

# Preface

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The underlying theme of the symposium held by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) and the ANU Crawford School of Public Policy on 21/22 November 2012 was whether economic growth was worth having. Ian Castles argued throughout his illustrious career that economic growth should be an outcome of good policy not a policy objective in its own right. A second theme was the role that broader wellbeing indicators play in informing and shaping public policy. The event brought together a number of distinguished former public servants, politicians and academics as well as current policy advisers including departmental officials from Treasury and the ABS and several eminent Australian economists and other social scientists. The objective was to review contemporary developments in measuring and promoting economic growth and society wellbeing, and the role of economic growth, whilst reflecting upon the work in these fields by Ian Castles AO.

This symposium was held in memory of Ian Castles, who passed away in 2010. As a long-time senior member of the public service, including as Secretary of the Department of Finance, Australian Statistician and Under Secretary in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and subsequently as an academic at ANU and Deputy President of ASSA, Ian dedicated much of his professional career to pursuing a rigorous appraisal of measures and drivers of economic growth and wellbeing. He was also an important advocate for the social sciences, particularly economics and official statistics. Despite the constraints of public service, Ian's contributions over 40 years include an impressive array of fine writings and publications available to the public, a selection of which are included in this collection and were provided as background to the symposium. An overview of Ian's work is provided in Michael Keating's chapter in this book, a speech he gave at the opening dinner.

The context of the symposium and this book is the more recent developments both in Australia and overseas in the measurement of wellbeing and the use of such measures in public policy, and also the renewed debates about 'sustainability' and whether continued economic growth might present unacceptable social and environmental costs for future generations.

To facilitate careful examination of these developments and debates, the symposium and this book explore in some detail three dimensions of the issues involved:

- measuring real income and wellbeing;
- measuring inequality; and
- the possibility of limits to growth, particularly because of climate change, if the wellbeing of future generations is to be protected.

Before coming to these matters, however, the book commences with an overview of the symposium, followed by some broader reflections on the role of economics in defining and promoting wellbeing, including Mike Keating's appreciation of the contributions made by Ian Castles. We have included here two of Ian Castles' most significant contributions not well known beyond close colleagues or not known to be his work. The first, *Economics and Anti-Economics*, was a paper he presented in 1984 to an ANZAAS conference but never published. The second, *Economic Growth: Is it Worth Having?*, was published as Treasury Economic Paper No 2 in 1973 without attribution to Castles, but known to have been written by a small team Castles led at the time. Central to both papers was Ian's conviction that economics as part of the social sciences can and should be used to improve the wellbeing of people however wellbeing is defined by individuals and collective public policy.

While firmly supporting wider concepts of wellbeing, there was almost unanimous agreement among the symposium participants that economic growth is worth having as it is closely linked to improvements in most other aspects of wellbeing and provides opportunities for further action to improve society wellbeing.

We hope this book will promote better understanding of the concepts and measurement of economic growth and wellbeing, support further improvements to the contribution of the social sciences to wellbeing in its broadest sense, and encourage further research.

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