

Lessons from Australia's past national wellbeing approaches

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Dr Cressida Gaukroger

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The information in this report is based on a combination of desk research using available public resources, discussions with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Commonwealth Treasury, and former employees who were working at the Treasury and ABS during the period of the development, tenure and/or discontinuance of *Measures of Australia's Progress (MAP)* and phasing out of the Treasury's Wellbeing Framework. We would like to thank Subho Banerjee, Jon Hall, Imogen Wall, and nine former and current Treasury and ABS staff who were involved in the early creation and implementation of *MAP* and the Treasury's Wellbeing Framework.

SUMMARY

In the early 2000s two different wellbeing 'frameworks' were implemented in Australia. In 2002 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released *Measuring Australia's Progress (MAP)* later called *Measures of Australia's Progress*, a national report focusing on a series of key economic, social, and environmental indicators that represented whether life in Australia was getting better. At the same time a formal wellbeing framework was being developed by the Commonwealth Treasury – this was used internally for a number of years before its public release in 2004. This Treasury Wellbeing Framework outlined five dimensions particularly relevant to Treasury analysis of policy proposals that directly or indirectly impacted wellbeing. It gave some guidance on how these should be considered in Treasury decision-making, alongside traditional economic considerations.

Both *MAP* and the Treasury Framework were at the forefront of international practice of recognising and embedding wellbeing at the heart of the public service. The introduction of *MAP* made the ABS "the first national statistical agency... to produce a broadly focused measuring tool for assessing national progress" (Podger, Trewin and Gort, 2014: 4) and placed Australia at the cutting edge of wellbeing measurement at the time, inspiring a large project in the OECD's statistical directorate on "Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies" from 2005-2009. The Treasury Framework was internationally recognised and discussed, providing inspiration for countries such as New Zealand (Gleisner et al, 2011) in developing their own Living Standards Framework.

Both programs had more than decade-long lifespans under both Liberal and Labour governments. However, despite the international acclaim it received, *MAP* discontinued in 2014 alongside the shrinking or ending of 12 other ABS projects (ABS, 2014) in response to a series of consecutive cuts to ABS funding. It has been reported that the Treasury Framework was similarly discontinued in 2016 though it is more accurate to say that its explicit use was fading from practice at this time - it was never officially discontinued, indeed it remains on the Treasury's

website, and it contributed to a deep, persisting change in the way the Treasury operates.

The history of both *MAP* and the Treasury Framework highlight the challenges and opportunities that wellbeing programs face in the public service. While *MAP* spotlighted the right kinds of things, the data it provided was neither used significantly in government decision-making, nor did it succeed in dislodging the primacy of GDP in the political or public imagination. The Treasury Framework did change practice in the Treasury, but at the same time it was not revolutionary. It suffered from a lack of clear direction that made it hard to communicate outside of the Treasury and meant some found it hard to use. But it did as it claimed to do: provide context for thought without aspiring to be an analytical tool that staff could use to work through specific policy issues. Despite these limitations, both programs have had long shadows. More than a decade on from its last publication *MAP* is still referenced as ground-breaking by experts in the field of wellbeing and the measurement of progress. The Treasury Framework's decades of use reportedly changed the culture of analysis and decision-making at the Treasury, and consideration of wellbeing dimensions became a feature of Treasury practice.

MEASURES OF AUSTRALIA’S PROGRESS

Background

In 2000, the Australian Bureau of Statistics began work developing *Measuring Australia’s Progress (MAP)* as a measure of national wellbeing. The idea was driven by Dennis Trewin, the recently appointed Australian Statistician, who intended to create a measure that would “inform and stimulate public debate and encourage all Australians to assess the bigger picture when contemplating progress in all its forms” (Trewin, 2002). Public consultation was carried out including eliciting the views of hundreds of academic researchers, government agencies, businesses and business councils, community organisations, and individual Australians on the question of what they thought was important for the ABS to measure. A Reference Group of experts was also established to help inform the development of *MAP*.

There had been interest in international statistical circles in new measures of progress since the mid 1990s. Internationally there was some work being done in research institutions in the USA, Germany and the UK on ‘Genuine Progress Indicators’ intended to replace GDP as a

measure of progress. Within the ABS, interest had been particularly sparked by a 1995 *Atlantic* article “If the GDP Is Up, Why is America Down?” (Cobb et al, 1995) which discussed the seeming paradox of high voter unhappiness despite very strong economic figures. The article highlighted the flaws of GDP as a measure of progress, and called for new, better progress measures.

