

The UN Sustainable Development Goals, national values, and Indigenous self-determination: Australian perspectives

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Abstract

Australia endorsed the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. In 2017, its Senate established a committee to satisfy itself of the goals' benefits, opportunities, and costs to the country. Although beyond its terms of reference, the committee also found that the goals were consistent with ill-defined national values. This article uses the committee's report as a framework for assessing the relationship between normative political values and the practical scope that exists for Indigenous self-determination. While prevailing political values mean that such scope is limited, it is also true that when the sustainable development goals are interpreted with reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, further possibilities for meaningful independent political influence may be developed. These include the proposal to entrench a First Nations' Voice to Parliament, which this article presents as reflecting a value of inclusion that is substantively different from the values that the Senate inquiry identified and endorsed.

Keywords

Indigenous self-determination, Uluru Statement from the Heart, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

In 2017, the Australian Senate established an inquiry into the country's implementation of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs were adopted by all UN member states in 2015 to give effect to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda's purpose was to provide "a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future" (UN, 2015b, p. 1). It was a conservative Liberal/National party coalition government that agreed to the goals. Through the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda envisages

a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. (UN, 2015b, "Our vision" section, para. 8)

Although Australia had endorsed the SDGs, the Senate wanted to be satisfied of their national benefits, opportunities, and costs (Australian Government, 2019). The committee comprised members of both government and opposition parties—though the government did not have a majority. The committee's consensus view was that the SDGs were largely beneficial to Australia, provided it with opportunities, and were not unduly compromised by

cost. Although the two government members dissented from the majority report, they were not opposed to the SDGs *per se*. Their argument was that the goals' consistency with prevailing public policy priorities was obvious and well established, which made the detailed consideration of their merits unnecessary (Australian Government, 2019). I argue against that proposition, with reference to Indigenous self-determination as a constituent of peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). Without defining them, the committee accepted that the goals were consistent with national values, but it did not interrogate the supporting arguments raised in the submissions that it received. Nor did it test the presumption of consistency against specific policy measures. This article tests the presumption against the right to self-determination as it is set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007). The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. It codified universal human rights norms and made explicit their unique application to Indigenous contexts. The Declaration recognised the right

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to self-determination as the Indigenous right: “to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State” (UN, 2007, Article 5). It was the outcome of unprecedented international cooperation among First Nations’ people, including the Cobble Cobble legal scholar Megan Davis (2008) who described the Declaration as a struggle in “standard setting” to advance, among other considerations, the value of people determining their “political destiny” as an essential democratic entitlement (p. 21). However, for Watson (2011), the Declaration’s substance was “watered down” from earlier drafts and it pays inadequate attention to the overarching value of “the rights of Indigenous peoples to survive as distinct peoples” (p. 507).

My argument is that the SDGs do not add to the rights of self-determination and cannot guarantee their substantive application. Instead, their potential is to support an integrated and internationally sanctioned policy framework in self-determination’s favour, and the implicit requirement that self-determination means survival as distinct peoples. The article discusses some of the ways this might occur, and which may, inform and contextualise the incoming Labor government’s, elected in May 2022, support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017), which includes a widely supported proposal from Indigenous people to alter the Australian constitution to enshrine a First Nations’ representative political body as a Voice to Parliament and Executive (the Voice).

National values

The test for the acquisition of citizenship is Australia’s only official statement of national values. It gives the concept a nebulous character when set against the Uluru Statement from the Heart which proposes a clearer set of values flowing from how its authors understand self-determination. The Uluru Statement is a First Nations’ peoples’ call for political reform beginning with the Voice, a treaty or treaties to establish just relationships between First Nations and the state, and makarrata a truth telling process to foster reconciliation. The Uluru Statement introduces the values that underlie First Nations’ sovereignty. It is:

a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or “mother nature”, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. (Referendum Council, 2017, para. 3)

The citizenship test’s values questions do not provide a framework for evaluating the SDGs, but they are noted to show that the concept of national values does not, from this sole official perspective, enjoy philosophical depth.

- Why is it important that all Australian citizens vote to elect the state and federal parliament?

