

AUSTRALIA IN 2025: A Happy Scenario

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Coalition for a Happier Australia Tomorrow (CHAT)***

The President of the Republic of Australia has just announced the date of the 2026 election. As was the case in the last two elections, the policy platform of all major political parties outlines their approach to making Australia more “authentically happy”. This term had been defined more than two decades ago by Dr Martin Seligman as describing the state of using one’s unique talents and strengths in the service of others.

After a decade of global crisis (see Historical Background below), the Liberal, Labor and Green parties are once again fighting the election on their different platforms for promoting a society where “progress” and “success” are defined in terms of human happiness, social harmony and wellbeing rather than GDP, median incomes and stockmarket indices. These traditional economic indicators have now become of secondary importance, providing they are above the threshold levels agreed several years ago by all major parties at a joint sitting of both houses of Parliament.

Historical Background

The decade from 2010 to 2020 was one of violent hurricanes, dramatically rising sea levels after major chunks of the Greenland and Arctic ice shelves broke off and began melting. The North Atlantic current also dramatically weakened and the temperate water that used to moderate the climate of much of Northern Europe no longer flowed. This resulted in temperature drops across many parts of Northern Europe of around 2 degrees Celsius. The economic and social impact was horrendous and required massive global aid projects that overwhelmed the capacity of developed nations to continue to spend and invest their wealth in the way that they had been used to. Those governments that tried to isolate their countries from the global crisis were so severely ostracised by domestic majorities and the rest of the global community that they were quickly replaced by governments that adopted a more cooperative approach. Most people around the world could see that the world had changed forever and that sectional interests were puny by comparison with the climate change threat that was facing the planet – a threat that was clearly going to become more severe and more widespread unless our values, our societies, our governance structures and our economies were dramatically transformed, and transformed quickly.

The old goals of economic growth, reducing interest rates, minimising unemployment, managing the inflow of migrants, etc were acknowledged as being of much less importance than promoting human happiness, social harmony and wellbeing. During the last 10 years, Australia and many other countries had redefined what it meant for a country and its people to be “progressing” and “succeeding”. This process of redefinition had not been easy nor did it proceed in a linear way. But any faltering in the journey was quickly ended by new climate shocks that re-focused the major players in the debate on the main game – the survival of the world as we know it and the future of their children and their children’s children. The impact of climate change had become so undeniably serious that political change was unstoppable.

As part of the move to eliminate wasteful resource use, local councils were amalgamated into governments of regions having a distinctive geographic and social identity. The States and their bureaucracies were finally eliminated in a national bi-partisan referendum held in 2020.

In the election campaign, we can again expect much bi-partisan support for:

- Schooling that ensures that children discover their “signature strengths” and develop competence and confidence around these strengths. For example, school curricula include learning about life and the environment, and are not just designed to prepare young people for vocations. Homework is designed to foster each child’s connections with their peers and with the broader community and may involve team-based community projects working with older children and adults.
- Older people being brought back into the lives of children - e.g. qualified retirees are encouraged to train as assistant teachers in primary and secondary schools.
- Advertising that educates and informs about choices that support engaged and meaningful lives (not just choices about products and services).
- Products and services that depend on unacceptably high energy or resource input, or that serve no meaningful purpose in society, being taxed out of the market place; e.g. cotton, rice, guns and bullets, extravagant consumer items, grazing animals for meat, etc. Consumption of unsustainable or wasteful or ecologically threatening products has become socially unacceptable.
- A fast, efficient public transport system that is widely used by people and where user charges are zero. Private vehicles are small, rarely used and run on new, smart forms of energy (such as nano-sized iron “dust” particles) that do not put CO₂ or other pollutants into the atmosphere.
- People not having to travel long distances to work. Information is moved, not people.
- Fewer large office buildings. Workplaces and residential premises are co-located and more closely integrated. “The work-life village” is a reality.
- Work resources and workplaces that are shared between people from different companies and community groups.
- Workplaces changing to accommodate older workers as the population generally ages.
- Corporate governance that fosters high levels of stakeholder participation, corporate decision-making that is highly transparent and that makes corporations accountable for the social and environmental impacts of their actions.
- Election and referendum voting being done mostly by the Internet – from PCs, mobile phones, local public communications centres, etc.
- New technologies being subject to social and environmental impact analyses and government subsidies and tax regimes being tailored to encourage those technologies that nurture the natural environment and promote human interaction and skill enhancement (and to discourage other technologies).
- The technology necessary for connection and communication between people being provided free as a public resource. Buy-back by the government of privatised communications and transport infrastructure has been funded by The Future Fund since 2020.

