor that makes society what is known as a ‘complex system’ which interacts with other complex systems”. He concludes (p.19) that “contemporary ‘information society’ is not ‘knowledge society’. Deceit, ‘fake news’, data smog, and information blockage are part of people’s day-to-day lives. This arises because communications has social functions other than the transmission of accurate information. … People invest heavily in information groups around identities and meaning, and develop ‘information paranoia’, embracing an ordering of doubt or suspicion”. Likewise, Madden, Lenhart and Fontaine (2017, p.3) explore “eroding trust in journalistic institutions and the rise of a highly-politicised networked digital media environment”. Their interviews of high school graduates in the United States revealed (p.4) that “most teens and young adults express low levels of trust in the news media and are relying on networked strategies to help them navigate the stories they most care about”.

Growing uncertainty & insecurity

The third disruptive force is growing social and economic polarisation due to globalisation-related dislocation from the unrestricted international flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge and labour. Those in (mainly) developed countries displaced and marginalised by the exodus of capital and labour to more efficient low-cost destinations have responded with resentment and growing cynicism to the inability of their national leaders to protect their sovereign interests and ensure equitable access to the benefits of global free trade. Community confidence in and
support for a range of established institutions, including trust in democratic processes, have diminished in a number of developed countries, reflected in a rise in electoral support for populist candidates promoting protectionist and nationalist policies.

Demos (2017) explores a rising culture of fear (of the unknown, of the other, of the future) in Europe, reflected in the growth of populist politics that support tighter border controls, the erosion of liberal freedoms and welfare chauvinism. Demos observes (p.14) that the social impacts of fear are “seen in the increasingly nativist and ‘othering’ discourse in the public realm; the disintegration of civil society and declining social trust; and the resurgence of exclusive national and regional identities” (ibid). In Australia, research conducted by the Australian National University (2015) reports (p.11) that “mapping the political mood over time reveals that the political mood has been in steady decline since 2008. Net satisfaction among Australians … has fallen from more than 50% in March 2008 to 19% in March 2015”.

Further economic and social disruption is likely (in both developed and developing economies) with the prospective large-scale displacement of traditional labour-based work by new technologies, particularly through automation. Characterised by some in the media as “precarious work in the gig economy”, diminishing access to stable paid work has great potential to further erode confidence in existing social and economic systems and institutions. In a 2017 report titled Preparing Young People for the Future of Work by the Mitchell Institute, Torii and O’Connell (2017, p.3) find that “future generations will navigate a vastly different world of work to that of their predecessors. Technology is rapidly disrupting how we live and work – many tasks at the core of low and medium skill jobs are being automated or contracted offshore. Some research estimates that 40 per cent of jobs in Australia are at high risk of being automated in the next 10 to 15 years”. In a similar vein, in a report prepared for the International Monetary Fund, Berg, Buffie and Zanna (2018) apply a general equilibrium model to analyse the implications of advances in artificial intelligence and robotics for output, wages and inequality. Their report finds that the modern world is at the threshold of a new industrial revolution that could have significant negative consequences for employment, wages and inequality.
The politics of fear

The final disruptive force is the emergence post-9/11 of the spectre of international terrorism, and the corrosive influence of fear and suspicion in undermining trust and social cohesion within the Australian community. As explored in the discussion paper at Appendix E, a largely State-fed fear of terrorism threatens to incrementally erode an inclusive and resilient pluralist society by spawning a divisive narrative that demonises others along racial, religious or ethnic lines, undermining the shared core values of equality and respect for the freedom and dignity of all. An amorphous and uncertain threat of extreme violence may have particular emotional resonance with communities already anxious about the implications of rapid social change and the ill-defined threat posed by “foreigners”. Data from a 2017 IPSOS survey of attitudes towards world affairs in 24 countries reported that 67% of Australian respondents felt there was a very or somewhat real threat of a major natural disaster occurring in Australia, while 82% of Australian respondents felt there was a very or somewhat real threat of a terrorist attack taking place in Australia in the next twelve months (10% more than the average for all other countries).

At a deeper institutional level, the State’s counter-terrorism responses threaten to undermine essential democratic accountability when they include far-reaching changes to national security policies and practices that alter the long-standing balance between national security and civil liberties. While pervasive secrecy impedes essential public accountability, the extension and normalisation of the expedient and relative ethical precepts of utilitarianism across broader government functions may pose unprecedented moral and ethical risks to the professionalism, integrity and independence of the Australian public service.