Australia was no stranger to the movement to go beyond GDP in measures of progress. In 1996 a Senate Inquiry was held entitled *National Wellbeing: A system of national citizenship indicators and benchmarks*. The recommendations to come out of the Inquiry included resourcing the ABS to identify and collect data to fill gaps in areas such as social and cultural significance, and social and political participation. In 1997 the ABS co-hosted a national conference with the CSIRO and the National Citizenship Project on ‘Measuring Progress’ (Eckersley, 1998) where it was generally agreed that a better measure of progress was needed for Australia (Trewin and Hall, 2004). At the state and local level this was a rich time for the introduction of new wellbeing and sustainability measures (or public plans for such measures) including the publication of the *Tasmania Together*¹ plan and *Growing Victoria Together*² document in 2001.

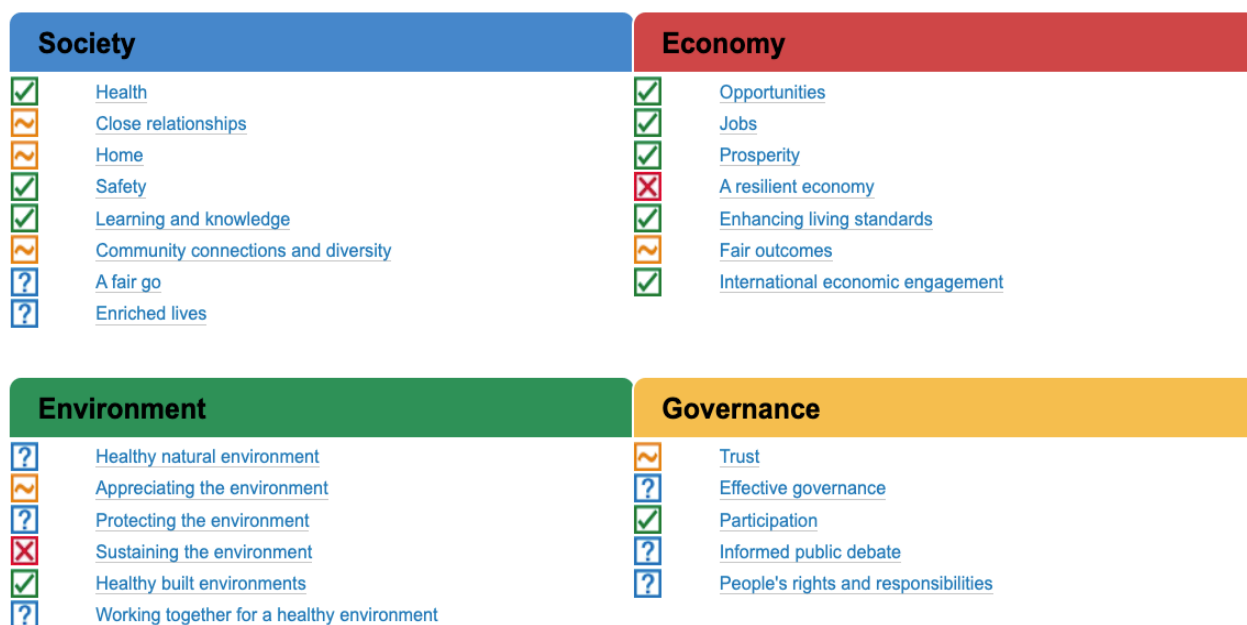


Figure 1 Domains and headline dimensions from MAP 2013.

Development

The first *MAP* report took two years to develop. According to ABS employees during this time *MAP*'s development was somewhat controversial within the ABS. It was argued that a better measure of progress was needed for Australia, and the ABS were the best institution to objectively produce such a measure. However, there were concerns amongst some at the ABS that it wasn't within the remit of a statistical agency to measure progress. They argued that the inclusion of the idea of progress made *MAP* a political project, not suitable for the ABS which was and had to be impartial and independent from political influence. Staff who worked in the *MAP* team at the time attribute the fact that *MAP* overcame these objections to the strong backing of Dennis Trewin.

The intention behind the first *MAP* was to generate a set of independent measures that people could put together to construct their own holistic picture of progress in Australia. In order to avoid controversy the focus was on choosing indicators that were outcome-focused (for example, focusing on health outcomes rather than expenditures), and which were seen to be unambiguously associated with progress (for example, noting that the divorce rate would be an ambiguous measure of family wellbeing: it might mean more unhappy marriages or it might mean fewer people trapped in unhappy relationships) (Hall, 2005). It was also important that *MAP* measured the nation's progress, not the government's progress, so indicators tied to specific policies were avoided (Trewin and Hall, 2004).

