



Australian Community Futures Planning

Snapshots from *Australia Together*

Q&A Feedback on Episode 2: A new economy: The benefits of a social wage for all Australians

This is a Question and Answer sheet about ACFP's 3-part episode on a new economy for Australia in Snapshots from *Australia Together*.

Questions listed here have been received from subscribers and are answered to the best ability of Australian Community Futures Planning.

[Watch the full 3-part episode on YouTube.](#)



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For more information view the latest issues of *Australia Together* at
<https://www.austcfp.com.au/australia-together>

Snapshots from *Australia Together*

Q&A Feedback – Episode 2: A new economy based on an Accord on Wealth, Welfare and Wellbeing

ACFP has released a three-part episode of Snapshots from *Australia Together* on Strategies and Targets for a new economy.

[View all three parts of Episode 2 here.](#)

Questions from viewers are responded to as they arise. The following questions have been posted by a subscriber on the YouTube pages for the Episode and are public. The questioner stated that, “Scanning online comments seems like a reasonable way to get a feel for what Australians want for the future. I applaud ACFP for taking this initiative, though of course, there are inevitable questions that arise:”



Question 1: Do people know what they want?

ACFP's research indicates that:

- **When it comes to the long term**, Australians not only know what they want but they also want many of the same things. For instance, when it comes to our kids, we are likely to want them to thrive. When it comes to the environment, we are likely to want to protect it, knowing how vital it is to our economic future. When it comes to our governance, we are likely to prefer it to be a strong open democracy. When it comes to quality of life, we are likely to call for fairness and equal opportunity.
- **When short term considerations are foremost**, different *priorities* begin to emerge and people begin to differ more *how* we might safely make the Vision a reality over the long term.

You can help shape
the Vision for
Australia Together.
Click [here](#) to respond
to surveys on the
Vision and Directions.

At ACFP, we view these differences as a strength to be capitalised on. We are therefore attempting to establish a planning system that doesn't squash those different desires and priorities. The Vision for *Australia Together* should have space enough for everyone's aspirations. Our problem, as Australians, isn't about knowing what we want – it's about getting our politicians to hear us.

Overall, ACFP's research indicates that **Australians are remarkably coherent about what they want for the long term**. It's always about safety, good health, security, equity, inclusion, fairness, an affordable home, freedom of expression, freedom from poverty, freedom from discrimination, and opportunity, particularly through education.

Not everyone wants each of these things to the same degree but there is enough coherence to give confidence to planners that there is sufficient capacity within the Australian community to work together, not just by putting aside differences but by appreciating them for the value they add.

Question 2: Are the samples representative?

ACFP has neither the resources nor the need to run opinion polls. We use the sources of data and polling supplied by others. A long list of these sources is supplied [here](#).

Ideally it would be preferable to be able to run statistically valid national opinion surveys on the Vision for Australia Together. But ACFP has no financial resources and until an independent source of volunteers becomes available, it will not be possible to conduct such surveys.

However, for purposes of selecting Targets and Strategies for inclusion in Australia Together, it would be neither necessary nor desirable from the point of view of equity and inclusion to run surveys, representative or otherwise. This is National Integrated Planning & Reporting, not a federal election. ACFP has structured the National Integrated Planning & Reporting process to release Australians from the tyranny of the majority – not to bind them back into a process which is more likely to exclude them and/or deny their rights as equals. National IP&R is simply an extra sensible step in the election process of a democracy and it is something new to improve the quality of communications between Australians and politicians. It's not the election itself and it's not where the final decisions are made.

For the purpose of selecting Targets and Strategies for inclusion in *Australia Together*, other forms of human interaction are needed – and these are quite different to surveys. To facilitate these other forms of interaction so that the planning process can be open, orderly and efficient, ACFP has developed and provided:

1. the National IP&R process,
2. the structure for the national community futures plan itself – *Australia Together*, and
3. the *Australia Together* National Wellbeing Index, which provides the baseline data and starting points for the plan.

Within that, the 57 Directions currently stand as the signposts of the safest routes to the Vision. Any Australian can make a suggestion about a potential Strategy or Target for inclusion in *Australia Together*, using the directional signposts. No-one is excluded. The 57 Directions provide an assessment process for use by Australians to help them think through whether a suggested Strategy:

- will fit well with the Vision,
- will not completely disable another important strategy, or
- is likely to be more effective than a currently included Strategy.

See Question 7 below for a practical example of the process for selection of Strategies in Australia Together.

In 2022, ACFP hopes to increase the awareness of how Australians can engage in Strategy development for *Australia Together*. And we hope to offer more opportunities for enlarging involvement in development of Strategies. In the absence of government support for National IP&R, we intend to approach Universities to help spearhead the introduction of National IP&R.