In conclusion, the convergence and interaction of these powerful disruptive global forces may be changing the community’s shared core values by catalysing a shift towards individualism and egoism. This shift is reflected in growing political and social volatility, a decline in community participation in a range of traditional forms of altruistic civic participation (including formal volunteering), and increasing social atomisation and polarisation. The response of many Governments to these emerging trends (in particular growing insecurity) is to increase the public emphasis on
national values in an attempt to counter a marked decline in many traditional forms of civic participation. In some states the response has included a rise in nationalism.

This critique of globally disruptive forces would not be complete without an acknowledgement of the profound implications of an increase in the risks posed by climate change-related hazards. Climate change is a generic term used to refer to long-term changes in global climate patterns due to a rise in the level of atmospheric carbon dioxide, and leading to an increase in ocean water temperatures (warming). Climate change poses great challenges globally as it pits longer-term environmental and social sustainability against immediate and long-term economic interests, in particular the growing energy needs of emerging economies like China and India. Climate change poses a particular dilemma for Australia because the nation is one of the world’s largest per-capita emitters of greenhouse gases and one of the world’s major coal producers.

Catastrophic climate change-related natural events (principally extreme temperatures and fire weather, prolonged droughts, extreme rainfall and floods, severe storms and damaging winds, sea level rise and inundation) are beginning to threaten previously safe communities in both developed and developing nations. Climate change is important for this research because of the likely implications of an increase in both the severity and frequency of destructive climate-related events requiring a coordinated response from a skilled emergency services volunteer workforce.

**Indicators of contemporary Australian values**

As noted earlier, altruistic values reflect a primary concern for the well-being, welfare and benefit of others, and this thesis contends that such values play a crucial role in motivating formal emergency service volunteering. The importance of altruistic values (whether they are an integral part of core national values) are reflected in the degree to which a country’s economic, social and political systems operate to uphold other-oriented values such as equality, fairness, inclusion, compassion and opportunity, and in the policies and actions of Governments and the community towards the circumstances of those who are most disadvantaged. Kasser (2011)
examined values data on twenty wealthy nations to determine the extent to which (shared) cultural values influence the level of concern for the well-being of current and future generations of children. He concluded (p.211) that “the values espoused by a nation may affect the extent to which it enacts policies and pursues practices that promote or diminish the well-being of present and future generations of children”.

As noted earlier, Australia is unique amongst developed Western nations in its reliance on amorphous politically-mediated narratives to articulate and sustain its core national values. In the absence of their formal expression in a founding Constitution or Bill of Rights (and acknowledging the relatively recent promulgation of the Australian Values Statement), objective measures of Australia’s core values largely need to be inferred from evidence-based reviews of the actual effect and consequences of public policy and Government action.

Applying the Oxford Dictionary definition of altruism as a “disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others”, the following official reports provide some broader indications of contemporary trends in real levels of Government and community concern for the welfare of others, in particular for those who are most disadvantaged. These reports encompass the dimensions of aged care, business ethics and public governance, child and youth welfare, civic participation and philanthropy, equity and opportunity in income and wealth, health and wellbeing, housing and homelessness, and social inclusion and cohesion.

**Aged care**

A 2017 report titled *Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response* from the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) finds that (p.17) “as Australia faces the ‘inescapable demographic destiny’ of an ageing population, the potential reach of elder abuse may grow”. The ALRC report finds that the majority of aged care and support is provided in the community by informal carers, and concludes (p.18) that “vulnerability does not only stem from intrinsic factors such as health, but also from social or structural factors, like isolation and community attitudes such as ageism”.

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In May 2017 a fact sheet titled *National Prioritisation System* from the Australian Government Department of Health outlined the commencement of a national prioritisation system for access to a capped number of home care packages (130,750 in total in December 2017) in order to address “significant variations in waiting periods across Australia”, and with the aim of “the fairer allocation of packages to clients, based on their individual needs and circumstances” (p.1). A March 2018 report titled *Home Care Packages Program* from the Department of Health indicates that “as at 31 December 2017 there were 104,602 consumers in the national prioritisation queue, with 45.8% either in, or assigned, an interim package” pending the Government’s allocation of more home care packages.

In an address to the *National Press Club* on 25 October 2017, Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt noted that up to 40% of people in aged care homes never get visitors and asked “Do I want to be abandoned in my later years? Is this what my elders deserve? Is this how I want to live out my days?” The Minister noted “when I talk to people in aged care I find so many who crave simple touch, a hug, the warmth of palms clasped together, or a soothing hand on their shoulder”.

