

Four Leverage Points to Improve How Australia Makes its Future

This document is a snapshot of the full Recoded report *Next25 Recoded: Understanding and improving how Australia makes its Future Vol. 1 Ed. 1* (accessible [here](#)).

Next25™

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We are Next25

Next25 was founded out of frustration that Australia – a wealthy nation with boundless opportunity – is squandering its future success. Our research has uncovered deep-seated problems hampering effective progress on issues such as climate change, inequality, and growth. These problems lie in Australia’s future-making system.

The future-making system in Australia is made up of the sectors, institutions, organisations, groups, and individuals that influence Australia’s future. It includes the public, politics, media, business, community organisations, experts, and the public service - and how these actors relate to each other. Next25 is a non-profit, non-partisan organisation dedicated to understanding and improving Australia’s future-making system. We know Australia can make the future it wants only with three strong pillars in place, but these pillars are weak, and we have programs to strengthen them:

1 Navigator: Pillar 1: Desired Future [View site](#)

Deep social research that surveys the public and engages experts to discover the future Australia wants and whether we are on track.

2 Recoded: Pillar 2: System Assessment [View site](#)

Solutions-focused research that engages established and emerging leaders in the system to assess whether Australia has what it takes to create the desired future, and if not, what more is needed.

3 Solutions: Pillar 3: System Fix [View site](#)

Ongoing action to fix Australia’s future-making system and keep it fit for purpose in a changing global context. Based on previous findings from Pillar Two, Next25’s active solution is Leadership, courses, coaching, and support for parliamentarians to reconnect to their values, strengthen their capability to respond to the challenges of the 21st century, and restore trust in the political system.

“There are many challenges presently facing Australia, as well as new (unknown) challenges that will emerge as the future unfolds. It is a precondition to dealing with these effectively and in the public interest that the right decision-making systems and institutions are in place that have our trust and confidence. This is the focus of Next25, and why I believe it is a priority to support, irrespective of the particular issues that concern us personally or where we sit on the political spectrum.”