- Should people in Australia make an effort to learn English?
- In Australia, can you encourage violence against a person or group of people if you have been insulted?
- Should people tolerate one another where they find that they disagree?
- In Australia, are people free to choose who they marry or not marry?
- In Australia, is it acceptable for a husband to be violent towards his wife if she has disobeyed or disrespected him?
- Do you agree that men and women should be provided equality of opportunity when pursuing their goals and interests?
- Should people’s freedom of speech and freedom of expression be respected in Australia? (Australian Government, 2020a, p. 46)

The committee’s interest in national values did, however, invite conceptual questions about the relationship between values, as a general idea, and the Indigenous right to self-determination. This is because self-determination is a right which the SDGs implicitly, though not explicitly, support. While the committee report did make references to the goals and Indigenous peoples, it did not consider Indigenous self-determination as a normative Australian value. The committee was told that the goals could lead to significant benefits for Indigenous peoples, people with a disability, and young people, as well as reduced inequality and enhanced environmental sustainability (Australian Government, 2019), yet there is no published evidence of high-level policy attention to the relationship between the SDGs and the scope of the Indigenous right to self-determination in Australia. However, as this article’s discussion of contemporary policy and institutional arrangements and debates shows, there is a significant conceptual and practical relationship that could reconfigure Australian policymaking and its underlying philosophical presumptions. It shows that the SDGs’ potential to support self-determination relies mainly on the goals’ capacity to encourage the development of more effective policy processes. This, in turn, requires a broader conceptualisation of national values than the Senate committee inquiry discussed, or that are present in the citizenship test.

The SDGs and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

There are 17 SDGs, supported by 169 targets and 232 indicators. They focus on the themes of “people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership” (UN, 2015a, p. 1). The goals are no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice, and strong institutions and partnerships for the goals (UN, 2015a). The

goals are informed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum's (2003) capabilities approach to development and are remarkable for their scope of ambition. As a universal political right self-determination requires a secure body of human capacities and capabilities. While some Indigenous scholars argue that these capacities do not support the *particular* concerns of all Indigenous populations (O'Sullivan, 2015), Sen's (1999) point is to ensure that people have the resources at their disposal to make choices consistent with living lives that they have reason to value, and by implication in ways that are consistent with the Declaration.

The goals succeeded the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN in 2000. These were intended to

eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and global partnership for development. (UN, 2015a, para. 6)

The Millennium Development Goals were not developed from the broad consultation that distinguished the SDGs' drafting and were concerned only with the needs and aspirations of poorer countries. There was no specific Indigenous engagement in their development. Similarly, and notwithstanding their broader ambition, the SDGs do not explicitly or comprehensively respond to Indigenous self-determination in wealthy states like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, though there is such potential. Systematically referring to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of the SDGs may, however, help Australia work towards these universal aspirations.

The Declaration recognises that human rights, such as the rights to language and culture, may belong to groups as much as they belong to individuals. Its 46 articles rationalise Indigenous peoples' authority to make decisions for themselves, as far as possible, in fields as diverse as quality education (SDG 4), good health and well-being (SDG 3) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). For example, the Declaration affirms that Indigenous people are entitled to be educated in their own languages and cultures and with reference to preferred pedagogies (UN, 2007). It affirms their equal right to the highest attainable standard of health and to participate in determining health policy (UN, 2007). In summary, by virtue of the right to self-determination as both political value and strategy, they may "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (UN, 2007, Article 3).

Like Canada, New Zealand, and the USA, Australia initially opposed the Declaration. All four states particularly feared the expansive nature of its concession to Indigenous land rights. However, after *reading down* its significance, each reversed its opposition and accepted the instrument's aspirational significance (O'Sullivan, 2020). In Australia, the Rudd Government (2007–2010) argued that the Declaration's *universal aspirations* could "help build

understanding and trust" and "gives us new impetus to . . . advance human rights and close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (Macklin, 2009, p. 2).

Australian values, the SDGs, and the Indigenous right to self-determination

The question of values does, however, presume a strong connection between philosophical disposition and policy outcomes. From this perspective, values provide an instructive framework for considering whether the SDGs may be drawn upon to advance the Indigenous right to self-determination. Do, for example, the SDGs provide opportunities for contesting political values that interfere with the realisation of that right? Alternatively, it is true that internationally, there is not a large body of Indigenous scholarly or policy literature on the SDGs, which could, as Watene and Yap (2015) argue, be because the goals and targets make minimal references to Indigenous claims and do not meaningfully attend to relationships between culture and development.

The SDGs' potential to reframe how public policy works flows from the overarching significance of Goal 16 *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*. It flows furthermore from the role of strong institutions in leading cohesive, integrated and focused policy development (UN, 2015a). The goal provides a framework for responding to inequities in the distribution of political power.

