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Ricky Ponting's homilies

REVIEWS

Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk

***Ponting: At the Close of Play*, by Ricky Ponting. Harper Collins, 2013.**

[Website](#)

Barry

It has riled Australian Test cricket captain Michael 'Pup' Clarke, with 'earwitness' accounts of heated exchanges and manhandling. It's offended former skipper Mark 'Tubby' Taylor, with taboo airings of dressing room contretemps. And it's given a media 'free hit' to passed-over leader Shane Warne, who's gone into bat for his protege, Pup. All this, before a summer of cricket and angry commentators really starts cooking.

Record-breaking batsman and former Test captain Ricky 'Punter' Thomas Ponting has given a balls and all account of his decades of on- and off-field dramas, and has not backed away from the short stuff.

Highly successful athletes are often lauded for their tunnel vision or white line fever — the capacity to achieve and stay in a zone of excellence. Ponting records the personal cost of victory and defeat in a role that in Australia is traditionally exaggerated as being second only to the prime ministership. The book, I found, boasts commendable truisms and anecdotes about leadership, integrity, accountability and honesty.

I don't know how you found the 'he said/he said' accounts, Jen, or, for that matter, the 'sledging' controversies and overall 'must win' zeitgeist. I love it. The 47 'Insights' homilies add context to the accounts and subtext to how Ponting wants to be remembered (did you also catch the odd whiff of revisionism?).

Sometimes Punter dumps on mates or foes who reveal character flaws; he also 'fesses up squarely to times that he himself stuffed up. He bags gutless administrators and rages against the machine of cricket bureaucracy, and the high-end lucre that tilts cricket's geopolitics towards the subcontinent.

Striving, winning or losing the contest between bat and ball, sometimes spacking it at teammates and adversaries ... All in all, nothing I haven't seen in microcosm every Sunday morning at Milo cricket with my seven-year-old.

But there is also surprising personal growth on offer. Punter is a bloke's bloke, 'brung up' in a limited but nurturing suburbia of cricket, cricket, golf and cricket. I was genuinely touched by his acknowledgement of the role his wife, Rianna, and their daughters have played in his maturation as an adult human being.

There is also more than a hint of genuine, honest to God bereavement, as the memoirist notes the sometimes turbulent decline and demise of

champions/beloved mates, such as the aforementioned Warnie, Justin Langer, Glenn McGrath, Adam Gilchrist and Matthew Hayden. The surprise retirement/vanishing act of his mate Damien Martyn (Ponting was his best man), in particular, still seems to trouble the author.

Jen, I owe you a big vote of thanks for suggesting this bumper-size cricketophile's opus (which comes in at a glorious 699 pages); it pays homage to Ponting's love of a great game and takes an insider's stickybeak at the people who play it; the difficulties they face and the armwrestle for supremacy that's waged both internally and against their ostensible foes.

Jen

Glorious, Barry? I can think of a few other words to describe Ponting's much-quoted autobiography. Why don't we start with earnest?

'My name is Ricky Thomas Ponting,' says our narrator, 'and I played cricket.' Indeed he did. As Ponting writes, he played for the 'junior cricket, indoor cricket, club cricket, re cricket, state cricket, T20 cricket, one-day cricket and Test cricket' — as Barry attests, what more can a cricketing tragic ask for?

Ponting is to Australian cricket what Stilton is to cheese. During a professional career that spanned more than two decades, 'Punter' was not only synonymous with the baggy green; he stamped upon it his never-say-die brand of captaincy.

Much of Ponting's successes (and perhaps a few of his failures) are due to a nuggety self-belief and determination. 'Cricket was my focus,' he says, recalling his teenage years. 'It was what I knew; it was what I was good at ... '

That says it all, really. While life experiences — travel, a family and charity work, most notably in the area of cancer support — invariably expanded young Ponting's mind, I feel it's fair to say that there remains something of the awkward teen in the man.

Barry's right to point out that there's plenty of salacious detail in this 'explosive autobiography' (fanned by the subsequent 'revelations' told by former teammates Clarke and Warne). What did I make of the 'he said/he said' accounts? Or the 'must win' philosophy at the core of Ponting's leadership? In all honesty by the time we arrive at these accounts I had all but thrown down the bat.

Which brings me to another word that encapsulates this book for me. Protracted. To say that the hardback copy could easily serve as a doorstop is something of an understatement. That it's just shy of 700 pages is indeed small mercy for any reader with little interest in the sport or its players.

This tome may have arrived with a bang, but it left me — granted, hardly a fan of the gentleman's game — in purgatory. After establishing himself as Mr Cricket, Ponting hardly challenges the sporting autobiography's field of vision. He's no scribe, of course, but I would have appreciated insight that went beyond navel

gazing or the forensic (read: tedious) post-analysis of games played and lost.

I'd love to say that Barry's delight when I put this book forward (was I, perhaps, suffering from white-line fever myself?) was compensation enough, but I can't. Yes, Ponting loves cricket. To be fair, he loves his wife and family, too. But having to wade through 699 pages is a lot to ask for an, at best, runs-on-the-board reckoning.

Heed the voice of the wounded child

RELIGION

Moira Rayner

The [findings of Victoria's parliamentary inquiry](#) into the sexual abuse of children in non-government institutions surprise nobody who has been listening. But they are listening to adults, not children. The truth is, we started to talk about emotional, physical and sexual maltreatment as children in the '60s and '70s, when the language and concepts of 'abuse' were developing through the research. The cone of silence started to lift a little. We know now why it did: there were just too many dirty secrets underneath.

And there were a lot more opportunities to talk about them — group and individual therapy, therapeutic and spiritual and 'self-actualisation' movements — and even newly accessible professional, medical, and free and empathetic legal services. As the wounded child within the damaged man or woman spoke, it was eventually realised that if it happened then, it could be happening now.

Unless we take children seriously as people, it will. Unless individuals within the culture of their institution see it as a duty to stick their necks out and challenge its culture, it will. Unless bishops and their helpers and archbishops and cardinals and religious supporting them in their spiritual work take personal responsibility for protecting vulnerable people ahead of protecting the reputation of their institution, it will happen again.

A report of misconduct by even a very powerful person within that institution should not lead to the expulsion of the messenger. It should bring into question the culture of the organisation, that such a report could surface decades after the reported misconduct. It could just happen again. I am acutely aware of the present day experience of Professor Patrick Parkinson, who was asked to advise one Catholic teaching order on its culture, and then withdrew, citing institutional obduracy and avoidance as making the completion of his task impossible.

Still, today, Catholic orders and institutions have chosen to rely on 'the Law' and their insurers' caveats, on avoiding admissions at the cost of empathy and pastoral care, on challenging reporters to proof of facts and liability. It is, to put it mildly, bad spirit. The dirty secrets about the misuses of power come from the structure of the unincorporated church, with its multitude of trusts and shadowed networks.

For hundreds of years, powerful men have decided who gets to talk, and who influences their exercise of authority. For a couple of thousand years the Roman Catholic Church has operated as a feudal empire, now limited monarchy. Even though this started to change a little in the 1960s, the mindset has not.

Only a person with power, in a hierarchy, who does not perceive that 'even' a child is a possessor of dignity and knowledge and a perspective on the world that

comes from their own experience, could assault, seduce, blackmail or gratify their sexual needs on the body of one. But the covering up of that offence, the protection of the offender at the cost of the victim, is far, far worse.

Institutions are a means of protecting and enlarging the power of those who control them. Religious institutions claim their ultimate authority from their founders, which makes challenging their fallible use of power a blasphemy. Once, 'Christendom' was an international institution, and it repressed unorthodoxy and encouraged compliance, while later allowing the saints as thorns in their sides that goaded them back onto the right path. This was in an age when the secular concept of 'incorporation' had no meaning.

Christianity is a diverse community now. Perhaps we should use the word 'incarnation' to reflect the fact that Christian people are the church, and to appreciate the full horror of a hard-hearted priestly response to the agony of a child.

Victoria's path to child sex abuse prosecution

AUSTRALIA

Ray Cassin

Will the recommendations of Victoria's parliamentary inquiry into the sexual abuse of children in non-government institutions be overshadowed by the proceedings of the Royal Commission that is now under way? Probably, but it doesn't matter. The first thing to be said about the Victorian inquiry, which tabled its report, *Betrayal of Trust*, in the state's parliament today (13 November 2013), is that the MPs have done a far better job than many people — including this writer — had expected them to do in the relatively short time allotted to them, and without the resources available to the commission.

The inquiry's recommendations are, with one important exception, carefully considered responses to the evidence the bipartisan committee received from 405 written submissions and in more than 160 hearings. Apart from the exception, of which more later, the Napthine Government should implement these recommendations and, if they are later subsumed under all-state legislation recommended by the Royal Commission, that will not render them pointless. They will have been a model and a guide in dealing with a problem that all forms of institutionalised authority — not only the churches — have preferred to avoid dealing with openly for far too long.

That is not to say, of course, that the sexual abuse of children has ever been condoned, let alone treated as less than a serious offence under criminal law. As the inquiry's report notes, buggery of children under 14 and rape were capital crimes until 1949. But that official abhorrence makes all the more lamentable the fact that until the early 1990s abuse happened extensively in non-government institutions, especially the churches, and that perpetrators were typically redeployed rather than being suspended from their duties and the police notified.

And the biggest adherents to this practice of routine concealment were Catholic bishops and major superiors, just as Catholic priests and religious were proportionately far more numerous among the ranks of perpetrators than were those who worked in other non-government institutions. The figure has been cited before but is worth repeating: Patrick Parkinson, professor of law at the University of Sydney and formerly a consultant to Towards Healing, the Church's national pastoral response to victims of clerical sexual abuse, estimated in his evidence to the inquiry that Catholic clerics and religious outnumbered other institutional perpetrators by six to one.

