

COMMISSION FOR THE HUMAN FUTURE: WATCHING BRIEF

This Brief outlines the formation and plans of the Commission, and identifies ways in which Friends can support its vision.

Background

For twenty years, **Australia 21** – a Think Tank for the Public Good – has conducted research on many themes – such as environment, health, democracy, equality, migration, and violence. Over 50 reports have been prepared, disseminated and discussed widely.

In 2017 a roundtable discussion was convened by Australia 21 at the Australian National University (ANU). There were 40 participants drawn from many areas of interest and knowledge, including academics, public servants, ecologists, health scientists, biologists, geologists, business leaders, teachers, economists, foreign affairs specialists, environmentalists, and NGO representatives. From this emerged **The Commission for the Human Future**.

Threats Facing Humanity

Bob Douglas AO (retired epidemiologist and Secretary of the Commission) identified (*The Canberra Times*, 22 April 2020) the ten interacting threats facing humanity:

1. Unconstrained climate change.
2. Nuclear war.
3. Unconstrained growth in human numbers.
4. Environmental decline and extinction.
5. The rapidly increasing insecurity of human food supplies.
6. Depletion of essential resources on which modern civilization depends.
7. Universal pollution with chemicals.
8. Pandemic diseases, caused both by pathogens that are new, and others well known to humans.
9. The advent of powerful new technologies, including artificial intelligence.
10. Failure both nationally and globally to understand and act preventively on all these threats, due both to widespread denial and intentional misinformation.

Bob Douglas says all these threats must be dealt with immediately if we are to transform the human world in ways that will enable us to survive and thrive. COVID-19 has done us a favour by showing the need for a collective global endeavor. Security depends on genuine well-being of humans everywhere, and a new human narrative to guide our thinking and behavior.

John Hewson AM (ANU Crawford School of Public Policy), who chairs the Commission, has noted the considerable changes we have all made in our lives as a result of the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, and believes this shows the potential for imagining a

different future. He sees the possibility of rebuilding globalization to the mutual benefit of all peoples as we share ideas and visions about tackling the major threats we face.

Arnagretta Hunter (ANU Medical School), another member, says the Commission aims to be a conduit for a public conversation among Australians about the catastrophic and existential risks that are to facing us. Planning ahead will be essential, and the full use of our imagination to transform our world.

The Role of the Commission

The aims of the Commission for The Human Future (CHF) are:

- Provide trusted scientific advice to industry, government, media and the Australian public about the nature of all the major catastrophic risks - and what can best be done to solve, mitigate or adapt to them.
- Identify new opportunities for national economic and social growth and sustainability in solving the risks that face us.
- Encourage policymaking that addresses all of the major risks we face in an integrated way.
- Help build national consensus and engagement on the ways forward in meeting risks and so building new prosperity
- Position Australia as a global leader in the new field of global catastrophic risk and its solutions.
- Serve as a knowledge hub for understanding and solving global catastrophic risks.

Members of the Board of CHF are:

Professor John Hewson, Dr Paul Barratt, Professor Sharon Friel, Julian Cribb FTSE, Em Professor Bob Douglas, Professor Russell Gruen, Professor Judith Healy, Dr Arnagretta Hunter, Ms Alison Leigh, Dr Leigh Dayton, Mr Mark Dorman, Ms Hannah Ford, Mr R umtin Sepasspour and Ms Rachel Hay. Associate of the Board: Em Professor Ian Chubb

The Commission “*calls on the nations and peoples of the Earth to come together, as a matter of urgency, to prepare a plan for humanity to survive and thrive, far into the future*”. This will involve political reform, wider participation, empowerment of everyone, a new definition of national security, a more eco-centric vision, and a willingness to adapt. The Commission seeks to partner with governments, researchers, policy makers, industry and civil society in this endeavor, to act as a ‘knowledge broker’, and engage in dialogue with key players. It plans to develop a Human Survival Index in order to measure and monitor progress. There are more details and resource lists on the website <http://www.humanfuture.net/>.

To help the Commission’s work, a new narrative called **Australia Remade** has been developed by a large number of cooperating NGOs (<https://www.australiaremade.org>).

The Vision is based on hundreds of conversations with Australians across the country, and includes nine pillars:

1. A First People's Heart.
2. A Natural World for Now and the Future.
3. An Economy for the People.
4. A Society where all Contributions count and every job has Dignity.
5. A Diversity of People living side by side.
6. A Country of Flourishing Communities.
7. A New Dawn for Women.
8. A Thriving Democracy.
9. A proud Contributor to a Just World.

Supporters of the Commission are invited to register on-line with the Commission, receive its public reports and newsletter, and share them as widely as possible. Donations to the Commission are tax deductible within Australia.

Quakers have a tradition of seeking where the truth lies, and of acting on the leadings of the Spirit. The advent of the Commission for the Human Future gives us an opening to contribute our ideas, skills and experience to the global journey through the Commission.

Canberra

June 2020