– Bill Manos, major donor

Why Australia Needs Recoded

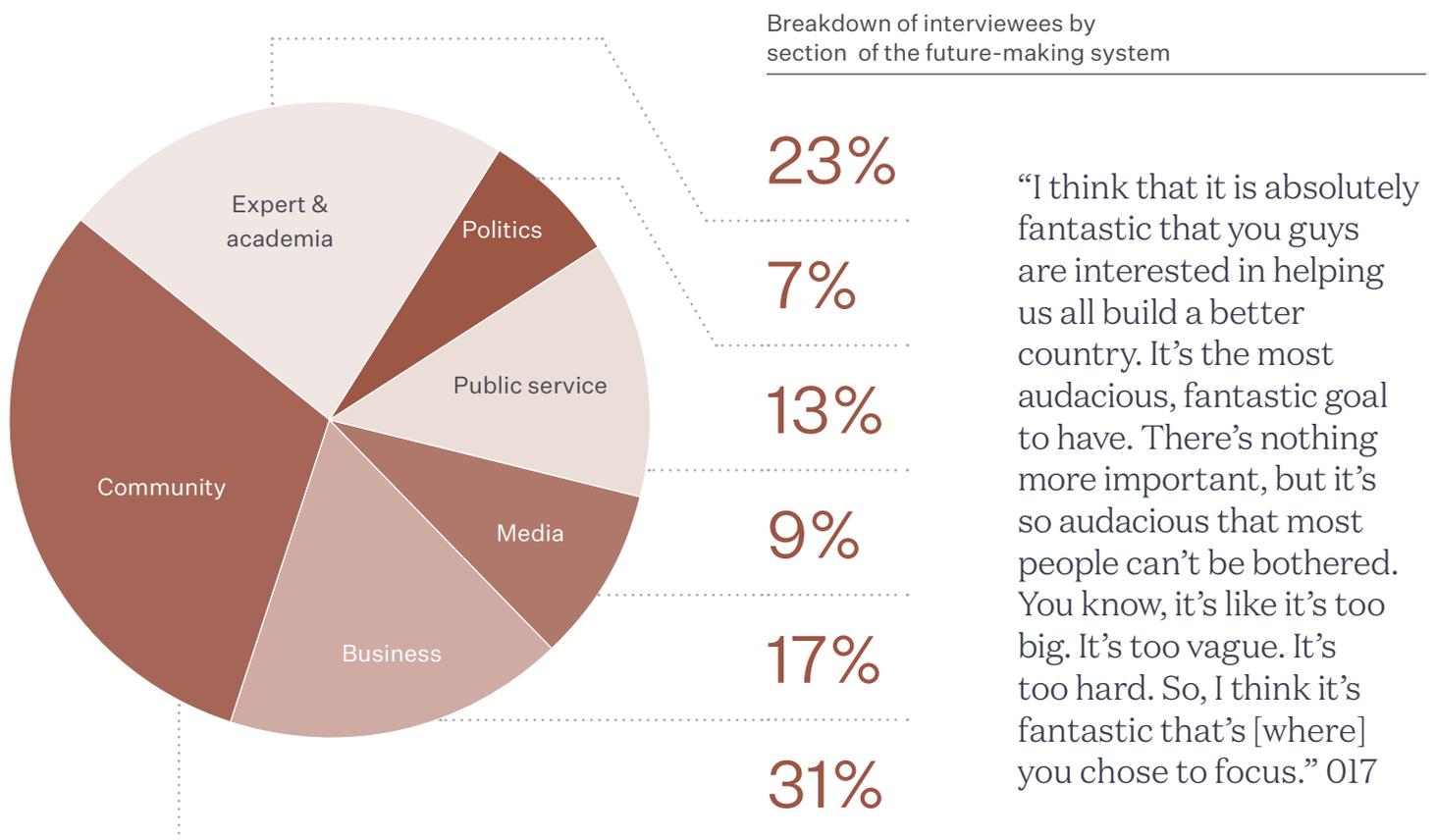
Next25 Navigator tells us that Australia is not on track to achieve the desired future. This year, Australia scored just 31/100 on the Public Interest Index – a national assessment of how well politicians and five other institutions act in the public interest. Navigator also found that only 39% of us are confident Australia will be a better country in 5-10 years and only 30% of us feel we can influence the future.

Recoded unearths a similar concern for Australia’s future among virtually all interviewees. A common fear is that “younger generations today are the first that won’t have a better quality of life than the previous ones” (005).¹

We know from our research that Australia’s dysfunctional future-making system is the underlying problem. To fix the future-making system, we must know the best places to intervene and have broad support from people and institutions within the system.

Without the knowledge and system support produced by Recoded, Australia cannot make its future-making system fit for purpose. And without this, the future Australia wants remains an impossible dream.

As well as directly contributing to system-fixes implemented through Next25 Solutions, Recoded lays the foundations for others to take steps of their own towards improving Australia’s future-making system.



¹ All interviewee responses have been anonymised throughout the report, with randomised numbers used as identifiers. See the full report for a list of participant’s names.

Next25 Recoded:

Understanding and Improving
How Australia Makes its Future
Vol. 1. Ed. 1

The first Recoded report explores and synthesises 50 deeply reflective, one-on-one interviews with established and emerging leaders from a diverse cross-section of the future-making system.

The report findings explore how interviewees define success for Australia, how they understand the current system, the extent to which they believe change is required, and where the system can be transformed to improve how Australia makes its future.

Themes of success

We first examined what success looks like for the nation by asking interviewees, “How do you define success for the country today and in the future?” Answers differed with respondents drawing on their individual experiences and perspectives. However, there was common ground in four themes of success.

