

FOREWORD

We're delighted to share with you CPD's latest research – a new discussion paper called *What do Australians Want? Active and Effective Government Fit for the Ages*.

This paper is the latest outcome from a series of events and projects to mark CPD's 10th Anniversary. It draws on a detailed survey of Australian attitudes to democracy and government. It is also informed by input from about 30 eminent Australians from diverse backgrounds who gathered in Melbourne last month for a special roundtable on democracy.

Every day we're reminded our democracy is struggling under the strain of new and old challenges. The arduous and painful path to marriage equality despite broad public support is one example. The rolling crisis over the citizenship status of parliamentarians is another. And this isn't a temporary blip. For too many years we've been treading water while the big challenges of our time – climate change, inequality, the future of work, sustainable growth, and Australia's place in the region – have gathered steam. We need better answers, and we don't have any more time to lose.

What's clear from our research is that Australians are up for the challenge of rebooting their political system. The community has shown it can lead the way in finding agreement on fresh ideas to drive new policies for Australia's future. This is not just a matter of reforming the system of government and its processes. It means ensuring the best contemporary policy ideas rise to the top.

Reforms to the form and function of our democracy strongly backed by Australians include a federal anti-corruption commission (77% support), four-year parliamentary terms at the national level (58% support), more diversity in the parliament (59% support) and a tougher code of conduct for parliamentarians (79% support), embedding the public sector in more parts of Australia (75% support), putting citizens on parliamentary committees (68% support), giving public agencies more independence from the government of the day (55% support), and a convention on how we can update the Australian Constitution for the 21st century (57% support).

These ideas are important – and *in a sense*, they are the easy part of renewing Australia's democracy, because Australians want these reforms. The more difficult challenge is developing an agreed vision and purpose for our future which can breathe new life into our democracy. But CPD's research shows there is fertile ground here, too.

Australians also want a rejuvenated public sector that plays an active and effective role in policy development and the delivery of human services. They want business to invest in building shared, sustainable value. They care about the wealth of nature, not growth at all costs. They want a stable democracy, not a static one that refuses to change with the times. They want programs that work and are rigorously evaluated by government. Above all, they believe in Australia and believe we can and must do better if democracy is to deliver for all.

Australia's progress this century isn't inevitable. We must all be up for the challenge of renewing our democracy so that it is fit for the ages.

In times of great crisis, such as the Second World War and the period of national development which followed, government and the community have rallied with new ideas and determination. We need a similar national effort now to navigate the most uncertain policy and geopolitical period since the height of the Cold War. We can start by responding to a clear desire in the community to reform our democratic system and processes, and for fresh policies driven by better ideas, not ideology.



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