

LETTER FROM CANBERRA

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it's happening in AU!

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Inflation, interest rates,
ongoing skill and staff
shortages, Russia in Ukraine,
disrupted trade lanes, market
confidence and rapidly
increasing energy prices.

How have we got to a point
where business and social
confidence and decision
making becomes less certain
because of the uncertainty in
the cost of the basics!

Inflation, interest rates and
increasing power charges are
NOT new, we have created
this, we knew it was coming
and across government
delivery failure is significant.

Be accountable, or just go!



Editorial

The image provides a theme and there are many angles one can take to comment on. Is the most obvious one a simple question on why the previous government did not develop a national, self-sufficient energy strategy?

We certainly do not have a National Energy plan, and rapidly escalating energy prices and volatile in supply is not a new problem. Government failure has caused this over a long time frame.

Therefore the other obvious theme is around the lack of government accountability for inflation, energy issues, debt and many other impacts that politicians leave behind with no accountability against their super arrangements.

Climate change and energy experts have been telling us for years a rising share of solar and wind power in national grids would cause prices to decline. Yet, the two nations furthest down that path - Germany and Denmark - have the most expensive power in Europe. Why does it look like we are heading down that path?

When do unidentified so-called experts and incompetent politicians hiding behind "these experts" become accountable for poor decisions? An energy shortage (in Australia in 2022???) and staggering volatility in supply and pricing. All of which adds to cost of living levels pressure caused, in fair part, by politicians and experts making bad decisions.



Health and broken trust

.....
To ensure we don't identify anyone known to us we will tell this story in bullet points. It's awful and highlights the multiple issues that have come from trust being broken in the health system, broken trust that has been generated by the health sector, government and media.

- Internal organ issue, impacted by delay from elective surgery postponement due Covid.
- Ineffective treatment and resourcing at public hospital emergency unit that saw heavy pain periods extended.
- Ineffective ongoing emergency treatments, including being sent home with minimal pain management.
- Pain continues to worsen.
- Surgery finally but not as effective as hoped. Could have been better, pain continues to worsen. Despair.
- Suicide attempted, survived. Family impacted, recovery, if at all will be long.

Avoidable, tragic, unnecessary!

This is in VIC, we all have stories!

Covid is serious, still. But, many expert epidemiologists and public health experts have been wrong about much of their supposed speciality. Covid may well go down as one of the great fiascos of history after nearly three years of restrictions that appeared to do very little in the end to stop the spread of Covid-19, let alone pass any sort of rational economic and social cost-benefit assessment. Some good but many more bad decisions by politicians and 'their experts'.

Experts and politicians must be accountable. For the new opposition to be credible it is hard to see how Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor can be taken serious when the accountability for the energy issue built over a long time should sit with....Angus Taylor.

There is no avoiding accountability, exit stage left rather than lecture on inflationary pressure from wage increases. The Coalitions record on cost of living is woeful!

Accountability is the key. New energy minister Chris Bowen has a big job ahead. Time will tell what the Albanese government delivers but there is no doubt that the former Coalition government and the Andrews VIC State government are accountable for the unnecessary huge energy price hikes that Eastern Seaboard Australians have been suffering.

Accountability! Senior VIC State government ministers are jumping ship before judgement day. That says a lot, superannuation is safe and accountability is avoidable!

Great system! Those of us who own, lead, run businesses are responsible for our decisions that impact economically and socially. Not the politicians. They either move to the other side of the house and maintain the same rhetoric, or they retire to do well for the rest of their days. We need better accountability.

Time's up, say those who look at our business and residential power bills, our broken trust with the health system (this page of Letter from Canberra).

Accountability, until that's demonstrated its hard for any of us to take pollies serious. Cue four ministers in the VIC State government exiting stage left ahead of judgement day!



Call of the Day

- For decades, climate campaigners have fought to make fossil fuels so expensive that people would be forced to abandon them. Their dream is becoming reality: energy prices are spiralling out of control and will soon get even worse. But, we are no closer to solving climate change.
- Global engineering design and consulting firm Arcadis has urged the Federal government to ensure the design of the Inland Rail project can accommodate hydrogen-powered trains as a key step in decarbonising the 1,700km freight link. Arcadis showed hydrogen will not only be cheaper than diesel within a couple of years but, if used to power rolling stock on the route, could potentially strip 763,000 tonnes of CO2 from Inland Rail operations per year.
- Solar and wind can only deliver a fraction of electricity needs. Despite subsidies and political support, solar and wind delivered just 9% of global electricity in 2020. We need to get the strategy for this right,

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Hydrogen.....is happening

Apparently I have a hydrogen allergy!

A few weeks back I caught up with an old colleague now working in the hydrogen sector. Our hydrogen conversation started with all the reasons why hydrogen should be an investment. I stopped and said "have heard that all before, tell me how and where is the demand". That, apparently, is my hydrogen allergy., scepticism!

Turns out, in this case, there is a how, with cost-benefit analysis and potential for deployment strategies that deliver hydrogen to a transport sector with a high dependency on fossil fuels.

Let me elaborate, this is worth well worth a few minutes of your time.

Hydrogen Fuels Australia (H2FA) is launching Australia's first modular hydrogen production and integrated Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV) refuelling operation at its greenfield facility in Truganina, Victoria. H2FA will expand its reach, providing refuelling of both electric heavy and light vehicles throughout Australia, EVs that are powered from a hydrogen fuel cell.

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Aviation staff shortages

Staff shortages across the airline industry resulting in widespread disruption and chaos have been blamed on the “bad habit of working from home”.

Aviation job shortages in other regions were creating delays and restricting airline capacity, with the issues likely to continue for some time.

Globally, and in Australia, governments were wanted that sacrificing sectors like travel would lead to capability shortages, especially as people sought more secure employment in other sectors impacted by closed borders and halted migration patterns.

The outcome is now evident. Unheard of, airports are restricting airline departures per day to offset shortages of staff across airport precincts.

Airline CEOs have shared horror stories of five-hour waits at security checkpoints in Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport and “massive lost bags” at Heathrow Airport in London.

At home, long delays at security points has lead to long queues at the start of school holidays.

Hydrogen, happening... continued:

Founded on environmentally sustainable and low impact concepts, H2FA’s operation uses its own electrolysis assets to convert renewable power into green hydrogen. H2FA’s pathway is to provide 100% renewable green hydrogen to Australia’s transport industry - and leave a minimal carbon footprint.

This is real, this is happening and it provides a great opportunity for governments to engage with H2FA to understand the details of this heavy and light vehicle refuelling program.

Policy development ideas are many from this green hydrogen development.

H2FA can provide governments with key subject matter expertise on working with the transport sectors and its participants to effectively match green hydrogen fuel supply with fuel and vehicle upgrade decisions that can factor hydrogen availability and refuelling across Australia.

To recap, not why on hydrogen, but can do. That means governments, working with H2FA capability could look at other opportunities to deploy hydrogen refuelling stations to speed up demand generation to help the climate and to improve the conversion of demand for EVs.

There will be many other opportunities for governments presented by H2FA’s capability. Affairs of State understands the demand to convert and build new ships with hydrogen powered fuel cells. Shipping lines will look to Australian ports to develop hydrogen refuelling capability to enable these ships to effectively operate cargo lanes to and from Australia.

In a logistics market that remains heavily disrupted and volatile Australian hydrogen refuelling capabilities for cargo ships at ports may offset current capacity issues, where ships are pointed at markets away from Australia as they can earn more elsewhere.

To put that in content, Australia imports more than it exports. Australia exports primarily are heavy, resources and primary products. Imports are lighter and come in larger 40’ containers. This imbalance is not new but it becomes a factor when shipping lines make capacity decisions. Longer term governments and H2FA could improve shipping capacity to Australian ports.





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Breaking News

Is Affairs of State about to win a significant aviation project?

Are we about to make a real impact in freight, destination demand recovery, the best possible air and sea service levels - all as part of the most unique and challenging recovery and business development project? Watch this space.

Fortescue buys clean trucks

Fortescue Metals Group has stepped up a push to replace diesel-power trucks, signing a deal with Swiss manufacturer Liebherr for the delivery of a new fleet of battery and hydrogen-powered haul trucks for its mines.

Fortescue said on Wednesday it would buy 120 trucks from Liebherr, enough to replace about 45 per cent of its current Pilbara mining fleet, with deliveries to begin in 2025.

National Energy Plan

A long term national plan that would coordinate the shift from fossil fuel-dominated energy systems to net zero emissions. Learning from global activities and outcomes Australia is now hopefully on track to develop, assess, present and implement a national energy strategy. We hope!

Our current crisis is undoubtedly an outcome from poor planning at State and Federal government levels. Wholesale power and gas prices have been surging amid increasing demand for heating and from increased manufacturing activity.

While all states and territories have already committed to reducing emissions in their power grids and hit net zero by 2050, governments, industry leaders and experts have warned that a lack of centralised planning risked supply imbalances and price shocks.