*Business ethics and public governance*

A 2014 *Report of the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program* by Ian Hanger revealed systemic deficiencies in the administration of a Federal Government business stimulation program that resulted in several fatalities, and concluded (p.2) that “it ought also to have been obvious to any competent administration that the injection of a large amount of money into an industry that was largely ‘unregulated’ would carry with it a risk of rorting and other unscrupulous behaviour”.

A 2017 report titled *Wage Theft in Australia* by Berg and Farbenblum (2017, p.5) finds that “a substantial proportion of international students, backpackers and other temporary migrants were paid around half the legal minimum wage in Australia” and (p.7) “international students, backpackers and other temporary migrants also experienced other indicators of exploitation and criminal forced labour. The report concluded that “the findings also invite scrutiny of how certain businesses profit from
wage theft and gain advantage over others that pay workers in compliance with Australian labour law, and how wage theft among temporary migrants may be driving wages down for all workers in certain industries” (ibid).

A 2017 report titled *Black Economy Taskforce – Final Report* commissioned by the Australian Government finds (p.1) that “the black economy is a significant, complex and growing economic and social problem”. The report notes (p.11) “in our opinion the black economy could be as large as 3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) today, up to 50 per cent larger than the Australian Bureau of Statistic (ABS) 2012 estimates”. The report concludes (p.2) that “the black economy is an endemic cultural problem. It is supported by values and assumptions that participation in the black economy is a “victimless crime”, that “everyone does it”. We are seeing it become more entrenched with such views spreading through families and communities including through social media”.

A 2017 report titled *Corporate tax transparency report for the 2015-16 income year* from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) finds that of 2043 major corporate entities only 64% paid tax, and there had been a decrease in tax payable from the previous financial year of 8.7% ($3.6 billion). Reasons for the non-payment of taxes included deduction of prior-year losses; entitlement to offsets; reconciliation of items like deductions against an accounting profit; and accounting losses (p.12).

A report titled *Corruption Perception Index 2017* by Transparency International that measures perceived levels of public sector corruption worldwide finds (p.6) that “since 2012 several countries significantly improved their index score,…while several countries declined, including Syria, Yemen and Australia”. The report reveals that Australia’s score fell from 85 in 2012 to 77 in 2017.

An August 2017 report titled *Shifting the dial: 5 Year Productivity Review* from the Productivity Commissions explores a range of strategies to enhance productivity in health, education, cities and confidence in institutions. The report notes (p.7) that “in the period between now and the next of these reports in 2022, income growth in Australia is likely to be about half of historical levels. … We estimate that on a business as usual basis, productivity growth in Australia is more likely to fall than rise
over the medium term”. The report observes (p.8) that “governments and commentators should be very wary of the seductive claim that something is well under way already in the areas to which we devote most attention. The Commission’s analysis … is that the headline is not often supported by reality; or has not yet achieved the cooperation of all necessary participants. … We were told by countless participants that governments themselves – their structures, relationships, incentives and capabilities – are today the key impediment to (but could be the crucial catalyst for) essential reform”.

A June 2018 report titled *Restoring electricity affordability and Australia’s competitive advantage* from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission into Australia’s electricity markets concludes (p.iv) that “high prices and bills have placed enormous strains on household budgets and business viability. The current situation is unacceptable and unsustainable”. The ACCC report notes (p.v) that “electricity retailers have also played a major role in poor outcomes for consumers. Retailers have made pricing structures confusing and have developed a practice of discounting which is opaque and not comparable across the market. Standing offers are priced excessively to facilitate this practice, leaving inactive customers paying far more than they need for electricity”.

Evidence presented by various major financial institutions to the *Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry* in 2018 has demonstrated repeated, consistent, significant and systemic patterns of unconscionable conduct. In addressing the reasons for such systemic behaviours, the Interim Report published in September 2018 concludes (p.xix) that “too often, the answer seems to be greed – the pursuit of short term profit at the expense of basic standards of honesty”.

*Child and youth welfare*

A report titled *Society at a Glance 2014 Highlights: Australia OECD Social Indicators* from the OECD finds (p.1) that “relative poverty in Australia (14.4% of the population) is higher than the OECD average (11.3%)”, and while poverty rates for youth and those over the age of 65 had declined, child poverty increased. The OECD report
also notes (p.2) that confidence in the national government had fallen from 55% in 2008 to 44% in 2014.

A 2015 report titled *The mental health of children and adolescents*, based on an extensive Federal Government-funded survey, found that almost 14% (or 1 in 7) of 4-17 year-olds (560,000) were assessed as having mental disorder in the previous twelve months, with one fifth of adolescents experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress, and one third of 11-17 year-olds having been bullied in the previous twelve months. The same report found that almost 25% of 11-17 year-old spent 3-4 hours per (week) day on the internet, with 17.6% spending 5-8 hours per day, and over 10% spending more than 9 hours per day.

