



MENZIES
RESEARCH CENTRE

Annual Review 2020-21

“The Menzies Research Centre’s lively and engaging presence is driving the debates the nation needs to have.”

The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson AO



The year in numbers



28
Face to face
events



26,000
Podcast
downloads



143,000
YouTube
views



22
Webinars



4
Research
reports



2
Books
published



50
Watercooler
newsletters



6,382
Social media
followers



6,968
Mailing
list



683
Subscribers /
donors



**Permanent
Robert
Menzies
Institute**

2020-2021

Introduction

A year ago, we entered a recession with precious little indication of when or how strongly our country would emerge or the damage our basic freedoms might sustain along the way.

We determined that we would seize the opportunity in partnership with our supporters to build a bigger, stronger, smarter organisation capable of rising to the challenges ahead.

This annual review of the Menzies Research Centre is a reminder of what we have been able to achieve this year thanks to our shared determination to keep Liberal thought at the heart of public policy.

One of our proudest achievements this year was to establish the Robert Menzies Institute in partnership with the University of Melbourne, a centre that will bring a great prime minister's legacy to life as an inspiration to future generations.

We have produced major reports advocating sound public policy and expanded our presence in broadcasting and print.

And we have acquired the equipment and skills to stream compelling video and audio content to a larger audience in every corner of the country.

The threats to our freedom may be multiplying at home and abroad, but the MRC has never been in better shape to fight them.

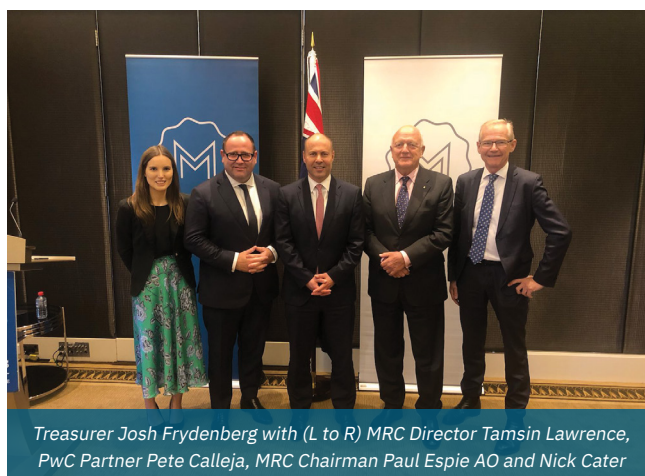
Thank you for your engagement, feedback and support during the year. Our work is only possible thanks to the contributions of people who share our principles and support our purpose.

We look ahead to the coming year with confidence, gratitude and determination to deliver even more towards a free, just and prosperous Australia.

I look forward to catching up with you soon.



Nick Cater
Executive Director
Menzies Research Centre



Treasurer Josh Frydenberg with (L to R) MRC Director Tamsin Lawrence, PwC Partner Pete Calleja, MRC Chairman Paul Espie AO and Nick Cater

Front cover: Nicolle Flint MP, Bev McArthur MP and MRC Director Tamsin Lawrence at the Gender Agenda event in Melbourne

Vision

The Menzies Research Centre is a think-tank that champions Liberal principles and advocates for a free, just and prosperous Australia.

It draws inspiration from Sir Robert Menzies, Australia's longest-serving prime minister and an exceptional articulator of Australian Liberalism.

The Centre conducts public policy research, publishes books, hosts live events and maintains an active media presence promoting the values that have made Australia one of the most free and prosperous nations in the world.

