

# Sociium

SHOWCASING EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP

EDITION 2 | MAY 2026

## Australia's War History

Education resources  
launched

## Featured Fellows

Adam Possamai  
and Kalpana Ram



## Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Changing the story Australia tells about itself



**Cover photo:** Kiesha Wear (left), Coordinator of Data Sovereignty at Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and Distinguished Professor Emerita Maggie Walter FASSA at the 2025 Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty (GIDSov) Conference.

**Photo credit:** WolfLab Media

# Socium magazine

*Socium* is a Latin word meaning partner, ally, or companion. It signifies a relationship of shared purpose and collaboration – a fitting title for the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia’s bi-annual publication.

*Socium* showcases the work of the Academy, and the more than 750 leading social science researchers and professionals that make up our Fellowship.

The breadth of the social sciences means that our elected Fellows are experts in diverse fields including economics, history, education and law, through to psychology, linguistics, anthropology and statistics.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Australia. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. We pay respect to the Elders of the Ngunnawal Nation both past and present, on whose ancestral lands our National Office stands and recognise any other Peoples and families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.



## CONTENTS

Contents	1
President welcome	2
Feature story: Indigenous data sovereignty	3
Academy Workshops	6
Featured Fellows: Professor Adam Possamai	7
Featured Fellows: Professor Kalpana Ram	8
Events	9
Seriously Social: Australia’s War History	11
Policy update: Social science in the national interest	13
International Highlights	15
Q&A with Professor Alex Broom	17
Meet the Academy President	18
Committee Members	20
State Convenors	21

### Socium Editorial Committee

- Professor Kate Darian-Smith
- Professor Nicholas Brown
- Professor Guay Lim
- Dr Chris Hatherly
- Vanessa Barratt



## PRESIDENT WELCOME

Welcome to this second edition of *Socium*, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia's biannual publication which reports on its activities, and celebrates the many achievements of Academy Fellows and other social science researchers.

This issue includes a feature story on Indigenous Data Sovereignty, a global movement that was initiated in Australia by Palawa sociologist and Academy Fellow Distinguished Professor Emerita Maggie Walter and her colleagues. The Academy's long-running Workshops Program supported an early gathering of Indigenous scholars in Canberra in 2015 to explore the key issues. A decade later, and also supported by the Academy, Professor Walter and her colleagues hosted an international conference involving 280 Indigenous leaders from around the world. The strength of the movement today shows how Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and data custodians are charting a new and more ethical course with respect to the collection and use of Indigenous data. It demonstrates how social science research and research governance can have an impact on bureaucratic data practices and empower Indigenous communities.

The Academy and its Fellows have been active over the past half year in engaging with policy-makers through workshops, roundtables, submissions and briefings about Australia's future and the many changes afoot in higher education and in research and development. This issue highlights how social science expertise is crucial to Australia's Asian capability and to evaluating the long-term trends in the national Intergenerational Report. We also cover the Academy's broad portfolio of international activities from travel and collaboration grants to a regional gathering of social science academies held in New Delhi.

The Academy is delighted to announce its new school education resources on Australian War History, which were supported by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and launched at the Anzac Memorial in Sydney. This issue also turns a spotlight on select Fellows, asking what drives their research and leadership contributions.

There is much happening, and much to be excited about, including the Academy's revamped website and newsletter (take a look at [socialsciences.org.au](https://socialsciences.org.au), and subscribe to our newsletter while there if you haven't already). We trust you enjoy this issue of *Socium* and look forward to seeing our Fellows and readers at Academy events and activities soon.

Finally, the Academy's Board extends its deep thanks to Dr Chris Hatherly, who will be leaving the Academy at the end of June. Over his seven years as CEO, the Academy has benefitted significantly from Chris's professionalism, good cheer and commitment to advancing the social sciences across all of its programs. We wish him every success in his future endeavours.

**Kate Darian-Smith, President**



Distinguished Professor Emerita Maggie Walter FASSA at the 2025 Global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference.

Photo credit: WolfLab Media

## FEATURE

# *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Changing the story Australia tells about itself*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are among the most counted populations in Australia, and among the least heard. Governments have collected mountains of statistics about Indigenous lives: rates of smoking and drinking, attendance at school and rates of arrest, illness and incarceration. What those numbers have rarely captured is context, cause, or culture. According to Palawa sociologist and Academy Fellow Distinguished Professor Emerita Maggie Walter, that imbalance isn't accidental. 'The data tells a story of inadequacy,' she says. 'It says we are to blame for our own problems.'

The Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement emerged as a collaborative effort by Indigenous academics around the world to reclaim control over how data about Indigenous Peoples is collected, interpreted, and used. While the term itself is relatively recent, its foundations reach back long before spreadsheets and surveys.

Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples governed knowledge through complex systems of cultural authority. Colonisation disrupted those systems, replacing them with British administrative practices that transformed Indigenous Peoples from knowledge holders into data subjects.

The modern movement took clearer shape in the mid-2010s, catalysed by a 2015 workshop funded by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia that brought together Indigenous scholars from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Professor Walter describes the workshop as deliberately rigorous, with participants required to write their chapters before they arrived. 'This wasn't a roundtable or a chat,' Maggie recalls. 'The term Indigenous Data Sovereignty hadn't been coined yet but everyone in the room had been working in this space and understood what was needed to improve Indigenous rights to data.'

That scholarly groundwork mattered. It meant the conversations could move quickly from definitions to relationships; from critique to strategy. It also highlighted something fundamental: Indigenous data looked similar across settler colonial nations. Whether Māori, First Nations, Native American, or Aboriginal, the same pattern persisted—data dominated by deficit, stripped of explanation, and framed to serve government priorities rather than Indigenous wellbeing.

Maggie describes this as the tyranny of ‘what’ questions. How much do you smoke? How often do you drink? How many days did your child attend school? What’s missing are the ‘why’ questions about racism, safety, institutional failure, and social environment. For example, the Australian Government’s Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), commencing in 2008 and involving over 1,200 children and their families, provides answers to Indigenous-designed questions which in turn enable different results to be generated. When Maggie recently investigated LSIC data in relation to educational well-being, she found that commonly cited factors like poverty or family structure explained only five per cent of children’s wellbeing status. When questions about school safety, bullying, and school environment were added, explanatory power jumped to more than fifty per cent. ‘The answers they don’t seem to want,’ she says, ‘are always about institutions, not Indigenous people.’

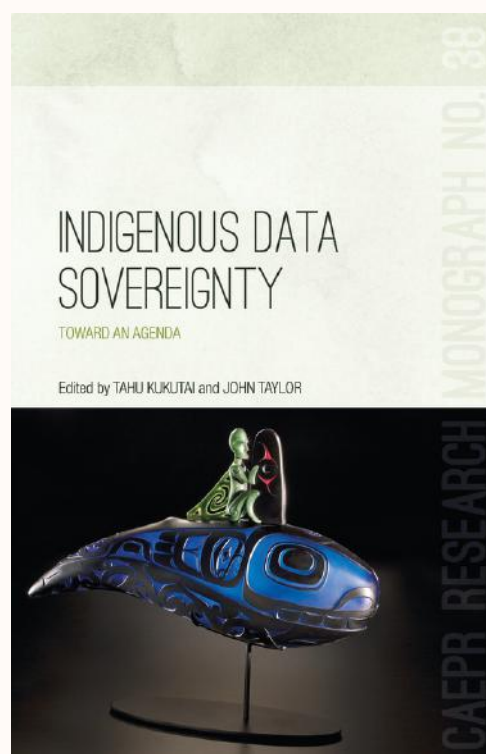
Maggie, along with Professor Ray Lovett, Dr Vanessa Lee-Ah Mat and Professor Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, formed the Maïam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty collective in 2017. One of its first strategic decisions was to refuse government funding. ‘That meant freedom,’ Walter explains. ‘Freedom to critique, to speak plainly, and not be captured.’ Another was to ‘write the canon’, to publish foundational texts so thoroughly that searches for ‘Indigenous Data Sovereignty’ would lead back to Indigenous scholars themselves. Today, that strategy is so successful that the term appears everywhere, from policy documents to corporate frameworks, often copied verbatim, sometimes without acknowledgement.

The widespread uptake of the term Indigenous Data Sovereignty is both a victory and a warning. As Maggie notes, Indigenous concepts are frequently absorbed, diluted, and redeployed as platitudes.

To prevent that, the movement has guarded access carefully. Indigenous-only workshops in 2018 and 2023 brought together scholars, community leaders and organisations to co-design principles and practices for Indigenous data governance, the operational arm of data sovereignty. A global Indigenous Data Sovereignty Conference held in Australia in 2025, 10-years on from the initial Academy-supported workshop, brought together 280 Indigenous people from around the world. After two days of discussion, non-Indigenous stakeholders and allies were also invited into the room to talk about how Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles could be better embedded into administrative systems and research practices on local and national scales.

Those gatherings provided something academia alone could not: authority grounded in community.