Federal Energy Minister Chris Bowen said state and federal governments had agreed, for the first time, to a national plan that would coordinate the shift from fossil fuel-dominated energy systems to net zero emissions.

The Federal Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources is developing a national energy plan to deliver a reliable, secure and affordable energy system by:

- delivering reforms to put downward pressure on electricity and gas price,
- ensuring our markets are well-regulated and transparent,
- encouraging new reliable supply and technology,
- supporting the security of domestic and international supply chains for electricity, gas and liquid fuel,
- investing in new ways to make our energy system cleaner and more efficient,
- improving the energy efficiency of our products, homes and commercial buildings,
- compiling and publishing energy data to support sound policy baseload power.

We note the gas sector is critical to ensure a smooth transition to more renewable energy.

Older generation can work

More than 400,000 people over the age of 65 could return to the nation's workforce if a proposal to let older Australians work more without losing benefits gets support in Canberra. It has been said that this more than sensible call has previously been ignored as it may impact housing demand by slowing migration. Really?

Easing the rules around pension eligibility to make it easier for older Australians to work more without losing benefits could be possible as sectors of the economy continue to be impacted by skill and resource shortages.

The idea was promoted by business groups late last year to help ease chronic labour and skills shortages, but it was not taken up by the former government.

Peter Dutton at the weekend called on the Albanese government to double the amount pensioners can earn before their pension payments are reduced. Mr Dutton estimated the policy would benefit about 80,000 pensioners who are currently choosing to work, at a cost of \$145m in 2022-23.

Where was that call in government Mr Dutton? Hospitality and other sectors have been calling on this to maximise recovery post pandemic. Can you use a retired truck driver, forklift operator, office worker....of course. Lets make this happen as soon as possible.

Business advice on wage increase demand

In the last 12 months the cost of living has increased dramatically, it looks like getting worse. Higher interest rates are devastating because prices keep rising.

If the Reserve Bank slow the economy via higher unemployment the spouses' income and/or the bonuses could be in jeopardy. Workers want pay rises that match inflation.

Higher prices and cost of living pressures makes it almost impossible for those in the \$60,000-80,000 (many many people) to live on that income, especially with higher interest rates. Workers in this income bracket are asking for wage increases saying that they now can't live on that income and are seeking new employment. New, higher paying jobs are in play for many.

Business leaders and the Public Service will be hoping that inflation will be brought under control, if not most entities will be under pressure to increase remuneration at a much higher rate. The consequential inflationary pressures will force much higher interest rates and a more severe downturn.

The minimum wage rises just came through at 5.2%. Inflation is likely at potentially 7%. So where does real wage increases sit with working families in Australia and also for the businesses who employ?

Wages have to increase or employees risk capability loss. In our opinion we prefer to see wage rises be more moderate, but to keep the unemployment rate closer to 3.9%, rather than rising to 5%. Increased costs need to be managed carefully to avoid businesses having to lay workers off. The economy works better when there are more people in work, even if they're being paid a bit less than what they perhaps think they are entitled to.

Business may be able to offset wage increases with other factors. More WFH, shared transportation costs, education contributions, clear advancement planning, company vehicles?

Retention of employees and capability is a core business factor impacting the decision on wage increases and the extent these increases may need to be adopted. Business leaders need to weigh the cost of replacement staff, the downtime during that process and the actual cost versus the wage increase they may be looking to avoid. In a tight labour market the decision to increase wages is likely to have few alternatives at this point.



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More changes at the Head of the Public Service

Prime Minister Albanese has reinforced commitment to place greater value on the public service and to grow its capability.

It was a very different observation from that of former PM Scott Morrison, who declared the role of the public service was to deliver on ministerial policy.

Four new Federal Department Secretaries were announced: Finance (Jenny Wilkinson), Foreign Affairs (Jan Adams), Employment (Natalie James) and Infrastructure (Jim Betts).

David Fredericks went back to his former energy and environment portfolio. Former Environment secretary Gordon de Brouwer returns as secretary for public sector reform.

As the public sector responds to the post-COVID-19 world of remote working and booming regionalisation, the massive infrastructure projects the Federal and State governments oversee will need to be reconfirmed as cost increases and skill resource shortages impact the delivery "to build a recovery"

Infrastructure is a huge job and very much transport based.