The media interest in the upcoming election focuses on the extent to which each party advances policies that increase the “happiness, harmony and sustainability” indices developed a few years ago by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. At the national level, these indices have been defined as set out below. Similar indices have been defined to assess the contributions made by communities, corporations and government agencies, and by individuals and families.

Happiness Index:

A weighted average of the following positive and negative indicators:

- The average duration and meaningfulness of individuals' key relationships within the community (family, work, community/neighbours).
- The incidence of depression, alcoholism, drug usage, violence, and suicide.
- The incidence of voluntary participation in NGOs and other providers of community and environmental enhancement.

Harmony Index:

A weighted average of the following positive and negative indicators:

- The presence of a balanced ethnic mix within communities and regions.
- The incidence of racially motivated violence.
- Incidence of languages and social studies among students' elective subjects at schools and universities.
- Incidence of corporate recruitment and employment policies that welcome diversity in relation to age, disability, gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Gap between the after-tax income and total economic wealth of the wealthiest 20% of Australians and the poorest 20% of Australians.

Sustainability Index:

A weighted average of the following positive and negative indicators:

- Net growth/decline of natural forests and marine ecologies.
- Volume and weight of CO₂ and other pollutants discharged into the atmosphere.
- Size and quality of Australia's water catchment and underground water resources.
- Area of arable soil above threshold levels of salinity.
- Energy consumption by corporations per \$1000 of sales revenue.

Differential tax scales apply to organisations and individuals depending on their demonstrated contribution to national levels of "happiness, harmony and sustainability". A self-assessment arrangement is used to measure contributions in the relevant index categories in much the same way that income and capital gains have been self-reported for decades.

The fundamental principle guiding government policy and law making is this:

The government will facilitate and reward (through positive incentives and lower taxes, etc) those corporations and individuals that are living and working in ways that promote the enhancement of Australia's measured "happiness, harmony and sustainability" and will discourage and penalise those corporations and individuals who live and work in ways that reduce Australia's measured "happiness, harmony and sustainability".

Elections and public debates are no longer about the appropriateness of these goals but about the relative advantages of the different ways in which they can be pursued in different parts of the country.

*** Members of the "Coalition for a Happier Australia Tomorrow" as at 8th July 2006**

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This informal group formed and met several times to explore the possibility of imagining a future where the world might become structured to enable and encourage most people to pursue a way of life that Dr Martin Seligman's research suggests is the only path to lasting happiness (see www.authentichappiness.org). This path involves identifying one's unique talents and using them in the service of others.

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AUSTRALIA 2025: Personal Profile #1

On his 45th birthday in 2025, Arthur Richards reflected that it had been almost 10 years since he and his wife, Jennifer, had left behind their stressful jobs at their respective multi-national corporations in the Sydney CBD and moved their home and work to one of the new semi-urban, satellite cities that had been developed within a radius of about two hours fast-rail or fast-bus travelling time from Sydney.

His colleagues had said that it was a crazy career move. However, Jennifer and Arthur were totally fed up with the incessant international and interstate travel in their old jobs, the soul-destroying focus on ever-increasing monthly budget targets and the declining time available for them to spend together and with friends. They knew they could never start a family of their own in that kind of lifestyle. Apart from anything else, they probably would never survive long enough to see their children grow up!

Arthur's last promotion to Sydney, and the geographic move that it had involved, had disconnected him from most of his old friends and the people in the upper-class neighbourhood where he and Jennifer had settled were locked into lives like theirs, making the establishment of new friendships difficult.