The distinction between data sovereignty and data governance matters. Sovereignty names the rights of Indigenous Peoples to have authority over data about their Peoples, lands, and resources. It is grounded in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Governance is how that right is enacted through protocols, institutions, and accountability. Without governance, argue Maggie and her colleagues, sovereignty remains abstract. Without sovereignty, governance becomes tokenistic.





Attendees at the 'Data sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples: Current practice and future needs' workshop in Canberra in 2015.

The decade since that first workshop has not been without its challenges for Maggie and the other members of *Maiam nayri Wingara*. 'Public servants often respond with blank stares when I talk about the "ontological chasm" between two very different ways of seeing, and measuring, the world,' she explains. The work has also been met with resistance by some statistical agencies who claim neutrality, insisting 'the data are just the data.' Maggie says it can be exhausting constantly explaining why numbers are never neutral. 'What is counted reflects what, and who, matters. When data are used to endlessly demonstrate disparity without explanation, it doesn't simply describe inequality—it helps to create it.'

For Maggie and her international collaborators, the challenge is ensuring Indigenous Peoples remain in charge of this conversation. 'Colonisation never sleeps,' Maggie says wryly. For Indigenous data advocates, the goal is not fewer numbers, but better ones. As Maggie says, 'we do this work to ensure data provides a more complete and accurate picture of Indigenous Peoples and better supports stronger, more informed decision-making.'

### **Definition of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, from The *Maiam nayri Wingara* Indigenous Data Sovereignty collective website:**

*The right of Indigenous Peoples to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination, and reuse of Indigenous Data (Kukutai & Taylor 2016; Snipp 2016).*

This is an internationally recognised and endorsed definition that cannot be changed even when summarising or paraphrasing.

## ACADEMY WORKSHOPS

# *Bringing experts together to solve Australia's most complex issues*

The Academy's Workshops Program offers Australian social scientists financial assistance to host multidisciplinary workshops that advance research and policy agendas on nationally important issues. The Academy supports up to eight workshops each year with funding of up to \$9,000.

The Workshops Program is intended to support the development of new ideas in social science research and policy. It helps researchers at all stages of their career to build skills and connect with others across different fields. The program also brings together people from government, business, and the community to share ideas and work on creative solutions to important, complex problems.

Over the past 30 years, the Academy is pleased to have funded more than 200 workshops involving thousands of leading experts from across Australia and the world.

The next round of Workshops Program Grants will open in May 2026.

To find out more about past recipients or to apply for funding, go to the Workshops Program Grants page of the Academy website, found under Grants & Awards.

## Highlights from the 2025 Workshops Program

The workshop *Transdisciplinarity for Socially Responsible Artificial Intelligence: Aligning Expertise in Social Sciences and Computing Research* was held at RMIT University, Melbourne on 31 June and 1 July 2025. The workshop was developed by an interdisciplinary team: Ms Joann Cattlin, Professor Lisa M. Given (FASSA), Dr Alexandra Ridgway, and Professor Falk Scholer, all from RMIT University.

The workshop sought to explore and raise awareness of the current challenges associated with development and adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), develop researchers' understanding of transdisciplinarity, and develop a transdisciplinary research agenda that integrates social science and technology methodologies, perspectives, and expertise. While many researchers are exploring the implications of AI, they often work in the confines of single disciplines or sectoral communities.

During the workshop, participants mapped out a research and policy agenda for AI and identified priority areas and timelines for new collaborative work.

## FEATURED

# Fellows



**Professor Adam Possamai**

Affiliation: Western Sydney University

Discipline: Sociology

Year elected: 2023

### How would you describe your work at a dinner party?

As everyone has an opinion about religion, being a believer, ex-believer, atheist, sceptic or someone who grew up with a religion, I always find it challenging to speak about my research. I have found that the best answer I get is usually a raised eyebrow and a moment of silence. It gets even more delicate when I speak about my research on esotericism and exorcism. A more neutral approach is to speak about census data in Australia and religion but that does not get much traction. So, I usually start by saying that I work at Western Sydney University and I take it from there.

### What role do the social sciences play in your work?

It might sound very unsociological to say this, but I feel I was born a sociologist without knowing what that meant until I went to university. I have navigated across various cultures, religions, and countries from a young age and have always taken the task to understand how and why people think and behave differently. This is now crucial in my work as a researcher on religion, in my various governance positions, and in my fiction writing in which I explored and illustrated social scientific theories such as Arendt's banality of evil, Bataille's notion of transgression, and Benjamin's writings on modern life. Being a Weberian, people's interpretation of their own life is at the core of my work.

