

Australia in 2050

Public Visions

2012 and 2013

Hobart

Small is beautiful - in terms of governance, development & community caring.

Page 3

Melbourne

Planning and governance needs to shift from short term interests to long-term goals

Page 4

Canberra

A society under pressure turns to a sustainable economy, augmented reality or space-based resources

Page 5

Exmouth

Change is coming. Education is needed to support sustainable thinking & living.

Page 6

Someone will think about the future.

It had better be us.

Apocalypse

- Rampant disease
- Widespread poverty & starvation
- Violence, terrorism & warfare pervasive
- Inequality & intolerance
- Loss of community
- Corrupt or totalitarian government
- Destabilised economy
- High unemployment
- Extensive pollution
- Severe climate change
- Water shortages
- Energy shortages
- Degraded environment
- Infrastructure disrepair
- Constant fear
- Little personal freedom
- Lack of services
- Lack of access
- Lack of security

Imagine that it's 7am, January 1 2050.
What world would you be waking up to?
What world would you want to wake up to?

Why is it worth thinking about it?

Because thinking about it may change our attitudes and actions. It may also change our future.

Scientists, politicians, NGOs, and industry bodies often meet to speculate about what the future may hold. These speculations result in decisions which shape how Australia looks in 2050.

It is important to hear the experience and opinions of Australians of all walks of life. This is a summary of three discussions of Australia's future - held in Hobart, Melbourne and Canberra. These discussions explored what Australians of many walks of life think Australia might be like in 2050, what they want it to look like and what drivers might shape it

Utopia

- Illness is rare
- Poverty eradicated
- Peace (violence & warfare absent)
- Equity, equality, tolerance, acceptance & respect for all
- Participatory democracy
- Well educated populace
- Vibrant communities
- Well planned cities
- Access to information
- Personal freedom
- Good work/life balance
- Transparency & honesty
- Natural environment is healthy & valued
- Sustainable industries
- Climate change contained
- Accessible services (e.g. health, education)
- Accessible resources (e.g. water & housing)

Looking into the future

We looked at potential futures in two ways

Future Backwards

It can be hard to predict the most likely futures, but we can say what we would or wouldn't like in the future.

A “future backwards” approach was used to explore these extremes. Participants spelled out their visions of ‘utopia’ and ‘apocalypse’. They didn't need to agree with one another (although most visions converged). Nor did these futures need to be self-consistent or even physically possible.

The participants also described the current state of Australia and how it reached this state. Lastly, they mapped out pathways to utopia or apocalypse.

The versions of utopia and apocalypse serve to bound the alternative futures painted by citizens in each city.

The lists created (see panels on page 1) were very similar in all three cities. They also largely match lists provided by people of other cultures. They reflect humanity's universal desire for a safe and secure future.



Future forwards

Another way to think about alternative futures is to step forward through time. To imagine standing at the beginning of each decade and to think about how that decade may unfold, what kind of influences might be important, what kind of events may happen.

It can be a daunting exercise; uncertainty is high. To make the process easier, discussions were held in small groups so that different futures could be explored in detail.

These discussions identified key issues to drive each decade and themes to weave into a story of how the future may unfold.

The most common themes were energy, the economy, the environment and climate change, governance, education, technology, population and aging.

Other issues of concern were extreme events, wars or nuclear catastrophes, urbanization, social capital and value systems.