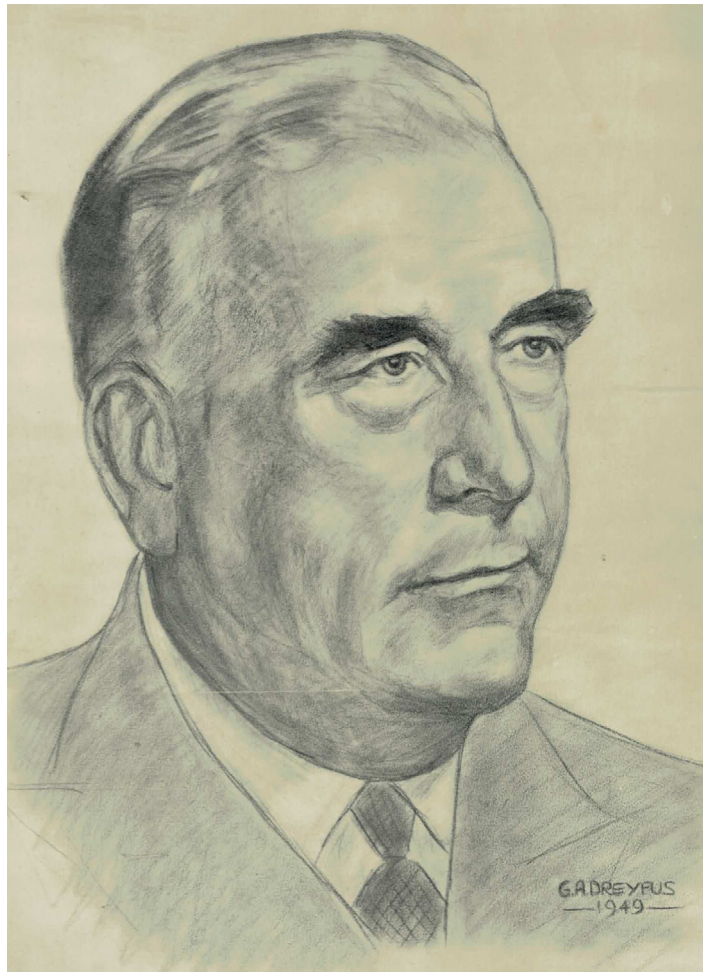
The Centre supports freedom, human dignity, personal responsibility, and private enterprise as the mainstays of modern Australian Liberalism.

It is committed to a just and humane society in which every individual has the opportunity to flourish.

The Menzies Research Centre advocates for effective, efficient and democratic government while encouraging independence, innovation and reward for effort.

It supports the institution of the family as the foundation for a strong and dynamic society bound by shared values and mutual obligations in which every individual enjoys equal moral worth.

The Centre is an associated entity of the Liberal Party of Australia.



Credit: Portrait by G R Dreyfus courtesy of Anthony Lowen Clarke

For more about us please visit:
www.menziesrc.org

Policy

Gender & Politics

In October, we released a 2020 update to the MRC's previous Gender & Politics reports from 2015 and 2017. Authored by Nick Cater and Nicolle Flint MP, the latest gender report provides empirical evidence of the extent and nature of the gender imbalance in politics, discusses its consequences and constructs an intellectual and philosophical framework to address the disparity based on Liberal principles.

Energy

Following our advocacy work during the 2019 federal election, where we highlighted the economic costs of extreme energy targets, we released a major report in October 2020 on energy policy. Written by Dr Brian Fisher AO PSM, "Powering out of pandemic: Unleashing the potential of gas" is an independent assessment of the contribution gas can make to fulfilling our national energy requirements. It argues that gas delivers the cheapest and quickest way to ensure that a renewables intensive electricity grid can deliver power around the clock.

Soil carbon

We also researched the role that carbon farming can play in the transition to a low-carbon future. Released in November 2020, "From the Ground Up: Unleashing the potential of soil" argues that a deliberate and consistent national focus on soil enrichment, driven by national leadership from politicians, farming groups and farmers themselves, will deliver substantial benefits far beyond the farming sector. The report highlights the many co-benefits of soil carbon, including farming productivity, profitability, drought resilience, emissions reduction and biodiversity.

Contestability

We will soon be releasing a report on contestability of government services by analysing public sector service contestability. The paper will promote conversation and present evidence about the contestability model's contribution to contemporary public sector service delivery and opportunities.