If the Catholic Church is so frequently mentioned in *Betrayal of Trust*, therefore, Catholics and their clerical leaders can hardly complain. It simply reflects the evidence: among the churches scrutinised by the committee, only the Salvation Army has an even remotely comparable record of abuse in its institutions. Nor is it sufficient response to say that this is because the Church is so heavily committed

to schools and to the provision of welfare services for families and children, becoming thereby a magnet to potential abusers.

The crucial question is why these institutions fostered a culture of secrecy with regard to abuse, and in asking that question and essaying an answer to it the Victorian inquiry is surely a harbinger of the Royal Commission. Expect to hear much more about the relationship between clerical power and secrecy, and about the role of celibacy, on which topic *Betrayal of Trust* offers observations that, though tentative and exploratory, are neither crass nor naïve. Abuse is not deemed to be a product of sexual frustration, but the report does ask whether there is a link between celibacy and the pervasive clericalism of the Catholic Church.

So what about the inquiry's recommendations? The most important of them makes for easier prosecution of those who fail to report a serious indictable offence involving the abuse of a child. Under section 326 of Victoria's Crimes Act, it must be proved that a person who conceals a serious indictable offence received a benefit, and the committee recommends that this 'element of 'gain' should be removed'.

This is paired with a recommendation that a new offence of child endangerment be created, where 'a person gives responsibility to another for the care of children and is aware there is a risk of harm to those children and who fails to take reasonable steps to protect them from that risk'. There will no doubt be lawyerly argument about what being 'aware there is a risk of harm' means and how failing 'to take reasonable steps' should be defined, but both these recommendations should be implemented. The core of the sexual-abuse crisis has been the failures of those in authority, and the state should make it as difficult as possible for such failures to be repeated.

As *Betrayal of Trust* notes: 'No representative of the Catholic Church directly reported the criminal conduct of its members to police. The committee found that there is simply no justification for this position.'

Other recommendations that would make it easier for abuse victims to obtain legal redress should also be implemented: excluding child abuse from the statute of limitations; requiring NGOs in receipt of public funds or tax exemptions to be incorporated and adequately insured; and holding these organisations to be vicariously liable for acts committed by 'agents, representatives or volunteers' deemed to be their employees.

And, although the Church has offered the pastoral processes of Towards Healing and the Melbourne Response as alternatives to the civil justice system, it must be accepted that many victims will doubt whether an internal ecclesiastical process can ever be genuinely independent. The committee is right, therefore, to recommend that the powers of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal should be broadened so that those who for practical, including financial, reasons cannot seek

redress in the courts can be assured of independent resolution of claims.

More dubious than any of the foregoing, however, is the committee's recommendation that another new offence of 'grooming' be created, which would not require a substantive offence of sexual abuse to have been committed. There is no doubt that the grooming of intended victims, especially with the new opportunities for abusers that have arisen in the age of the internet, is an insidious activity. But it amounts to the cultivation of friendship with an intended victim, and often with the victim's family, too.

What makes this a process of grooming other than the committing of a substantive offence? And how easily could it be distinguished from acceptable conduct by teachers, clergy and youth workers? In some cases the danger signals would be real and apparent early, but in others well-intentioned behaviour might easily be misunderstood. The committee's desire to find a legislative remedy for grooming is understandable, but it is difficult to see how such a law could be drafted without running too great a risk of prosecuting the innocent with the guilty.

Troubled Belfast's rickety punk prophet

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Good Vibrations (M). Directors: Lisa Barros D'Sa, Glenn Leyburn. Starring: Richard Dormer, Jodie Whittaker. 103 minutes

'New York has the haircuts. London has the trousers. But Belfast has the reason!'

At the height of The Troubles of 1970s Belfast music lover Terri Hooley opened a record store and dubbed it Good Vibrations. That callback to the warm-hazed, LSD love-in of a romanticised 1960s (a la US pop geniuses The Beach Boys) was inherently counter-cultural, in a city riven by violent hatred between Catholic and Protestant. Certainly the non-religious and charismatic Terri managed to stand outside and above the conflict, and so became a kind of rickety prophet to Belfast's disaffected youth, as godfather of the city's burgeoning punk music scene.

Good Vibrations sets Terri's (Dormer) story within its socio-political context, but with a light touch that makes it highly accessible. There's stacks of irreverent humour, and a lot of music, especially from Hooley protégés, seminal Belfast punk bands The Undertones and The Outcasts. Terri's first Outcasts gig, where he 'discovers' punk, is nothing short of a religious experience, as he goes from awe at the raptness of the heaving, roaring crowd, to joining them in uninhibited physical expression of the music's anti-establishment fury and visceral transcendence.

The film follows a predictable formula, as Terri's idealism and often ill-founded optimism rubs uneasily against practical realities and the responsibilities that come with interpersonal relationships. As a would-be music exec he is determined to eschew the capitalist mantras of the big record labels. He wants his Good Vibrations label to be a platform for bringing music to the world, not a source of personal profit. But he embraces this principle to the detriment not only of his own finances, but also of his marriage to the patient yet long-suffering Ruth (Whittaker).

Their relationship, portrayed perhaps a tad earnestly, at least provides some emotional grounding both for Terri and for the ramshackle film itself. Its unorthodox origins predate the Good Vibrations record store — Terri meets and woos Ruth after she appears, dancing with blissful abandon in the otherwise deserted bar where Terri is DJ-ing — through its romantic early years and into its strained latter days. Initially supportive of Terri's dedication to his punk vocation, Ruth inevitably (and understandably) grows weary of the neglect this entails for herself.

Formulaic or not, *Good Vibrations* is vicious good fun. Watch Terri unwittingly sabotage his own efforts to obtain a major record deal for The Outcasts: nervous

about rubbing shoulders with fine-suited bigwigs in London, he decides to take the edge off with a line or two of cocaine — bad idea. He obtains the drugs from a friend and former street-level dealer from Belfast who is living like a prince off his illicit proceeds; his 'business' success stands in stark contrast to Terri's refusal to grasp the capitalist horn, yet is itself inherently anti-establishment.

Good Vibrations makes these kinds of emotional and softly satirical points without passing judgement on its self-evidently flawed characters. Ultimately it is a celebration of the sense of community and belonging that comes from a shared love of music. In one scene, a British soldier pulls over the Good Vibrations musos' dilapidated tour bus and is astonished to discover that its congenial occupants are variously Catholic and Protestant. In the very next scene Terri arrives home to horrific news footage of the latest round of sectarian violence to singe the city.

If any community had a reason to embrace the rage and unity of punk culture, it was Terri Hooley's Belfast.

Church's family reality check

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The invitation by the Vatican to lay Catholics to offer their views on the family to the coming Synod is welcome. It is an understandably awkward first step, but the document that accompanies the discussion questions shows the need for wide consultation. The document illuminates by its silences as well as by its words the immense challenges the Synod faces.

The document was written primarily for bishops and assumes familiarity with theological terms and arguments. It is followed by 40 questions grouped under eight headings. They invite discursive responses which will be collated and synthesised and sent to the Vatican where presumably they will be further synthesised. The risk in this process is that a homogenised document emerges that loses the sharpness and diversity of the original submissions.

Three features of the document suggest the challenges facing the Synod. The first is the striking contrast between the ideal of the Christian family that it proposed and the reality of child rearing in our society.

The document represents a fairly traditional Catholic theology of the family, setting it within a high theology and expressed in elevated language. This theology, of course, has been developed principally by celibate men, no doubt familiar with family life through their childhood and pastoral ministry, but at a distance from it. They may know that young parents may be up five times a night to tend to a teething baby, but the knowledge is not carved into their hearts and minds.

The gap between the ideal Christian family and the relationships in which children are reared in Australia is large. Many children are reared by single parent families, by serial parents, in unmarried partnerships, in blended families and in same sex relationships. Many Catholics, too, are married outside the Catholic Church.

This contrast is significant because it makes it harder to argue persuasively that the rearing of children within a monogamous and enduring family is the normative state for all human beings rather than an ideal for the few. It makes more plausible the argument that state regulation and formalisation of marriage and family ought to be separated from church regulation and ceremonies. This in turn makes it more difficult to appeal in public conversation to arguments based on natural law.

Second, the account of family life in the document is coloured by nostalgia. It looks back to a period when marriage alone had legal sanction, most marriages were in churches, divorce was difficult if not impossible, to be born out of wedlock was a stigma, and there was no social support for raising children outside of

marriage.

Nostalgia tends to overlook the harsher aspects of relationships within many duly married families: the incidence of domestic violence, of loveless relationships, of neglected and abused children, the damaged health and early death of so many women, and the inequality of husband and wife.

It is also easy to forget that critics of such family arrangements were motivated by concern for the human dignity of wives and children who were trapped in abusive relationships. They were led to press for divorce and for tolerance of different forms of child rearing by the failures in practice of the Christian ideal of marriage when embodied in law and custom.

Whether changes in social mores have ultimately benefited or disadvantaged women and children is open to debate. But to ignore the failures of societies in which the Christian understanding of family life was imposed by law, and the ethical passion of many of its critics, is to underestimate the challenge facing Christian reflection on the family today.

The third challenge for the Synod lies in a significant omission in the document. It shows little interest in the correlation of patterns of child rearing and marriage with fashions in economic theory and developments in technology.

In an economic order that is constructed around the participation of individuals in the market and values people by their financial success, it is expected that both adult partners will work to sustain the economy. Those who cannot engage in paid work are stigmatised and their benefits kept very low.