01

Egalitarianism

02

New success
paradigm

03

A common view
of what brings us
together

04

Continual systems
renewal

Interviewees described how each theme would look in a successful Australia:

01 Egalitarianism

- Reconciliation with First Nations and truth-telling
- Moving away from paternalistic, Western approaches to embrace Indigenous wisdom
- Reducing gaps of inequality and disadvantage, particularly in wealth disparity and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- Quality processes, structures and institutions that are fair and enable equal opportunity
- Diversity at the highest levels of leadership
- Acting to ensure the wellbeing of future generations

“If 1% of the population or 10% of the population is having it really tough at the moment, then that’s a matter of concern for all the rest of us.” 037

02 New success paradigms

- Going beyond profit and growth
- Accounting for the environment
- Valuing all contributions, including the immaterial and the non-monetised
- Considering the common good and what it means to look after the community
- Acting for the long-term interests of the whole population

“The greater good ... is in the long-term interest for the bulk of the population, rather than the short-term interest of some small and vociferous vested interest group. I think Australians are very good at recognising noisy vociferous special interest groups, and sort of hosing them down, no matter how well connected they are. And that, is really important.” 037

03 A common view of what brings us together

- That we, as a country, are cohesive and inclusive
- Having an Australian story that understands and addresses historical harms and trauma
- Celebrating the diversity, difference, and contributions of all

“I think Australians are unsure of our future. The key is that we don’t know our past ... we’ve really got to ask ourselves, if we don’t understand the past and celebrate the past and know the history, our future has no fundamental basis. [There is] no foundation for the future.” 051