Goal 16 includes targets that are explicitly relevant to the exercise of self-determination. From its perspective, public institutions are just when they are inclusive of Indigenous people, perspectives, and leadership. These targets are to:

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. (UN, 2015a, "Goal 16 Targets" section, paras. 3, 6–7)

However, if the two government senators who dissented from the committee's report and whose coalition, since May 2022, no longer forms government were correct that Australia already fully implemented the SDGs and provided the best international benchmark for assessing other states' implementation (Australian Government, 2019), then the goals have no scope to question contemporary priorities, to critique prevailing philosophical presumptions or fundamentally change policy directions.

By way of contrast, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has made several recommendations to member states on the implementation of the SDGs. Its website notes a connection between the goals and the Declaration. It is therefore instructive to assess the

relationship between political values and the SDGs as a potentially transformative policy framework, consistent with self-determination, and capable of considering the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' observation that Australian public policies

do not duly respect the rights to self-determination and effective participation; contribute to the failure to deliver on the [Closing the Gap] targets in the areas of health, education and employment; and fuel the escalating and critical incarceration and child removal rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2017, p. 1)

By way of further example, in some remote Australian communities, inadequate access to a safe water supply (SDG6) contributes to endemic rates of trachoma among Indigenous people (O'Sullivan, 2015). Might the SDGs instead support coherence and integration to respond to relationships between clean water and trachoma prevention, for example? Might they also support improved water security through the biocultural knowledge of water that Judd (2019) explains was the source of effective water management prior to colonial disruption or, perhaps, support the overturning of *aqua nullius* (Marshall, 2017) as a constraint on the social, cultural and economic uses of water that First Nations' people wish to privilege as expressions of self-determination.

The cost of culture

The Senate inquiry received few submissions on the costs of implementing the SDGs, but it did find that cost was an obstacle to private business supporting the goals (Australian Government, 2019). The perceived cost of reducing fossil fuel emissions is one example that concerns Australia, and which intersects with the Indigenous right to self-determination. In Queensland, in 2019, a government preference for developing the coal mining industry was used to rationalise setting aside the state's duty, under the declaration, to acquire Indigenous peoples' *free prior and informed consent* (32) to resource extraction on their lands. As there was no government interest in reducing fossil fuel emissions, as SDG 13 *climate action* implies, the government found no obstacle to extinguishing an Indigenous nation's native land title to allow a coal mine proposed by Adani Mining Ltd to proceed. While the Wangan and Jagalingou First Nation of Central Queensland, was divided on whether its consent should be offered, the idea that consent should be sought was a moral value that Queensland did not accept. Yet, the right to property and the right to say *no* are fundamental marks of equality. Extinguishing the Indigenous nation's native title and transferring it to a private company under a more secure form, and without the compensation that the Constitution requires when land is held under private title (Australian Government, 1977), affirmed unequal citizenship as a substantive and consequential political value. Extinguishing native title restricted an Indigenous nation's internationally sanctioned human right to culture. The Senate committee did not test the SDGs implementation against a practical example of human

equality as a potential human value. In particular, it did not consider the right to culture as a constituent of equality.

The Declaration affirms the human right to culture (8) and recognises that culture is formed from relationships with the physical environment. From this perspective:

Human beings are understood to be only one part of a development story that includes and weaves all things in the world (and universe) together. Our shared and overlapping lands, oceans and rivers connect us (Watene & Yap, 2015, p. 52).

Therefore, the term sustainable is vague, vacuous, and detached from human being if it cannot be described and defended with reference to culture. The social and economic dimensions of development make sense only with reference to the cultural foundations of human being. Bringing culture explicitly in to the implementation of the SDGs is therefore an essential objective which Nussbaum (2003) provides for in her list of "central human capabilities" including, for example, "control over one's environment"—this includes political participation, material control over resources, and employment rights (pp. 40–41) which are, again, constituents of SDG 16.

Do Australian values include Indigenous people?