This shapes family life. For example, someone who came to Australia from a rural society where the family was the economic unit may have been one of nine or ten siblings, but in Australia will have only one or two children. And it will be normal for the children to be placed in child care so that both parents can work.

The place of the market in society will always be the subject of debate, but when it becomes the lens through which a culture evaluates the world, religious faith and the relationships in which the raising of children are set will be seen as matters of purely private choice.

That suggests that when Catholics reflect on the future both of church and family, they should first ask whether the ordering of the economy serves human values.

Greek consolations in stone

INTERNATIONAL

Gillian Bouras

The last time I was in the Athens-Kalamata bus I happened to sit next to an older woman, a widow, who was very excited to be returning to her *patritha*. Having married a German, she had been away from the scenes of her youth for a long time, so that she gasped and sighed over familiar sights, and at the changes time had wrought.

As the bus neared its terminus, she clutched my arm, pointed, and said, 'There it is: that's my work; that's why I'm here.' I saw nothing but a large white plinth. But a few days later, I observed a Statue of Liberty in place, and the name inscribed on the plinth made it obvious the statue had been donated by my travelling companion.

The bronze edifice follows convention: Liberty/Eleftheria is a female usually swathed in flowing robes: she holds aloft either a sword or a flame. Beneath this particular statue is a relief that shows the events of 23 March 1821, when the Greek War of Independence started, two days ahead of schedule, right here in Kalamata. The scene of priests and warriors bears the legend: *With one voice, we have decided to live or die for our freedom.*

The problem is that the town already has two similar statues. Did it need another? Statues are, of course, a very Greek thing. Busts of military heroes and departed civic dignitaries are all over Kalamata, while rows of long-gone bishops grace the forecourt of the Cathedral. Predictably, my foreign friends and I rumbled and grumbled. All that money. What about the hospital? What about the poor and unemployed? What about children going hungry?

I was in a state of doubt. As usual. *Perhaps people will feel encouraged and uplifted*, I ventured, but subsided when my ex-Sydney friend came forth with a scathing *Oh, come on!*

In Jessica Anderson's fine novel *Tirra Lirra by the River*, narrator Nora Porteous, reflecting in a series of seamless flashbacks on her difficult life, tells the reader that she is in love with beauty. She becomes a dressmaker who also does exquisite embroidery. Much of her life, during which she moves from Brisbane to Sydney to London and back again, is spent in an often unconscious search for sensibilities that match her own.

During the search she consoles herself with her work, and with reading what a like-minded friend calls 'the great big beautiful classics'. At the end of the novel, Nora recalls her father's funeral, and a voice that makes the comment: *A fine ceremony, madam! A verry fine ceremony!* Nora's last words and those of the novel are: *I think it consoled me, a little. I think ceremony always has, a little.*

Although the tourist season in Greece was better than expected, there is otherwise not much cause for cheer. PM Antonis Samaras says that recovery will take six years: other people are more pessimistic.

Suicide rates have risen alarmingly in a country where formerly they were very low, and the young continue to seek opportunities elsewhere. Strikes and demonstrations occur regularly, and until recently the political scene has been marred by the rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. But in a shocking episode, a left wing musician was last month stabbed to death by a Golden Dawn member. Pavlos Fyssas was 34, and his death led, in a move itself fraught with hazard, to a long-overdue governmental crackdown on the party.

Nora was in love with beauty; Greeks have always been in love with freedom. And they know that ordinary people have fought for it, and are keeping on fighting. Fortuitously, I have come across some lines written by another novelist, the mighty George Eliot, who maintained that the 'growing good of the world' (a concept with which I struggle) 'is partly dependent on unhistoric acts.' Such good, she went on to say, was 'half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs'.

Perhaps that's it. The newest Statue of Liberty, donated by an exile, certainly acknowledges that age-old love that countless hidden and unknown Greeks have lived and died for. And perhaps the statue also consoles. A little.

Mishandling Indonesia

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin

Following the interception late last week of an asylum seeker vessel approximately 43 nautical miles south of Java, Operation Sovereign Borders Commander Angus Campbell told media that 'all people have been accounted for'. When pressed by journalists for further detail, the Minister for Immigration Scott Morrison simply reiterated, 'The Commander has made it very clear ... that all the persons on the vessel have been accounted for.'

At the time that Morrison and Campbell were stubbornly sticking to this empty terminology, these persons had in fact for many hours already been safely on board an Australian border protection vessel. Why didn't they say so? Isn't it appropriate promptly to inform the public when a maritime rescue operation has been successful?

The use of the evasive term 'accounted for' caused me great concern. There are five known cases of asylum seekers drowning off their own boats, after their boats had been taken into custody by Australian border protection vessels. During the 2001 Operation Relex period, there was SIEV 10 (a fatal sinking from a cooking stove fire) and SIEV 7 (unexplained deaths during towback). SIEV 4 was a near-death case of a boat that foundered without warning with all its passengers and an Australian boarding party from *HMAS Adelaide* on board.

Under Labor: SIEV 36 exploded with an Australian boarding party on board, causing deaths. And on 13 and 16 July 2013, there were two more [events](#), SIEV 784 and SIEV 794, involving deaths from boats already in Australian custody. It is reasonable to conclude that people from these boats are never truly safe until offloaded either onto a safe Australian vessel or at Christmas Island.

The next day, Morrison issued an embarrassing [clarification](#) on what had happened to the (as he now admitted) 'rescued' passengers: 'In the best interests of the safety of the passengers and crew of the rescued vessel and the Australian vessel that has been rendering assistance, earlier this morning I requested Lieut-General Campbell to transfer the persons rescued ... to Christmas Island for rapid onward transfer to Manus Island or Nauru.'

By this time, there had been extensive Australian media reporting sourced from Jakarta on what had happened since the boat had sent its first distress call to Australian authorities, reporting engine failure, when it was 43 miles from Java, in international waters and in the Indonesian SAR zone which extends to Christmas Island.

An Australian vessel went to inspect, and asked Indonesia to take back the boat or its passengers. Indonesia declined, giving various reasons. When *HMAS Ballarat* first inspected the boat, it found it initially seaworthy and sailed away. The engine

subsequently failed irreparably. The people — understood to be about 56 — were then removed to the safety of *ACV Ocean Protector* at a point around 60 nautical miles from Indonesia.

There then ensued many hours of diplomatic standoff, resolved finally by unusually firm public language from a spokesman for the senior Indonesian minister now in charge of the matter, Djoko Suyanto, Indonesian coordinating minister for Legal, Political and Security Affairs. Suyanto's spokesman Agus Barnas said the government's policy was that Indonesia should no longer accept asylum seekers from Australia. Barnas [told](#) *The Guardian*:

From what I've been told, the boat was fine and they were not in danger ... If that's the case, then we reject it. We don't want Indonesia to be a dumping ground, but we don't want Australia to accuse us of not doing anything. We want to respect Australia. At least for the time being we will not accept them.

Strong words. The diplomatic warning signs should have been clear to Morrison and OSB many weeks ago. As far back as 29 September, a senior Indonesian academic Hikmahanto Juwana [commented](#) to the *Jakarta Post* that the Indonesian Government had come to the view that BASARNAS (the Indonesian search and rescue agency) was acting as Australia's 'paid agent', receiving illegal funds from and working for the Australian government in regard to the handling of refugees and asylum seekers.

The article was a strong signal that the Indonesian government had lost confidence in BASARNAS and that Australia should not try to use BASARNAS's statutory maritime rescue role to process boat turnbacks or passenger returns. Two passenger returns had been allowed as a diplomatic courtesy on the eve of Tony Abbott's first visit to Jakarta as Australia's prime minister. None have been allowed since.

On 9 November, Juwana [commented](#) on the latest incident, saying that governmental relations between the two countries would now only worsen. He said the atmosphere of distrust sparked over issues of wiretapping and asylum seekers 'had strained relations indefinitely ... Only by addressing the issues openly can relations improve.'

Such Australian stubbornness has set back relations. Australia has behaved like an importunate suitor who would not take a lady's polite face-saving rejection for an answer, pressing ahead to the point where Indonesia had to say very firmly and publicly 'We will not tolerate this any longer.'

Labor predictably has been making a political [meal](#) of the mishandled affair. But neither Bill Shorten nor Richard Marles has shown any sympathy or kind words for the rescued asylum seekers at the centre of the story. No doubt Labor is equally sceptical as the Coalition as to the authenticity of the distress signals in this case. Labor may not wish to remember the discomfiting details of how 1100 people died at sea under Labor's border protection watch, when similar scepticism and

dilatoriness sometimes had fatal consequences.

It's a sad and embarrassing episode. Australian politicians from both parties continue to dehumanise asylum seekers in distress at sea.

There is one silver lining. From what we know, the on-water rescue-at-sea response of *HMAS Ballarat* and *ACV Ocean Protector* was correct. They did not leave asylum seekers in situations of danger on their unsafe boat after Australian interception and inspection. For this, we should be thankful.

My Philippines typhoon fury

INTERNATIONAL

Fatima Measham



I was in Cagayan de Oro in the southern island of Mindanao, Philippines on 16 December 2011. All that Friday and through the night, rain poured. Later we were told that over a 24-hour period, rainfall at Lumbia (a weather bureau station) exceeded its monthly average by 60 per cent. This coincided with a 1.2m high tide late that night. But our sense of severe tropical storm Washi (local name Sendong) preceded these meteorological figures.

We felt the pall the following morning before we even saw the river. My prevailing memory is of mud: on the streets, on people with shock-hardened faces. When I did finally see the river, I felt weak in the bones. It had become a monstrous, brown slurry, with barely recognisable traces of dwellings left on its banks. My dad drove us through hard-hit areas, some of which saw floodwaters rise to as much three metres in an hour. In the deepest night, some people simply ran out of time. I called my family several times after we arrived in Australia.