But the final trigger for their decision to make their "downshift" had been a newspaper article on a radical new industry policy that was instrumental in a new federal government being elected in 2017. The policy had been developed as a belated response to the increasing demand by Australian voters for their political leaders to articulate a coherent vision for the country as part of a reinvigorated push to become a Republic in the second decade of the new millennium. It was also a response to the growing community awareness that success as a nation in the 21st century was not going to be based on increases in the production of raw materials, agricultural products or low value-added manufactured goods. No, it was becoming clear that the new scarce resource and the new basis for economic wealth-creation was going to be knowledge and intellectual and social capital.

Recognising this, a coalition of small political parties (he could not remember all of their names) had proposed the following national industry policy; and it had really caught his imagination - and the imagination of a majority of voters:

- "Australia is committed to being the preferred location when knowledge workers are choosing where to live and to raise their families.
- We will design our cities and regional communities to offer a range of safe, sustainable, visually attractive, well serviced environments with all the state-of-the-art technology and support services needed by knowledge workers to perform at the level of global best practice; e.g.
 - ⇒ challenging work opportunities provided by leading edge companies; close proximity to a world class university or advanced technical college or centre of research excellence;
 - ⇒ heavily subsidised education and lifelong learning facilities;
 - ⇒ reliable, cheap telecommunications systems including high speed data connection to the world wide web;
 - ⇒ town planning that encourages the creation of neighbourhood resource "hubs" that provide knowledge workers with access to excellent telecommunications, videoconferencing and information services close to home as well as fostering the regular interaction and informal, professional community-building that has been shown to spark the generation of valuable new knowledge;

- ⇒ efficient airports, high speed train and ferry links between capital cities, their regional satellites and subsidised domestic and international business travel services;
- ⇒ professional, tax deductible child care facilities; and a range of subsidised, highly professional, community-building and support services which, together with the nation-wide, guaranteed minimum income scheme, will create communities with virtually zero levels of crime, vandalism and social unrest.
- As a nation, we will actively attract and give greatest support to those industries that reinforce our strategy of being a magnet for the world's best inventors and designers, business consultants, scientists, ecologists, architects, researchers, artists, writers, composers, musicians, film makers, software developers, health care specialists, food technologists, financial service providers, curriculum designers and educators, etc.
- We will provide economic and social incentives for people with the knowledge and skills necessary to create valuable intellectual property or to create and manage knowledge-based businesses. We know that wealth-creating businesses will have to follow where these scarce, strategically critical resources choose to live. Flow-on employment will also be created in "support" fields such as housing; entertainment; catering and restaurants; the arts; retailing; education; telecommunications; family support; home maintenance services; health services; financial services; travel; public space maintenance and beautification; etc."

Arthur knew he could do his job from almost anywhere in the world. However, up till that moment, 10 years ago, he and Jennifer had not felt that Australia was a country that had committed itself to providing an attractive range of lifestyle options for people like them who wished to live a balanced, meaningful life (an "authentically happy" life). When he read that newspaper story about the new industry policy, he knew that the era where professionals like him had to trade off lifestyle for career success was coming to an end. Arthur had also read that the new policy had motivated a significant number of high profile international leaders in a wide variety of fields to renew their employment contracts in Australia and stay here because of Australia's increased attractiveness as a place to live for knowledge workers.

The vision that the new Australian government was implementing offered him the prospect of being part of a community of like-minded people from other professional fields and from all over the world who could stimulate his professional development and extend his network of contacts. Strengthening his network was critically important to him because he thought of his clients, prospects, colleagues, and sources of new ideas as the only "organisation" that offered him any chance of ongoing employment in today's world. In a way, he saw himself as the "Managing Director" of this employment-creating and knowledge-creating network.

And so Arthur and Jennifer had packed up, quit the rat race and moved out of the CBD in order to "get a life". He recalled that, for over two hundred years, many "new Australians" had come to this country to escape oppressive old lives and to build new ones in a country that offered the promise of new rules and new ways of doing things. He felt that Australia was now actively making its own luck (beyond its natural resource wealth) and making it in a way that was likely to be sustainable for a long time to come.