Values are open to contest. With respect to Indigenous self-determination, values may help define and redefine conceptions of the good life, especially when juxtaposed against the SDGs as a policy framework that counters practices of exclusion. It is true that "contemporary [state] practices are framed by discourses of sovereignty. These discourses are neither natural nor neutral. They reproduce a space for politics that is enabled by and rests upon the production, naturalization, and marginalization of certain forms of 'difference'" (Shaw, 2008, p. 9). However, self-determination presumes that difference may be positively re-cast; as a value that would support Australia's implementation of the SDGs and provide context for thinking about the substantive inclusion of *all* among the nation state's people "whose consent [liberal theory requires] for legitimate government" (O'Sullivan, 2014, p. 65). Normative liberal assumptions about the source and location of political authority are central to policy debates on what is fair and efficacious Indigenous public policy. These assumptions are not always consistent with the Senate Inquiry's description of national values as distinguished by a fair go. Recent changes in how Indigenous policy is made suggest that this colloquial concept of a fair go is, however, gaining influence, but not with the ongoing certainty that justifies the dissenting government senators proposing that no further work on the SDGs is required (Australian Government, 2019).

Similarly, the The United Nations' Association of Australia (2019) overlooked the alternative concepts of diversity and plurality, when it told the committee that "only the branding name of the SDGs is new for Australia" (pp. 4–5). The International Women's Development

Agency (2019) submitted that the SDGs are consistent with Australian values because they support principles of cooperation, a fair go, gender equality and being a good neighbour. Understanding whether these really are national values requires examining their relationship with specific government policy priorities. Furthermore, it is only from this examination that a framework is established for assessing the government's first Voluntary National Review of its progress on implementing the SDGs. The National Review to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (Australian Government, 2018) remarked that:

The SDGs reflect things that Australians value highly and seek to protect, like a clean and safe environment, access to opportunity and services, human rights, strong and accessible institutions, inclusive economies, diverse and supportive communities and our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage. Our support for political, economic, social and religious freedoms is underpinned by our commitment to promote liberal democracy, the rule of law and the rules-based international order. (p. 6)

Reflecting the view of the government of the day, the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, told the inquiry that "because the SDGs are so consistent with our national values, many of the priorities we are pursuing form part and parcel of the Australian Government's agenda both here and abroad" (Australian Government, 2018, p. 7). To advance and develop this view, the two dissenting government senators, argued that the government's commitment to overseas aid was a particular example of the relationship between national values and the SDGs. They argued that the government's policy priorities for health, education, agriculture, water, the environment, the economy and gender equality were further examples (Australian Government, 2019).

The fairness of this observation is a philosophical judgement—a question of just how far-reaching or ambitious an interpretation one should apply to what it means to implement the SDGs; whether it overstates their position for the two dissenting senators to "firmly contend that Australia as the most free, democratic and prosperous nation in the world should be considered as the gold-standard in terms of all the SDGs" (Australian Government, 2019, p. 155). An alternative and independent perspective put by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is that Australia consciously chooses to reject policies that could establish itself as an international *gold-standard* in the rights of Indigenous peoples (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2017). This means that the question of what institutional arrangements exist to ensure policy accountability to the Indigenous citizen is especially important in relation to both the goals and the declaration.

Steps towards inclusion as a practical political value

Parliamentary democracy's assumption that public bureaucracies are accountable to their ministers, who are in

turn accountable to parliament, which is then accountable to the people, does not routinely work for Indigenous citizens and this is a key argument in favour of a constitutionally entrenched Voice to Parliament. While, a record number of 10 Indigenous people were elected to Parliament in May 2022, from both government and opposition parties, these people were not elected to represent Indigenous voters, who at around 3% of the national population are a minority of their constituents. These members of parliament have no particular mandate to advance distinctive Indigenous aspirations.

Measures beyond parliamentary accountability need to be established to ensure just and strong institutions. These foundations could focus on directing public institutions towards the integrated approach to policy-making that the SDGs envisage, as one way of mitigating against the entrenched failure that in 2020, the Prime Minister Scott Morrison identified as a distinguishing, but neither inevitable nor immutable characteristic of Indigenous public policy:

Despite the best of intentions; investments in new programs; and bi-partisan goodwill, Closing the Gap has never really been a partnership with Indigenous people.

We perpetuated an ingrained way of thinking, passed down over two centuries and more, and it was the belief that we knew better than our Indigenous peoples.

We don't.

We also thought we understood their problems better than they did. We don't. They live them.