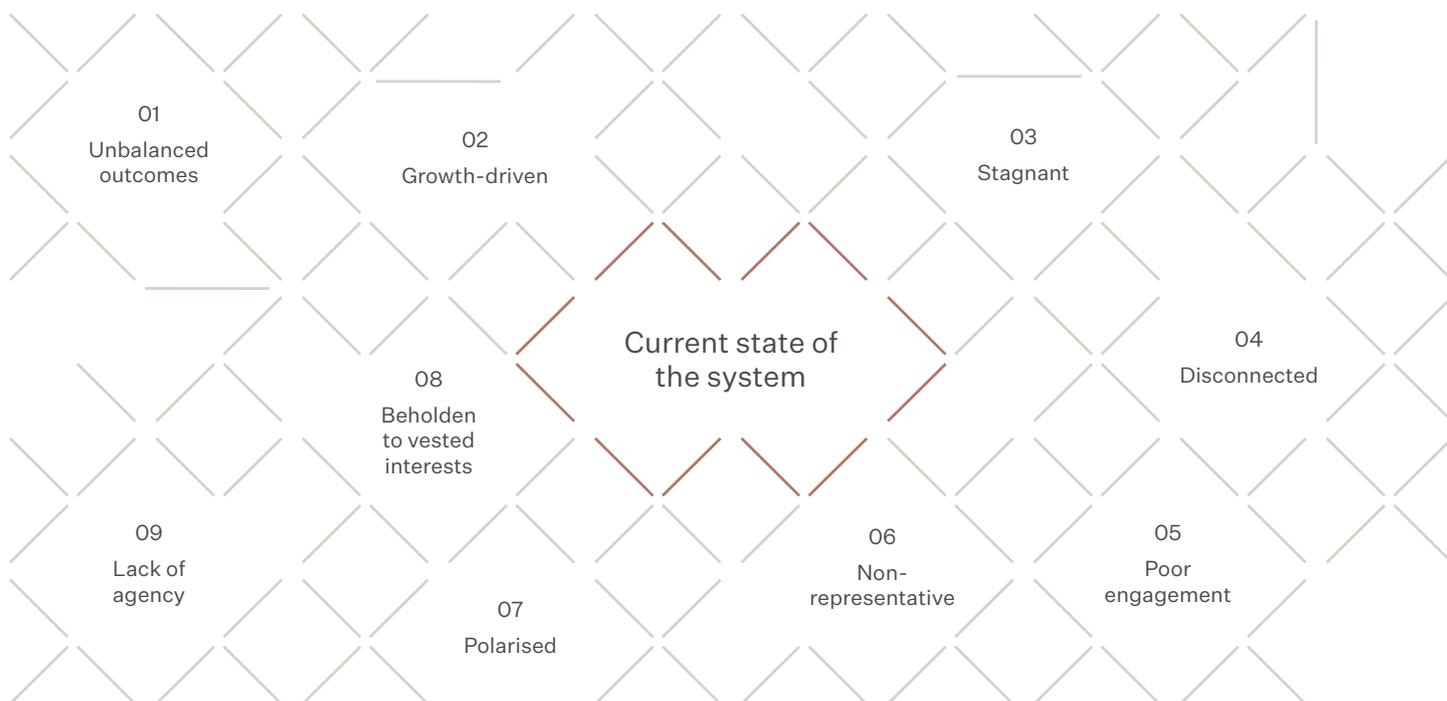
04 Continual systems renewal

- Understanding interconnectedness in a complex, rapidly changing world
- Capable of continually evolving, learning, and experimenting
- Embracing change as a democratic process

“[A] continuing capacity for development and review of actions to be an equitable, fulfilling, sustainable society, and effective international citizens... it’s really a process focus through which ideas and actions are refined, examined, critiqued and developed ... A workable and improving system.” 016

Nine factors of the current state

A core part of Recoded is building a shared understanding of the system's status quo. This allows Next25 to identify leverage points with the potential to transform Australia's future-making system. To understand the system, we spoke with interviewees about what they see as the biggest factors – and who they see as the most significant actors – contributing to the current state.



01 Unbalanced outcomes

Australia's future-making system has created a divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Interviewees are concerned about the degree of wealth disparity and see it as unacceptable in a country with the resources of Australia. Not only does this affect people today, but interviewees are also concerned about how it will impact generations to come.

02 Growth-driven

Australia's future-making system is obsessed with economic growth.

The growth-driven narrative of neoliberalism is one that has been accepted and held up by many from the 80s onward. While there are positives that come with finding efficiencies, interviewees see this growth narrative as “a big cause of inequality in Australia” (047) that “favours the rich” (009). This paradigm shift is seen as having set a course for Australia that emphasises market forces while diminishing the role of government and the common good. The powerful and successful are viewed as “beneficiaries of the neo-liberal perspective, and in their minds, it's been very good to them and there's no need to challenge that system” (007). However, interviewees did point to green shoots for positive change, including Donut Economics from Kate Raworth, Wellbeing Budgets, ESG, and Stakeholder Capitalism.

03 Stagnant

Australia's future-making system has become complacent and stagnant.

Interviewees see Australia's lack of reform over the past decades as an indication the nation has become complacent and stagnant. Many link this to a lack of vision and the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Politicians are criticised for "responding rather than leading" (007) and the Federal election cycle is called out as a driver of short-termism. Interviewees also note that the public service is an environment that does not encourage risk-taking or radical reform. In contrast, the private sector is seen as being far more innovative and long-term in their approach.

"Is the expansion of the education system or the tourism industry in Australia a result of government decisions? No, it's been, you know, corporate opportunity, and people in those industries embracing those opportunities, with some government facilitation." 002

04 Disconnected

Australia's future-making system siloed.

Numerous interviewees see a lack of collaboration across the system. Politicians and the public service are called out for lack of engagement with experts and interviewees feel disappointed when these actors are so poorly informed. The sense of distrust and aversion toward experts is also felt by the public, linked to growing inequality and uncertainty as people look for answers and seek to blame the "elite". The structure of Federation and the misalignment between levels of government is also viewed as problematic.

"I think that there are a few different systems working in parallel, sometimes intersecting like a Venn diagram, other times, just not talking to each other." 011

05 Pockets of public engagement

Australia's future-making system does not genuinely engage the community.