Advocacy



The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson AO passionately defends history as he launches the fourth volume of David Kemp's Australian Liberalism series

Religious freedom

In late 2020, we supported the campaign to protect religious freedom and parental rights in response to the Victorian Government's anti-conversion bill, which criminalises acts of prayer for individuals who want to transition to another gender. Among other things, the MRC hosted an online forum which acknowledged the sensitivity of the issue and drew attention to fact that the measures proposed in themselves were dangerously illiberal.

The ABC

We continue to agitate for reform of our national broadcaster. Independent polling commissioned by the MRC showed voters were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the progressive overreach of the ABC. Many voters are in favour of an independent public broadcasting ombudsman, a proposal that SA Senator Alex Antic explored in more detail in our "Watercooler" newsletter.

Identity politics

Over the past year, the MRC has campaigned vigorously against the scourge of identity politics and cancel culture. We have and will continue to defend Liberal values through opinion pieces, forums and media appearances. The fight against the radical authoritarianism of the cultural Left has become even more pressing following proposed draft changes to the national curriculum, which airbrushes the Judeo-Christian tradition out of civics lessons and robs future generations from learning about the principles that shaped Australian history.

Many more policy issues have been researched, written about and raised by the MRC this year. We continue to play a leading role in setting narratives, framing reforms and informing development where it matters most.

Events

The MRC paused its physical events programme during the first half of the financial year due to COVID-19.

However, even with the success of our webcasts, MRC supporters were eager to return to in-person events. A major highlight therefore was the 8th John Howard Lecture in Sydney in December 2020, where the Hon John Anderson AO delivered an incisive speech on identity politics.

The fourth volume of David Kemp's Australian Liberalism series was launched by the Treasurer Hon Josh Frydenberg MP and the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson AO in Melbourne (March 2021) and Sydney (April 2021) respectively. In June 2021, we held events in Western Australia to launch an anthology of Tony Abbott's prime ministerial speeches. This book tour will continue in Queensland in July.

The Minister for Youth and Education, Alan Tudge, delivered a landmark speech at a sell-out MRC event in March 2021 announcing a series of measures to reverse declining school standards. The event was also live streamed and broadcast on Sky News.

We hosted two Gender Agenda events in Sydney (April 2021) and Melbourne (May 2021) featuring Boothby MP Nicolle Flint, who together with Kristy McSweeney, Tamsin Lawrence and Bev McArthur MP in Melbourne and Gemma Tognini in Sydney discussed how best to tackle gender equality.

We hosted a series of private dinners with Australian luminaries, including John Howard, Peta Credlin and Brendan Nelson.

Our corporate engagement program, the Policy Exchange Network, has grown markedly. We hosted subscribers for seven face-to-face events with senior ministers and a special webinar with Health Minister Greg Hunt.

Specific events in Canberra have brought together the defence community via our National Security Network. Minister for Defence Hon Peter Dutton MP, his predecessor Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, and Assistant Minister for Defence Hon Andrew Hastie MP have been guest speakers.



Robert Menzies Institute

In April 2021 we established the Robert Menzies Institute, a prime ministerial library and museum that will preserve the timeless principles championed by Sir Robert Menzies and apply them to the challenges of today.

Our successful partnership with the University of Melbourne marks the culmination of a six-year project by the MRC to establish a permanent centre dedicated to strengthening the legacy of Australia's longest serving prime minister.

Former diplomat Georgina Downer will be the Institute's inaugural director. It will be governed by a board headed by former Qantas chairman Leigh Clifford AO.

Other directors are Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne Professor Su Baker AM, political commentator Peta Credlin, lawyer Geoffrey Hone, Dean of the Melbourne Business School Professor Ian Harper AO and academic and former Howard Government minister, the Hon Dr David Kemp AC.

There could be no better place to house this prestigious Institute than the Old Quad, the historic heart of the University of Melbourne's main campus, where Sir Robert honed his philosophy of public life as a student more than a century ago.

Forty-nine years after his graduation ceremony, his public life ended at the university where he served as Chancellor from 1967 to 1972.

The university is already home to Sir Robert Menzies' personal book collection, notebooks and memorabilia.



The Institute will:

- Curate Sir Robert's papers, books and other significant items including 3,800 items already held by the University.
- Create a digital hub for researchers.
- Host visits by schools and develop curricula.
- Become a centre for research into Australian liberal democracy with a series of visiting professors.
- Organise public lectures, discussions and exhibitions.

At a time when the illiberal ideology of post-structural thought is gaining ascendancy in much of academia, there is desperate need for an intellectual setting where Liberal ideas can freely be discussed.

The Institute has been established with the support of a \$7 million Commonwealth Government grant, matching the funding given by the Gillard Government to establish the Gough Whitlam Institute at Western Sydney University.

We also thank our Foundation Donors, and particularly the Cormack Foundation, without whose support this project would not have been possible. Their generous contributions will help fund the Institute's operation for the first three years.

Menzies Institute to inspire new generation



Georgina Downer at the University of Melbourne ahead of the launch of the Robert Menzies Institute

EXCLUSIVE
ANNE HARRIS

The Robert Menzies Institute will be created to honour Australia's longest-serving prime minister and will include a museum, library and initiatives to raise awareness of the Liberal leader.

The Menzies Research Centre at the University of Melbourne have combined to create the institute, which will host public exhibitions, lectures and activities for schools.

Former diplomat Georgina Downer will be the inaugural director, and the institute will be governed by a board headed by former Qantas chairman Leigh Clifford.

Other directors include former Liberal political adviser Peta Crellin, professor Ian Harper and former Howard government minister Duncan Kerr.

Ms Downer said the institute that would be displayed or become part of the wider collection. Menzies was born in the Victorian Mallee town of Geelong in 1894 and died in 1973 aged 83.

At a time when the illiberal ideology of post-structural thought is gaining ascendancy in much of academia, there is desperate need for an intellectual setting where Liberal ideas can freely be discussed.

Samantha Hutchinson

Robert Menzies, Australia's longest serving prime minister, will be remembered with an institute and library at Melbourne University, as a push grows to better preserve prime ministers' legacies.

The Robert Menzies Institute will open in September. It will feature a library and museum as well as a research house dedicated to probing Menzies' life, his term as prime minister, political ideals and impact on modern Australia.

The non-partisan institute will be headed by former diplomat Georgina Downer and chaired by former Qantas chair Leigh Clifford.



Georgina Downer: to head institute.

A significant part of the cultural and educational experience," said Ms Downer, the daughter of former foreign minister Alexander Downer. "I don't think Australia has been as good at exploring its own modern history and the contribution of some of its most prominent politicians... this will seek to address that."

The institute nears completion as support grows around the country to commemorate other former prime ministers in institutes, libraries and research bodies intent on educating the public about their contribution to public life.

While the initiative was spearheaded by Melbourne University - where Menzies studied law and then returned as chancellor after politics - and the Liberal Party-aligned Menzies Research Centre, it follows a blueprint first

established with the Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney dedicated to Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam.

Both initiatives were handed a \$7 million grant from the federal government.

Ms Downer said the institute would work closely with other prime ministerial libraries and think tanks including the John Howard museum set up by the University of New South Wales in Canberra, the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Library inside the University of South Australia and John Curtin Institute of Public Policy at Curtin University.

The Menzies Institute would likely have a heavy emphasis on research into higher education and its funding models, immigration, and Australia during war time - in line with the priorities during Menzies' two terms in office from April 1939 to August 1941 and again from December 1949 to January 1966.

The institute's board will also include Melbourne University's pro-vice chancellor Su Baker, political commentator Peta Crellin, lawyer Geoff Hone, Melbourne Business School dean Ian Harper and former Howard government minister David Kemp.

MEATIE A013



Books

Publications are an essential contribution to education, engagement and the advancement of Liberal values. We are proud to continue to produce quality books, monologues and materials.

Our publications program this year featured the launch of Volume IV of David Kemp's history of Australian Liberalism, *A Liberal State*, which covers the Menzies era and the founding of the Liberal Party.