We must see the gap we wish to close, not from our viewpoint, but from the viewpoint of Indigenous Australians before we can hope to close it, and make a real difference. (Morrison, 2020, paras. 23–28)

Pat Turner, the chief executive of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, argued that the Prime Minister's remarks constituted: "For the first time. . . a genuine acknowledgement of why the Closing the Gap outcomes seem steeped in failure" (Turner, 2019, para. 3). For example, in 2020, revisions to the Closing the Gap policy targets were made through a partnership agreement between the national Indigenous Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments. Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage was a policy framework for closing statistically measurable gaps in policy outcomes. It was established in 2008 by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the national local government association. Its policy targets were grounded in egalitarian conceptions of justice as *sameness* in policy outcomes. For example, reducing gaps in life expectancy, school achievement, health, and unemployment. However, Indigenous people were not systematically included in setting the targets. Nor were they formally included in evaluating them. The targets did not take account of culture or reflect broader Indigenous aspirations. Their focus on

closing gaps in material disadvantage was at the exclusion of closing gaps in political disadvantage (O'Sullivan, 2015).

Nevertheless, the revisions in 2020 were distinguished by what the Coalition of Peaks explained as unprecedented Indigenous inclusion, though not guaranteed leadership, in policy development, which involved governments committing "to building strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors and organizations to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs" (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 2020, p. 12).

Exclusion was the national value that both the Prime Minister and Turner claimed they wanted to set aside in favour of a deliberative approach to policy-making. Under the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap in Partnership, 2020b) the Commonwealth, state and territory governments would share responsibility with the Coalition of Peak Organisations for developing and evaluating measures across 16 policy domains. These include raising Indigenous life expectancy, improvements in health and educational outcomes, employment, economic participation and community development, housing, reducing rates of imprisonment and domestic violence, reducing the number of children placed under state care and advancing cultural and linguistic security (Closing the Gap in Partnership, 2020b). These objectives support and are supported by, for example, SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequality), 13 (climate action) and 15 (life on land). They are also supported by the declaration's 46 articles which focus on policy domains including health, education, culture, land, and economic growth (UN, 2007).

According to Closing the Gap in Partnership (2020b), the National Agreement sets four "priority reform areas for joint national action" (p. 5): these priority areas are, "formal partnerships and shared decision-making" (p. 5), "building the community-controlled sector" (p. 8), "transforming government organisations" (p. 11) and "shared access to data at a regional level" (p. 13). These priorities reflect a significant philosophical shift in how policy is made. They require integration across policy domains and agencies, with special attention to Indigenous civil society as sites of self-determination, for example, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. They also provide a guiding framework for policy evaluation and inform the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy which is discussed below.

Making policy differently

Alongside the national agreement, the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (2020), which is a *whole-of-government* evaluative framework developed by the Productivity Commission, reflected a departure from prevailing approaches to public policy. The commission described its distinctive characteristic as putting "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at its centre" (Australian Government

Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 2). It contributed to the recent trend of systematically including Indigenous people in government policy work and was developed to recognise the connection between evaluation and effective policy outcomes (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2020). The strategy may support the SDGs' requirement of regular reporting against internationally agreed targets, which occurs through the periodic Voluntary National Reviews to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Structured and systematic Indigenous engagement in national reporting may support accountability to Indigenous citizens and increase demand for policy evaluation that is equipped to guide ongoing policy development. Indigenous policy evaluation is presently underdeveloped and "policy problems and policies are not things that just happen, and policy instruments are not applied by themselves" (Briassoulis, 2004, p. 14). Indeed, the Declaration (UN, 2007) proceeds from the assumption that policy does not just happen, but as a matter of justice, presents an

urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources. ("The UN General Assembly" section, para. 7)

The strategy acknowledges accountability as an important constituent of the evaluation process. It also claims that there is a need for "incentives for agencies to improve the quality of evaluations" (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 3). This suggests, perhaps, that the established relationship between evaluation and effective policy design is insufficient incentive and a contributor to policy failure. Instead, the strategy refers to the declaration as a guiding instrument and establishes an Indigenous Evaluation Council to provide "leadership and oversight" (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 3). The strategy represents a significant shift from Indigenous exclusion as normative policy practice. It claims that evaluation should contribute to community accountability and help to establish people's "trust in government" (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 4). The strategy proposes that evaluation contributes to trust if it draws on what is known about what works and takes into account the perspectives of people immediately affected by a policy decision.