A 2016 *Youth Survey 2012-16* from Mission Australia and the Black Dog Institute finds (p.5) that “in 2016 just under one in four young people aged 15-19 years who responded to the Youth Survey met the criteria for having a probable serious mental illness. Concerningly, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of young people meeting this criteria over the past five years (rising from 18.7% in 2012 to 22.8% in 2016)”. In relation to indigenous youth, “in 2016 over three in ten (31.6%) of ATSI respondents met the criteria for a probable serious mental illness” (ibid).

A 2017 report titled *Independent review of out of home care in NSW – final report* by David Tune that examined child protection systems in NSW concludes (p.3) that “the NSW system is ineffective and unsustainable”, and “the system is failing to improve long term outcomes for children and to arrest the devastating cycles of intergenerational abuse and neglect. Outcomes are particularly poor for Aboriginal children, young people and families”.

A 2017 report titled *Generation Stalled* from the Brotherhood of St Laurence finds (p.2) that “precarious employment is hindering the capacity of many young people, especially those without qualifications and skills, to build satisfying and productive adult lives, as the pathways that were open to their parents appear to have stalled”. Using data from the ABS and HILDA, the report finds that “underemployment, at 18 per cent of the youth labour force (February 2017), is the highest in the 40 years since the count officially began. The challenge now affects even more young people
than unemployment, currently at 13.5 per cent; young people are far more likely to be in casual and part-time jobs than at the beginning of this millennium; in the past 15 years the average gap has widened between the actual working hours of young underemployed people and the hours they would like to work” (ibid).

A 2017 report titled *Family Matters* from SNAICC finds (p.5) that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up approximately 36 per cent of all children living in [out of home care], the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC is almost 10 times that of other children, and disproportionate representation continues to grow (AIHW, 2017a). This has eventuated despite – or because of – the laws, policies, and programs of successive Australian governments”. The report concludes (p.74) that “this report exposes the alarming trajectory that some of Australia’s most vulnerable children face. … For the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, it is incumbent upon our collective responsibility as government and non-government stakeholders to work together … to change the story of the past 200 years and begin to provide an environment which is in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and sees them safe and thriving”.

A April 2018 report titled *What price the gap? Education and inequality in Australia* by David Hetherington from the Public Education Foundation examines educational inequality and (p.3) “analyses the costs of students at the bottom falling further below those at the top and estimates that over the six years from 2009-15 alone this growing inequality has cost Australia around $20.3 billion, equivalent to 1.2% of GDP”. The report notes that “Australia’s school performance (as measured by international test scores) has been falling. What’s less understood is that this headline buries a stark, unpalatable fact: our international test results show that kids at the bottom of the performance distribution are falling faster and further than kids at the top” (ibid).

A 2018 report from *headspace* has reported that “nearly one in three (32%) young Australians (12 to 25 year olds) are reporting high or very high levels of psychological distress – more than treble the rate in 2007 (9%)”. The report indicates
that rates of psychological distress are higher among young women, and that that 18-21 year olds are reporting the highest levels.

The 2018 Final Report of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* concludes (p.5) that “tens of thousands of children have been sexually abused in many Australian institutions. We will never know the number. Whatever the number, it is a national tragedy, perpetrated over generations within many of our most trusted institutions. … It is not a case of a few rotten apples. Society’s major institutions have seriously failed. In many cases those failings have been exacerbated by a manifestly inadequate response to the abused person. The problems have been so widespread, and the nature of the abuse so heinous, that it is difficult to comprehend”.

*Civic participation and philanthropy*

The ABS 2014 *General Social Survey* (2014 GSS) aims “to provide an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of relative advantage and disadvantage across the population, and to facilitate reporting on and monitoring of people’s opportunities to participate fully in society. … The themes include how Australia has progressed on aspects of social capital such as participation, support, feelings of safety and trust”. The 2014 GSS “results show changes in the levels of involvement in activities connecting people to their broader community and the way people are interacting with the community outside their household” that are consistent with previous ABS data “showing a decrease in the time and opportunity that Australians have for recreation and leisure, and social and community interaction” (2015, p.xx).

The ABS defines a volunteer for statistical purposes as “someone who is over the age of 15 and, in the previous twelve months, willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, services or skills, through an organisation or group” (2010 Glossary). The 2014 GSS finds that in “in 2014, volunteering rates declined for the first time since the ABS began national voluntary work surveys in 1995. Between 1995 and 2010, volunteering rates increased, reaching a peak of 34% in 2010, but in 2014, the
proportion of people aged 18 years and over who were volunteering fell to 31%. Both men and women were less likely to volunteer in 2014 than they were in 2010”.