Normality was long in returning to Cagayan de Oro, with clean water being scarce and power down in several areas. It took a while for students to go back to school. My mum said that, even a couple months after, children would whimper at the sound of rain. Literally. That pierced. I have childhood memories of playing in the rain. In the tropics, the rain falls warm and soft. We would muck around, wet as fish, laughing into the sky to catch the drops. But in the wake of Washi, what once filled me with joy instead fills children with fear.

I spent two-thirds of my life in the Philippines and recall no storms or typhoons ever having the sort of impact that Washi had on Mindanao. When I wrote about it at the time, I pointed to human factors such as over-mining and logging, inadequate infrastructure, poor risk management and disaster preparation, incompetence and culpability. Certainly when Bopha hit the Davao region, hard lessons had been learned from Washi, which probably helped mitigate casualties.

But the truth is that whatever adaptive measures may be taken, the intensity and frequency of typhoons have worsened. This is not debatable. This is reality. Excluding super typhoon Haiyan (which made landfall in the Visayas on Friday), five of the 10 deadliest cyclones in the Philippines occurred in the past decade: Winnie in 2004, Durian in 2006, Fengshen in 2008, Washi in 2011 and Bopha in 2012.

Even if we concede that increased population accounts for such fatalities, the scale of destruction — damaged or destroyed infrastructure, services and agriculture — remains alarming. Six of the 10 costliest typhoons in the Philippines, typically in hundreds of millions of dollars, also occurred in the past decade

(Fengshen in 2008, Parma and Ketsana in 2009, Megi in 2010, Nesat in 2011 and Bopha in 2012). Notice the yearly succession. Then think about the fact that Washi, Bopha and Haiyan also broke local and international records within a year of each other.

It was hard for me not to completely bawl when I saw the satellite images of Haiyan (local name Yolanda) as it bore down upon the central islands. Every indicator showed that it was a behemoth. According to Eric Holthaus (Quartz), one real-time estimate of Haiyan's intensity maxed out — ticked slightly above — the Dvorak scale (which measures strength using satellite imagery).

I may have gotten extremely swearsy on social media. Part of it was due to gut-deep fear for people to whom I am personally connected, but also generally for a country that runs in my veins. The other part of it was fury — a useless one, ultimately — that the growing reality of extreme weather events is still being characterised as normal or natural by climate change sceptics who have the luxury of speculating and refuting links outright.

They hide behind the word 'cause' (as in 'climate change did not cause these bushfires/hurricanes') which gives away an unscientific understanding of risk. As Kevin Trenberth at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (US) says: 'The answer to the oft-asked question of whether an event is caused by climate change is that it is the wrong question. All weather events are affected by climate change because the environment in which they occur is warmer and moister than it used to be.'

It infuriates me when people (politicians, pundits, quasi-scientists) reckon that it is business as usual around here. Or that it is part of some 'cycle' which is the lot of people who contribute least to climate change and are least equipped to deal with extreme events, to endure.

The narrative out of Haiyan — as it ever is in Philippine disasters — will be one of Filipino resilience, which is not untrue. But as stories and images emerge out of places like Leyte and Cebu, my despondence intersects with rage. I realise now that whenever I have referred to island-nations such as the Maldives but not the Philippines when it comes to climate change, I was suppressing very personal anxieties.

Refuge Cove

CREATIVE

Warrick Wynne

Driving into the future

Driving west with the future gloriously uncertain
we stopped for a photo near the Twelve Apostles
and later her alone, leaping weightless
over the river at Apollo Bay.

I remember us walking the moon-shaped
curve of the long beach, the motel room
filled with the sound of the sea, thinking
this was the end of something, or the beginning.

Next morning, I hauled her oversized photos inside
and waited by the printing presses,
solid and impenetrable as the metal sea,
trying to imagine her living here.

We took the inland way home,
left the long blue fringe behind us,
in the back of the car, her art
rolled up in rumbling cardboard tubes.

Prom bird

Wren is just genus
Blue descriptive
Superb superfluous

Refuge Cove

Above the sea in slanted light,
the earth before me blunted
by an impassable shadow,
the bay and an unbroken sea of calm
converge, two arms tapering

to distance and swirls of yellow sand
separating bay from stillness,
calm from swirling chaos, lines of wind
and swell pushing slowly past and away.
Behind, the cliffs are already in shadow
But the sun falls on this calm place,
the sun falls still on these untroubled waters.

New Camping

Canvas has been replaced by
branded versions of nylon
but the architecture remains,
poles soaring beyond fine fly-wire mesh
to an impossible apex,
a mountaineering space backlit
like stained glass, rising
from pegged earth
to awkward crescendo,
an airy cathedral
cradling the silver tubing
of a flickering Maglite torch.

Fronts

At some time, over central Australia
we met air that had been disturbed,
and we rocked back and forth, gently at first
then more strongly, a pitching with the sense
that we were falling or bucking, or riding
a wave of air that, had sometime in the past,
passed over a mountain range or tangled
itself with another system, a trough that spiralled
across a continent, until we met it

and felt the history of the air
in the movement of our bodies
that were jostled gently, or firmly
through the passage of this stiff metal shell
crossing over into a new front.
Flying over Australia
The interior,
cresselated brown
featureless, like the bottom of the sea,
ridge, brown-splattered
with the shadows of clouds.
It is the colour of ore: brown, orange,
stained with the accumulated minerals
of millennia.
Later on, far north
the scattered clouds, white
below us, throwing down hundreds
of cool imaginary lakes.

Eddie Obeid's need for legal aid

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

Corrupt former NSW Labor minister Eddie Obeid has [sought](#) public funds to cover his legal fees. In July the Independent Commission Against Corruption found Obeid and his family had made \$30 million by rigging the tender for a mining licence. But Obeid and his legal team have argued the seemingly unlikely case that he was eligible for legal assistance under guidelines that take into account the public interest and the 'prospect of hardship to the witness if assistance is declined'.

The wealthy are more likely to know and exercise their legal entitlements than the poor. They can afford expensive professional advice to help them find loopholes in the law. This often involves self-delusion and spurious argumentation in an attempt to have it accepted that they are 'doing it tough'. Obeid is worried his costly legal battles are swallowing his ill gotten gains and that consequently he will end up penniless. He has already put his \$10 million Hunters Hill mansion on the market.

Meanwhile those who are genuinely disadvantaged are too often crushed by poor self esteem, or are simply ignorant of their entitlements, and often fail to claim the assistance that is rightfully theirs. That is the conclusion from the recent Legal Australia-Wide (LAW) [Survey](#) that shows high levels of disadvantage are associated with a lower likelihood of taking action and seeking professional advice in response to legal problems.

The survey's key findings indicate that people with a disability, and single parents, are twice as likely to experience legal problems. The unemployed and people living in disadvantaged housing also have heightened vulnerability. The survey also found the Indigenous people are more likely to experience multiple legal problems including government, health and rights related problems.

It found a lack of awareness of free legal services, and that this is associated with lower levels of taking action and consulting legal professionals. In particular, Indigenous people are less likely to take action and use legal professionals if they live in more remote areas.

A society that cares for its citizens should ensure that publicly funded legal assistance is delivered to those who need it, and not to those who simply want it. It seems our system is geared towards people who are capable and practised in helping themselves, such as Eddie Obeid, and that it leaves out in the cold those who live a more passive existence, often involuntarily. These people are the ones who really struggle to make ends meet and to resolve the conflicts that life serves up to them. They need our help.

War fires should be left to smoulder

AUSTRALIA

David Stephens

Remembrance Day has always been for Australians a quieter affair than Anzac Day, particularly as Anzac Day in recent years has taken on a brassy, bragging style. Most of us now do not even pause at 11am on 11 November. But perhaps there will be quietness during the day to think some thoughts about killing and dying. We may also unearth some clues about our life as a nation.

The American jurist and Civil War veteran, Oliver Wendell Holmes, famously said, 'We have shared the incommunicable experience of war'. Holmes spoke for all veterans of his war and all other wars. Yet if the experience of war is 'incommunicable', we still talk and write an awful lot about it. If you type the single word 'war' into the Amazon search box, you get more than half a million entries.

If something is 'incommunicable' then why so much communication? Holmes himself provided part of the answer: 'We have felt, we still feel, the passion of life to its top ... In our youths, our hearts were touched with fire.' Those who have gone through the fire, who have been passionate to this full measure, empathise with others who have done similar things and felt similar emotions. On the other hand, these men and women often find it difficult to pass on the experience to those who were not there.

Wives, families and observers have frequently remarked upon the reluctance of veterans to talk of their wars. Most writing about war comes from people who did not serve in the conflict being written about. The American Civil War continues to attract a steady stream of volumes. World War I has generated thousands of books, with many more to come during the centenary. Then there is World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and numerous other smaller conflicts, all with their own literature.

Why? Wars change history, often in unexpected ways. They are fascinating and exciting, with battles and sieges, the birth and death of nations, great and flawed leaders, masses of men under arms, heroism and cowardice, courage and cruelty, the broad sweep of grand strategy, military campaigns requiring analysis and explanation, individual human stories evoking sadness and regret. There is Lincoln and Antietam, Gallipoli and Edith Cavell, the Western Front and the Unknown Soldier, Anne Frank and Dresden, 600,000 Americans in Vietnam and Kim Phuc, Ben Roberts-Smith VC and Waziristan villagers taken out by American drones.