Canberra news and comments in short

- ✦ "Nuclear is the most expensive form of energy. We have a cost of living crisis, energy prices going through the roof and what's their big bright idea? Let's have the most expensive form of energy we can possibly think of." Comments made by Energy Minister Chris Bowen after a National nuclear call.
- ✦ Pauline Hanson has secured her Queensland senate seat. Congratulations in Tasmania to new Lambie Network Senator Tammy Tyrell. We look forward to working with you wherever possible.
- ✦ Incredibly...Victorian Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio has ruled out any supply payments to fossil fuel generators. "We have always been clear that a capacity market operating in Victoria would make payments to zero emissions technologies and not fossil fuels," she said. "We are leading the nation in renewable investment and job creation - our investment is delivering cheaper energy prices for Victorian households and businesses - while we work towards net-zero".
 - ✦ Note: Affairs of State supports climate change, done right. There is a potential Gippsland carbon-free gas solution and there are many calls being made that are contributing to volatile energy prices that impact socially and economically. VIC claims on current cheaper energy prices are laughable.
- ✦ Starting in 1992 at 3 per cent of wages, compulsory superannuation in Australia is now set to rise from 10 per cent to 10.5 per cent on July 1.
- ✦ Metcash, which supplies thousands of independent supermarkets and retailers across the country, has warned of accelerating food inflation. In an update, food prices within its wholesale business leapt to 5.3 per cent in April and 4.5 per cent in May as pressure from suppliers mounted.
- ✦ A question from Letter from Canberra, instant asset write-off rules right now expire June 30, 2023. So next year, can under a constrained spending environment that the government may have, will that continue for business?
- ✦ Goldman Sachs economists, in a deep dive published on Monday, said they now expected inflation to peak at 8.1 per cent year-on-year, pushed higher by food, fuel and utility prices. "Importantly, the high rate of headline inflation over the next 6-12 months is likely to lead to an even larger increase in minimum wages next year, which will lead to persistently higher inflation across a range of services items."
- ✦ Across Asia, where social safety nets are rare, millions of people who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic now face a new hurdle: access to credit and an ability to recover quality of life and the ability to earn and contribute.

Saltbush reduces carbon emissions?

Say our surprise, clicked on The Australian to read that saltbush can slash global carbon emissions and become a major source of world protein to relieve world food shortages.

What is saltbush?

In Australia saltbush typically refers to an edible blue-grey shrub, there are about 60 species in this country; grey saltbush, a coastal variety with slender leaves, and old man saltbush, an inland plant with flatter, wider leaves, are the most commonly eaten.

Saltbush leaves, which were an important vegetable for early colonists, are what the plant is prized for now.

How does it reduce emissions?

Saltbush stores stored below the ground in the roots and soil and in the woody section of the plants above ground.

Approximatley 5.7 million hectares of land in Australia is unsuitable for cropping and grazing due to salinity Profitable options for this land are very limited. Semi-arid Australian lands could now become key to help the country meet its Paris Climate Change Agreement targets.



Nato briefs

The Prime Minister is attending the NATO Summit in Spain; along with other representatives of the Indo-Pacific; Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. Amid the battles in Ukraine and the current global economic challenges, NATO is acknowledging that security problems extend beyond Europe.

With Finland and Sweden shedding their historical neutrality and Turkey withdrawing their veto to admission we are witnessing a new found relevance of the organisation. In parallel NATO is preparing to upgrade four of its eight battle groups into full brigades, mostly likely those in Poland and the three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

This is up from just four battle groups before the Russian invasion on February 24, and increases the number of troops on high readiness from 40,000 to a figure“well over 300,000”.

This will be the third summit this year. Normally the NATO leaders only hold a summit every two to three years. Topping the agenda will be the Strategic Concept. This blueprint guides the deployments and decision making.

The last version was from 2010 and the complacency that came with the end of the Cold War has now vanished. It is not surprising the focus will be on Russia - the most significant and direct threat to our security.

The document will set out “the challenges that Beijing poses to our security, interests, and values”. Australia and our partners are specific to this strategy as Europe has come to understand that China is not just a trade or investment partner, but a competitor and rival. Many think that China, like the Russians, will leverage cyber attacks, disinformation and economic coercion - to increase influence disrupt or reshape the international order.

In Australia the impact of China Australia geopolitical issues persist. Relations between the two countries began to deteriorate in 2018 due to growing concerns of Chinese political influence in various sectors of Australian society including the Government, universities and media as well as China's stance on the South China Sea dispute.

An early call for a Covid investigation by the Australian government has also not helped our most important trade relationship.



Skilled Migration

A long-awaited sequel to 1986 blockbuster Top Gun has rebooted a claim that the original film caused a 500% spike in US Navy recruitment that year.

But the claim is said to be false. Navy enlistments increased by around eight per cent in 1986 before falling back slightly in the following year.

