

'Measuring what matters' – brief submission as a Have Your Say input

This mini-submission addresses three dimensions of “the conversation on how Australia might better measure what matters”. (Treasury consultation web page, 2022)

What matters is value-laden and contextual. My interests and concerns might not be reflected in what others find of crucial significance. [‘Sufficing’ can be as valid as ‘aspirational’ goals. ‘Progress’ in economic, political, security, and governance terms will not necessarily translate to individual or even group sense of purpose, fulfilment and wellbeing.]

Measuring and measurement, to be meaningful, have to take into account qualitative and contextual factors, as well as quantifying through data collection and analysis. Non-tangible social and personal wellbeing is measured by means of anecdotal (descriptive) evidence as much as through objective specific-purpose data. ‘Indicators’ are not of themselves measurable in the sense that the consultation framework requires. (i.e. “have the potential for objective measurement, ideally with existing and continuing representative data available” and “comparable: be defined and measured consistently to enable comparisons within a country and internationally”.)

There is the prospect of applying (adapted) indicators of wellbeing deriving from Universal Basic Income/ Guaranteed Minimum Income/ Basic Income Guarantee and similar projects. Papers presented at the recent BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network) congress held in Brisbane in September 2022 offer perspectives that could add value to the conversation underway.

Still seminal, Guy Standing (2002) *Beyond the new paternalism: basic security as equality* sets out challenges to notions of progress, productivity and The Good Society that are central to ‘measuring what matters’.

‘Have your say’ is an important qualitative consultative mechanism/ procedure/ process but is biased in favour of those who have the time, inclination and capacity to express an opinion or marshal relevant facts. It will be important for the conversation to embrace many and diverse sources, including social media “chatter” and the infamous “pub test”, along with carefully constructed and targeted surveys and kitchen table dialogue.

In conclusion, my submission is that it matters what we measure, why we think it should be measured, and how we go about measuring! What matters most to some, perhaps many Australians, may have cultural, spiritual and psychological dimensions that are not amenable to ‘measurement’ in its conventional meanings. Articulation of these ‘imperceptible’ factors will contribute to a better informed and more multi-dimensional conversation.

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13 January 2023