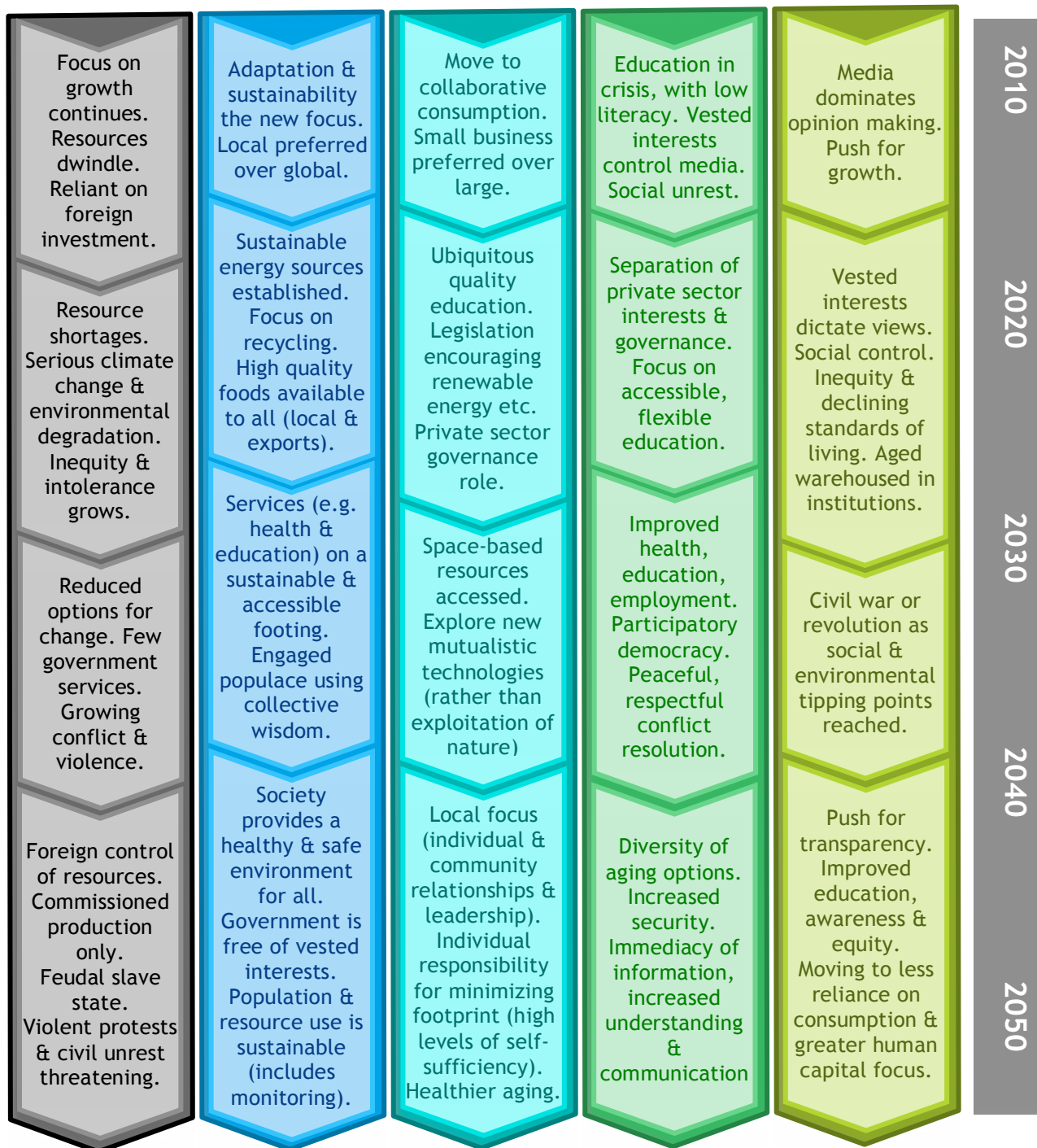
These futures did not have to progress smoothly or linearly. There was much discussion of tipping points (whether social, economic or environmental) that saw the whole system change quite suddenly.



Hobart - February 2012

There were a few common themes to the alternative futures identified in Hobart:

- The main drivers shaping the future lie at the intersection of governance, media and education; a better educated public would lead to improved political awareness & participation
- Humans are the major agents of large-scale change, they are not victims of circumstances outside their control
- The future is determined by large trends not by individual events
- Small is beautiful - local governance, development, family and community preferred



