



BRIEFING #9 HOW THE WELLBEING ECONOMY CONCEPT RESONATES WITH AUSTRALIANS

In the face of challenges and negative trends, Australians are looking for new ways of doing things that align with their sense of what is most important. Deliberative dialogues – such as those run by Australia ReMADE¹ and the Victorian Council of Social Services² – mirror the findings of focus groups run by social researchers such as Hugh Mackay³ and Rebecca Huntley. A suite of recent opinion polls add to the picture of Australians expressing a displeasure with business as usual and a vision for their country that would require a wellbeing economy to attain. The following is a small selection of these poll findings:

- » In 2020 Edelman found that 56% of Australians said the system is failing them and only 35% 'believe they and their families will be better off in five years' time'.⁴
- » A 2022 Guardian poll found that a majority (58%) of respondents believed that 'Australia's economic system is broken' and 'the government needs to make fundamental changes to sort it out'.⁵ Research from 89 Degrees East revealed that 73% of Australians felt measures of economic success should encompass areas such as health, fairness, and sustaining the environment; and 69% believe we can't be a successful nation if we only focus on economic growth.⁶
- » The ABC Australia Talks⁷ survey found that 49% strongly agreed (and another 27% somewhat agreed) with the statement that 'The gap in wealth between rich and poor Australians is too big'⁸ with 46% saying wealth inequality is 'very much a problem'.⁹ The reflection that 'It's harder for young

Australians to get by than it used to be' is either somewhat or strongly agreed with by 68% of Australians.¹⁰ In terms of what people want from the economy, people report an average of 7.9 out of 10 for the importance of job security in their choice of job¹¹; it is 8.1 for finding fulfilment in work¹², and 8.3 for work/ life balance.¹³

- » There is a growing sense that the function of government is to increase the wellbeing and quality of life of the population. Polling commissioned by the Centre for Policy Development found that 33% of Australians think the primary purpose of government is to ensure a decent standard of living - which is clearly not being achieved when one looks at the extent of financial distress and low income as laid out above. A quarter (25%) think the primary purpose of government is improve overall wellbeing of the population, with 45% strongly agreeing and another 30% somewhat agreeing with the statement that 'the wellbeing of the population should be the top consideration in government decision making, above other concerns'.¹⁴ Other CPD polling found 'a five-point year-on-year rise in support for the idea that the primary purpose of government is to improve overall wellbeing'.¹⁵ A 2022 Guardian poll found that 80% of those polled were for governments taking an active role in shaping the economy.¹⁶ Last year people were asked by 89 Degrees East about the idea of a wellbeing budget: '69 percent think that people's wellbeing should be a bigger priority in major governments' budgets'.¹⁷

ABOUT THIS SERIES:

These mini-briefings look at the idea of a wellbeing economy, how it relates to other ideas for economic change, and what some of the core elements of a wellbeing economy are. They reflect on why Australia needs to build a wellbeing economy.

This series of ‘mini-briefings’ attempts to clarify terms and expressions and associated wellbeing economy ideas so that discussions can take place from a basis of shared understanding and language.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Australia reMADE. (2023). [The makings of a vision](#).
- 2 VCOSS. (2023). [Voices of Victoria](#); and Sved, M. (2023). [Hearing what matters: a case study of meaningful community engagement as a model to inform wellbeing initiatives](#).
- 3 Mackay, H. (2008). *Advance Australia... Where?*. Hachette Australia.
- 4 Edelman. (2020). [Edelman Trust Barometer 2020](#).
- 5 Martin, S. (2022, August 23). [Guardian Essential poll: 70% of people want price caps on essential services such as energy](#). The Guardian.
- 6 Wells, L. (2022, November 14). [Wellbeing budgets are not the soft underbelly of public policy](#). Croakey.
- 7 2019 data (most recent at time of writing). They explain the representativeness of their data: ‘a series of pre- and post-stratification statistical weights were applied to the Australia Talks National Survey sample in order to model inferences that are representative of the Australian population. The weights control for sample selection effects using the Census and other population-level estimates for sex, age, education, language, geography and partisanship (vote choice in the 2019 federal election’. ABC News. (2020). [Australia Talks Data Explorer: Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- 8 ABC News. (2020). [Australia Talks Data Explorer: The gap in wealth between rich and poor Australians is too big](#).
- 9 ABC News. (2020). [Australia Talks Data Explorer: To what extent do you consider the following a problem for Australia generally... Wealth inequality?](#)
- 10 ABC News. (2020). [It’s harder for young Australians to get by than it used to be](#).
- 11 ABC News. (2020). [How important would you say the following are in your choice of job... Job security?](#)
- 12 ABC News. (2020). [Australian Talks Data Explorer: How important would you say the following are in your choice of job... Finding fulfilment in your work?](#)
- 13 ABC News. (2020). [Australian Talks Data Explorer: How important would you say the following are in your choice of job... Good work/life balance?](#)
- 14 Williams, L. & Hammerle, M. (2024). [Purpose of Government Pulse: Australian attitudes to democratic purpose, priorities and performance](#). Centre for Policy Development
- 15 Murphy, K. (2022, February 25). [More Australian voters say government should prioritise population’s wellbeing over law and order, poll suggests](#). The Guardian.
- 16 Martin, S. (2022, August 23). [Guardian Essential poll: 70% of people want price caps on essential services such as energy](#). The Guardian.
- 17 Wells, L. (2022). [Wellbeing budgets are not the soft underbelly of public policy](#). Croakey.