

Castan Centre Director Reports Back on 2020 Summit

Castan Centre Director, Professor Sarah Joseph, was chosen to attend the Australian Government's 2020 Summit in Canberra on 19-20 April. She was part of the "future of Australian governance" stream, in a subgroup that focused on the rights and responsibilities of citizens, an Australian republic, and recognition of Indigenous peoples in the Constitution. Other members of the governance stream included eminent academics Professors Hilary Charlesworth, George Williams, Cheryl Saunders, and Greg Craven, former Human Rights Commissioner Chris Sidoti, activists Brett Solomon and Kristen Hilton, and media warhorses Philip Adams, Paul Kelly, Gerard Henderson and David Marr.

The discussions within our group were lively. There was overwhelming support within the stream for a republic, with only one member, Senator George Brandis, seeming to identify himself as a monarchist. My subgroup suggested a two stage process for becoming a republic by 2020 (and probably much earlier). The first stage would sever links with the Crown, while the second stage would address the tricky issue of the exact republican model that we adopt. Within our subgroup there was also great support for constitutional amendments to appro-

priately recognise indigenous peoples, though precise wording was not agreed. The issue of federal protection of human rights elicited the greatest debate. The group recommended a national consultation process on how best to protect human rights. The group split over the best way to protect rights, with the majority supporting a statutory Charter similar to that in Victoria, and the minority supporting alternative models which exclude the judiciary from rights protection. In my opinion, the issue of the types of rights to be protected (particularly economic social and cultural rights) got a bit lost in the mix.

It is premature to judge where the Summit ideas will go from here. In one respect however it seems to have borne fruit. An underreported aspect of the May 14 budget was the allocation of a couple of million dollars towards "a national community consultation on the most appropriate methods of protecting human rights". The prioritizing of this issue may not have happened without the 2020 recommendations.

Overall, the 2020 summit had a great energy, and it was a privilege to be

there. The boxed lunches weren't even that bad. I did get the impression that many of 'the usual suspects' had been invited (from both sides of politics, though it is probably fair to guess that there were more ALP voters). That is, many of the attendees, including myself, have numerous outlets and forums in which to make their ideas known, which possibly diluted the potential for truly 'new' ideas. I suspect that the government would have been exposed to more original and radical ideas if it had invited 1000 random people. Of course, a new idea is not necessarily a good one. And an old idea can be a very good idea whose time has finally come.



Sarah with Kram from Spiderbait, the only rock star invited to the Summit.

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