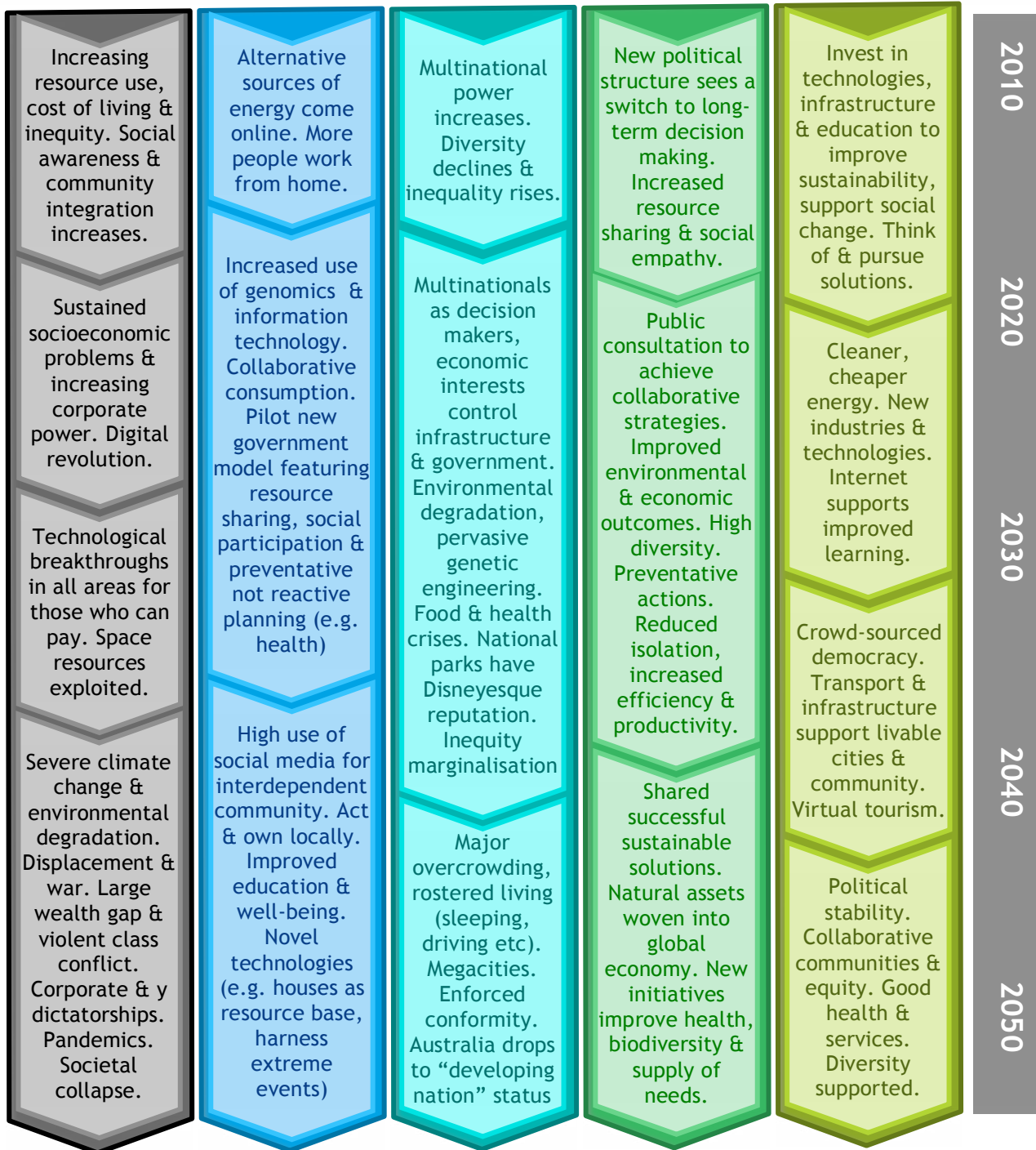
The main driver determining the future lies at the intersection between governance, media and education

Small is beautiful

Melbourne - October 2012

The pathways considered in Melbourne had a much greater focus on governance than seen in Hobart and Canberra. There was a strong desire to move away from decision making based on short-term goals (influenced by private interests) to a new system which allows complex & inclusive decision making that addresses long-term goals and provides for social equity. The common themes across pathways were:

- Humanity is in full control of the future, it just comes down to the choices we make (regarding the role of technology, levels of population growth & social equity, the response to climate change)
- Governance was central to all pathways, but there were also some unique ideas (e.g. Australia joining an Asian trading block; the use of extreme events to provide energy or resources like water).

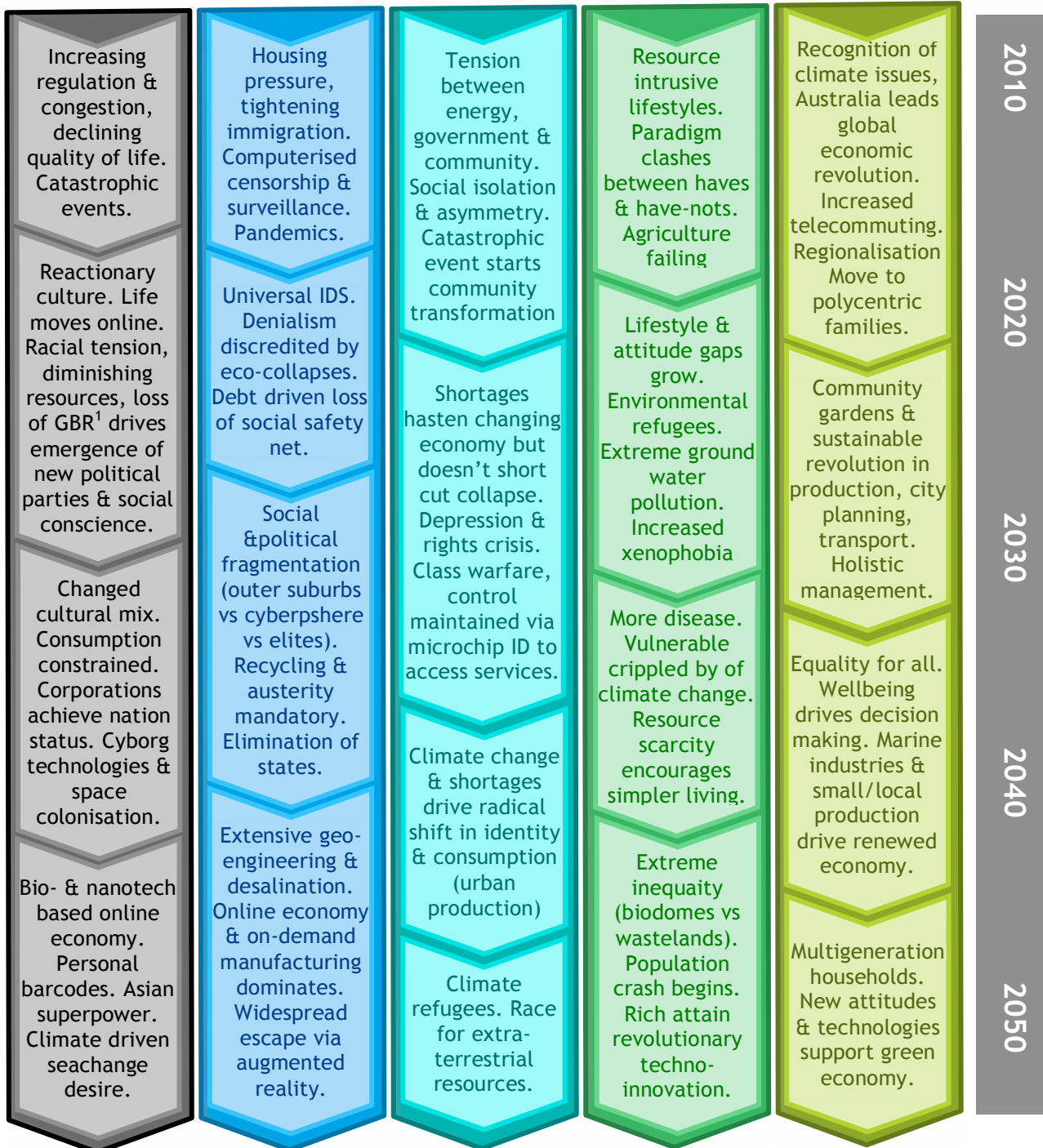


Elected officials must prove their competence
Humanity is in full control of the future, it just comes down to the choices we make

Canberra - March 2013

The pathways presented in Canberra were more strongly divided than at the other locations. While similar topics were brought up they tended to be presented more strongly in the extreme than previously. This meant that there were three major threads to the pathways:

- Attitude is crucial to deciding the future; either individual consumerism and a profit focus will dominate (leading to highly asymmetric outcomes), or societal norms shift to an inclusive, strategic zero-growth economy that recognizes all externalities
- Catastrophic events will act as tipping points - either catapulting us into new ways of thinking & acting, or leading to reactionary tightening of regulations, worsening tension, environmental degradation & societal dislocation.
- Issues of identity & increased blending of physical & virtual life (more so than elsewhere)

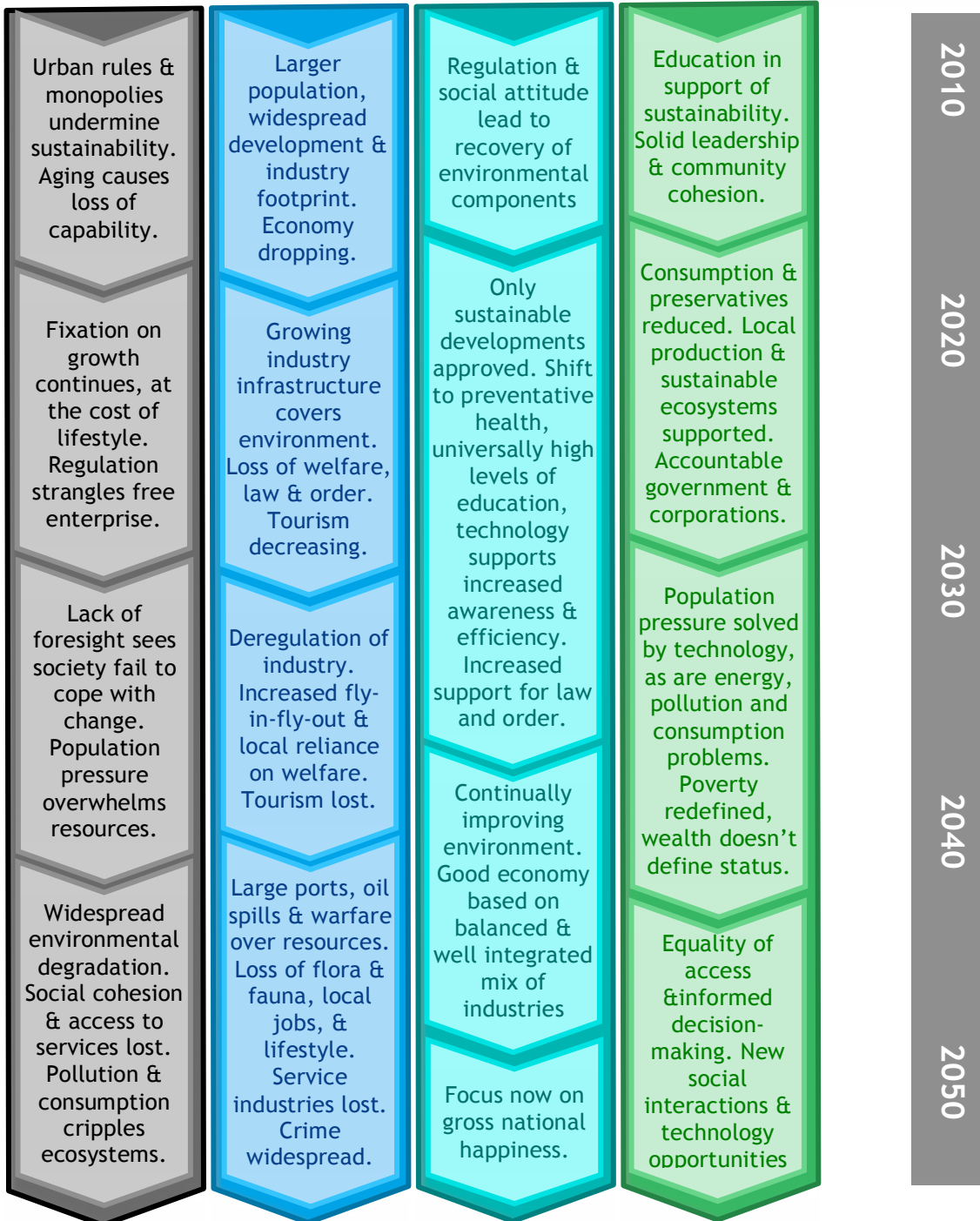


Which branch will we take?
The future is likely to be shaped by extremes - good or bad

Exmouth - November 2013

While there was a lot more agreement in Exmouth about what potential pathways might be and what the big issues were, everyone was uncertain about whether what was desirable would actually come to pass. Nevertheless there were strong common themes:

- The desire to have the environment remain a strong feature of daily life and to see it used well (i.e. sustainable use).
- Government decisions currently dictate pathways (e.g. through regulations), but that may not be moving society to a desirable end point.
- Desirable pathways will likely rely on education regarding responsibilities not just rights, about living with each other and the environment. With the end result that decisions are made because they are the right thing to do not the expedient thing.



At the cross roads, change is coming
 The future is about change, do we live with what we get or make the changes we want?

De-growth - has Australia reached there first?

Based on the discussions we've held to date, it appears that Australians desire a future featuring sustainable access to natural resources, a healthy environment, good health and education, diverse opportunities in life & a robust participatory democracy - free of poverty and inequity.

Equally, Australians do not want a future in which the stability of day-to-day life has been eroded by a degraded environment, depleted resources, lawlessness and violence, limited access to health-care and education, increased economic or political inequity and the fragmentation of social cohesion.

