



GAP Task Force

Progress in Society Canberra 2011

Social commentators have long argued that traditional economic indicators such as GDP are incomplete statements of a country's wellbeing.¹ Such 'hard metrics' can bear little relationship to self-reported sentiments of personal satisfaction² and happiness.

Australia has investigated broader measures of the quality of life. In 1998, twenty five academics contributed to a study "*Measuring progress: is life getting better?*"³ The Australian Bureau of Statistics⁴ led research on 14 dimensions of progress regarding individuals, the economy, the environment and society, and the Productivity Commission has supported "count the smiles" seminars on community happiness as an indicator of policy success. The Australian Centre for Quality of Life at Deakin University, the BankWest Quality of Life Index and the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index periodically monitor life satisfaction amongst the Australian population, but little serious attention has been paid to the implications of such research for the domestic policy issues of today.

International studies of the 'economics of happiness' include the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress⁵ in France, initiated by President Sarkozy and led by Nobel Prize winners Dr Joseph Stiglitz and Dr Amartya Sen. In contrast to Australia, many nations have applied happiness research to cost-benefit analysis, social welfare policies and consumer protection regulation.

Recognising this dichotomy as a significant opportunity, public policy network Global Access Partners (GAP), in association with online think-tank Open Forum, propose to convene a task force, supported by research and public consultation, to consider:

- ▶ **Is it now appropriate to formulate a measure of Australian happiness?**
- ▶ **How could a better understanding of happiness be used to inform national policy?**

Potential participants in the **GAP Task Force on Progress in Society** include:

- ▶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- ▶ Australian Bureau of Statistics
- ▶ Productivity Commission
- ▶ Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet
- ▶ Commonwealth Treasury
- ▶ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs
- ▶ Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations
- ▶ Australian Centre for Quality of Life at Deakin University
- ▶ State departments for communities and welfare
- ▶ State Treasury and Finance departments
- ▶ State Premiers' Departments
- ▶ Public Health Information Development Unit at University of Adelaide

The work of the task force will be documented and the results of existing studies drawn into a policy proposal, based on sound analysis and practical thinking. The final report will be presented at the Australia's Annual Growth Summit in September 2011.

"In an era when Australians are richer than ever, more than one million adults and 100,000 young people are experiencing depression every year."

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index 2009

- "Is a productive society necessarily a happy one?"
- What does "progress" mean to the world's citizens?
- Which environmental, social and economic indicators should be included in the measurement of quality of life?
- Why is there a gap between the effects of current measurement of well being and the real lives of citizens?"

wikiprogress.org
OECD, 2009

¹ Hagerty, M.R., Cummins, R.A., Ferris, A.L., Land, K., Michalos, A.C., Peterson, M., Sharpe, A., Sirgy, J., & Vogel, J. (2001). Quality of life indexes for national policy: Review and agenda for research. *Social Indicators Research*, 55, 1-91.

² Satisfaction is commonly used interchangeably with happiness and quality of life. There are, however, some subtle differences.

³ Richard Eckersley (ed) CSIRO publishing, Melbourne, 1998

⁴ Cat.1383.0.55.001 - *Measures of Australia's Progress: Summary Indicators*, 2009 ABS

⁵ www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm