

# Foreword

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This ANU Press book is a most appropriate way to commemorate the contribution John Wanna has made to the understanding of the practice of politics, public policymaking and public administration. It includes not only acknowledgement of John's work by his peers, former students and practitioners, but additional material that builds on his work, provides updates on recent developments or reflects new perspectives on his work.

Throughout the book are glimpses of John's personal style, most notably his respect of practice and practitioners and his determination to understand the world of the practitioner. But there is more to his personality and style than this.

I had the privilege of giving the dinner speech at the festschrift workshop held at The Australian National University (ANU) in September 2018. It was a light-hearted 'roast', not really suitable for publication in an ANU Press book, but behind it was heartfelt gratitude from so many people for his friendship and collegiality as well as his ability to inspire and educate.

John is an outstanding expert on public sector management, public policy and public finance. But these were not his initial interests, which have evolved over time.

I knew John was from Adelaide when Pat Weller appointed him to Griffith University along with Glyn Davis. Both arrived in 1985 and began teaching in 1986. Pat chose wisely, and Griffith became the leading public administration school in Australia.

In Adelaide, John had had a more radical reputation. His first book featured a bright red cover with a clenched fist; it was called *Defence Not Defiance: The Development of Organised Labour in South Australia*.

John had also been a bass player in a punk rock band he joined during his third undergraduate year at Adelaide Uni in the 1970s. It was called Diamond Dice. They played in Brighton, South Australia, and then went to the UK, playing a few gigs in London pubs. They had an old 1950s ambulance for a van in which they could sleep if necessary. The van finally broke down and was cremated by the roadside.

John continued his studies in Adelaide, completing his PhD on industrial relations.

His conversion from Adelaide industrial relations radical punk to respected and respectable public policy expert came with the 1988 publication of *Public Policy in Australia*, co-authored by Glyn Davis, John Warhurst and Pat Weller.

The 1990s were among the most consequential of John's personal and professional life. It was when he met Jenni, and when the twin boys, Aidan and Sean, arrived and joined his daughter, Erinn, in their home in Rainworth, Bardon, in Brisbane. It was also when John established himself as one of a handful of the most prominent and prolific public policy experts in Australia, and beyond; and when he also branched out into public finance and became a pioneer in the field, and dabbled in institutional history for good measure. It was when he built around him a team of impressive young academics and earned a reputation for collaboration and for generously including others in his projects.

I was an undergraduate student of John's in the mid-1990s. All my fellow students I have spoken to have identical recollections – of an outstanding teacher, engaging lecturer, generous with his time, wonderful company. He wanted us to do well, and we wanted to do well for him. We still do.

Because for those of us who arrived uncertain of whether we belonged at uni or not, many of us from the outer suburbs, he made us feel like we did. Not everybody has had that experience with their lecturers.

He was also a bit of a style guru in those days, a cultural icon – Hawaiian shirts, shoulder-length silvering hair. His dress sense remains noteworthy.

He was a cultural ambassador too, welcoming visiting academics from around the world, like Rod Rhodes and others, with barbecues and beers, and thanking keynote speakers at conferences with an unusual array of quirky gifts that now populate pool rooms worldwide. Being in a serious game need not mean we take ourselves too seriously. John's sense of fun was a key reason I was so delighted when he agreed to supervise my honours thesis on One Nation.

But I also remember his blunt feedback on inferior work. Something that prepared me well for work in politics.

I remember his air of cheerful disorganisation. The very casual – not causal – relationship between agreeing to meet at a particular time and the meeting actually going ahead then. I remember the look of surprise when you showed up at his door at the arranged time. And I remember his fierce resistance to diaries and deadlines. I am told that his casual disregard for punctuality survived the move south and even compelled his colleagues to decorate his ANU office with a 'Where's Wanna' sign.

But his lack of time in his office may have been a reflection of the amount of time John spent teaching and mentoring mid-career public servants, and engaging with the decision-makers and decision-shapers in the public service – one of the genuine and recognised strengths of his later scholarship. Or that he was plugging away somewhere on what really is an astonishingly long and influential list of publications, many of them in collaboration with distinguished friends who are contributors to this book.

As with all good academic work, John's publications strengthened not just the academy's understanding of public policy and public finance, but the public service's understanding of itself. I have been reminded of this as John has generously shared with me his ideas and understandings as I have plugged away in the Finance and Treasury portfolios up on the hill, picking his brain on public finance, budgeting and public service reform. It has been terrific to be back in touch with the teacher I learned so much from as a student.

John's kindness is worth dwelling on, not because that kindness is rare from him but because it is common. I remember well a trip to London and Berlin we took together with Pat Weller in 2000, when I was 22 and on my first ever trip overseas. He took charge of translating into German; I was responsible for fetching those enormous beers for him and Pat from

the bar. Michael Keating was on that trip too – he was responsible for character assessments for the rest of the travelling party, especially its youngest member.

While we were in London, John took me with him to a hearing of a House of Commons public finance committee examining whether the UK should split Treasury as Australia and Canada had done. Her Majesty's Treasury had claimed that that trend was now in reverse: John asked for evidence noting there was no sign of reversal in Australia or Canada and that the US had four central economic and budget agencies.

I am told that a *festschrift* celebrates the transition of a distinguished academic into the emeritus stage of a great career. The Japanese call it 'ascending to heaven'. Us Queenslanders just call it moving back to Brissie!

Congratulations, John. And thank you, not just for the words you have written, as important as they've been, or for the research you've undertaken, but the friendships you've forged, the encouragement you've given, the knowledge you've shared cheerfully and selflessly, and the immense fun you've had – and we've had – along the way.

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