

# HASS on the Hill

Canberra: 16-17 August 2005.

**A report on the event from Dr Deborah Henderson, Faculty of Education, QUT.**

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## Introduction

Deborah Henderson attended the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) on the Hill event as one of two NTEU Representatives. The NTEU has consistently supported the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) as a peak body representing this sector, and the participation of the National Policy and Research Unit Coordinator, Andrew Nette, in a panel on the Briefing Day provided more of a public face to this support. Deborah's report provides an overview of this recent event and commences with an account of how CHASS was formed and why this lobby group is so significant for the state of the Australian humanities. For as one prominent Australian academic, Simon During (2005), noted there has been much concern that the humanities are able to defend themselves against government policies that prioritise science and technology.

## **Background: The origins and purpose of the Council for the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences (CHASS)**

In the Federal Budget of May 2003, the Australian Government allocated funds for the establishment of a Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS). The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, observed in a media statement that

*The humanities, arts and social sciences are critically important to the future development of Australia. Not only do they play a key role in supporting the national innovation system, they make a significant contribution to the development of our society, culture and individual identity. It is from this sector especially that the soul is passed from one generation to the next.*

Funding was provided to establish this peak body to play a key promotional and advocacy role for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sectors, and to serve as a coordinating forum for academics, students, business, and the broader community. This is particularly significant, given that 80% of available funding goes to the Sciences and Technology. Peak councils, such as CHASS, also streamline and simplify the consultation process for once the government has had some form of dialogue with a peak council, it then claim to have consulted the sector.

According to the CHASS website: [www.chass.org.au](http://www.chass.org.au), the aims of CHASS are:

- ❖ To represent the interests of the sector
- ❖ To promote the contribution of the sector to government, industry and the public

- ❖ To provide a forum for discussion between the humanities, arts and social sciences sectors in Australia
- ❖ To build up the innovative capacity of Australia, through better linkages between this sector and industry, as well as improved cross-linkages with science and technology.

## **HASS on the Hill**

The *HASS on the Hill* event was held in Canberra on 16 and 17 August and aimed to open a dialogue with federal Members of Parliament. This forum provided opportunities for people and organisations from the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector to discuss ideas and issues, and to have some influence on the national policy-making process. Participants were encouraged to view this dialogue as the commencement of a relationship, for gaining access and influencing policy often depends on accessibility, contacts and personal relationships. As well, *HASS on the Hill* provided an opportunity for people working in this diverse sector to meet informally and discuss cross-disciplinary approaches and possible collaborations. I was selected as one of two NTEU Representatives to participate in this event.

### **Day 1**

#### **The key message**

The first day of the program focussed on the most effective means of convincing politicians of the significance and value of our work. Following a welcome by Warwick Cathro, Deputy Director of the National Library of Australia, the host venue on Tuesday, the President of CHASS, Malcolm Gillies, emphasised the theme for the day. That is, how do we position and promote our sector, and demonstrate to parliamentarians that our work is critical to driving Australia's future?

Gillies argued that Australia is playing the innovation game with one hand tied behind its back, and that Australian innovation needs to better engage the arts as well as the sciences. Moreover, we need to build on our strengths and encourage the innovative side of undergraduate and graduate students. Most significantly, our work and research needs to be adequately funded. Consider that although two thirds of Australia's university students and half of all university staff in Australia are involved in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the largest proportion of Commonwealth funding goes to the Sciences and Technology. Gilles urged us to build long term coalitions and capture the government's, and the opposition's, support for our work. Gilles developed aspects of this argument further in his address to the National Press Club '*Rethinking Australian Innovation*' the following day.

#### **A panel discussion: Why Australia needs my work**

Ten brave participants volunteered to explain their work and its significance to Australia in one minute, and then received feedback from a panel of experts as the rest of the registrants observed (and were secretly relieved that we weren't put in the spot). Matt Price, (*The Australian*), Andrew Nette, (NTEU National Policy and Research Unit Coordinator) and Fiona Poletti (The Australia Council) gave fearless and frank feedback to each of the ten volunteers on how politicians might respond to such presentations. The message was clear – keep it simple and focussed, don't use jargon, be positive, provide creative ideas (*politicians are always looking for ideas*). Show how your work is contributing to the national interest and why it is significant for

Australia's future. This session served as a mental rehearsal, and a timely reminder, for registrants to be well prepared and succinct when they meet their politician the next day.

### **Partnering up**

Prior to the forum, participants were asked to nominate their areas of interest from a list of ten issues, namely:

- ❖ Australia in Asia and the Pacific: language, culture and trade.
- ❖ Aboriginal Australians: health, welfare and reconciliation.
- ❖ Creativity in the innovation economy.
- ❖ Drugs, crime and security.
- ❖ Breathing new life into bush communities.
- ❖ People and the environment: sustainable water and land use.
- ❖ Better cities and a better world: how design and social infrastructure can help.
- ❖ Australian cultural heritage: history, literature, the arts and humanities.
- ❖ The ageing of Australia: implications for health, employment and happiness.
- ❖ Improving our education system.