In 2004 *MAP* saw its second release. It included a number of changes in response to feedback including a change in its title to *Measures of Progress*, "to ensure readers realise immediately that we are not claiming to have included everything that is important to progress in this country" (ABS, 2004). The view of the ABS was that the first *MAP* was experimental, and they invited feedback – there was a commitment to *MAP* being open to 'continuous improvement' as part of an iterative process that was responsive to comments and community attitudes (Trewin and Hall, 2004).

The original intention had been to release *MAP* annually (Trewin and Hall, 2004), however it was in fact released every two years. While *MAP* was modified with each release, in 2010 *MAP* underwent a significant update including a two-year community consultation process (the largest, broad-ranging consultation in the ABS's history) centred around asking Australians, 'What is important to you for your nation's progress?'. The consultation included expert reference groups, engagement over social media, workshops, forums, written submissions and championship by prominent Australians. Following this process *MAP* added a fourth 'governance' domain, included more indicators relating to the built environment, increased the ability to disaggregate their data, and added explicit goals. However, the first *MAP* released after this process in 2013 was also the last.

Structure

MAP was aimed at the general public – it presented a suite of indicators that were intended to be easy to interpret, alongside discussion papers that discussed the links between them. The intention was that readers could use *MAP*'s indicators to draw their own conclusions about Australia's progress as they were neither weighted nor combined.

MAP's indicators are organised under domains – originally these were 'economic', 'environmental', and 'social' domains, with the fourth 'governance' domain added in 2013. Under the domains sat sets of 5-8 themes. The later presentations of *MAP* listed these with icons next to each indicating whether the theme showed progress (green tick), no progress (orange tilda), regression (red cross), or unknown due to a current data gap (blue question mark).

For each theme one headline indicator was presented alongside a series of supplementary elements each with their own indicators. For example, under 'Society: Health' for the 2013 *MAP* the headline indicator was 'life expectancy at birth'. The assessment on whether there was overall progress in the Health dimension (and, by extension, whether the dimension earned a tick or cross) was based entirely on whether there was an increase in life expectancy.

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The supplementary indicators provided for each theme allowed consideration of other important elements. For example, the Health theme supplementary elements included: physical health; mental health; services; healthy lifestyles; and healthy environments. These supplementary elements typically consisted of one indicator (such as 'average air quality index for capital cities' under 'healthy environments'), but a few supplementary elements consisted of two sub-indicators (such as 'proportion of adults who are overweight or obese' alongside 'smoking rates').

Some supplementary indicators included placeholders indicating gaps where data was not yet available. Because the ABS chose not to aggregate the data from its *MAP* indicators, the supplementary indicators did not explicitly contribute to the overall assessment of how a headline dimension was doing and instead helped paint a richer picture of the entire dimension.

Reception and use

There was widespread media coverage at the time of *MAP*'s release in 2002, and upon the release of each of its later iterations. The first *MAP* did draw some limited criticism. On the one hand, there was some criticism that this work was threatening the ABS's political neutrality. Some commentators saw the inclusion of a number of environmental indicators, and the fact that *MAP* included a measure of income inequality, as a sign that a left-wing notion of 'progress' was being employed (Saunders, 2002). On the other hand, some others argued that fear of political criticism had prevented the ABS from going far enough in presenting a clear definition of 'progress' (Davidson and Wilson, 2011). However, the broader response to *MAP* was very positive. Within Australia it was lauded in a number of publications and its data was regularly used in the media to highlight key issues such as the rate of environmental damage. Dennis Trewin won *Bulletin Magazine*'s 2003 "Smart Australian" award in the Social category for his work on *MAP*.

MAP was widely acknowledged internationally and some of those who worked on it ended up in senior statistics positions in international organisations, further increasing *MAP*'s influence.³

"[MAP] was showcased as the benchmark for developed nations at previous OECD World Forums."

Shaw, 2015

One feature *MAP* was particularly recognised for was its inclusion of environmental and sustainability dimensions, highlighting their crucial role in wellbeing and progress.

"MAP was interesting because it was one of the pre-Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi initiatives that appeared to come from a sustainable development perspective. The other examples from that era were largely performance 'report cards' that were focused on public services rather than society-level dashboards."

Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust

According to some ABS employees at the time it was not explicitly discussed within the ABS how they intended the *MAP* data to be used beyond painting a broader picture of progress for the general public. *Measures of Australia's Progress* was cited as a reference in Parliament and in Government reports, though not extensively (Howard & Chambers, 2016). One past employee said it had been suggested that the ABS could put out briefs for policy departments, enabling the department to tick off a range of *MAP* areas when they put out a new big policy proposal and show that they had considered areas important for wellbeing in their policy formation. However, this was not carried out due to concerns that it was not within the remit of the ABS to tell government departments what to do.