Does it matter, no! How good is this second edition? How many parents have rewound the clock, viewed the original movie before heading to the cinema for the fantastic, action packed sequel.

World-wide box office turnover is reported at more than \$1 billion already. Isn't that great, especially for those in the hospo and entertainment industry starved of a blockbuster to bring people back out for a night at the cinema, the restaurant and the bar!

Tom Cruise ranks among the highest-grossing actors of all time. Despite some controversy that has surrounded him he's still capable of conquering the box office. Mr Cruise performs his own stunts, audiences are still lining up to see him. How many of us will see this sequel more than once?

The cost of AU Defence

\$133,191,780.82 per day.

ASPI has released the 2022-2023 edition of 'The Cost of Defence', Australia's most comprehensive analysis of defence spending. Defence funding grows to \$48.6 billion in this year's budget, or around 2.11% of GDP. But that growth could be eaten away by inflation and hits to GDP caused by the economic disruption rippling out from the war in Ukraine.

The report's author Dr Marcus Hellyer says that 'The new government will face some immediate challenges. The main one will be whether to increase the defence budget. There's good reason to do so: the invasion of Ukraine shows that authoritarian states will still use war to achieve their ends, plus China's coercive actions in our region are intensifying.'

Dr Hellyer stresses the need for Defence to deliver on its capability programs with a rapid return on its funding. 'Much of Defence's budget is tied up in megaprojects that take years or even decades to deliver. The government will need to identify areas where Defence can move faster to hedge against the risks in the megaprojects.

The report also examines Defence's HR needs - the ADF needs to grow by 20,000 to operate the capabilities it is acquiring, yet it has only been able to achieve growth of 300 per year.

Additional Defence spend translates into growing local spending, both in absolute terms and in relative terms compared to overseas spending.

The new government will have some significant issues to address. Perhaps the biggest one is the size of the defence budget.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reminded us that war has not gone away. China's influence in our near region is growing and could result in a permanent Chinese military presence. The US is looking to its allies and partners to do more, as they must. See our NATO article.

As always, the government will need to adjudicate between competing priorities for funding. At a time when Australians are dealing with the rising cost of living, spikes in energy prices and the grinding pressure of housing affordability, it may be tempting to reduce defence spending in the face of competing budget priorities.





Suing from Australia

Apple and Google Android users in Australia are suing the California-based technology giants, alleging they used their market power to force app developers to use their payment systems, resulting in higher prices for consumers.

Twin legal actions allege Apple and Google have “a substantial degree of power in the markets for the purchase” of apps via the App Store and Google Play Store respectively, as well as the in-app purchase of content on the respective Android and IOS devices..

Apple and Google allegedly forced developers to use Apple and Google payment systems for apps and in-app purchases, then charged commissions of 30 per cent, or in some limited cases 15%.

Thank you for reading

Reach out for a chat, the coffee is on us in Melbourne, Canberra or Tasmania.

Lets take care of each other,

Hans, Michael and Alistair



Too many political staffers

If you read and believe the media....you would have noticed that the independents, the cross-bench et al have been griping about a reduced number of staff. Four down to one! The media has feasted on this, but, has anyone thought this through?

As a strategist and an engagement specialist we question whether this will make the impacted politicians more, or less productive. Those on the cross-bench will need researchers to seek opinion on legislation that requires decisions. Government may have a long list of policies, that will require work.

From our perspective a core value delivered by the independents and cross-bench is the ability to support and influence constituent and state decisions that deliver growth, prosperity, social outcomes and jobs. These representatives know their local area, what is needed and how the right government contributions can make a real difference.

Lets not hamstring this important activity and deliverable. We met with new Lambie Network Senator, Tammy Tyrrell last week. Sen Tyrrell made this exact point very eloquently and we agree. These representative can really help growth and investment in their local communities, lets not make that important work harder than it needs to be because they are short on staff resource. The real saving, if there is one, will be small versus the cost of more effective productivity on behalf of their local communities.

Last Minute?

A NSW inquiry probing John Barilaro’s appointment to a plum US trade position heard how the agency filling the role settled on a candidate before being told by the government to halt and “unwind” the process because it was being converted to a ministerial decision. An offer was undone, apparently to give the former Deputy Premier this reported 500K/annum role.

Energy Minister Bowen at the Press Club said that domestic supply is part of the gas industry’s “social licence”. Spell it out, state politicians have given in to unscientific populism about onshore gas extraction and won’t develop onshore reserves sitting next to the industries they are so anxious to protect. Why isn’t Mr Bowen calling out VICs government on this, or VICs excessive reliance on over-ambitious renewables targets?

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