Participants were then paired according to their area of interest. Similarly, those Members of Parliament who indicated an interest in meeting registrants to discuss specific issues were also asked to nominate topics from the same list. Appointments were made on the basis of these mutual interests. Interestingly, the three most popular topics with Members of Parliament were:

- ❖ The ageing of Australia: implications for health, employment and happiness.
- ❖ Aboriginal Australians: health, welfare and reconciliation.
- ❖ Improving our education system.

I was fortunate to be partnered with Professor Ira Harkavy, visiting Fulbright Senior Specialist, Associate Vice President and founding Director of the Centre for Community Partnership, University of Pennsylvania. The next session in the program provided the opportunity for us to meet and plan our approach.

Professor Harkavy proved to be an engaging and knowledgeable partner and we had some interesting discussions. Ira has written and lectured on the history and current practice of urban university community-school partnerships and strategies for integrating the university and school missions of teaching, learning, research, and service. Ira had a demanding schedule during his four week visit to Australia. He visited universities, gave public lectures, keynote presentations, master classes and workshops. Ira's visit focused on two key areas: the university, school and community partnership as a method of improving community outcomes, research scholarship, teaching and research integration, and student learning outcomes. Ira also discussed and debated the role of universities in their communities. He asked the various groups he spoke with to reflect on the question "what is the good of the university?" Specific details of Ira's visit can be found at this website: [http://www.eidos.org.au/features/results.shtml?filename\\_num=09125](http://www.eidos.org.au/features/results.shtml?filename_num=09125).

Ira and I were scheduled to meet Andrew Laming, Liberal member for Bowman (Queensland), the next day and agreed that I would emphasise the significance of the humanities, arts or social science in driving the innovation economy and Ira would focus on linking community renewal to university goals and enterprise.

### **The PMSEIC Inquiry, and how the sector can contribute**

In this session, Dorothy Illing (*The Australian*) interviewed and one of Australia's leading social scientists, Professor Iain McCalman. Professor McCalman, Federation Fellow and President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, is Chair of the Working Group on *The Role of Creativity in the Innovation Economy* for the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC). PMSEIC is the Australian Government's principal source of independent advice on issues in science, engineering and innovation. The council is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes in its membership nine senior government ministers. It meets in full session twice each year to receive presentations on major national issues in science, engineering and innovation.

PMSEIC has chosen *The Role of Creativity in the Innovation Economy* as a major topic for presentation at its 14th meeting scheduled for late 2005. Professor McCalman emphasised that this was an opportunity for the working group to highlight to the government how the creative arts and social sciences sectors can intersect and enhance the science, engineering and technology (SET) sectors.

Participants were provided with a copy of Professor McCalman's address to the National Press Club in 2004 *Making Culture Bloom* which was delivered to mark the birth of CHASS. We were asked to leave it with our allocated Member of Parliament. I hope that each MP read it carefully, as McCalman argues lucidly and insightfully for the role of the humanities, arts and social sciences in any civil society.

#### **Address by Professor David Cannadine**

Professor Cannadine, Professor of British History at the University of London, reiterated and extended some of the arguments that McCalman developed in *Making Culture Bloom*. Cannadine spoke of the challenges we face in the sector and the opportunities that can arise from responding creatively. He stressed that as economies have evolved from an industrial to a knowledge base, human capital is now the basis of production. He also noted the ways in which the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences enrich and enhance our lives by broadening our experiences and deepening our sensibilities. Moreover, Cannadine emphasised that they provide a powerful riposte to the temporal and geographical parochialism of the here and now.

#### **Talking to politicians – an MP's view**

In this session Dr Carmen Lawrence, Member for Fremantle, spoke with Libby Raupach, Executive Director of the Helpmann Academy and candidate for election to the CHASS board, about the most productive ways to talk to politicians. Dr Lawrence, a former premier of Western Australia, currently holds the Presidency of the Australian Labor Party. She is the first female national president of the ALP and the first person to be elected to that post by the party members.

Dr Lawrence emphasised the need to find a point of entry in any discussion that engages a politician. One possible strategy is to align the issue with a related contemporary debate. Another strategy is to make links to the long term challenges facing Australia. She observed that politicians are incredibly busy and frequently lobbied by those with means, such as wealthy companies. She suggested that one of the weaknesses of public policy formation was that not enough information reaches politicians – a sobering and timely reminder for all of us to make the effort to lobby for our cause. Dr Lawrence reiterated the advice of the panel session earlier in the day –

develop a public profile to push the issue, follow it up, avoid jargon and be clear in concise in your dialogue and correspondence.

The CHASS Annual General Meeting followed this session.

