

The newDemocracy Foundation Chairman's Report 2023

Summary

The year started well with two promising Citizens' Assembly prospects at the national level. However, as the year drew to a close, it became apparent that both were unlikely to proceed. This disappointing turn of events was partially made up for by several local and international project opportunities.

We were pleased that Prof. Larissa Behrendt agreed to join our Research Committee in March. Larissa is a distinguished academic and author, with broad experience in law and the arts; and brings an indigenous perspective.

In early October, the executive team travelled to Denmark - Copenhagen - to participate in the *Democracy R&D* Conference. 160 people attended and Carson was honoured as the initiator of the network. It is pleasing to note that, with the thought leadership of Carson, Iain and Kyle, *newDemocracy* has gained an international reputation as an early mover and trusted adviser.

Locally

The first most promising prospect, carried by the crossbench's interest in CA's, went through several iterations to finally settle on 'Housing Affordability' as the topic, with Allegra Spender always in the lead. The second prospect was on the 'Republic' and was being championed by the Labor MP Matt Thistlethwaite. Both are now in limbo: the CA on Housing Affordability initially garnered good media (Peter Hartcher, *SMH*) but was frustrated by the Government's apathy, notwithstanding that a NFP Foundation has indicated preparedness to fund the \$1.7m project. The second prospect was derailed by the impact of *The Voice* referendum, as there now appears to be zero appetite for another referendum anytime soon.

Robert Hill and Geoff Gallop, the RC members, accompanied Iain in Canberra to present to various MPs. Subsequently, Andrew Bragg, the Liberal Senator for NSW, sought our advice to design a CJ process for public consultation on the topic of household gas supply.

The main local projects commissioned this year have been:

- The private energy company *Jemena* sought our advice to evaluate their third-party public engagement practitioners for two of their price proposals.
- In Lismore NSW, the Lismore City Council requested us to design and oversee a CA process to assist in developing a community vision, spatial master plan for the Lismore CBD and an infrastructure and investment strategy for the region.
- In North Sydney, we advised Kylea Tink, the Independent Federal MP, on how to better engage with her constituency. Several other MPs have subsequently contacted us for a similar template for their electorates.

- The *Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes* held a deliberative panel on sex and gender in medical research practices for which we did the process design and supported *Gauge Consulting* on the facilitation.

In collaboration with *MosaicLab*, we ran a facilitating deliberation masterclass that included community engagement professionals in a mock citizens' assembly before taking a smaller cohort through an intensive training course.

Change Politics, with Polly in the lead, has produced - at a substantial production cost - another campaign video clip, *Then There's Us*, inspired by a Danish TV promotion. The campaign launch has been postponed awaiting the 'right' moment in the political cycle.

The Voice referendum prompted a couple of opinion pieces (*Mandarin & ABC*) which highlighted the missed opportunity to use Citizens' Assemblies.

Two interns have joined us for a day or two each week through *UNSW*.

Internationally

In June, Geoff Gallop, Kathy Jones and Luca travelled to Dublin to sit as observers to Ireland's sixth Citizens' Assembly – this time on drug use. In late September, Iain and Luca were in Athens for the *Athens Democracy Forum*, where Iain presented and then convened separately a small group of parliamentarians, who were introduced to various deliberative engagement practices. Thereafter, in early October, the executives travelled to Copenhagen for the *Democracy R&D* conference, where Kyle, Polly and Iain made presentations. The next annual *DR&D* conference in 2024 will be held in Vancouver, Canada, jointly hosted by *MASS LBP* and us. It was determined that Australia is too far for most members to travel to, so west coast Canada was seen as a reasonable compromise.

The Metals Company approached us to advise on a broad public engagement exercise related to approvals for mining on the seabed floor in the Clarion Clipperton Zone. The proposal requires the approval of the *International Seabed Authority*. Our credentials for the project could be traced back to the work we did successfully for UNDEF. The immediate challenge for *TMC* is how best to engage with a diverse group of stakeholders, many of whom are opposed to seabed mining. As such, we have sought the involvement of the OECD to assist us in this complex and potentially controversial project.

We have endorsed a proposal from *FIDE* to explore a North American *FIDE* initiative, headed up by Marjan Ehsassi. We have been encouraged in this by Peter McLeod (*Mass LBP*, Toronto) who has been a keen supporter of Marjan.

Research

Our research team, Carson and Kyle, have published three additional R&D Notes, including one documenting the first learnings from the French Convention on the End of Life written

by Marjan Ehsassi & Helene Landemore. They have also developed a framework for the evaluation of citizens' assembly processes that builds on the work of the OECD and others.

Kyle is a part of the New Frontiers of Deliberative Democracy research project funded by the National Endowment for Democracy. He is involved in writing guidebooks on the institutionalisation of citizen deliberation and deliberation on 'difficult issues'.

We have supported the work of Bailey Flanigan, a researcher from *Carnegie Mellon University*, who is studying both the public spiritedness of deliberations and the fairness of random selection algorithms.

More Generally

With every passing year, there is a growing public interest in democracy - as a subject per se, with an increasing number of events, media articles and conferences, especially in Europe, focussed on deliberative democracy.

It can be said that we are generally regarded as a valuable 'go-to' authority for advice, regularly responding to enquiries at home and abroad from people and organisations seeking to learn more about the practical application of citizens' juries.

Luca Belgiorno-Nettis
December 6th 2023