There was a strong interest in, and support for *MAP* within the commonwealth Treasury. *MAP*'s data had a mild influence on Treasury decision-making, seen as providing background or a 'reference point' rather than being used in a directly instrumental way. This is in part because of the nature of the *MAP* data – its headline indicators both in scope and number were designed with public utility in mind but were not fine-grained enough to be used for policy design or evaluation (Tallis, 2004). According to Treasury employees *MAP* also didn't have the same standing as numbers regularly used by the

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Treasury, such as the quarterly employment statistics.

"It is fair to say the report has had more influence on public debate rather than policy debate."

Trewin and Hall, 2004: 99

According to a former employee, the ABS did receive feedback that *MAP* had another unanticipated use within government departments. Apparently some government department employees found that it was helpful to use *MAP*'s headline measures when working with their minister on priorities in order to keep the minister focused. With all the new information, thoughts and stories that ministers receive daily from every corner, *MAP* figures were reportedly used by senior public servants as a way to keep ministers "grounded".

Cancelation and legacy

On the 5th of June 2014, the acting Australian Statistician, Jonathan Palmer, [announced](#) planned reductions to the ABS work program, including the discontinuation of *MAP*: "The ABS must reduce expenditure by about \$50m over three years. While the ABS has been able to implement efficiencies in its operations, these are insufficient to meet the expenditure target. As a result, the statistical work program will be reduced from 2014-15." According to one former ABS employee, faced with the need to make significant cuts, *MAP* was a good choice of programs to discontinue as its indicators tended to be overarching and slower moving and it had recently been updated, meaning that the 2013 publication would have remained generally relevant for up to a decade.

Measures of Australia's Progress continues to be referenced in Australian public discourse, and it has an impressive international and local legacy. Other countries looked to *MAP* as a guide in developing their own wellbeing and progress frameworks. Over the last decade many wellbeing and progress frameworks have been developed in Australia and overseas, and there is still broad alignment between the elements in *MAP* from 2013 and these newer frameworks.

THE COMMONWEALTH TREASURY WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

Background

Around 2000 the then Secretary of the Commonwealth Treasury, Ted Evans, was undertaking a routine revision of the Treasury's mission statement when its opening sentence caught his eye: "The Treasury's mission is to improve the wellbeing of the Australian people...". He asked his staffers what that phrase meant, and in doing so opened up a debate that got to the core values of the Treasury. Working parties were established, papers were produced, seminars were held, and there was furious internal debate. The Treasury's perceived job was to maximise the economic wellbeing of the country, and that had previously been seen as being akin to raising GDP. However, this understanding of economic wellbeing was beginning to be questioned within the organisation, led in particular by Ken Henry who took over as Treasury Secretary the following year in 2001.

Like the ABS, Treasury was becoming increasingly engaged in the discussion happening internationally about the need to augment the model of economics that was guiding nations. Indeed, the conversation about the limits of GDP as a measure of economic performance and wellbeing had been happening in the Treasury since the 1960s (Treasury, 1964; Treasury, 1973). In the early 2000s there was also a strong interest in Treasury in what was happening with *MAP* and there were good cross-connections between Treasury and the ABS, with some Treasury employees having come from the ABS, or having been in the *MAP* reference groups.

Meanwhile, climate change was becoming an increasingly salient issue. A new Treasury unit was created and staffed to work out the underpinnings and policy foundations for the natural environment. The employees in this area identified that the Treasury would benefit from a new framework for how it was going to address these environmental issues generally.

As a response to these influences an internal paper was produced in 2001 to provide guidance on how to incorporate wellbeing considerations into Treasury assessments, which would form the basis of the Treasury Framework (Henry et al, 2010).

Development

The early version of the Treasury Framework had provided an internal way of thinking for several years before the decision to publicly announce the Framework. In the lead up to the Treasury Framework's public release, and in its later development, there had been extensive work within the Treasury including establishing working parties and releasing papers on the topic of wellbeing. There was also "furious internal debate" and during its development the wellbeing approach was fiercely contested amongst Treasury officials. The debate about the purpose of economics and remit of the Treasury was described as "intellectually stimulating and [having] real impact on what people were doing". However, the wellbeing side eventually won thanks in large part to the commitment of Ken Henry "[who argued that] this is a better way of doing economics, we're not abandoning economics, it's actually founded in a great tradition, Adam Smith, and traditional thinking about kind of a broader objective function..." (Former Treasury Employee).

"This document was the compromise that came out of that debate... and you can see this tension coming through this document. But the upshot is that we did adopt a Wellbeing Framework."

Former Treasury Employee

The release of the Treasury Framework was low-key, done in a paper, known as 'the wellbeing paper' (Treasury, 2004) given by Martin Parkinson (who would go on to succeed Henry as Treasury Secretary in 2011) to the Australian Statistics Advisory Council in 2004.