A 2016 report titled *The Australia We Want* from the Community Council of Australia (CCA) finds (p.9) that “Australia is currently a place where our incarceration rates are three times that of Ireland and rising, our suicide rates are higher than our road toll, and inequality is growing. We volunteer less and give less as a percentage of our income than we did five years ago. We are slipping down the international corruption scale just as we are slipping down the scale of international generosity. These are not good indicators”.

A report titled *Australian Organ Donation Performance* from ShareLife reveals that as at December 2016 Australia’s organ donors per million of population was less than 50% of world leading practice, with Australia ranked 17th in organ donation rates in the world. Despite the expenditure of over $300 million over 7 years, Australia’s number of organ donors per million increased by 8.6 whereas other countries such as Croatia and Iceland increased by more than 20.

A report titled *Australia’s Welfare 2017* from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), commenting on the trends revealed by the 2014 GSS, finds (p.170) that “the decline in the rate of volunteering is concerning as it … is thought to be an indicator of wellbeing (for example, by building social connections)”. The AIHW report concludes (p.172) that “rates of volunteering appear to be on the decline. Data on why this is occurring – such as societal factors (including changes in work patterns and living arrangements) – and on the impacts on society (for example, on trust and social cohesion) are not readily available”.

A November 2017 report titled *Economic contribution of the Australian charity sector* from Deloitte Access Economics defines a volunteer (p.3) as “an individual who provides unpaid help willingly”, and estimates (p.77) “that in 2015 there were 3.35 million individuals who volunteered with ACNC registered charities and collectively contributed 327.7 million hours of volunteer time” that “has been valued at $12.8 billion in 2015 dollars”. The report notes (p.10) that “population ageing and income inequality have been identified as two of the major social challenges for Australia in
the coming decades. The ageing population will put increasing pressure on health related services provision such as aged care, disability support and community health services. And, to the extent that the gap between rich and poor widens into the future, demand for charity support from lower income households will become a critical issue for the outlook for charity sector services”.

A 2018 report titled *Charity still ends at home* by Browne, Swann and Grudnoff from the Australia Institute examines Australia’s declining levels of official development assistance (ODA). The report notes (p.3) that ODA as a percentage of Gross National Income (GNI) has fallen 33% over the period 2013-2018, placing Australia 17th internationally as a donor.

*Equity and opportunity in income & wealth*

A 2014 report titled *Income & Wealth Inequality in Australia* by Richardson and Denniss from the Australia Institute notes (p.2) that “inequality between those with the most and those with the least is rising in Australia. Australia is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but there are many people in our society who are falling behind. For instance, the minimum wage and unemployment benefits have failed to keep pace with the rise in average earnings, resulting in a divergence between low-income earners and the average employed Australian. A divergence has also occurred between the average Australian and those at the top. Senior executive pay is now 150 times greater than average weekly earnings”.

A 2015 report titled *Living Standard Trends in Australia: Report for Anglicare Australia* by Ben Phillips from NATSEM at the University of Canberra examines (p.3) “changes in living standards for a broad range of family types in Australia between 2004 and 2014”. The report finds (p.4) that “living standards have increased in Australia over the past 10 years however, that growth was not shared evenly by all. The gap in the living standards between the richest and poorest grew by around 13 percentage points during this period and we project a further widening by 10.4 per cent over the coming decade. Growth in living standards of the top 20 per cent grew by around 22.1 per cent while the bottom 20 per cent grew by just 13.8 per cent”. The report concludes (p.26) that “while all groups have enjoyed an increase in their
living standards there are some groups who, from a relative perspective, are falling behind. These groups include low income households, single parents, younger households, and those on allowances such as new start, parenting payment partnered and youth allowance.

A 2015 report titled *Inequality in Australia – A Nation Divided* from the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) observes (p.8) that “excessive inequality in any society is harmful. It is harmful to the ability of people to participate in social and economic opportunities, and it undermines social cohesion”. The report finds (p.10) that “wages growth was very unequal over the period and acted to increase income inequality. Over the 25 years to 2010, real wages increased by 50% on average, but by 14% for those in the bottom 10% compared with 72% for those in the top 10%” and “wealth is far more unequally distributed than income. A person in the top 20% has around 70 times more wealth than a person in the bottom 20%”.