The treatment of war often takes a didactic or even semi-religious aspect. Recently, Brendan Nelson, the director of the Australian War Memorial, has taken to recommending the 'Anzac' values depicted on the stained glass windows around the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier — devotion, comradeship, coolness,

endurance and so on — as a guide to virtuous living for young Australians. The historian Ken Inglis described Anzac as Australia's civil religion. Although we were the first country anywhere to come together under a national constitution after a mass popular vote, we downplay Federation and venerate instead a failed military campaign in Turkey in 1915.

The interest in Anzac and in wars generally has intensified in Australia since around 1990. Does the sound and fury of war merit this sharp focus?

Some observers have suggested we obsess about Anzac (and Pozières and Fromelles) because we have had relatively few wars, compared with, say, Britain. Yet we have been involved in some kind of war for much of the last 75 years, in World War II, Korea, Malaya, Konfrontasi, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iraq again.

There is another possibility. Graeme Davison, in his 2009 Menzies Lecture, characterised modern young Australians trekking to the Dardanelles as like Ulysses in Greek legend. There was an element of Ulysses also in the journeys of the original Anzacs, many of whom had imbibed as children the myths of Greece and Rome, but today 'the old themes of patriotic duty and sacrifice have receded in favour of an emphasis on travel and risky adventure'.

Davison argued that the Odyssey narrative has a strong appeal to a people who have always valued their worth in terms of how they are seen by great and powerful friends. Reliving the Anzac myth leads us into 'a chauvinistic attempt to prove ourselves in the eyes of others'. This strange Odyssey begins at home, though. The way we make much of Anzac suggests we still have a lot of maturing to do as a nation. At least the Remembrance Day minute was brief and dignified.

Our recent obsession with making pilgrimages to battlefields, and with commemorating and sacralising and trying to understand the experience of war, has overshadowed other equally memorable and important but rather less showy parts of our history. It is said that, in our daily lives at home or at work, the urgent often drives out the important. In living our national lives, we are letting the noisy and exciting swamp what really matters.

Until we make real progress in other fields — making multiculturalism work under pressure rather than simply as a slogan, for example, or reconciling meaningfully between black and white — Anzac will remain in place as a bloated and disproportionate national myth.

What the postmaster saw

AUSTRALIA

Brian Matthews

It is Melbourne Cup eve, 5.30am. Magpies chortle, querulous seagulls bicker on the beach, the first light of day flashes from the rising tide. Why am I up and about at this hour? Well, I'm simply going to the newsagent — which is also the post office — at dawn.

Let me explain. In this small coastal town, the combined newsagency and post office is run by Mac. Like rural postmasters and mistresses of story and legend, Mac is full of tales and theories, knows just about everyone and observes their comings and goings, likes and dislikes, eccentricities, qualities and faults.

'You're a writer,' he says to me one day, 'you should spend a day here some time, learn a bit about the passing parade.'

So, it's arranged for the day before the Melbourne Cup when, as well as locals, there will be long weekenders, day trippers and all kinds of other 'blow-ins', as Mac amiably calls them.

'I'll come down around eight,' I say.

'Six o'clock is when we get moving. See you then.'

And that's how I come to be admiring the beach in the half light of dawn on the day before the Melbourne Cup.

'This is a beautiful time of day,' Mac says as we manoeuvre various displays — hats, sunglasses, toys, paperbacks — to their positions outside the shop. 'And it's different every morning.'

By half past six most of the preparatory work is done. The computers are glowing, things are where they should be, papers are on their racks: 'We're out of gaol,' Mac says. Although neither the newsagency nor the post office is officially open, a bloke wanders in and buys an *Age*. A chap in bike rider's Lycra and a woman in running gear follow — so like it or not, the day has begun.

Within an hour or so the shop is humming with talk and movement. Mac is unfailingly courteous, but he has some iron rules. A woman at the counter who talks ceaselessly into her mobile phone receives a steely glare and silence. Someone with both ears plugged into his iPod finds Mac has also suddenly and inexplicably gone deaf.

He knows the locals, of course. Each new arrival is threaded into a sort of endless conversation which functions at two levels — greetings to the customer and side-of-the-mouth asides to me.

'This bloke coming in now,' he tells me quietly, 'is a retired supreme court

judge. Argues the point about everything.'

'Good morning, Your Honour.'

'This one was a neurosurgeon — very difficult bastard.'

'Lovely morning, Doc.'

'Watch this woman, Brian. She'll have the exact change in ten cent pieces in a special purse.'

'Good morning — two dollars thirty.'

She hands over twenty-three coins.

'Can you give me two \$5 notes for a ten?' says a fresh-faced youth.

'I can give you one,' Mac says, 'fair enough?'

Rick, who runs what he calls Caf  Armageddon next door, drops in for change and pretends amazement to hear that I'm writing about Mac.

'See me,' he says, 'I'll tell you all you need to know — and it's not pretty.'

Just before eight, the mail arrives and Mac combines sorting with serving. A steady stream of people is now winding through the shop, and a queue builds up at the post office counter.

'The computer's gone slow,' Mac apologises to the nearest customer.

'Well, it is Monday,' she says.

By 9am the pressure has relaxed a little only to be pumped up again by the arrival of lots of children. They are everywhere, mostly under people's feet.

'Well, you better get your bets on,' Mac advises a very small boy whose look of utter incomprehension combines bewilderment with that expression of corrosive scorn that little kids so often reserve for their more stupid elders.

The newsagency's Melbourne Cup Sweeps are filling up rapidly. For the more knowledgeable punters Mac occasionally gives a cryptic tip with the change: "'Sheer talent", Race eight — know the owner.' Or, 'Race 5 number 5, mate. Dead set' — neither saluted.

During a mid-afternoon lull, we chat in his tiny office. I learn that cards, toys, gifts, stationery and art supplies are where the money is and that there's little return on newspapers and magazines. That, as captain of the local B Grade cricket team, Mac made 71 not out and took four wickets on Saturday and the local paper didn't even bloody mention him. And that post office box users who complain might find a huge black and red rubber spider squatting on their mail

The day ends with another rush of customers and then, around 5.30pm — a neat 12 hours since I started — I help him trundle all the display gear back inside.

With the doors closed, Mac produces a couple of stubbies and, leaning on the nearest counter, we toast what he reports has been a 'very good day'.

Walking home, I reflect that this experience amounts to more than its confusion of fragments. In its small way it is a glimpse into the 'frail, travelling coincidence' of a community, the benign pulse of the everyday.

Coalition's car kill is crazy

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin

Along with its planned abandonment of carbon market pricing, the Coalition's impending destruction of the Australian car industry by calculated public stalling of decisions on government assistance is shaping up as its most disastrous high-visibility policy blunder. This is Australia's version of US Tea Party budget brinkmanship

Consider the policy inconsistencies. The Abbott Government proposes to throw billions at an overgenerous planned maternal leave scheme that nobody really wanted, and billions more at generous discretionary handouts to industries that cut carbon pollution, in the vain hope of reaching a 5 per cent reduction that will be too low to help slow global warming anyway. It proposes to build submarines in Australia at vast expense compared to off-the-shelf imported submarines. The decision to exclude the Chinese market leader Huawei — the cheapest world supplier of equipment — from any involvement in Australian telecommunications will cost taxpayers billions.

None of these policies has anything to do with responding to market forces. Yet finance ministers Hockey and Cormann, heartened by a steady drumbeat of support from influential economics commentators like the *Australian Financial Review's* [Alan Mitchell](#), are ready to sacrifice Australia's car industry on the altar of an economic theory which abhors the relatively paltry \$500 million per annum assistance paid to this industry under Labor. This industry — but none other — is to be wilfully abandoned as a victim of rigid free-market economic ideologies.

It does not make sense, in economic, social or national security terms.

The hapless Minister for Industry, Ian Macfarlane, is struggling to keep General Motors and Toyota manufacturing in Australia on uncommitted temporary government assistance through 2014. Later that year the Productivity Commission will issue its report; its entirely predictable advice will be to kill the industry by ending assistance.

Abbott will then face the same tough political decision as PM that he is avoiding now. But perhaps he hopes that Holden and Toyota will save him the odium, by doing meanwhile what Ford has already done — announcing the shutdown of manufacturing in Australia. He could then say it was not his decision, it was market forces.

MacFarlane's other senior Cabinet colleagues — Pyne, Johnston, Truss, Joyce — all have portfolio or electorate interest in a viable Australian motor vehicle manufacturing industry. Their silence is puzzling.

There are sound national interest policy arguments for continuing to assist GM

Holden and Toyota car manufacturing in Australia, and announcing this decision without waiting for the Productivity Commission report.

These companies make good, technically advanced cars of which Australia can be proud. They sell well, and set a standard of performance in Australian conditions for imported cars to meet. They help maintain a complex skills base in this country and a level playing field for every Australian car buyer.

Strategically, Australia needs to retain this mix of technical capabilities in-country. Designing and building a modern car is not simple. Purist economists may sniff at these as older low-level technologies, but national metal-fabricating and engine-building technologies and assembly lines could quickly be converted to making armoured trucks and weapons platforms if ever needed. The future is uncertain. Australia should not abandon its ongoing manufacturing capacity to make large numbers of motorised defence vehicles if we ever had to in a hurry.

And there is nothing primitive about the IT-rich control systems in our current cars. Cars like the Cruze or Camry Hybrid are right up there with imports.

The flow-on economic and social effects of closing these industries are huge: 8000 jobs would be lost in SA, 30,000 in Victoria. Flow-on job losses are estimated by former minister Kim Carr as 200,000. Some of these may be in auto maintenance industries that would continue, but a lot won't, and I would guess 100,000 flow-on jobs lost is a reasonable estimate. What are all these businesses and workers going to do? Retrain as hospitality staff?

There would be major regional effects on SA — a state whose de-industrialisation is now well advanced. This state needs more than wheatgrowing, tourism, cultural festivals and winemaking.