While the basic frames and dimensions (see *Structure* below) were already in place, after making it public there was a move within the Treasury to fill out the Treasury Framework in far

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more detail. At a broader level this work included incorporating more explicit discussion of Amartya Sen's 'capabilities approach' which sees wellbeing as constituted in having the ability to live a life that one has reason to value. This ability is only present if a range of internal and external factors are present – for example, if one has the educational background to pursue meaningful employment opportunities, and if they live in an environment that will not limit their ability to stay healthy. A central focus in the development of the Treasury Framework was applying the idea of the 'capabilities approach' to all areas of government policy. There was also work done to develop a deeper understanding of the five dimensions that made up the Treasury Framework. For example, to support the understanding of the Framework's 'Risk' dimension, a paper entitled "Risk, Wellbeing and Public Policy" (Banerjee and Ewing, 2004), was released exploring the relationship between risk and wellbeing, and the implications for public policy.

The framework was always understood to be a document which would evolve over time. In 2011 it underwent a revision based on consultations with Treasury staff (Gruen et al, 2011). Notably the 'Level of consumption possibilities' dimension was reframed as 'The sustainability of opportunities'.

Structure

The Treasury Framework identified five dimensions that were believed to best "describe the aspects of wellbeing that are considered to be most relevant to Treasury's responsibilities" (Treasury, 2004). In the most recent iteration of the Treasury Framework these were (Gorecki & Kelly, 2012):

- **"The *set of opportunities* available to people.** This includes not only the level of goods and services that can be consumed, but good health and environmental amenity, leisure and intangibles such as personal and social activities, community participation and political rights and freedoms.
- **The *distribution* of those opportunities across the Australian people.** In

particular, that all Australians have the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life and participate meaningfully in society.

- **The *sustainability* of those opportunities available over time.** In particular, consideration of whether the productive base needed to generate opportunities (the total stock of capital, including human, physical, social and natural assets) is maintained or enhanced for current and future generations.
- **The overall level and allocation of *risk* borne by individuals and the community.** This includes a concern for the ability, and inability, of individuals to manage the level and nature of the risks they face.
- **The *complexity* of the choices facing individuals and the community.** Our concerns include the costs of dealing with unwanted complexity, the transparency of government and the ability of individuals and the community to make choices and trade-offs that better match their preferences."

The Treasury Framework included a discussion of each dimension, briefly exploring their importance for policy analysis. The Treasury Framework also included a table that could be used to highlight the interactions between the dimensions, indicating overlapping opportunities, but also potential trade-offs. For example, where the *complexity* and *opportunity* dimensions interact the 2004 Treasury Framework states: "Simplification may reduce the choice of instruments to match individual wellbeing preferences. However, assisting participation in society by disadvantaged groups increases their substantive freedoms." (Treasury, 2004)

While the Treasury Framework's purpose was "ensuring a broad assessment of the costs and benefits of all policies in our analysis and advice" (Treasury, 2004) it served to provide a background context and high-level direction for policy advice.

The Treasury Framework did not provide any formal tools for guiding how the dimensions could be incorporated into more formal decision-making processes. For example, it could not be

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used as a checklist to be applied in every circumstance (Gruen et al, 2011).

Reception and use

The development and public release of the Treasury Framework was relatively quiet, and as a result it flew under the radar of the general media for some time. When public responses emerged they were largely positive (Martin, 2008; Tunny, 2016).

The influence of the Treasury Framework within the Treasury was significant, though not always consistent. Within Treasury the Framework impacted the culture in the department and the advice they gave. It broadened the economic perspectives of treasury officials and was used as a point of reference in inter-departmental meetings spurring discussion of whether proposed policies would have a positive impact on people's lives in place of the assumption that, so long as they increasing economic output, this was a good enough proxy for increasing wellbeing.

"[It] has actually had quite a profound impact on our policy advice."

Henry et al, 2010

One example of the influence of the Treasury Framework on policy advice was in tax reform. The Treasury was reviewing the system of taxes on retirement benefits and superannuation. In consultation with the superannuation industry they learnt that the tax system in this area was so complex that almost everyone who retired needed to seek professional advice no matter how much they were withdrawing. The complexity of the system was creating significant levels of stress for almost everyone trying to access their superannuation and costing people thousands of dollars in professional advice even though the average amount being withdrawn at the time was only around \$8000. While the taxes on retirement benefits and superannuation brought in government revenue, it was by considering the system through the lens of the Treasury Framework, and in particular its complexity dimension, that the Treasury concluded that the benefits came at a

disproportionate expense to wellbeing, particularly of those who were on lower incomes (Henry et al, 2010). It was for this reason that the Treasury advised to abolish this complex tax system altogether.