A 2017 report titled *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 15* (HILDA) from the Melbourne Institute aims to provide “a nationally representative longitudinal study of Australian households”. Utilising “the most commonly employed definition applied to the study of poverty in developed countries, which conceives of poverty as *relative* deprivation or socio-economic disadvantage, and which measures deprivation in terms of inadequacy of *income*”, the report finds that the relative poverty rate in Australia has shifted only marginally from just below 12% in 2003 to the current rate of just below 10% in 2015 (p.33). The report also finds (p.34) that relative poverty rates are high for people living in single-parent families, amounting to 21% in 2015.

The OECD’s *Better Life Index 2017* compares a range of social and economic indicators across 38 countries annually. The current OECD report ranks (p.xx) Australia’s household disposable income as 21/38 for social inequality, and 22/38 for gender inequality; employment rate as 22/38 for gender inequality; personal earnings as 28/38 for gender inequality and 20/38 for social inequality; job security as 20/38 for gender inequality and 27/38 for social inequality; quality of support networks as 26/38 for gender inequality; very long hours as 29/38; leisure and personal care time as 32/38.
A report titled *Australia’s Welfare 2017* from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) finds (p.354) that “real net disposable income per capita rose steadily over the 30 years to June 2016 but has dropped since 2012”. The report concludes “while the distribution of income in Australia has shown little change in recent years, income inequality has risen since the mid-1990s as measured by the Gini coefficient” (ibid).

A report titled *OECD Economic Surveys: Australia 2017* finds (p.5) that “inclusiveness has been eroded. The Gini coefficient has been drifting up and households in upper income brackets have benefited disproportionately from Australia’s long period of economic growth. Real incomes for the top quintile of households grew by more than 40% between 2004 and 2014 while those for the lowest quintile only grew by 25%. … This partly explains the increasing share of income going to the very top end of the income distribution. In addition, large socio-economic gaps between Australia’s indigenous population and the rest of the population remain and there is room to reduce gender imbalance”.

A 2018 report titled *Household financial comfort report* by ME Bank that surveyed 1500 respondents on how comfortable they feel about their financial situation using 11 measures, concludes (p.2) that “with subdued and stagnant incomes, more Australians are feeling strapped for cash, and are being forced to dip into their savings to cover the rising cost of living”. The report notes that “currently, around a quarter of Australian households have less than $1000 in cash savings” and “consistent with ABS wage data, the latest HFCR data found nearly half (42%) still had the same income as a year ago” (ibid).

A 2018 report titled *Rising Inequality? A stocktake of the evidence* by the Productivity Commission examines contemporary trends in inequality, economic mobility and disadvantage across Australian society, including (p.5) “the nature and extent of deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia”. The report defines (ibid) disadvantage as “a multidimensional concept that can take the form of low economic resources (poverty), inability to afford basic essentials of life (material deprivation) or being unable to participate economically and socially (social exclusion)”. The report
finds that “about nine per cent of Australians (2.2 million people) experienced relative income poverty (income below 50% of the median) in 2015-16, with children and older people having the highest rates of relative income poverty. … Despite 27 years of uninterrupted growth [this aggregate figure] has not declined”.

A March 2018 report titled *The cost of privilege* from Per Capita (commissioned by Anglicare Australia) examines the tax measures that benefit the wealthiest Australians (including CGT concessions and exemptions, superannuation concessions, private education tax exemptions, private health tax exemptions, negative gearing and discretionary trusts). The report finds (p.5) that “the cost of forgone tax revenue from the richest 20% of Australians is over AU$68 billion per annum”, compared to $6.1 billion in benefits to the bottom 20%. The report concludes (p.6) that “Australian society is becoming increasingly stratified, with growing inequality of wealth and income”.

**Health and wellbeing**

A 2017 report titled *Pillars of Communities* by Bourne, Nash and Houghton from the Regional Australia Institute finds (p.4) that “between 1981 and 2011, the number of professionals in inner regional small towns grew by 85 per cent, but there was growth of only seven per cent in small towns in remote and very remote areas. This is despite the fact that education and health outcomes are consistently worse in remote and very remote areas”. The report found many people in Australia’s small towns are unable to access basic services and concludes (p.5) that “although there are instances where the gap in service delivery personnel between major cities and small towns is closing, overall these gaps remain significant and for some professions the trend is that the gaps are widening rather than narrowing”.

A 2018 report titled *Australian Wellbeing Index* from the National Australia Bank (NAB) finds (p.1) that “Australian wellbeing has fallen to survey low levels, with a marked improvement in anxiety offset by low happiness, life worth and life satisfaction”. The report notes (p.2) that “the NAB Australian Wellbeing Index fell to a new survey low 62.8 points in Q1 2018. This was down from 64.6 points in Q4 2017 and now sits well below its long term average of 64.4 points”.  