While there are pockets of public engagement across Australia, interviewees want to see greater and more diverse avenues for public participation in decision-making processes. This includes recognising the value of lived experience in the same way as traditional knowledge through education or the professional sphere. A stronger connection between communities and politicians is also noted as a pathway for broader systems change. Whether it is a form to fill out or handing down information with minimal interaction (020; 026), failing to genuinely engage the public can lead to people not feeling heard and fears arising over the unknown. Interviewees pointed to running multiple deliberative approaches, better promotion of public engagement opportunities, and institutionalising these processes as avenues for improvement.

06 Non-representative

Australia's future-making system leaders do not reflect the diversity of Australia.

Many see leadership in Australia as becoming more homogenous, perceived as "old, white, and male". Politics is identified as the area lacking the most diversity of representation due to multiple barriers to entry, such as the professionalisation of the sector and the resources required to run for office. This is strengthened by our two-party system where "only certain kinds of people can work their way into those parties" (032). A consequence of the "limited pool" of politicians is that they are often disconnected from the community they serve. However, while interviewees mostly spoke about politics lacking diversity, it was also noted how this pervades throughout society: The "overarching ideology blocking it [diversity] is white supremacy ... [which] keeps particular people who are profiting off that system at the top" (032).

07 Beholden to vested interests

Australia's future-making system is not holding the powerful to account.

Interviewees are concerned about the significant political influence of big business and lucrative sections of the economy, such as those in the coal, mining, and petroleum supply chains. Cross pollination between politicians, lobbyists, and journalists as “super connectors” is also seen as problematic due to their ability to influence decision-making through their relationships. Interviewees spoke of a “strong gravitational pull around the existing status quo” for those with an interest in the process to want to maintain a system that works for them. Additionally, these conditions can also lead to “good politicians” who end up “dropping out because the compromises they have to make are too great” (009). A lack of accountability among politicians is seen as being perpetuated by the media, which is not as resourced as it once was to uphold accountability as the Fourth Estate.

08 Polarised

Australia's future-making system is increasingly divided.

There is increasing polarisation among the public, politicians, and the media. Interviewees see us becoming a less tolerant society with declining ability for constructive and empathetic conversations. Two factors contributing to this include the media, including social media, and a cultural tendency to avoid difficult or intellectual conversations. Politicians, even from those within politics, are perceived as having a self-interested “win at all costs” attitude and a lack of willingness to work together for the good of the nation. The increasingly commercial media model is also viewed as deepening the divide and contributing to echo chambers through a lack of diversity in opinions and the rise of misinformation. Interviewees see the relationship between politics and media as the most influential in Australia's future-making system, mainly due to their role in the polarisation of society.

09 Lack of agency

Australia's future-making system makes people feel disempowered.

Many interviewees commented that Australians do not feel a sense of ownership over the system or the ability to influence change. Often, structures that “are meant to enable people to make their voice heard”, such as political party membership and compulsory voting, leaves people feeling that “their voice doesn't matter anyway” (012). Interviewees from politics spoke about the need to build better relationships between politics and citizens but note that it is difficult to do so and to manage public expectations about what eventuates from light-touch engagements. Interviewees often expressed how the system is likely to beat individuals down.

Change is necessary, but what kind?

All interviewees believe some change is necessary in Australia's future-making system. So, how do we go about making change?

- Incremental, evolutionary change: While it might be tempting to “dream of a revolution”, most interviewees see evolutionary change is seen to be more enduring and realistic. “Incrementally moving the needle” in a complex system provides “greater capacity for change to stick and endure”.
- Immediate, revolutionary change: Some interviewees see fast-acting change as necessary, and some argue we need a “fundamental shift.” A desire for immediate change is often linked to concerns of climate change.

Four levers to make the system more fit for purpose?

Discussions for Recoded unearthed multiple potential areas for improvement. Next25 has identified four leverage points with catalytic potential to transform Australia's future-making system:

01 Articulating and embracing an inclusive Australian identity

How might we embrace a national identity and story that is honest, inclusive, inspiring, and values the contributions of all people?