Australia Together is not an edict and it does not replace executive government control. It is simply intended to provide an orderly public open space where Australians can present their well-thought-

through, funded, safe paths to the future. In that regard it can give sensible and clear guidance to governments about what they may use power for and what they may not do with it. If the National Integrated Planning & Reporting process is ever adopted as legislation (as it is already for local government) then the guidance that can be provided now by ACFP may evolve into instructions from Australians at large that governments should heed and be held accountable for at the next election. But until the National IP&R process is legislated, that level of increased power for Australians will regrettably not be available.

Question 3: What steps has ACFP taken to compensate for personal bias in information gathering?

ACFP is neither more nor less subject to bias than any other group or individual Australian. However, *Australia Together* has been designed with a structure that enjoins people to build a plan for a better future starting with the facts (baseline data) of our current health and wellbeing as a nation. These facts are being assembled from a large and growing group of credible and diverse sources as mentioned above. The diversity of sources functions as a guard against bias and the long term focus of the plan also helps to ensure that when Targets and Strategies are selected, they too do not lead to the social exclusion that “bias” can sometimes embed. National IP&R is a thoughtful, interactive, **inclusive process**, not an autocratic one.

The **structure** of *Australia Together* allows Australians to check whether **Strategies** that they might personally prefer can happily coexist with other Strategies that have already been suggested and included because they fit with the Vision. Within that structure, “bias” is quite unlikely to be the thing that might eventually exclude a Strategy or Target. The factors that will exclude a Target or Strategy are not decided by ACFP, although ACFP certainly oversees the construction of the plan at present by default and will do so until more Australians become involved or National IP&R is legislated. Until then, a Strategy will only be excluded if it:

- a) doesn't fit with the Vision, or
- b) doesn't follow a directional signpost for safe travel, or
- c) doesn't sufficiently allow for inclusion of another Strategy which does fit with the Vision (i.e., it disables another legitimate Strategy that is well-matched with the Vision).

To sort out and harmonise any competing Strategies, there are several checks and balances in the **National IP&R process** (rather than just in the plan itself). That process is a comprehensive cycle of planning, reporting, reviewing what went well and what didn't (the End of Term Report) and revising. If bias affects part of the plan somehow, it will get ironed out eventually and usually before it's done too much damage.

It may help to think of *Australia Together* as a plan that is always in draft and that Australians can therefore always influence. It's meant to be a very good solid plan over time but even early drafts can be inspirational and powerful in the opportunity they provide to Australians to tell their governments what they want them to do today to secure a better future for tomorrow.

Question 4: How do we get the opinion of people who can't easily express it? (Non-English speaking people, shy people, children).

ACFP has attempted to create a public space for thoughtful opinion and suggestions that is far less intimidating than politics or social media. We are attempting to make policy development a skill that

any Australian can become involved in, not just the loudest and most fluent public speakers and commentators.

We are hoping that universities may soon pick up on the process and if they do, we can begin to introduce National IP&R to school children. That would be exciting.

As to “shy people” (and maybe Scott Morrison’s quiet Australians?), the door is open to them at ACFP already. As noted above, opportunities are open to anyone to become involved by responding to surveys on the Vision and Directions for *Australia Together* and more opportunities for interaction will open up if volunteering can be expanded.

Question 5: Is there a distinction made between informed and poorly informed commentary?

Resources permitting, all commentary provided by community members should be responded to respectfully. However, bearing in mind resource shortages, it is likely that such responses will refer simply to whether the comment or suggestion fits well with the Vision or not. Alternatively, ACFP may refer the questioner to data that are available but may have been overlooked. ACFP hopes to capitalise on great commentary by Australians and use that feedback to incorporate new Strategies in the plan.

**For inquiries regarding internships
at Australian Community Futures
Planning, please contact us at
info@austcfp.com.au**

Question 6: Is there a danger that the collation of data results in a loss of individual perspectives?

The question in full: Is there a danger that the collation of data results in a loss of individual perspectives? eg. everyone wants yummy food does that mean we should focus more on food than on reading or sailing because fewer people are interested in reading and sailing? etc.

ACFP is not intending to design a planning process that will result in the loss of individual perspectives. On the contrary, we view that diversity as something to be capitalised on, not eclipsed. And in order to capitalise on diversity we are asserting that the nation should build an integrated plan – not ACFP, but the nation.

It is obvious that it will be some time yet before this additional step in the process of democracy and elections in Australia will be recognised as a valuable additional step. But over the next decade more people may come to recognise what National Integrated Planning & Reporting is and see the value of getting more involved in planning the nation’s future.