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A 2018 report titled *Australia’s health 2018 in brief* from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) notes (p.16) that “mental illness and substance use disorders are responsible for 12% of the total disease burden in Australia – the third highest disease group after cancer and cardiovascular diseases. Mental illness affects individuals, families and carers. It also has a far-reaching influence on society as a whole, through issues such as poverty, unemployment and homelessness”. The report identifies particular groups experiencing increased rates of mental illness, noting “females aged 15-24 account for nearly 3 in 5 community mental health care service contacts for eating disorders (58%) and hospitalisations for eating disorders (57%)” (ibid).

A 2018 report titled *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia* from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) finds (p.ix) that “one in 6 Australian women and 1 in 16 men have been subjected, since the age of 15, to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabitating partner”, while “almost 1 in 4 (23%) women and 1 in 6 (16%) men have experienced emotional abuse from a current or previous partner since the age of 15” (p.x). The report notes (p.xii) that “in 2014-2015 Indigenous women were 32 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence as non-Indigenous women, while Indigenous men were 23 times as likely to be hospitalised as non-Indigenous men”.

**Housing and homelessness**

A 2017 report titled *Housing Australia* from the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) notes (p.86) that “these trends present a distinct picture of a growing divide between generations in terms of access to housing market opportunity. It would appear that young people’s access to both home ownership and property investment opportunities has lagged further and further behind the opportunities available to older age groups. The property ownership trends have inadvertently resulted in housing wealth becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of smaller sub-groups”. The report concludes (p.88) that “Regrettably, it would appear that property ownership has become the new class divide in Australia. It is increasingly a marker of distinction between young aspiring
home buyers and older home owner-investors. In addition, it is exacerbating intra-generational inequality, creating a widening chasm between the haves and have-nots as young people are fortunate enough to receive substantial transfers of wealth from their parents while others miss out on such intergenerational transfers”.

A 2017 report titled *The opportunities, risks and possibilities of social impact investment for housing and homelessness* by Muir, Meltzer, Moran, Mason, Michaux, Ramia, Findlay and Heaney from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) finds (p.7) that “despite an extended period of economic growth and increasing prosperity for the majority of Australians in recent decades (in part due to rising property prices), Australia faces numerous housing policy challenges that negatively impact on health and wellbeing outcomes and increase associated costs, reduce the opportunity for people affected to achieve their potential and contribute fully in society, and have potential broader consequences for social cohesion and economic outcomes for the country”. The report concludes (p.1) that “the waiting lists for social and affordable housing are long (and a significant proportion of the social housing stock is no longer fit-for-purpose), large proportions of the population are in housing stress and too many people are experiencing homelessness”.

A report titled *The Hard Road – National Economic & Social Impact Survey 2017* from the Salvation Army finds (p.4) that “unacceptable persistent disadvantage and exclusion experienced by individuals and families” in need. A large proportion of the Salvation Army’s clients experience “housing issues including housing stress, homelessness and transience; financial difficulties, managing on inadequate income and resulting from prolonged unemployment; persistent hardship, financial pressures due to costs of living in Australia and multiple deprivations; limited opportunities and exclusion for individuals and their families; and reduced participation and access, disconnectedness and inequity for children” (ibid).

*Social inclusion and cohesion*

A 2015 report titled *National prevalence survey of age discrimination in the workplace* from the Australia Human Rights Commission (AHRC) finds (p.2) that
“over a quarter of Australians aged 50 years and over report that they had experienced some form of age discrimination in the last two years”, and “when managers were asked if they factored age into their decision-making, a third responded that they did”.

A 2016 report titled *Mapping Social Cohesion* by Andrew Markus from the Scanlon Foundation notes a marked decline in community trust in Australia’s political system, with 48% of respondents to a 2009 survey indicating that the government in Canberra can be trusted ‘almost always’ or ‘most of the time’, but by 2016 this had dropped to 29%. The Scanlon Foundation report concludes (p.4) that “there are emerging signs of increased pessimism, relatively high levels of negativity towards Muslims and an increase in the proportion of people experiencing discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity or religion”.