Interviewees expressed a strong sense of opportunity in broadening our understanding of Australia's story and identity. Whether it be embracing First Nation wisdoms, our democratic feats, multiculturalism, or the efforts of everyday people, like the Rural Fire Service.

"I think there is not enough education on how problematic some of the history is, and then how that informs some of the problems for society today" 051

02 Authorising and embracing success paradigms beyond GDP

How might we embrace a success paradigm that goes beyond economic growth to also include social and environmental factors?

Our current system operates under a paradigm where growth is prioritised above all. This continuous growth mindset is seen as contributing to unbalanced outcomes, environmental degradation, and unsustainable consumption. The shift toward embracing a more holistic version of success is already beginning in Australia. This is reflected in the elevation of ESG guidelines and stakeholder capitalism within the business world, and wellbeing budgets becoming more normalised in government.

03 Enabling and embracing constructive discourse

How might we embrace and enable more constructive discourse across Australian society?

There is broad consensus that constructive conflict, debate, and being challenged is necessary and must be developed going forward. Increasing acceptance and bridging divides can create more conducive environments for constructive debate. Pathways forward might involve using what we have in common as a starting point. We can use broad ideas of success or visions for the future as a means of connecting with other another, such as social cohesion, diversity, and valuing all contributions and experiences.

04 Engaging with and embracing public wisdom in decision-making

How might we enable all people in Australia to contribute to, and feel represented by, the decisions made on their behalf?

Interviewees often discussed the concern that most people in Australia, including themselves, do not feel that they have a say in the decisions that impact them. Many interviewees see decision-making processes that are inclusive of voices with lived experience as greatly important. These voices have been "an ingredient that's being missed in a big way." There is opportunity to connect people to decision-makers and improve processes to enable greater, more genuine participation.

What's next for Next25

Recoded is designed to continually identify and explore system challenges and solutions that have catalytic potential to improve Australia's future-making system, Recoded is designed also to build support to implement improvements. We encourage individuals, organisations, and institutions that make up our future-making system to harness the findings of our research to improve the system. Next25 will also continue to play its role.

In 2022

Next25 will engage with the system to select and work on one leverage point. Just as we have done with Next25 Leadership, we will then work with system actors to bring a new solution to life that improves Australia's future-making system.

Longer-term

Next25 will continue working with the system to further explore the four leverage points described above, to find further leverage points, and to build further solutions. For more on the Recoded process and approach, see [our website](#) or the [full report](#).

What you can do

We are all part of the system and have a role in shaping our society, our culture, and our institutions. All Australians have a role in creating a nation that we are proud to pass on to the next generation. By understanding and harnessing our power to improve the system as individuals, organisations, groups, and institutions, we can influence others to consider their role and ability to do the same.

For the reader

We are all part of the system and have an opportunity to be involved in making the future Australia wants. Next25 is eager to hear your thoughts as we explore the leverage point to take forward. Fill out [this survey](#) to tell us:

- What you think of the leverage points?
- Which leverage point you think has the most potential and why?
- Is something missing?

Share this report summary with your friends, family and colleagues and continue to actively engage in the future-making system.

For organisations, groups, and institutions

Next25 is here to support and collaborate with you to help make the future Australia wants. We encourage you to:

- Share this summary report and use its insights to inform your strategic planning
- Invite us to present the findings and facilitate discussions about how this impacts you and the nation
- Engage us to help you understand and articulate your role in the system and what actions you can take
- Partner with us or sponsor us to explore a leverage point in detail, including identifying and developing a solution

Please [contact us](#) if your organisation is interested in pursuing any of these options.

We cannot do this work alone.

We rely on our Board, Research Committee, partners, and donors for their generous support. If you are an organisation or individual interested in supporting, sponsoring, or partnering with Next25 for future Recoded activities or to arrange bespoke presentation, please contact Jessica Fuller, Next25's Research Manager and the Program Lead for Recoded to engage further with Recoded at: jessica@next25.org.au

Next25 acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

next25.org.au

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