In the meantime, ACFP will continue to pilot test both the process and the structure of the nation’s first long term plan itself. To date, the structure is working well – that is, we think it has ample capacity to allow more and more Australians to inject their preferences into the plan over time without severely restricting someone else’s essential safety, security and wellbeing. In this regard, even though most people might want, say, “yummy food”, and fewer want “to read and go sailing”, the structure of *Australia Together* seems large and open enough at present for diners, readers and sailors alike to share in the prosperity they can create by working together. *Australia Together* does

not rule out a preferred future for a group or individuals unless it is clearly contrary to the Vision or doesn't follow a safe Direction.

Question 7: ACFP seems to have taken very strong positions on political issues[?]

The question in full: ACFP seems to have taken very strong positions on political issues (eg. abolishing student loan debts for certain professions). I understand why a political party can and should present their policies for public consideration, but I thought acfp is a grass-roots movement that aspires to include all Australians in the policy-making process. Some people who would not get their student debts wiped by the proposed changes (soc05.01.01) would likely seek an amended policy.

ACFP is not aware that abolishing student loan debts is part of a political party's platform. But even if it is, this does not mean that the inclusion of the Strategy (or any other Strategy) is or isn't "a political position", driven strongly by partisan preference. Strategies are selected according to the Vision, not according to politics.

This question appears to assume that permission should be sought from Australians (perhaps by a statistically valid poll) before a Strategy can be included in *Australia Together*. Again this mistakes *Australia Together* for an election process rather than an ongoing open, planning process. (See the answer to Question 2 above.)

ACFP does not have (and does not intend to have) the **last word** on Strategies in *Australia Together*, although until more Australians become involved the reality is that at the end of 2021 ACFP is the organisation putting up the **first words** – inasmuch as we are pilot testing drafts of the plan by populating it with Strategies that obviously fit with the Vision. The National IP&R process has been designed to encourage more and more people to become involved and do that too as time passes.

In the meantime, questions like this one on Strategies for student debt are very useful in providing examples of how the Strategy selection process works in Integrated Planning. Here's an example.

Example of how the Strategy selection process works in *Australia Together*

The Strategy in **Soc05.01.01 – Cancelation of student debt for social services workers** fits quite well with the Vision for *Australia Together*. Abolishing the student debts of those graduates working in:

- teaching,
- childcare,
- aged care,
- disability services,
- nursing,
- social work,
- legal aid, and
- any graduate who by 2026 is earning less than the average weekly earnings

fits well with the Directions for **Soc 5, Soc 6, Econ 2, Econ 3 and Econ 4**. So it's safe and it's quite affordable. By contrast, a Strategy to abolish *all* student debts outstanding in 2026 would be unlikely to fit as well with **Soc 6, Econ 2, Econ 3 and Econ 4**. Additionally, because it would cost at least \$60

billion it would probably disable other Strategies – for instance, those necessary to fund the reintroduction of fee free tertiary education.

Those who might *not* get their students debts wiped if **Soc05.01.01** were to be adopted by a government – say, in a federal budget – may indeed seek an amended policy. And if they can convince an elected government that this will get them re-elected, they may succeed in having their debts wiped. *Australia Together* would not stop that sort of lobbying and ACFP does not intend to stop politics or lobbying. We simply intend to help the political process work better for all by adding in a voice that isn't heard at the moment – the integrated voice of we the people – we the people who don't have a pass to enter Parliament House any time we like, as lobbyists do.

If in the case of a particular policy – say for abolishing student debt or introducing a social wage – preferred Strategies emerge that entail extending identical the benefits equally to all, then the National IP&R process includes an element that allows Australians to send a clear signal to governments that this is indeed in the national interest and has been thought through. Element 5 of the National IP&R process allows Australians to become involved in national long term financial planning. In the case of **Soc05.01.01**, Element 5 would allow Australians to work through how they would fund abolition of all student debts if they really wanted to.

But until there is a process in place that Australians can use to work through that, a Strategy that abolishes student debts for all would not perform as well – in terms of delivering the Vision safely – as a Strategy that begins with improving the financial security of those who have taken on jobs in underpaid and undervalued essential industries.

Nevertheless, in building *Australia Together* the door is wide open for any Australian to suggest that all student debts are wiped. National IP&R gives them a space to do that and specifically they can do it with the **long term financial planning process in National IP&R**.

Australia Together integrates diverse strategies for our society, environment, economy and democracy to help us ensure that we can **ALL** arrive safely in 2050 with an acceptable degree of wellbeing and security. It is a live, inclusive planning space that all Australians can use to speak as a coherent nation to elected leaders.

Read *Australia Together* at www.austcfp.com.au/australia-together
Click on the pictures below to watch each part of this episode of
Snapshots from Australia Together



If you would like to become involved in building a plan for a better Australia, visit the Australian Community Futures Planning website at www.austcfp.com.au
Everyone is welcome to participate.

Further questions may be forwarded to ACFP at info@austcfp.com.au