A 2016 report titled *Australians Today* by Andrew Markus from the Scanlon Foundation explores the results of an extensive survey of Australian social attitudes, finding that 43% of respondents indicated (p.48) that “you can’t be too careful” in trusting others. On the question of tolerance towards cultural diversity, the report finds (p.48) “18% strong negative scores in major cities, 39% in outer regional areas, and within major cities, strong negative scores range from 13% in areas of highest cultural diversity to 28% in areas of lower diversity”. The report concludes “a prominent theme in focus group discussions was the difference between culturally diverse and homogenous areas, the multi-cultural and mono-cultural. Participants discussed environments in which they felt a sense of ‘belonging’, ‘at home’, ‘comfortable’, ‘normal’, contrasted with areas where they were ‘out of place’, a ‘stare object’, an ‘alien.’ Areas of diversity are seen as a separate world, one that is distinct from ‘white Australia’” (ibid).

A 2017 report titled *Concluding observations on the eighteenth to twentieth periodic reports of Australia* from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) finds (p.3) that “the Committee notes the State party’s definition of multiculturalism and social cohesion and appreciates the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Strategy. The Committee is, however, concerned that expressions of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, including in the public
sphere and political debates as well as in the media, are on the rise. The Committee also expresses concern that migrants, notably Arabs and Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as Africans and people of African descent, South Asians, and Indigenous Peoples are particularly affected by racist hate speech and violence”.

The CERD report recommends (p.3) that the State “ensure that anti-racism related measures are implemented effectively in collaboration with grassroots organizations and community representatives that are active in the fight against racism and racial discrimination; reconsider the anti-terrorism and national security clauses of the Multicultural policy, ‘Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful’, as these may lead to practices prohibited under the Convention, such as ethnic and racial profiling by law enforcement officers and agencies, targeting in particular Arabs and Muslims; increase its measures to combat racist hate speech and xenophobic political discourse, and ensure that public officials not only refrain from such speech but also formally reject and condemn hate speech, in order to promote a culture of tolerance and respect”.

A June 2018 report titled Understanding Australian attitudes to the world by Alex Oliver from the Lowy Institute, based on a random survey of 1200 Australian adults, reports (p.1) that “for the first time, the poll finds that a majority of Australians [54%] think the current rate of immigration to Australia is too high”, with 40% seeing “large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into Australia” posing a critical threat (p.3). “Only 17% of Australians are satisfied with the way things are going in the world today”, with 49% “satisfied with the way things are going in Australia today” (p.4).

A 2018 report titled Everyone’s business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces from the Australian Human Rights Commission finds (p.7) that “more than four in five (85%) Australian women and over half (56%) of Australian men over the age of 15 have been sexually harassed at some point in their lifetimes”, and more seriously “almost one quarter (23%) of women have experienced actual or attempted rape or sexual assault at some point in their lifetimes, and nearly one third (31%) of women have experienced unwelcome requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts” (p.8).
Implications for altruistic values and the nature of civic participation

These diverse (post-2010) official reports across multiple dimensions of disadvantage constitute a substantial body of empirical evidence on the real circumstances of (and significant challenges confronted by) the most disadvantaged in Australia (children, aged, sick, poor, disabled, migrants, indigenous, homeless). These reports provide substantial objective evidence of Australia’s current policies towards and treatment of those in the community who are most disadvantaged, and are indicative of the real levels of empathy and altruism in public policies (irrespective of statements about “compassion for those in need” in the National Values Statement).

These reports consistently reveal a widening gap between a relatively affluent majority and a poor but growing minority in Australia. While Australia projects itself internationally as a modern, affluent, progressive, fair and tolerant pluralist nation (a secular democracy), these reports raise serious questions as to whether this archetype accurately reflects Australia’s core values and actual social norms. The reports suggest that there are great inconsistencies between Australia’s idealised identity (as an egalitarian society concerned with fairness and the welfare of others), and the economic and social reality for a significant and growing number of citizens. Moreover, in the context of a powerful and bipartisan ideological commitment to free markets and competition, a range of essential social services for vulnerable people are being progressively transformed into large publicly-subsidised industries, where the interests and welfare of both “clients” and employees are increasingly subordinate to broader business and commercial considerations.

These often substantial evidence-based reports collectively confirm a decline in altruism as a core national value in Australia, with implications for many traditional forms of civic participation, including formal emergency service volunteering. It is clear that the changes that are occurring in values, culture and social norms in Australia in the 21st century are transformational, and community functions and organisations that have traditionally relied on goodwill, empathy and a sense of collective responsibility and duty will need to develop different strategies (that acknowledge and satisfy individual and personal needs) if they are to secure the
level of participation required for the provision of important community services into the future.

**Conclusions**

Consistent with the fifth research objective, this discussion paper has explored the broader social and cultural contexts for volunteering, highlighting the implications of changing core values for future forms of civic participation. The examination of contemporary indicators of Australian core values has confirmed a progressive decline in altruistic values, with important (potentially adverse) implications for future rates of formal emergency service volunteering.