

# AUSTRALIA'S SMART AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## Report from the Roundtable

Thursday 16 May, 2024  
GHD Melbourne Office and online via Zoom

As with the world at large, Australia is confronting the reality of the energy transition, including the overarching challenge of what constitutes sustainable prosperity while addressing the universal scourge that is climate change. The nation is facing a step-change, without precedent since wartime, in adjusting the fundamental elements that underpin its economy – its energy systems, its infrastructure and new and continuing opportunities for sustainable growth.

While the primary focus of the work of the Global Foundation is with the considerable challenges faced by the global energy transition, for which it is launching a project, *'Shaping Agreement on Global Governance, Climate and Nature,'* in Rome on 18 June, the Foundation leadership is also concerned to encourage and assist actors in Australia at the same time.

Feedback from the Foundation's Australian supporters had indicated a need for greater clarity and coherence about the national effort required in order to bring about an effective transition, at such large scale and in a timely manner. These concerns transcended individual political, business and community interests.

On Thursday, 16 May, the Global Foundation, in partnership with GHD, led by CEO, Jim Giannopoulos, convened a hybrid roundtable discussion from Melbourne, involving a limited number of its supporters and affiliates in order to gauge the national state of play and to assess what further contributions it might be able to

make. The roundtable was kindly hosted by GHD in Melbourne and online, and was conducted on the Chatham House basis.

### GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Roundtable participants heard global perspectives about the energy transition from distinguished members of the Global Advisory Council of the Global Foundation, including **Dr Mark Cutifani CBE, Ms Sharan Burrow AC and Professor Enrico Giovannini**, three highly experienced global leaders in mining, trade unions, and sustainable development policy, respectively.

They emphasised that the economic imperatives of the transition are integrally tied to social and political imperatives. It is possible – and, in fact, necessary – for activities designed to advance the energy transition to also bring economic and social benefits. The necessity of a 'social licence' for change was also emphasised. Though the notion of community consultation sometimes generates cynicism, consulting with local communities can illuminate avenues and opportunities that would not have been identified otherwise. Consultation done properly, takes time and genuine effort.

### THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

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The roundtable confirmed the Global Foundation's concern regarding the requirement for greater clarity and coherence about the national effort.

Roundtable participants identified a need for:

- a shared, coherent national ambition
- developing broad, cross-sector coalitions
- building trust in processes
- greater honesty to the community about the realities of the transition
- conversations to be led with positivity

## A SHARED, COHERENT NATIONAL AMBITION

Stalled progress in Australia is in part due to a lack of ambition. Australia needs a shared vision of where it wants to be in 2030, 2050 and beyond, as well as clarity on the pathways to achieve a sustainable future. This includes clear metrics of what constitutes a sustainable investment. It is also necessary for Australia's financial and other regulation to align with the nation's climate commitments.

## DEVELOPING BROAD, CROSS-SECTOR COALITIONS

The question of the energy transition in Australia has tended to fall prey to politics and short-term agendas. It is important for the private sector to have the confidence to continue the energy transition regardless of the politics of the day. To avoid continuing politicisation of the issue, it's imperative to develop broad, cross-sector and bipartisan coalitions that can agree on pathways forward and demonstrate that the issue of the transition transcends political, business, and

individual interests. As a unique platform for dialogue and one that is free from vested interests, there is an opportunity for the Global Foundation to play a role in the formation of such coalitions.

## BUILDING TRUST IN PROCESSES

Participants identified a lack of trust in Australia's processes for consultation and approval of green initiatives. This cynicism from all sides of the table slows down processes and acts as a barrier to change. There is a need to rebuild trust and perhaps reimagine the processes themselves. Without the 'social licence' from people and communities and without the expertise of science and industry, initiatives are likely to fail.

## GREATER HONESTY

Honesty about the realities of the transition is key to regaining trust. The energy transition constitutes another "industrial revolution."

## LEADING CONVERSATIONS WITH POSITIVITY

The approach to the transition shouldn't be adversarial. Significant progress has already been made and though some argue that existing progress has not been at a scale great enough to mitigate the climate crisis, it is more effective to lead conversations about change with positivity than negativity.



**Mr Jim Giannopoulos**  
CEO, GHD



**Dr Mark Cutifani CBE**  
Chair, Global Advisory Council; Chair and Acting CEO, Vale Base Metals



**Ms Sharan Burrow AC**  
Deputy Chair, Global Advisory Council; Global Advocate for Rights and Sustainability



**Prof Dr Enrico Giovannini**  
Former Italian Minister of Sustainable Infrastructures and Mobility



**Mr Mike Fitzpatrick AO**  
Director, Carnegie Clean Energy



**Ms Kristy Graham**  
CEO, Australian Sustainable Finance Institute



**Mr David Bartholomew**  
Independent Director, GHD



**Mr Richard Bolt**  
Principal Advisor, Nous Group; Chair, Hydro Tasmania



**Mr Stephen Jones**  
Low Carbon Solutions Manager - Australia, ExxonMobil