## **Day 2**

### **Breakfast with the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training**

During a breakfast address, Brendon Nelson reiterated his support for the four National Research Priorities, namely:

- ❖ An Environmentally Sustainable Australia
- ❖ Promoting and Maintaining Good Health
- ❖ Frontier Technologies for Building and Transforming Australian Industries
- ❖ Safeguarding Australia

Nelson noted that despite lobbying from CHASS, he did not endorse the addition of a fifth priority that specifically addressed issues significant to Australian humanities, arts and social sciences. Instead, he claimed that the initial focus on the contributions of science and technology had broadened following consultations with the humanities and social sciences research communities and these provided elaborations of the four proprieties. There was some dismay amongst participants that these 'Associated Priority Goals' did not address the scope and significance of research in our sector. Yet there was also hope that new networks amongst academics and their associations and meetings with individual politicians would strengthen the advocacy role of CHASS in championing the significance of Australian humanities, arts and social sciences.

### **Individual meeting with MPs**

Appointments with individual Members of Parliament were scheduled at various times and some participants had the opportunity to be partnered with two or three registrants and meet several MPs. As the day progressed most participants commented on the positive nature of their encounter with politicians and how many MPs requested further information and sought ongoing dialogue. Given the scheduling of these meetings, not all participants could attend a session with Peter Garrett, Opposition Parliamentary Secretary for Reconciliation and the Arts, and morning tea with the Hon Rod Kemp, Minister for Sport and the Arts.

### **Lunch at the National Press Club**

One of the highlights of this event was lunch at, and an address to, the National Press Club by the CHASS President, Professor Malcolm Gillies. Professor Gillies emphasised that we should challenge the equation of "science and innovation" and consider the vital role that our disciplines play in the talent economy. As noted earlier in this report, two-thirds of Australia's university students study in some kind of humanities, arts or social science course. Their admission scores indicate that they are, on average, just as talented as the other third studying for science, technology, engineering and medicine.

At PhD level, half of graduates come from a non-science area, yet not enough is being done to take on what Gillies (2005) terms “the mindset of innovation”. Further, Gillies claims that Australia is “backing away from some of Australia's most able minds, when it should be pushing them forward. In a world rapidly transforming from technology-based economies, through knowledge economies to economies increasingly reliant on highly mobile and talented people, Australia has all the ingredients to do well”.

During the Press Club lunch, I was delighted to find that I was seated next to one of Australia's leading photography curators and writers - the curator/author of *Margaret Michaelis - love, loss and photography* (2005), Helen Innes. This exhibition has just concluded at the National Gallery. When I realised who Helen was, I immediately fell into my role as Chair of the History Educators' Network of Australia (HENA) and benefited from the broader aim of *Hass on the Hill* – making connections. I asked Helen if she'd write something for the next edition of our journal *Contact* and she very gracefully said she would.

*Margaret Michaelis - love, loss and photography* is fascinating for those of us who are historians. In 1985 Ennis was able to collect a bundle of photographs, letters and papers from an elderly Margaret Michaelis who fled to Australia from Austria to escape Nazism and worked as a photographer in Sydney during the 1940s and early 50s. Michaelis died shortly after Ennis had some interviews with her in a Melbourne nursing home. Poignantly, in what was to be the final visit, Michaelis told Helen to ‘take the photographs’. Ennis, through the Margaret Michaelis-Sachs estate, lodged the materials with the National Gallery. All these years later - Ennis has written a lucid account of Michaelis' art and life - illustrated with her photographs. Helen's book is a fascinating mix of biography and history, elucidated by her empathy for Michaelis together with her perspective of Michaelis' personality and the times she experienced as revealed through her letters, photographs and Ennis' own investigations. Ennis travelled to Germany, Holland and Spain to research the material. I couldn't have asked for a more professionally fulfilling discussion, and hope to write my own review of this innovative work that combines biography and history. It was a personally rewarding conclusion to a most stimulating time in Canberra.

### **The role of Toss Gascoigne, Executive Director, CHASS**

A report on the 2005 *Hass on the Hill* event must include an acknowledgement of the significant role played by Toss Gascoigne, the Executive Director of CHASS from January 2004. Prior to this appointment, Toss was Executive Director of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS) for eight years. FASTS represented the professional interests of scientists and technologists (S&T), and worked to influence the political climate in favour of S&T. Toss developed and organised large national meetings between scientists and federal parliamentarians, called "Science meets Parliament" which have run annually since 1999. These meetings brought hundreds of scientists directly in touch with Australian federal parliamentarians.

Toss's visions and skills are now bearing fruit in the work of CHASS. Toss and his colleagues, Rachel Eggleton, Mel Lamprecht, not only organised a most productive and enjoyable *HASS on the Hill*, but also reminded registrants of how important it is to lobby effectively for our sector. As Malcolm Gillies (2004) observed “this is a sector capable of contributing so much more to Australian society, a sector now overflowing with people of diverse talents, but often not recognised for the value of its contributions to research and education, to innovation and to national creativity”.

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