While it does seem that Indigenous people are at the strategy's centre, it is not yet fair to conclude that Indigenous leadership has become a national value. Political obstacles remain. For example, in its discussion of the disproportionate presence of rheumatic heart disease among Indigenous people, the Australian Medical Association (2016) argued that the solution was a matter of the state's "political will" (p. 3) rather than simply clinical measures. Perhaps recognition that, for Indigenous peoples, a just public health system concerned with "good health and well-being" (SDG 3) will admit that

indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions. (UN, 2007, p. 23)

The National Agreement and the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy presume cooperation between tiers of government in domains like health, education, and employment where there are overlapping responsibilities. Integration across policy domains is also required to achieve the policy coherence that both the national agreement and the SDGs presume. However, the presumption of shared objectives that Bejaković (2018) also says is a requirement of policy integration is not consistent with publicly stated Indigenous experience and reflects the contested nature of national values. The conflict between colonialism and self-determination precludes shared visions. Applying Bejaković's (2018) category of "stakeholders" to Indigenous nations and their members is inconsistent with both citizenship and self-determination and could have implications for how policy-making occurs. While the stakeholder may have a legitimate interest in policy outcomes, the citizen and the self-determining nation hold higher-level political rights.

In New Zealand, for example, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) is explicit—Māori (Indigenous peoples of New Zealand) are not stakeholders in a government project, but peoples carrying distinct political authority and rights of participation. The extent of this authority and the nature of participation are matters of ongoing contest, but the presumption of participation and leadership does at least propose Māori citizens as the makers, not the subjects, of public policy. In Australia, and as the following discussion of a proposed First Nations' Voice to Parliament shows, it is a matter of contest whether distinctive influence of this kind transcends a *fair go* to give Indigenous people an unjustified privilege inconsistent with national values. However, if integration's purpose is to provide coherent responses to "relationships among policy objects" (Briassoulis, 2004, p. 15), the people making policy must understand these objects, their existing relationships, and the outcomes that they are intended to achieve. To this end, it may be instructive to use the SDGs alongside the Declaration to create an integrated response to self-determination; to achieve the conditions for integration that Briassoulis (2004) suggests:

Two policies are integrated, or have chances of being integrated, if they have a common scope, treat common or complementary facets (environmental, spatial, economic, social, institutional) of a problem situation in congruent or unified manner; or, equivalently, accommodate or respect variously one another's concerns about the social, economic, environmental, cultural and other features of the issues studied. (p. 15)

Australia lacks institutional arrangements of the scope and scale that policy integration requires. However, there are strong conceptual foundations and well-developed ideas for strengthening these arrangements, and the proposed

First Nations' Voice to Parliament may be the most important example.

The idea of an elected and representative national body being established and constitutionally entrenched to scrutinise legislation and speak to parliament, and by extension the Australian public, was proposed by Indigenous people in 2017 as a form of substantive political recognition (Referendum Council, 2017):

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country. (p. 1)

The Liberal/National party coalition Government (2013–2022) argued that a body of this kind would become a third parliamentary chamber, thus giving Indigenous people an additional and unjustified voice in public affairs (Turnbull et al., 2017). The government considered a less substantive alternative (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021), which would have strengthened Indigenous people's opportunities to contribute to policymaking through administrative measures established by Act of Parliament. As such these opportunities could be weakened or removed at any point, whereas the Australian Constitution may be amended only by national referendum, so once established an entrenched Voice to Parliament would be difficult to remove (Australian Government, 1977). Relationships among policy actors, including those who approach policy from epistemologically different perspectives, are important. An entrenched Indigenous deliberative body may bring clarity to the rules of engagement, which may counter contemporary weaknesses in the relationships among policy development, implementation, and evaluation.

While the Voice would not have the authority to legislate, it would strengthen democracy by giving Indigenous people opportunities for meaningful political expression that prevailing arrangements do not provide (O'Sullivan, 2021). As such, a voice may contribute to SDG 16's call for just public institutions (UN, 2015a) and the Declaration's recognition of the Indigenous right to participate in the public life of the state (UN, 2007).

One of the key determinants of the Voice's public acceptability will be its proponents' ability to explain it as an idea that is not only consistent with liberal democracy, but as an idea that will make democracy work better by ensuring that everybody has a fair go; an aspiration requiring that everybody is meaningfully present.

Ultimately, and broadly speaking, self-determination embodies distinct political values and presumptions about how, by whom and for whom policy decisions are made. These values were not among those that the Senate inquiry explicitly considered, and the principal determinant of Australia aligning the SDGs with the right to self-determination, is the extent to which it is a national value to pursue better policy outcomes through measures that institutionalise Indigenous political voice. Ultimately, policy problems and solutions are conceptualised according to human values and human agency, which means that

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