Also this year we published *Menzies in his own words: A collection of quotes* edited by David Furse-Roberts, which is a selection of Menzies' sharpest observations drawn from thousands of speeches, lectures and broadcasts delivered over 40 momentous years in public life.

After the success of *Abbott: The Defining Speeches*, a book of outstanding speeches by Tony Abbott, we are pleased to be working on the next volume in this leadership series, a book of Dr Brendan Nelson's speeches.

Further publications for release this coming year include:

- David Furse-Roberts' *God & Menzies: The faith that shaped Australia's longest-serving prime minister*; and
- Dennis White's monograph on Malcolm Fraser with an introduction by David Kemp.



Digital

This past financial year, stay-at-home restrictions necessitated a greater pivot towards digital forms of engagement to advance and advocate our principles.

The weekly Watercooler newsletter remains our primary form of digital communication. It is a curation of commentary and analysis on issues dominating the political and policy arena. Readership numbers have grown over the past year to nearly 7,000 quality contacts, including all state and federal Liberal MPs and Senators.

We use it as a platform to announce new research campaigns, policy reports, books, invitations to MRC events and other initiatives that help to advance a free, just and prosperous Australia.

The Watercooler webcast series is now a cornerstone of our digital offering, having launched on the MRC's YouTube channel during the first nationwide lockdown. Our followers have grown during that time thanks to the programme's ability to attract leading commentators and policy makers. On the show, Nick Cater has interviewed thinkers such as Douglas Murray, Frank Furedi and Claire Lehmann; NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian; Federal Ministers Angus Taylor, Dan Tehan and Michael Sukkar; Senators Alex Antic, Amanda Stoker and Claire Chandler, and subject matter experts such as Judith Sloan, Adam Creighton and Paul Kelly.

Podcasts have been a feature of our online strategy for two years now and will be further integrated into our digital offering in the year ahead.

The MRC has refined its social media strategy over the past year to improve engagement and follower numbers. Facebook remains our most popular social channel, although there has also been a resurgence of late in the number of MRC LinkedIn followers. We will continue to cultivate bespoke social media content, such as the publication of salient quotes from Sir Robert Menzies, to appeal to a growing subsection of supporters who prefer to engage with the MRC through digital platforms.



Media

Nick Cater continues to write a weekly column for *The Australian* as well as occasional pieces in other publications. Nick is also a regular panellist on Sky News and has spoken at length on a range of policy issues during the past year.

Tim James maintains a regular panel position on the ABC's *The Drum* and is an occasional contributor to other news programs.

David Furse-Roberts has written a number of excerpts from his *God & Menzies* book for Eternity News, ABC Religion and the Australian Jewish News website.

MRC staff and contributors have published op eds in major media outlets drawing attention to our policy research. For instance, the *Australian Financial Review* published an op ed by James Mathias on soil carbon and a piece by Brian Fisher on gas.

Supporters

Despite the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MRC continues to enjoy the support of a dynamic community of subscribers and donors.

We would like to extend our gratitude to those who have continued to support us throughout this challenging period.

Their contributions are essential to enabling our policy, research and advocacy work.

Donations to the MRC Public Fund are tax-deductible and every dollar of support makes a difference to the policies and projects we are delivering.

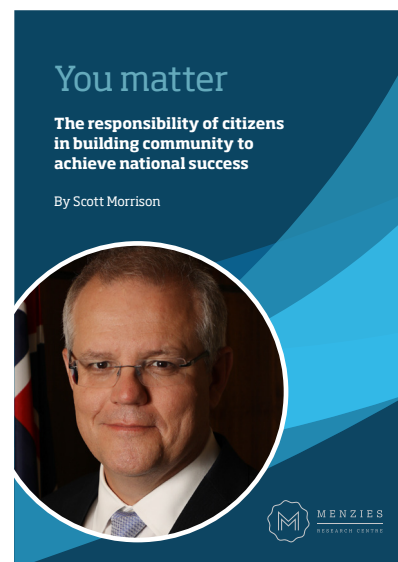
Our corporate subscription program, the Policy Exchange Network, has grown markedly this year. More than 25 engaged enterprises are now part of this valuable corporate community.