AUSTRALIA 2025: Personal Profile #2

For Alison Jamison (73 years of age), this was to be her last year in permanent employment as a Professor in the School of Sustainable Human Systems at Sydney University. She had decided that the challenges of staying on top of her rapidly changing field were better faced by younger staff. She wanted to continue to be involved in the occasional, interesting project or in mentoring younger staff but the three days a week that she had been working since she turned 65 were now feeling a bit too much given all her other interests.

Alison used to teach several courses in what used to be known as the Faculty of Economics. However, 5 years ago, in what was regarded as a somewhat revolutionary move at the time, the University merged the Economics Faculty with several social science Departments, including the Department of Sociology and the Department of Systems Sciences to form the School of Sustainable Human Systems. This move was the University's attempt to address declining enrolments in "pre-climate change" or PCC courses such as the traditional Economics courses.

For some years now, students have been increasingly pursuing the expanding new fields of study that relate to environmental regeneration, new energy management, human welfare, relationship management, ethics, cross-cultural communication, large-scale human system change, knowledge management and innovation, population relocation management, health crisis management, corporate/national/international governance, and active citizenship.

The focus of the curriculum in the new School of Sustainable Human Systems is to:

- provide students with an in depth understanding of the dynamics of human systems that are characterised by "happiness, harmony and sustainability";
- introduce students to the major fields of scientific enquiry that impinge on the happiness, harmony and sustainability of large-scale human systems and give them the language to engage with specialists in all of these fields;
- expose students to both successful and dysfunctional communities, economies and their natural environments and provide them with the skills and the opportunity to "make a difference";
- introduce students to a variety of global professional networks involved in tackling the serious challenges facing societies in today's world (including the various impacts of climate change on people, cities, agriculture, transport and politics);
- provide students with an understanding of the dynamics of the global knowledge economy and how to promote themselves as leaders and to attract resources in their chosen fields.

Alison was fascinated by how much her discipline of economics had changed and was continuing to change. Most other disciplines at the university were also in the process of being transformed by the events of the last two decades; e.g. financial crises; dramatic changes in global temperatures; drinking water shortages; rising sea levels; political unrest and a constantly changing kaleidoscope of security concerns; the 10-fold increase in the price of petrol and the 5-fold increase in the price of electricity.

Alison knew that many young people now regarded universities as increasingly irrelevant in a world which was likely to have changed dramatically during the time between starting a course of study and completing it. They believed that they could develop their talents faster and learn more that they could put to immediate use in the service of others (i.e. start to lead an authentically happy life) by working with experienced professionals on one of the many huge global projects that had been established with support from governments, corporations and NGOs to address the challenges now threatening the survival of life as we have come to know it – and especially life as we in the affluent, developed countries have known it. These huge, “life-preserving” projects had become a big competitor for young talent at a time when the labour markets in developed countries had virtually ceased to grow in net terms.

Working as a money market trader or marketing executive had lost its attraction in a world where everything had been turned upside down. Living harmoniously, simply, peacefully and sustainably with one’s local and regional neighbours were the new career and life goals. It was now recognised that we would all die if we continued to hold values that belonged to a world governed by the myth that the world’s resources were infinite and that escalating inequalities in wealth and power could continue without eventually triggering a variety of unpleasant self-correcting forces.

Universities and the whole education system were being forced to change by a new generation of young people who valued being able to contribute (to make a difference – NOW) and who valued being recognised by their peers in their chosen “contribution networks” much more than they valued paper qualifications, high salaries or promotions within toxic corporations that are damaging the planet or squandering scarce resources on luxuries, trinkets or other “consumables” that do not contribute to anyone’s authentic happiness.

Alison’s youngest daughter had just applied to join a UN sponsored poverty eradication project in Africa. Alison wondered whether they might also be able to use a 73 year old economics professor with no relevant qualifications but a strong interest in micro-finance.

AUSTRALIA 2025: Personal Profile #3

Lloyd Anderson was reflecting on his birthday yesterday. He had just turned 20. He was amazed by the change that he had witnessed in his first 20 years of life and wondered if the next 20 years would be just as eventful.

Lloyd had started his schooling in a Steiner school. The basic Steiner philosophy aims to develop the “head, heart and hands” of children so that they “are able out of their own initiative to impart purpose and direction to their lives”. Rudolph Steiner believed that “imagination, a sense of truth and a feeling of responsibility... are the three forces which are the very nerve of education.”