However, not everyone within the Treasury found the Treasury Framework as useful. The fact that the Treasury Framework was more of a theoretical framework than a practical tool was identified as a barrier to usage for many staff who found themselves unsure of its intended purpose. They felt they needed a tool that could better "give concrete answers to the policy questions they encountered" (Gruen et al, 2011: 4). This led to the Treasury Framework not being consistently applied within the Treasury (Treasury, 2011). There was also no mechanism within or supporting the Treasury Framework to give a sense of how widely or effectively it was being used. These issues were identified in the consultation with staff as part of the Treasury Framework's revision in 2011, and while the Treasury Framework itself was not augmented with more concrete decision-making tools, it was proposed that some of these issues be addressed by the Treasury's seminar series, and by making more case studies available (Treasury, 2011).

That the Treasury Framework was 'vague and unclear' was also a criticism that came from outside the Treasury (Gruen, 2017a). It was felt within the business community that the Treasury Framework was not well communicated or understood (Treasury, 2011). One commentator argued that without a solid guide to how to navigate trade-offs such as a ranked ordering of the dimensions or the inclusion of weighting, the Treasury Framework was essentially inert and could "justify Treasury's advocacy of almost any plausible policy" (Pincus, 2014: 223). However, while in theory this is a significant problem, in practice the Treasury Framework did critically inform much of the policy advice given. This is perhaps for many reasons, but two stand out:

First, while there would have been cases where it was hard to choose between policy proposals, there were also proposals that would have stood out from the crowd as either doing significantly more good for wellbeing than harm or vice versa. As with the example of superannuation tax policy above, such policies may not always be

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immediately obvious. However, the Treasury Framework gave guidance on what to look for when considering whether policies that looked good on the surface actually had hidden harms or created perverse incentives.

Second, while the Treasury Framework itself and the language in the Treasury at the time was very much focused on trade-offs, it had the potential to enable the people who used it to move beyond simply assessing trade-offs between the likely costs and benefits of proposals to identifying ways in which proposals could be modified to bring about more mutual benefits. The Treasury Framework's 'trade-offs' table actually lists more areas that can connect to create co-benefits than areas that are likely to come into conflict with others. While it may be true that more guidance could have been given⁴, there is a virtue in having a theoretical framework that allows creative and innovative problem solving (e.g. ability to link positive impacts), which is difficult to accommodate in rigid decision-making tools.

Legacy

In 2016, there was talk of the Treasury Framework having been discontinued. There was a feeling from some Treasury employees at the time that the end of practice of formally using the Treasury Framework was due to the more conservative economic views of the then Treasury Secretary John Fraser. However, the Treasury Framework was never officially scrapped. When asked about the Treasury Framework, Fraser [described](#) not having seen it used or mentioned in his 21 months at Treasury, and [said](#) that there was no conscious decision to get rid of it. Further, he affirmed the Treasury's commitment to wellbeing driving policy analysis, [stating](#): "From time immemorial, what drives our analysis is the health and the wellbeing—or whatever you want to call it—of the Australian economy and the Australian people."

The perceived ending of the Treasury Framework was drawn to the attention of the media through a line of questioning about the Framework and its absence from the Treasury's 2016 Corporate Plan in a [Senate Hearing](#). However, the Framework had also not been mentioned in Fraser's 2015 Corporate Plan (Treasury, 2015) either, which

preceded this by a year. It is not clear whether its use was officially ended, whether it had, as Fraser argued, stopped being used some time prior to 2016, or whether it was in fact not discontinued at all. The Treasury Framework can still be found on the Treasury's website and is still referred to in conversation with current Treasury employees, though it appears no longer to be formally used.

Whatever the reason it stopped being explicitly used in Treasury deliberations, the Treasury Framework changed the culture of the department and cemented the move away from simple growth-centred economics.

"The wellbeing framework really did pervade the consciousness of the department, so I don't think it ever went away. Once you do that seismic shift in thinking, sure you can have steps back and you can de-emphasise it, but I can guarantee you now... that basic notion's going to be there."

Former Treasury Employee

LESSONS FOR AUSTRALIA TODAY

The legacy of *MAP* and the Treasury Framework are often seen as warning stories for the wellbeing movement in Australia, but in fact they are examples of impressive achievements within the context of their times that should contribute to optimism about what can be achieved in the current environment. Both initiatives were ahead of their time, gained significant recognition, and offered promise of a new way of approaching governance and policy in Australia. Both initiatives lasted for over a decade and were predominantly well received publicly.

