

Australia in 2025: A Happy Scenario

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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 well-being 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

* This article was prepared in collaboration with Sandra Cormack, Joy London, Lisa Purser, Susan Leith-Miller, Noel Winterburn and Michele Goeldi.

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.

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.

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