There is the major loss of embodied capital from overseas. If GMH and Toyota run down their capital stock here in government-forced firesales, they won't start up again whatever happens to the exchange rate. Here we are (or some of us), bleating how much we need foreign capital to come in and help modernise our food processing and grain handling industries, yet when we have foreign capital and management attention in place in a viable industry that makes cars that compete efficiently with imports, should we deliberately set out to kill that industry?

Do Hockey and Cormann really think GM and Toyota are bluffing, that they can be nickel-and-dimed down to a smaller subsidy? Why risk it? I am sure these global companies are not bluffing. They will be tempted to write off Australian investment as Ford is doing, to build up capacity in countries like Mexico or Thailand. GMH's withdrawal to Asia of their top American-based CEO, Mike Devereux, was a clear warning shot to the Abbott Government that GM is serious. Toyota would surely follow as Australian parts supply chains become uncommercial.

Labor had achieved a workable longterm deal with GM that the unions supported. To keep their jobs, workers had voted to abstain from pay increases. Now, the deal is voided, and workers have to accept 3 per cent pay increases that they don't want. They would rather have job security.

Abbott needs to face down extreme free-market ideologues. If he buckpasses this crisis to the Productivity Commission, knowing that such a delay may set in train a self-fulfilling dynamic of closures in the industry, he will be responsible for destroying an industry of real importance and value to Australia.

Sex and haikus

REVIEWS

Philip Harvey

Saying we love someone can take all our courage, our wisdom, our foolishness. Often we don't know how to say it. When we do get to say we love someone, sometimes we reach for the pitch known as poetry. Of all the art forms, poetry and song relay love most immediately. A book of all new work ([Australian Love Poems 2013](#), edited by Mark Tredinnick) shows how poetry can stretch the message to screaming point, or say it all in a few seconds. Poetry allows us to say just how silly we feel or can make of a simple admission, something sublime.

Michael Sharkey asks profusely:

The sky that falls in children's tales,
the tide that ebbs, the moon's Swiss cheese,
Nijinsky's dance. Stravinsky's Flood;
what if I said you're all of these.

While Petra White forces a needful perspective:

Hogging both time and world,
soul of another's
body, making us
as we make it,
no fighting for it,
it blasts doubt out.

And the singer Paul Kelly opts not for the big ballad this time, but the minimal haiku:

Time is elastic
Together, days disappear
Apart, seconds crawl

Anyone writing love poetry needs be aware of the pitfalls of sentimentality. 'When we kissed,' claims Michael Crane, 'peach trees in China / did not blossom.' He distances himself further by considering:

Maybe there is no genius
in a kiss, just a hunger
a thousand centuries old

and a need for comfort
willow trees can not fathom.

Sentimentality though is not to be confused with sentiment. Every poem in the book expresses sentiments, from the passionate to the objective, the innocent to the experienced, the idealistic to the cynical. Peter Rose's Catullan persona says of love-making, 'It's more intimate / and exacting than one of his feeling lyrics.'

And indeed, love poetry expresses by knowledge and a little art the desires and experiences that necessarily remain inexpressibly personal to the individual. Anne M. Carson writes about 'honing / the human, so we too become vast, / and all that is paltry in us, blown away.'

It is true to say that most poems are written for love's sake, for what the Greeks call *agape*; still, most of this collection is tangled up in *eros*. The book confirms the given that love poetry in English means the erotic before other forms of love, i.e. affective and familial love, love of nature and nation, let alone the supreme love of God. Be that as it may, we are not alone when we read Bronwyn Lovell:

Outside the world is silent
after a light fall of rain that
must have come while we
were not looking or caring
for anything more
than each other.

Nor can we ignore the truth in Cate Kennedy's 'Ode to Lust':
It doesn't need to have a bed;
its teeth pull off your underwear;
it likes you driven from your head,
legs round neck. Clothes over there.

Freud was not the first person to advise that *eros* doesn't last. Relationship is about communication and change, so the poems are arranged to track different states in love's life. Poets talk things through to themselves, yet they talk to us. Poets talk to the one they love, or to us about the one they love, so it can get tricky. Quietly they let us in on secrets, or other times let it all hang out. Reading 200 love poems at once, we start hearing people talking to each other. We wonder if Poet A is actually mad about poet B, if Poet Y wants to take Poet Z to Paradise, or dearly wishes them in the other place. The book sets up such connections and moods.

Anthologies reflect the character of their anthologists. This book was shaped by someone who knows first loves and losses, resolutions and fresh starts. He likes the variety of forms, favouring clear expression, strong images, and striking analogies. Tredinnick has cited Hafiz and the Sufi tradition as a guiding principle in creating the collection.

This is spoken voice poetry from the heart, direct speech but heightened, tending to the ecstatic. We hear its poetic example in the deep breath lines of Anne Walsh Miller: 'You're written in me in the before antiquity language of snowflakes. / Landing everywhere on me so thickly that you're on me and in me and on my tongue / (you on my tongue is why I talk beautifully like snow under a streetlamp).'

Are Australians Persians? To judge by the evidence of this book they are more forthcoming than might be assumed, at speaking of love. Trademark laconic is there, but also a delight in syntactical play and unexpected words. Gender and orientation are not issues, even if relationships are. Shyness and bluster live as neighbours with bubbiness and raunch, but then also melancholy and regret. Survival, like love found, is a good in itself. There is an intelligence at work frequently in the use of allegory and trope that is almost courtly. But one conclusion is certain: when 632 Australians submit 1501 new love poems to a tight deadline, it has to be said, they're up for it.

Cackling geese and taxes

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Whenever public funds are made available for frowned upon projects they are described as taxpayers' money. The phrase rightly suggests that public funds are collected for the good of society, and so should not be spent wastefully or arbitrarily. But the phrase is rarely neutral. Taxpayers' money is misused, thrown away, squandered, wasted or cast at its unworthy objects.

The expression also hints at something more. It invites us to think of tax payers as individuals who still have claims over the money they pay in tax even when it is aggregated in the hands of the government. It also suggests that taxation is an imposition that we can rightly feel curmudgeonly about.

When I hear the phrase roll from critics' lips, I imagine taxpayers as prune faced and laser lipped, like geese cackling and snapping when some of their grain is taken away, or like children watching with beady eyes as their mother cuts the cake, ready to howl if their slice of the cake is the smaller half by a crumb or two.

Underneath the phrase usually lies a view of life in which the market is a sacred site. The free market in which individuals can buy and sell without interference is the foundation of political freedom. The goal of human happiness and of social endeavour is imagined in economic terms as wealth and position attained by competing in the free market. The welfare of the society is identified with its wealth, regardless of the equality of distribution or the wellbeing of the least advantaged of the citizens.

From this perspective anything that distorts the free working of the market is a threat to individual freedom and ultimately to society. Taxation is seen as a distortion of the market because it limits our choice to buy and sell as we wish. So it is endorsed only grudgingly for securing things, like infrastructure, that the market cannot provide by itself. This is why the conversation about tax is often like geese hissing at the farmer who sets aside some of their grain for weaker birds.

The insult of taxation is added to by the injurious ways in which its proceeds are used. Public funding of non-profit community organisations for their work with the disadvantaged is also seen as regrettable on these premises. By definition they are less efficient than commercial organisations because the latter are disciplined by a free and competitive market. I have looked at the case of legal services in an [expanded version of this article](#) .

It is right to scrutinise government spending carefully. Governments have been known to use public funds improperly to sandbag electorates under threat, to roll out imprudent schemes and to indulge their patrons. They need to be kept accountable.

But the constant reference to taxpayers' money is unhelpful because it leads us to consider people as individuals and to define them by their participation in the market. Human beings are not isolated individuals, but are inherently social. They can develop as persons only through relationships, with the result that they grow only if others grow. Economic development and the place of the free market within it are important because they contribute to the development of society and of people within it. But it is the business of the state to guide that development, ensuring that all, including the most disadvantaged, are benefited by it.

From this perspective the phrase 'taxpayers' money' is misleading and the response evoked by it too mean. It is better to speak of public funds. Public funds come from persons who depend on their relationships to one another within society. They also have a responsibility to one another in the building of society.

Taxation is an expression of the social reality of human beings and helps them discharge their mutual responsibility. It acknowledges that the free working of the market and the prosperity of those who profit in it rely on mutual trust built by the social structures inherited from those who have gone before us. Our taxes help our society build on what we've been given for the benefit of those who follow us. It is not my money but our money.

The state can foster the development of society in many ways. It can be particularly effective to work through non-profit community groups to support the disadvantaged. The key to such work is the building of relationships, for which the altruistic people drawn to community groups often have special gifts. Strong community groups too are an index of a healthy society. They are not a distortion of the market but a blessing for the society that the market also serves.

Human justice barometer

RELIGION

Peter Kirkwood

The annual [Blake Prize](#) is described on its website as 'exploring the themes of spirituality, religion and human justice'.

In the early years after the prize began in 1951 religion and spirituality dominated and artworks largely portrayed conventional Christian themes and symbols. But since then it has broadened in scope to embrace multifaith Australia and deeper concerns for human peace and justice.

In fact the Blake Exhibition each year is a good barometer of the social justice issues of the day, and this year's exhibition that opened in Sydney a few weeks ago is no exception.

This video features some of the works hung in the exhibition that examine current burning justice issues: persecution of minorities, even to the extent of genocide that seem to recur around the globe with alarming regularity; sexual abuse in the church and the failure of church leaders to deal with it; and reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australia.

The video is presented by Rod Pattenden who is a very able guide through this territory. He is a Uniting Church minister, the current chair of the Blake Society which administers the prize, and his doctoral thesis looked into the history of the prize.