Over the last 7-8 years, Lloyd had seen many of the educational principles of the Steiner approach flow into the mainstream school system as recent Australian Governments had let go of the view that children should be trained to “perform” as valuable cogs in the nation’s economic machine and embraced the view that each child should be guided to discover their unique talents and helped to explore ways in which these talents might be used creatively in the service of others and in ways that fulfil their potential as a whole human being.

As he was growing up, his parents used to explain how Lloyd was living at a time of major transition between two very different ways of living. The “old way” that had dominated most of his parents’ lives was a time where people pursued economic prosperity at all costs. In the name of productivity growth and international competitiveness, people had been pushed to work faster and longer. Most students (at all levels of education and learning) had had to cope with expanding course workloads that left little or no time to reflect on who they were, how they might best relate to other humans and to the natural world around them, and what would leave them in their older years with a deep sense that they had lived a worthwhile life that made a real difference to their family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, customers/clients.

Lloyd had been luckier than most people his age because his Steiner education since the age of 5 had helped equip him to live in the emerging “new world” with its growing emphasis on “happiness, harmony and sustainability”. He had been helped to develop the following characteristics and skills that he knew were increasingly being valued by employers, learning network members, community leaders – and members of the opposite sex:

- a strong sense of identity and self-reliance that allows him to deal resiliently and creatively with rapid external change
- an appreciation of beauty, the arts and nature and how to use this appreciation to improve the design of the structures in which he works and of the products and services that he helps create
- an ability to learn (and un-learn) quickly using a variety of methods, including self-reflection and honest analysis of feedback from those around him
- systems thinking skills and complex pattern recognition ability that enable him to always see “the big picture”, imagine possible future scenarios and to act strategically, sustainably and responsibly
- relationship skills that enable him to fit quickly into a variety of team activities and to negotiate opportunities to contribute his talents and to help relationships grow through difficult times
- an awareness of his spirituality and a sense of higher purpose in life
- a strong set of personal values and a clearly defined ethical and moral framework for acting and making decisions

Lloyd knew that he wanted to continue his formal studies and begin his work-life in organisations that nurtured and used these characteristics and skills. These were the characteristics that he valued in himself and that he was committed to fostering and using to create a meaningful life – one that would make a positive difference to the people whose lives he would touch.

On a recent holiday in Bali, he had learned of the ancient Balinese tradition of taking time out every seven months in a ritual that requires people to stay at home, not talk to anyone else and simply reflect on their lives and how they are living in the world. He wanted to learn more about the ancient wisdom that guided people in “less developed” societies around the world. He wanted to be part of what he saw as the process that was now underway in developed nations like Australia of building our national identity and our social policies and structures on wisdom that embraces our full humanity rather than merely the narrow view of man as a doer of paid work whose measure is the economic wealth he or she can accumulate before they die.

He had seen his parents come alive over the last ten years as they had “downshifted” their lives (Lloyd thought that “upshifting” was a more accurate description) and started to live according to the emerging new measures of “progress” and “success” that are grounded in the philosophies of people like Rudolph Steiner and Dr Martin Seligman. He knew that his parents had become more emotionally available to him as they made this change in their daily lives. He had always loved them but now he actually LIKED them as well. That was nice!

AUSTRALIA 2025: Personal Profile #4

Alan Turnbull couldn't wait to read his morning paper that chilly June morning in 2025 as he knew that his company had been selected as winner of the Sydney Morning Herald's "Best Company" competition (in the under \$50,000,000 p.a. turnover category). The story would be in the papers today.

The competition had been running for about 5 years now and aimed to highlight companies that outperformed against the new era ("after climate change") corporate success criteria of "happiness, harmony and sustainability". Alan's company was in the energy enhancement business – it developed technologies that reduced greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels as well as technologies that increased the cost-efficiency of renewable forms of energy.

At 58 years of age, Alan had worked in the energy industry for over 25 years. As he read the newspaper article about his company's win, he commented to his wife: "If you had told me 10 years ago that I would be leading a company in this industry that measured its performance against anything other than shareholder financial return, I would not have believed it".