The desire for security and some degree of choice and ability to shape our own lives are universal features of human nature (with similar statements made by many people from many nations). However, the very strong statement of the central role of human decision making in dictating the future and the desire for collaborative consumption, de-growth and crowd-sourced governance is not a common scenario in mainstream academic literature.

Whether this finding is unique to the people who joined in the discussions, is the new expression of Australia's historical egalitarian attitude, or is a new more general desire growing in many cultures remains to be seen.

We are very thankful for everyone's participation. It has certainly presented us with many new options, questions & opportunities.



Key messages from the workshops: Humanity creates its own future - education, governance and attitude shape the choices that determine our future, not material possessions. Societal trends, not specific events, make that future. The components of the future are already with us: impacts of current decisions will be felt by future generations. Less is more.

The usual suspects

People have been telling stories about the future and the past for a very long time. In the modern incarnation of this, using scenario-based strategic planning, examples of archetypical scenarios are:

Business as usual: The policies and patterns of consumption, exploitation, population pressures and wealth distribution of today play out largely unchanged into the future.

Eco-topia: Society transforms into a patchwork of self-sustaining, low footprint communities with high levels of consultative decision making.

Big government: Centralised government & regulation that simultaneously supports economic liberalization, pushes for a reduction in poverty & equity, but takes a reactive approach to environmental issues.

Fortress world: The world fragments, with each nation emphasizing the local or regional markets & security. Typically a reactive response to environmental, economic and social issues.

Collapse: Greed and consumption dominate; accelerated growth, or a lack of incentives to include consideration of environmental and social impacts of activities, lead to environmental and then societal collapse.

Transformation: New social models constructed, combining global unity & regional pluralism; local & adaptive institutions that take a proactive approach to addressing desires & concerns.

Technopunk: Technical solutions solve environmental and social problems without requiring a reduction in the standard of living. Robots, nano-sensors & virtual reality dominate & individualise lives. Ecosystems, services & resource use is highly engineered.

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