There are also brief interviews with some of the artists about the inspiration and content of their work. Adelaide-based Franz Kempf talks about his confronting painting called 'The Outrageous Has Become Commonplace' which won this year's Blake Human Justice Award.

The judges described it as 'a deserving winner and a stark challenge to us to recognise the great human tragedy of failing to heal the gouges, wounds and gaps in the delivery of a secure and pervasive protection against human rights abuse.'

[Rodney Pople](#) who lives in Sydney speaks about his very striking painting entitled 'Night Dance'. It portrays children dancing in a ring around a cardinal who has his face turned skyward and, with his mouth wide open, appears to be howling to the heavens. It has obvious allusions to the sexual abuse crisis in the church.

The final work featured in the video is the winner of this year's Blake Prize, a painting called 'Metamorphosis' by eminent Aboriginal artist [Trevor Nickolls](#) who died at the end of 2012. His close friend and executor of his estate, Angelika Tyrone, reflects on the painting as a depiction of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia.

The 2013 Blake Exhibition can be seen at the University of NSW College of Fine

Arts Gallery, Paddington in Sydney's eastern suburbs till Saturday 16 November. From January, it will go on tour to Melbourne, Hobart and regional NSW. It is also on display in the Blake Society's [Online Gallery](#) .

Africa and US worry the frayed edges of international criminal justice

INTERNATIONAL

Nik Tan

Two key developments in the past month have once more called into question whether the International Criminal Court (ICC) can end impunity for the most serious international crimes.

First, the African Union's (AU) request to the United Nations Security Council to suspend the trials of sitting Kenyan heads of state. Emerging from a special meeting of the AU in Addis Ababa on 11-12 October, the request comes on the back of perceptions of ICC bias in prosecuting Africans.

Secondly, recently released Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports raise the real possibility that any killing of civilians by United States' drones violate the laws of war.

The United States has signed but not ratified the Rome Statute, the international law instrument that enables membership of the ICC. This means United States citizens involved in the use of drones that leads to the death of civilians in an armed conflict cannot be brought before the court.

Both situations threaten the mandate of the ICC to end impunity for serious international crimes, and with it threaten the project of international criminal justice.

The International Criminal Court

The ICC came into operation in 2002 with a mandate to bring to justice individual perpetrators of the most serious international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

Following the Court's establishment, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said 'Impunity has been dealt a decisive blow ... a missing link in the international justice system is now in place ... Humanity will be able to defend itself — responding to the worst of human nature with one of the greatest achievements: the rule of law.'

One hundred and twenty-two states have now acceded to the Rome Statute, including 32 African nations. China, Russia and the United States, all permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, have not signed on to the ICC, as well as regional powers India and Indonesia.

In its 11 years of operation, 20 cases from eight situations have been brought to trial, with just one case completed (Thomas Lubanga of the Democratic Republic of Congo was convicted for war crimes in 2012). The AU's claims of Afro-centrism seem particularly well founded when one considers that all eight

situations are African, though four were referred to the ICC by the countries themselves.

African frustrations and sovereign immunity

The AU request seeks a one-year suspension of the ICC cases against Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta and Vice-President William Ruto. Both are facing charges of crimes against humanity in connection with the bloodshed that killed more than 1000 people after elections in 2007.

It also seeks the deferral of the ICC case against President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, for whom an arrest warrant was issued in 2008 for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide in Darfur.

Under Article 16 of the Rome Statute the United Nations Security Council, of which Australia is a non-permanent member, can suspend any ICC prosecution for one year.

The Addis Ababa meeting was an expression of African frustration with the ICC. In opening the meeting, Ethiopian Foreign Minister Tedros Adhanom said, 'the court has transformed itself into a political instrument targeting Africa and Africans'. AU delegates emphasised the long-held international principle of immunity from liability for sitting heads of state, stating the Kenyan case 'could undermine the sovereignty, stability, and peace' of the country.

The AU resolution flowing from the summit further provides that no international charges should be brought against a head of state until the end of their term. This is in conflict with Article 27 of the Rome Statute, which provides that state parties waive all immunities, including for current heads of state.

United States drone strikes

A recent Amnesty report investigates drone killings of civilians in northwest Pakistan by the United States. Human Rights Watch outlines similar cases of civilian deaths in Yemen. The deaths of between 400 and 900 civilians by these unpiloted aircraft are reported within the last decade.

Both reports are careful to avoid declaring the killings violations of international humanitarian law amounting to war crimes. The lack of public information the US provides about its drone program makes a legal case almost impossible. The first recommendation of Human Rights Watch is to 'explain the full legal basis' upon which the US carries out targeted killings, including drone strikes.

Nevertheless, Amnesty concludes that the civilian deaths 'raise serious concerns' that the actions of the US may amount to war crimes. Article 7 of the Rome Statute defines war crimes as 'grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions', including wilful killing.

Amnesty calls for the US to investigate and, where there is sufficient evidence, bring those responsible for the killing of civilians to justice. As the US does not

accept the jurisdiction of the ICC over its citizens, there is no current possibility to bring such individuals to trial at the international court.

Kenya is currently in the process of passing legislation to withdraw its accession to the Rome Statute and cancel its membership of the ICC. While this withdrawal would not affect the legality of the cases against Kenyatta and Ruto, it would be a major blow to the ICC's standing, especially in Africa.

Credibility under threat

Both situations highlight the fragility of international justice. The ICC is hamstrung by the perception — whether well-founded or otherwise — of targeting Africans.

The AU's pushback against ICC investigations raises the spectre of mass withdrawals from the court's jurisdiction by states of the most troubled continent on earth. Even the lesser result of Kenya's imminent withdrawal would be a blow to the ICC.

At the same time, the real possibility that the killing of civilians by US drones constitutes war crimes demonstrates the limitations of the court's reach. This further undermines the ICC's project to end impunity for the most serious international crimes.

A language for dying

CREATIVE

Thomas Shapcott

Charon

for Fay Zwicky

I never learned to fear Charon, just as I never
Learned Latin. The book (from England) came too late
So I was behind in class. I never caught up.
Coins for the ferryman? Any price seemed high
While blood flowed so easily. To be young
Was always to be taken for granted.
There were older brothers Over There, even dads,
That was just one of those things.
There was a price, no doubt of that.
But we were exempt. Money was nothing
As mortality was nothing to us.
It was a dead language. We were very young.
Now I am too old and Charon is waiting
I finger the coins but do not know the words,
All I remember might as well be Latin.
Is there a language for dying? Is there
Any language at all? Charon is waiting
But I still hear the ripple of water. Or is it just my pulse?

Light

We are used to light. It is the beacon
Guiding us and we ignore it at our risk
Not that we ever dream of abandoning it.
Light has become more than a mere friend,
It is almost part of the family
Though it has not the ability to betray us.

Dark remains perpetually strange.
Why is that? It is as if fear
Were part of our essential makeup.
Yet we cannot live forever in light;
There is that need of darkness somewhere;
Sleep is encouraged by what it has to offer.
We are plagued by certainty as much as by uncertainty.
Light is the norm the spectrum by which we live.
But darkness is always there, like something in wait.
We dream of an end, and we really know
That dark will claim us, that light is only temporary.
We may be accustomed to light, but only fools take that for granted.

Smell

Underneath everything we touch is the smell
Of something too obvious to express
And yet we say there is nothing, nothing at all.
We have learned to live with a multitude of smells,
They simply do not bother us, they are everyday
And part of the natural world we have inherited.
There is nothing more obvious than the smell of living,
It is like movement, and, like movement, it is everywhere.
Like sweat it is ourselves, only the language is different.
The smell of dying is also everywhere.
Why do we hide it with cosmetics?
We are appalled. Why are we appalled?
The earth is moving. Such a short while we are here.
Every smell is somehow precious.
We cannot afford to be choosy. There is nothing to deny.

Australia's Noah's Ark economy

ECONOMICS

David Stephens

If the Coalition can genuinely make a difference to Australia's intensely oligopolistic industry structures — which is among the worst in the developed world — there will be a lot of votes in it. Large numbers of small business people, especially those unfortunate enough to supply the big supermarkets, know only too well how far they are from anything resembling a level playing field. That they do not make this better known is only because they would lose their livelihoods entirely if they spoke out.

Conversely, the Coalition tends to subscribe to the idea that government intervention is *ipso facto* bad, and any meaningful change will require some serious intervention. There is also, to say the least, powerful political influence exerted on both major political parties by the big corporations. The political parties, which are comparatively small entities, might be said not to have a chance when the big money comes looking for influence.

The most likely outcome is business as usual. But the noises being made by the Coalition are sounding surprisingly pertinent. The Minister for Small Business, Bruce Billson, described the relationship between the big, dominant players and smaller business as akin to 'serfdom'. Quite right. He says the Government wants to examine 'whether the current competition law is the toolkit that supports that to deliver economic prosperity and growth and durable benefits for consumers'.

The answer is easy. It does not. Not even close. Neither is the issue the amount of resources available to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) as its head, Rod Sims predictably claimed, eager to put his hand out. It is the law that the ACCC administers, which only permits the regulator to act if there is a 'substantial lessening of competition'. The test is easy to get around by making incremental acquisitions.

Even when there are big acquisitions, the ACCC's use of this provision can be extremely weak, an example being Westpac's acquisition of St George in 2008, both of which were heavily concentrated on the New South Wales market. But it is not individual instances that matter as much as the overall shape of the market. Australia lacks anti-trust provisions, such as those that apply in the United States, whereby the total market share can be deemed as a problem and companies required to divest.