However, with the dramatic escalation of the climate change crisis and the election of the radical coalition government in 2017 the business world had been turned on its head. He had stopped being seen by his superiors as something of a "greenie ratbag" and began to be taken very seriously for his ideas on how to transform the business into one that could win on the metrics of the "post climate change" era. In addition to traditional measures of corporate financial viability, his company, Energy Futures International, now measured its performance using measures such as the following that reflect the company's contribution to the national happiness, harmony and sustainability indices:

- the nature and scope of its environmental "footprint"; e.g. extent to which the company contributes to environmental rehabilitation and maintenance; its net energy output/consumption; its net impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

Energy Futures had scored bonus points in the SMH's Best Company competition because it measured the total environmental footprint of all activities involved in its value chain (including the activities of suppliers, and other business partners).

- impact on the health, happiness and sustainability of the company's diverse community of stakeholders (including employees, contractors, clients, investors, suppliers, and neighbours).

Here, the Herald had praised the company's pro bono work in assisting several NGOs who are committed to environmental repair and regeneration; and also the way that it was actively educating and supporting its employees and other stakeholders in their individual and collective efforts to transform their lives in the direction of greater simplicity, sustainability and community building. The Herald also praised the innovative way that the company had engaged with its shareholders and investors in promoting a deep understanding and commitment to the long term strategy of the company. This had resulted in a much more stable shareholder base than the industry average as it meant that shareholders did not re-direct their investments elsewhere whenever the company invested today in sustainability and community enhancing initiatives that would not pay off, in financial terms, for some time. Alan knew that the cynics on his Executive Team suggested that many shareholders agreed to this corporate strategy in order to maximise their scores on their own "happiness, harmony and sustainability" measures and thereby move themselves into a lower tax bracket.

- the extent to which the way that it conducts its business promotes the development of attitudes and skills conducive to harmonious relationships between its stakeholders and other individuals, groups and communities.

For example, some years ago, Energy Futures revamped its strategic planning and corporate governance processes in order to bring stakeholder representatives into all the critical decision making processes of the company. Facilitators were engaged in order to help develop skills in futures thinking, systems analysis, dialogue, listening, problem solving, conflict resolution, transition management, team building and leadership. All participants in the company's decision making and governance processes were encouraged to identify and explore opportunities to apply and further develop these skills both in the service of the company and in the wider communities of which they were a part. The company allocated a budget of 5% of sales to support stakeholders' efforts to build "happiness, harmony and sustainability" in the wider community beyond Energy Futures' specific arena of operations. This skill building strategy not only improved decision making within the company but also raised its scores on the key non-financial measures that determined its overall tax bracket. Under the policies of the government elected in 2017, Alan had been able to implement some of the sustainability and community building ideas that he knew were long overdue in the world and, at the same time, deliver a financial benefit to those who were still focussed primarily on the pre-climate-change measures of success.

As he read the paper's report on the reasons why his company had been awarded the "Best Company" accolade, Alan Turnbull reminded himself that one of the greatest benefits he had derived from his corporate strategy had been a personal one. Through developing his array of relationship and community building skills, he knew that he had been able to head off a disastrous end to his second marriage and also strengthen his relationship with his two step-children. He mused that activities that promoted the three dimensions of national success ("happiness, harmony and sustainability") were good for business, good for the planet and good for individuals and their families. Why had it taken so long for most people and their governments to see this? Why had it taken the global climate change calamity to show us how toxic and un-sustainable the old capitalist, money-oriented ways had been? After all, the writing had been on the wall for decades.

As he drank his morning coffee, he wondered to himself: "What collective mindset or blindspot is waiting to hurt us in the decades ahead?" However, he truly believed that the new governance processes being implemented corporately, nationally and globally (involving as they did a much wider range of stakeholder inputs and viewpoints) offered some insurance that nothing significant would be missed or denied for long. He smiled because he really enjoyed what he was doing and was proud of the effect that his personal and corporate efforts were having on the people whose lives he, and his company, touched. Creating happy people, harmonious communities and a sustainable world was much more rewarding than creating large profits. He had known that long before the world shifted and enabled him to be part of actually making it happen.