

Executive Director
Greg Lindsay

RECENTLY, the Centre inaugurated the first of a number of initiatives that will lay the foundations for its future programme. To embark on an ever-widening range of activities as we enter our 25th year shows the strength of the CIS and its vision.

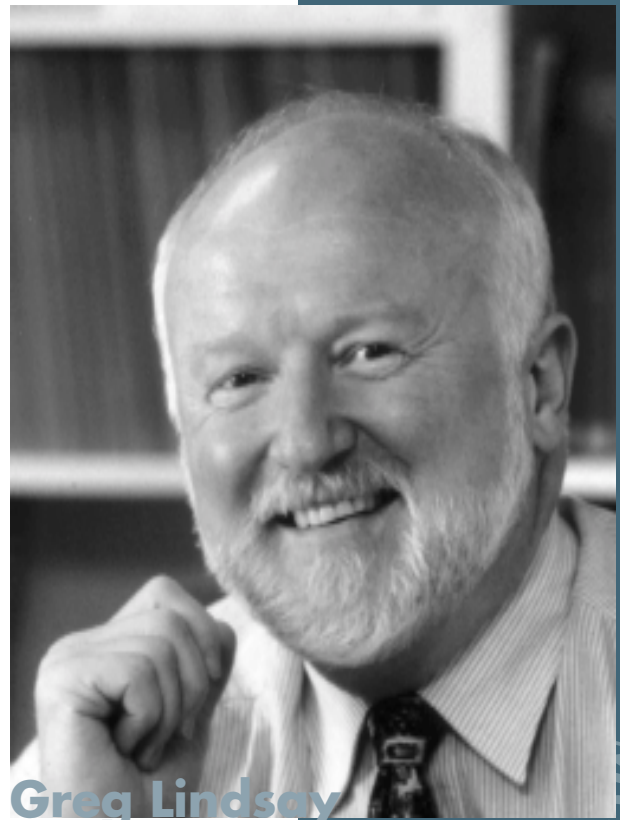
The first of these new activities is Consilium, a public policy conference that has grown out of the Centre's annual Board retreat. Along with most of the Centre's Board and many of our research team, a mix of people from business, government and academia, as well as others from a wide range of backgrounds and interests, met for over two days in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney in May. Consilium was remarkable in the range of issues covered—from central banking to tertiary education reform to an examination of our relationship with Indonesia and Papua New Guinea—and was indicative of the Centre's widening intellectual and policy agenda. 'Seeing the bigger picture' was the underlying theme of Consilium and the inaugural meeting fulfilled that vision magnificently. Invitations to attend the inaugural (and experimental) meeting of Consilium were offered to the Centre's major supporters, but for 2001 we hope to be able to extend invitations more broadly.

At Consilium, a longtime supporter of the Centre and early member of its Board, Mr Ross Graham-Taylor, was made a Distinguished Fellow of the Centre. Ross was one of a number of key individuals who was willing to back my idea of the Centre when it was just an idea. It was the commitment of people like Ross that helped the idea become reality and we all owe him a great debt.

Since the last issue of PreCIS, Dr Murray Horn, Managing Director of the ANZ Bank in New Zealand, has joined the Centre's Board. Dr Horn, who was previously Secretary of the New Zealand Treasury, brings a wealth of policy experience to the Board. Also, two recent appointments have been made to the Centre's Academic Advisory Council. They are Professor Jeff Bennett from the Australian National University and Professor David Robertson from the University of Melbourne. I look forward to working with all three in the coming years.

Throughout its history, the CIS has produced material that has challenged the status quo. We'd be a pretty dull and unimportant place if we didn't. Over more than a decade, for instance, we have been examining aspects of the welfare state's failings. In Australia today, the welfare system provides sufficient income and services for the indigent, disabled, unemployed and other recipients of state assistance to live adequate lives with sufficient to provide essential food, housing and clothing for themselves and their children, provided they manage their affairs sensibly. Despite this, governments are under constant attack from pressure groups anxious to increase welfare. These groups object to any attempts to monitor whether those in receipt of welfare are making efforts within their capacity to escape from welfare support. Things don't seem to be getting better for many. That's where attention must be directed.

Lucy Sullivan's recent monograph, *Behavioural Poverty*, was sure to ruffle some feathers and it has. She questions the objections to expecting more of those able to better look after themselves. She also points out that, after tax, a great many ordinary working families have incomes about the same as welfare dependent and unemployed families. She dared question the welfare status quo exemplified by bodies like ACOSS, and their responses have been typical. 'Ideological', or worse, they called the book. Of course it is. Their own thinking is based on ideas too and the testing of ideas; the accepting of the good and discarding of the bad are all hallmarks of a free society. If the aim of welfarist thinking is to enmesh more and more people and their children into dependence on their fellow citizens, then it has succeeded only too well. The trouble is, I think it's a pretty bad idea.



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