MRC Subscription packages	Platinum	Gold	Silver
	AUD \$500 per annum	AUD \$120 per annum	AUD \$25 per annum (note: only for people under 30 years of age)
Event invitations	✓	✓	✓
Early access to and complimentary copies of policy and research publications	✓	✓	✓
Book discounts (10%)	✓	✓	✓
Discounts on event tickets	✓	✓	
Subscriber-only events	✓	✓	
Exclusive Subscriber-only offers	✓	✓	
VIP event invitations	✓		
Book personalising / signing	✓		
Public acknowledgement of support	✓		
One complimentary book per year	✓		

MRC and the Liberal Party

As the think tank of the Liberal Party of Australia, the MRC plays a pivotal role in supporting the Party's policies and campaigns through evidence-based advocacy and research.



During the past year, we hosted a number of MPs and Senators as special guests or keynote speakers at MRC events and published excerpts from books written by Liberal backbenchers.

We also offer Liberal parliamentarians a platform to articulate their policy prescriptions, either in written form via an op ed or by webcast interview

We recently supported the Party's campaign to quell identity politics by producing and circulating a booklet containing a transcript of the Prime Minister's "You Matter" address to the United Israel Appeal NSW Donor Dinner.

We thank the Liberal Party and its staff led by Andrew Hirst for engaging and working with us this year.

MRC Operations

Our 26th year of operating was one of the most challenging in the MRC's history as events, face to face meetings and Canberra engagement were on hold for much of it.

However we proved more than up to the challenge by adapting operations, innovating means of engagement, strengthening systems and then returning to events and activity with greater vigour than ever. We are pleased and proud that we made the decision not to avail ourselves of JobKeeper and instead worked doubly hard to deliver and earn support.

We thank our Chairman Paul Espie AO and board members Andrew Abercrombie, Alex Danne, Georgina Downer (part), Mitchell Hooke AM, Meredith Jackson, Tamsin Lawrence, Brian Loughnane AO, the Hon Nick Minchin AO, Allan Pidgeon AM (part), the Hon Andrew Robb AO, Dr Peta Seaton AM, Adrian Tembel, the Hon Trish Worth AM, and Nick Cater. During the year we welcomed Party Vice-President Allan Pidgeon AM to the Board and farewelled Georgina Downer as she took up the Executive Director's role at RMI.

Thanks to the hard work of management, staff and board, and most of all thanks to the support of our supporters, the MRC is concluding 2020-2021 with a surplus larger than that of last year.

The management team of Nick Cater, Tim James, James Mathias and Susan Nguyen thank our Research Fellow David Furse-Roberts and many interns during the year for their significant and valued contributions. Susan joined us during the year as Communications Director and is delivering improved communications capability and outcomes.

The Year Ahead

As we are now well and truly into an election year the MRC will continue to produce high quality research and advocacy work to support the re-election of the Coalition Government.

Our policy focus for the coming year will be making Australia stronger and more resilient as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Current research on public sector contestability, climate change benchmarking and industrial relations, plus another iteration of our soil carbon paper, will be published and leveraged towards real reform and economic recovery.

We will also be unrelenting in our quest to preserve the principles and traditions that have informed our national culture as we push back against the dangerous ideology of the radical Left.

We come into the new financial year fully engaged and energised by the challenges and opportunities of this election year. Our contributions leading up to the 2019 election were timely and substantial as has been well recorded. We are today stronger and better able to research, develop and advocate policies and platforms for this significant period in our nation's history.

The MRC will continue to support the Robert Menzies Institute, its newly constituted board and leadership team in its formative year as they bring alive the spirit of a great Australian for a new generation.

A revitalised national events program will strengthen the MRC's engagement with supporters and donors, while a focus on continuous improvement of internal processes and systems will help us to optimise our outputs. This will enable us to maintain our strong growth and contribution in the election year ahead and into the long-term.

Back cover: Hon John Anderson AO delivering the 8th John Howard Lecture in Sydney

The Eighth John Howard Lecture



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