These 'frameworks' provide some important lessons for those who want to push for the adoption of further wellbeing approaches in Australia:

An effective change in institutional culture casts a long shadow

Both *MAP* and the Treasury Framework have had real lasting impacts within their respective organisations. Particularly within the Treasury, the Framework and the way it was implemented became part of the institutional culture that has long outlasted explicit use of the Framework itself. This was achieved due to the deep and involved program of engaging and informing Treasury employees. While it was found that not all employees understood or used the Framework consistently, the wide-ranging and involved debates, working parties, seminars, use of case studies, and release of papers all contributed to convincing the broader Treasury population of the value of considering wellbeing in deliberations and embedding it within institutional culture.

Wellbeing frameworks that explicitly set out dimensions to guide government decision-making can be particularly effective in bringing about change. The longevity and use of such frameworks is best supported when the guidance they give is clear, and their implementation is supported throughout departments

As seen with *MAP*, wellbeing measures driven by national indicators are important for providing a

snapshot of how a nation is doing, sparking public debate, and highlighting some key areas for action. However, they are not typically able to deeply inform policy decision-making (Tallis, 2004) as wellbeing indicators do not provide the kinds of detail that is useful to guide policy proposals, and such indicators are very slow to change making them difficult to use for tracking the effectiveness of specific policies.

In comparison, the Treasury Framework, in its formulation as a tool to guide decision-making, is the type of tool that has the potential to be an important and effective component of a wellbeing approach to government. Despite its limitations, it is clear that the Treasury Framework was deployed in many instances within Treasury, including in some cases, such as with retirement benefit tax reform, where it had a significant impact on decisions made.

Wellbeing frameworks that provide central principles to guide decision making can assist those who want to make decisions that will efficiently deliver wellbeing outcomes, but who are not clear about how to approach this task (Gaukroger et al, 2022: 15). Using unifying wellbeing principles also has the potential to contribute to greater consistency of high-quality policy proposals amongst decision makers and advisors, as well as supporting more and better collaboration between departments if the framework's reach is great enough.

Wales uses a more detailed version of this kind of decision-guiding model which underpins the nation's success as one of the leading international examples of a wellbeing approach to government (Gaukroger et al, 2022). The Welsh framework provides two levels of guidance for approaching decision-making by ministers, government, and public bodies: The first is seven wellbeing goals that drive government and public decision making in all its forms, with a clear statutory explanation accompanying each goal. The second is five 'ways of working' that should be used in working towards meeting the wellbeing goals.

The Welsh model overcomes some of the uncertainties around expectations on how to use the framework that were identified as a reason the Treasury Framework was not used more.

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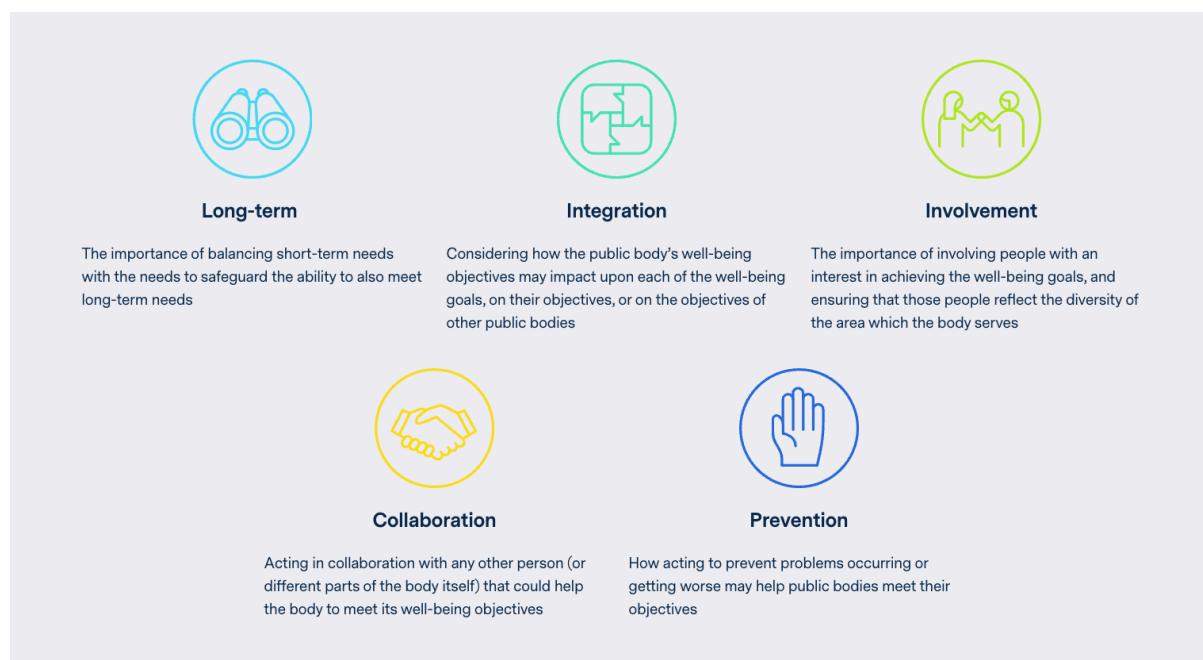


