

Introduction to Section 2: Queensland and Australian politics

Increasingly, academic reward systems have pushed scholars to specialise in narrow fields and to publish their research only in high-ranking journals in order to advance university rankings. For all John Wanna's specialisation in budgeting and finance, he has resisted these pressures, retaining interest in a wide range of public policy and administration, bridging theory and practice, and also being a significant player in Queensland politics in particular and in Australian politics more generally. Much of his mark has been outside of traditional academic work, often participating in the political sphere as one of the 'talking heads' on television.

In a major textbook for policy scholars, Davis, Wanna, Warhurst and Weller (1993, 15) defined public policy as 'the interaction of values, interests and resources guided through institutions and mediated through politics'. The impact of politics on policy and administration is not lost on John and his knowledge has been a game-changer in the political realm on many important occasions.

John has not been shy to venture into the political fray. Most famously, the 'smoking gun' document (Comitatus 2009) was a short paper based on a consultancy for the Queensland Labor Party. The only debate of the 2009 election campaign between Lawrence Springborg, leader of the newly merged Liberal National Party (LNP), and Labor premier Anna Bligh focused on Springborg's plan to make a 3 per cent across-the-board budget cut. During the debate, Bligh produced a report written by John

(Wanna 2009) stating that the budget cuts would result in a reduction in frontline services in Queensland. This effectively ended the debate and Springborg lost the election.

Few people know, however, of John's earlier contact with Springborg, which sowed the seed that brought about the LNP. Over coffee with Springborg one day in 2002, John mentioned that the tenuous National–Liberal Coalition in Queensland could be resolved through a merger based on the Conservative Party of Canada. Years later, Springborg went on a study tour to Canada and in 2012 the LNP went on to win the Queensland election.

Pat Weller¹ picks up on the theme of John's eclectic contribution using Isaiah Berlin's metaphor of the hedgehog and the fox: hedgehogs know one big thing; foxes know many things. John is the latter. Weller, a long-time collaborator with John, outlines the process of cabinet government as an adaptive process where the 'political, economic and administrative perspectives intersect'. To comprehend cabinet government, scholars of politics have to be foxes. Like cabinet governments, they have to manage the trade-offs of balancing the theoretical with the practical, the technical with the political. Weller agrees with John's approach to politics: 'to understand how and why the system works and explain it in terms that practitioners understand' rather than reinventing language that makes political science theories 'exclusive'.

Chris Salisbury² covers the trajectory of academic analysis of Queensland politics, noting with some concern the decline in such analysis in recent years notwithstanding John Wanna's contributions (both scholarly and as an active media commentator) after he moved to Queensland in the mid-1980s (where he again lives today). Queensland politics has been a source of influence on Australian politics more generally, with colourful characters and stories such as Joh Bjelke-Petersen's breaking of the convention on appointing a party-nominated senator following a senator's death, ultimately assisting the dismissal of Gough Whitlam, the 'Joh for PM' campaign and the infamous gerrymander, the Fitzgerald Inquiry, and the rise of alternative political parties such as Pauline Hanson's One

1 Pat Weller recruited John Wanna to Griffith University in the late 1980s.

2 John Wanna marked Chris Salisbury's PhD thesis.

Nation and Clive Palmer's Palmer United Party influencing politics on the national stage. Salisbury, through a historical lens, brings to light some of Queensland's unique political culture.

Salisbury's conclusion about the decline of scholarly analysis of Queensland politics, caused in part by financial pressures on universities and reliance on international students seeking courses and research activity that places more emphasis on national, international and transnational politics and history, has far broader resonance. Academic reward systems favour publication in high-ranking journals that tend to be international and not to favour research of limited interest to their international audiences. This is adversely affecting not only research into Queensland politics, but all social science research focused on Australia or parts of Australia. It is a serious issue that undermines research that is directly relevant to Australian public policy and administration practitioners, the sort of research John Wanna spent years trying to encourage.

Marija Taflaga³ examines how political parties in Westminster systems reshape and exercise power in the executive and legislative arms of government. Combining John's interest in the political side of policymaking in Westminster systems (Patapan, Wanna and Weller 2005; Rhodes, Wanna and Weller 2009), Taflaga's analysis suggests that much policy discussion downplays the role of 'capital P' politics in policymaking in Westminster government. 'Capital P' politics is also bringing about changes in the institutional framework of policy advisory systems as the delineation between political and professional careers is becoming increasingly blurred.

Michael de Percy⁴ finishes the section by bringing together several key themes covered by John during his career – government–business relations, comparative politics and industry policy – through a comparison of industry policy in the telecommunications industry, the automotive manufacturing industry, trade policy and reducing carbon emissions. De Percy's examination of ideological preferences versus pragmatism during short terms in office was based on a conversation that began in John's festschrift podcast (de Percy 2019). This chapter also addresses one of John's early interests and the focus of his 1984 PhD thesis: industry policy in the automotive manufacturing industry.

3 John Wanna was Marija Taflaga's PhD supervisor.

4 John Wanna was Michael de Percy's PhD supervisor.

The four chapters cover some of the breadth of John Wanna's interest in politics and its impact on public policy and administration. The range of authors also represents the 'passing of the baton' of the sage experience of the mentor to the emerging skill of the student. John's legacy, from breaking the mould to resisting the pressures of current university financial and career reward arrangements, has hopefully become a legitimate scholarly pursuit for the next generation of Australian political scientists.

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