Consequently, we have exceptionally powerful oligopolies. A glance at the Fortune top 500 global companies, which compares revenues (not profits) tells the story. Wesfarmers and Woolworths, which are in the top 200, have larger sales than Google or Coca Cola. National Australia Bank, Commonwealth Bank and Westpac rank far higher than global investment banks like Standard Chartered

and Morgan Stanley. Telstra ranks close to McDonald's, Hyundai and Halliburton.

That is on the global scale, giving some idea of how big we have allowed our oligopolies to become. On the domestic level Australia is very much the 'Noah's Ark' economy: two of everything.

Consider the spate of industry sectors in which only two companies dominate. Airlines, where Virgin and Qantas have replicated the old Ansett and Qantas duopoly. Paper and packaging, where Visy and Amcor dominate, resulting in corrupt practices that were recently exposed. Print media, where News Corporation and Fairfax enjoy dominance. BHP-Billiton and Rio Tinto are a global duopoly, although Fortescue Metals has, against the odds, managed to loosen its grip on the iron ore market.

It is often argued that it is 'something about the Australian economy' that leads to such concentration, and there are certainly issues of distance. But the argument does not convince. Australia is a \$1.5 trillion economy; much smaller countries have far greater diversity. It is rather the case that Australian governments have allowed middle size firms to be taken out, creating an elite tier of dominant, often bullying, oligopolies and small firms with little bargaining power. There are some sizable private firms, but it is not sufficient to even out the imbalance.

The heart of the problem is the use of the word 'competition'. A story by this author revealing that the two supermarkets' substantially raised prices (based on a basket of what consumers actually bought rather than across the whole range) in cities where there was no third competitor eventually resulted in a government inquiry. The inquiry concluded that there was fierce 'competition' between the two supermarkets.

The evidence used to demonstrate how competitive they were was that both companies had tight profit margins. But profit margins can be tight for many reasons, including poor management. Indeed, it is possible that a monopoly can have poor profit margins. Does that mean it is subject to 'competition'?

Better tests of what is meant by 'competition' are needed. This could include having a diversity of players. It seems pretty obvious that duopolies and oligopolies are not particularly competitive, yet the ACCC routinely concludes that they are. This is because of the regulator's terms of reference. Constraints on market dominance such as American-style anti-trust law would also help create some genuine competition. But don't hold your breath — elites are not shifted easily.

Climate denial tide is turning

ENVIRONMENT

Neil Ormerod

Many have seen the election of the Coalition Government as a blow to sensible policy on climate change in Australia. However marginally effective the carbon tax may be, it is a more effective mechanism for lowering carbon emissions than the direct action plan, proposed by Greg Hunt and Tony Abbott. Not only is the Coalition plan unlikely to achieve the set goal of 5 per cent reductions on emissions by 2020 with the money allocated, Abbott has made it pretty clear no further money will be forthcoming.

Now the Government's own independent adviser, the Climate Change Authority, is arguing that a 5 per cent target is inadequate and a 15 per cent target is the minimum acceptable option. While professing to believe in the science of climate change, the general public has every right to be sceptical about the reality of Abbott's apparent conversion to the cause.

On the other hand, it is clear that globally the tide is beginning to take a very serious turn. With the publication of the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the *Los Angeles Times* [made](#) the bold decision to no longer publish letters from climate change denialists saying it would not print 'letters that have an untrue basis'. The *Times*' letter editor, Paul Thornton, noted:

Scientists have provided ample evidence that human activity is indeed linked to climate change ... The debate right now isn't whether this evidence exists (clearly, it does) but what this evidence means for us. Simply put, I do my best to keep errors of fact off the letters page; when one does run, a correction is published. Saying 'there's no sign humans have caused climate change' is not stating an opinion, it's asserting a factual inaccuracy.

With a bit of prompting from its readership, but not a concerted campaign that I know of, the *Sydney Morning Herald* has followed suit. Now there is a campaign to get other newspapers in Australia to follow suit.

While this might seem like a small victory, the more substantial issue on the horizon is the global campaign for divestment in the fossil fuel industry. Fossil fuel companies base their market value on their reserves in coal, gas and oil. It is becoming increasingly clear that a significant proportion of these reserves can never be used without causing catastrophic climate change.

A group of 70 global investors, managing more than \$3 trillion worth of assets, has launched a coordinated effort to ask the world's 40 top fossil fuel and power companies to fully assess the risks posed by climate change and the benefits of supporting low carbon energy. These investors are demanding to know how fossil fuel companies plan to manage climate risks and the emerging clean energy economy; for example, by reducing the carbon intensity of assets, divesting from

the most carbon intensive projects, and investing in lower carbon energy sources.

The movement to divestment will gain momentum and fossil fuel companies will be forced to reassess the value of their assets. A global campaign to encourage divestment has emerged which points out that such investments are not just bad for the environment, but bad economics, with assets that can never be realised in a carbon constrained world.

This is a major economic issue. If you look at the top ten companies in the world, seven are major investors in fossil fuels; another two are high consumers of fossil fuels (power generation and automobiles). The level of investment here dwarfs most national economies. One can expect these companies to push back, and they have virtually unlimited resources to do so.

And the third point of interest is the newly elected Pope Francis. In the recently published biography, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, Paul Vallely notes that the Pope is planning a major encyclical on environmental matters. In a move which will drive conservatives to distraction, Pope Francis has asked Leonardo Boff to send him his writings on eco-theology as part of his preparation. Boff was a major figure in the liberation theology movement and his writings were closely scrutinised by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Indeed his book, *Church: Charism and Power* was the subject of a notification from the Congregation.

In an interview in 2010 Boff noted:

There are regions in the world that have changed so much that they've become uninhabitable. That is why there are 60 million displaced persons in Africa and Southeast Asia, which are the most affected by climate change and which emit less carbon. If we don't stop it, in the next five to seven years there will be as many as 100 million climate refugees, and that is going to create political problems.

It will not be difficult for the Pope to connect this issue with his own very public concerns on the plight of refugees.

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez de Maradiaga confirmed during a recent visit to Australia that Pope Francis is indeed planning a document on the environment. The Cardinal is chair of the group of eight cardinals chosen by Francis to advise him, and is a strong proponent of action on climate change. A strong and clear statement from Francis on climate change will be heard all around the world. The Pope has proven himself an able and direct communicator and a document from him will be difficult for our political leaders to ignore.

Climate change foes need to adapt

ENVIRONMENT

Fatima Measham

In the middle of the last parliamentary brawl over pricing carbon emissions in Australia, a Liberal-voting friend pointed out to me that we should be paying more attention to adaptation. He was referring to strategies that address vulnerability to climate change, such as poverty reduction, education and building institutional capacity. Adaptation includes infrastructure such as sea-walls, drainage systems and early warning protocols.

At the time, I took it as an irresponsible deflection. It didn't make sense to talk about adapting when we had not even taken steps to circumvent the things to which we would adapt. It felt like a defeatist position to take when a legislative window had opened to mitigate climate change.

But with Prime Minister Tony Abbott prioritising the repeal of the carbon price legislation, it is starting to feel like we are dancing over the watery graves of our [Pacific neighbours](#) .

The debate over climate change, like most international debates, is a thoroughly Western, developed world privilege. We need only consider the prospects facing the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Kiribati to realise this. People living on such island-states do not have the luxury of wondering whether climate change is 'natural' or induced by human activity. They do not get to have protracted internal brawls over which mechanism would effectively restrain the speed and impact of climate change.

'The Pacific is fighting for its survival,' [said](#) Marshall Islands president Christopher Loeak in the lead-up to the annual Pacific islands summit last September. 'Climate change has already arrived.' He and other island-state leaders have been saying so for years — while we have tinkered with questions around scientific consensus, and pointed at China and the United States to justify our inertia.

Part of this inertia of course relates to the problem of persuasion. We have not been able to substantively persuade people about basic aspects of climate change, much less frame it as a problem to care enough about that it constitutes political suicide for our leaders to do nothing.

Moralistic harangues about debts to our grandchildren have not worked, nor have emotive appeals about disappearing polar bears. There is no room for persuasion anyway when arguments are pre-empted by the view that someone who disagrees with you is a bad person or just doesn't 'get' it.

As it turns out, facts are not persuasive, either. As former political adviser Marcus Priest recently [pointed out](#) , it is not the solidity or volume of climate

science that is the problem, it is political ideology. This is not to say that characterising people based on their ideology helps, either, especially when there is a cross-political spectrum of opinion on climate change policy.

Perhaps the key problem with persuasion is that, in a postmodern world characterised by individualist hyper-scepticism, including (sometimes well-founded) distrust of government, everyone is an expert. This lends any claim some patina of fact. Let's face it, the overabundance of content on the internet — including the glorious rabbit hole that is Wikipedia — helps legitimise any position under the sun.

So where does that leave us? The bases of our arguments over climate change have been trodden so much that a moat has formed around us, leaving us stuck in our little island fortresses. We know thoroughly by now the content of our disagreement. But what are the things that do not require persuasion? Is it possible that we have values and interests that intersect?

Adaptation may be that intersection. It will depend on the extent to which the nature of bushfires in recent years is perceived as 'normal'. It will depend on whether, without resolving climate change links, citizens expect their government to be well-versed in risk assessment, the way the insurance industry already is on climate change. These are only a few possible points of convergence.

Of course it goes without saying that the effectiveness of adaptation hinges on genuine acceptance of climate change impacts. But those on the frontline underline the point that our disagreement over causes and mitigation cannot be at the expense of adaptation.

For the [Maldives](#) , which established a sovereign fund to assist the relocation of its people, and [Kiribati](#) , which has purchased agricultural land in Fiji to compensate for its saline-contaminated soil, there is no such thing as prolonging the inevitable.