Figure 2 Welsh Five Ways of Working

It does so in part by containing more detail presented in more accessible language than the Treasury Framework. Adoption and employment of the Welsh framework is also assisted by the office of the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner who supports and enforces its mandated use through training, making targeted recommendations, engaging in original research, and providing illustrative case studies. Incorporating these supports can help to avoid some of the shortcomings of the Treasury Framework in terms of the consistency of its use across the department.

Concerns about how to remain apolitical while explicitly identifying the values that guide the public service can be alleviated when these definitions are determined by the public

Government departments and the APS can find themselves torn between the recognition that clear values and shared purpose should underpin their work, and the concern that setting such values can undermine their apolitical nature. This was highlighted by the fact that there were vigorous discussions in Treasury and the ABS surrounding the place of such organisations to set values and principles to drive their work. As shown by the ABS, deriving those values from wide-scale public consultation de-politicises

them. International examples support this finding, demonstrating how broad consultation with the public in the design of the principles underpinning wellbeing frameworks gives them legitimacy and longevity that lasts beyond election cycles (Gaukroger et al, 2022).

Inclusion of the environment and sustainability is a key part of a successful wellbeing approach

Both *MAP* and the Treasury Framework had their origins in a recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability to wellbeing and the inadequacies of the current systems for measuring and responding to environmental threat, damage and degradation. One feature of *MAP* that contributed to its being a leading global initiative was the fact that it recognised the natural environment as a key domain for the wellbeing and flourishing of individuals and communities. This highlighted the wide range of gaps in data on the natural environment, as well as its importance for wellbeing. The need for the Treasury Framework came in part from the realisation of the limitations of classical economic theories in representing environmental values and addressing the environmental costs of industries and practices typically associated with GDP growth.

Lessons from Australia's past national wellbeing approaches

The natural environment is now recognised as a key aspect of wellbeing for almost every international wellbeing framework.

MAP and the Treasury Framework were largely successful in an environment far less amenable to a wellbeing approach than today

There was a significant international shift towards understanding the importance of moving beyond standard economic models centred around GDP leading up to and during the periods of *MAP* and the Treasury Framework. However, both initiatives were still very much at the forefront of the movement to put new economic and policy models into practice. The scepticism that such approaches faced internally at the ABS and Treasury was indicative of their appearing new, experimental, and potentially politically aligned. The kinds of economic approaches that underpinned these 'frameworks' in the early 2000s now have widespread acceptance, and the debates now being had within institutions such as the ABS and the Treasury aren't about whether to focus on wellbeing, but about how best to do it.

Measures of Australia's Progress and the Treasury Wellbeing Framework were important steps in Australia's history and their legacy should give us confidence that now is the time to be ambitious about building on and expanding that legacy.

"In the early 2000s even the more enlightened economists would say 'well we all know that GDP is not a measure of wellbeing, but it does correlate with almost every measure of wellbeing so what is the problem with GDP as a proxy for progress?'. You don't hear many people saying that anymore. That idea has been shot down by Economic Nobel laureates galore and many other leading thinkers."

Jon Hall, Human Development Report at UNDP, original MAP team.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The ABS assisted with the statistical development of the Tasmanian State Government's *Tasmania Together* plan which set out a social, environmental and economic plan for Tasmania including clear goals, half of which were benchmarked with indicators that had baseline-data, interim targets and a final target for 2020. (Hall et al, 2004)

² The Victorian State Government document *Growing Victoria Together* presented a broad vision for the future of Victoria listing goals, priority actions, indicators and targets.

³ Jon Hall, for example, who was one of the founders of MAP within the ABS took up a position leading the Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies at the OECD, and later became a Policy Specialist on National Human Development Reports at the UNDP.

⁴ Wales, for example, has a similar analytic framework as part of its Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), but it is clearer and easier to apply because it is supported by added tools that underpin specific wellbeing goals, including more detail about how to approach decision making and oversight, case studies, research, training and support provided by the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner.



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CONTACT

Melbourne
Level 16, 1 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne VIC 3002
+61 3 9929 9915

Sydney
Level 6, 115 Pitt Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
+61 2 8199 9407