### What are you most proud of?

My broad intellectual impact in the sociology of religion. By naming and legitimising various religious tendencies, I have given language to experiences many people were already having but could not articulate. I have also created new concepts and provided a precise vocabulary for scholars to describe something that was happening but had not been clearly named, e.g. hyper-real religion, perennism, and the over-policing of the devil in which the supply of exorcism creates its own demand. I have less takers for *Passé Secularism*, but this only came out last year.

### What continues to motivate your work?

Changes. My work as a researcher is on religion and change, and the way people understand religion is in flux. Whenever my work comes out in print, I feel I already need to update it. The same applies to my governance roles as I need to understand changes to lead. Change has become the only constant that keeps me going.

### What is your desert island book, song and/or movie?

The movie *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Children of Paradise) directed by Marcel Carné with a script written by the poet Jacques Prévert. Not only it is rich with meaning, but it has also a runtime of more than 3 hours, ideal on a desert island (assuming there is electricity). But to be more pragmatic I would probably go ahead with a collection of hundreds of chess games by world champions to keep my mind busy as the character from Stefan Zweig's *Chess Story* did in solitary confinement. Although it did not go that well at the end.

Professor Adam Possamai is Associate Dean Global, Partnerships and Advancement at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts, Business, and Law (SABEL) and Chair of the Academy's International Committee. He is renowned internationally for his work on popular religion, social theory, contemporary religion and Australian Aboriginal Peoples, and Muslim laws and society.



**Professor Kalpana Ram**

Honorary Professor of Anthropology,  
Australian National University  
Year elected: 2021

**What initially drew you to your field of study?**

Many of my answers about intellectual trajectory have their roots in my life journeys between India and Australia. I arrived in Sydney in 1971 from Delhi at the age of fourteen, my father had been appointed to further trade relations between the two countries. I was raised in an era of a newly independent Indian state trying to modernise and decolonise itself. The Australia I arrived in was experiencing a surge of social movements in the wake of the anti-Vietnam protests.

At Sydney University in 1973 I was drawn to disciplines and students engaging with questions of racism, sexism, class, and critical analysis of power. I did honours in Philosophy and Politics. As a postgraduate, my mission was to return to India to ask how such theories applied there. I turned to Sociology for my Masters, but my PhD in Anthropology proved better suited, giving me the time and methods to move beyond my family's privileged version of India and learn from women in Dalit agricultural and fishing communities, on their terms.

**What are you most proud of?**

Across nearly fifty years I have produced a high-quality body of work, but it is the last book *Fertile Disorder* which brings together decades of working in different areas of concern. I have shared the excitement of this breadth in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students in Australia and internationally – in India, the U.S, U.K, Germany, and Denmark. Doctoral scholars have taken my work on India in new directions of health and creative resilience of low-status communities, all based on grounded research.

However, Australia has performed poorly in funding and sustaining research on India. Earlier scholars had deep engagement built over years, but continuity in inter-generational transmission was lost. At a time when India is recognised as a rising power, we have lost a qualitative knowledge base from which applied responses can arise.

**What continues to motivate your work?**

I seek to resist pressures to simplify complex realities. The worlds of marginalised communities exceed discourses such as development, aid, or activism. Early on I questioned the usefulness of my writing, especially when community members asked how it helped them. Over time, their children and grandchildren have read my work and found value in seeing their lives and histories in print, using it to reflect on the social forces shaping their realities. Research has value beyond immediate usefulness. Writing that expands dominant definitions of reality can be read and used in ways we cannot anticipate.

**What role do social sciences play in your work?**

I teach students that qualitative, engaged, participatory research is essential to move beyond two common framings of cultural difference: seeing it as impassable, or managing it through institutional 'diversity'. Anthropology has been part of a colonial landscape, but it also offers an opening if we approach others as a humble apprentice rather than an expert.

This orientation has particular value for students from immigrant backgrounds. It opens pathways beyond a simple West/non-West divide. For students of Indian background, such work can become a transformative bridge to their heritage, widening it beyond family perspectives.

**What question keeps you awake at night?**

The scale of destruction of human and non-human life and its elemental matrix. Anthropology and sociology have focused too narrowly on human societies as if we were self-sufficient. Emerging approaches such as multi-species ethnographies and environmental humanities point toward a more holistic framework.

We must avoid technocratic solutions and draw on imaginative frameworks to be found among populations most affected by climate change and colonial legacies. First Nations understandings of land as 'Country', not owned but cared for, offer a powerful redefinition for how we relate to the world.

Kalpana Ram is Honorary Professor of Anthropology at the College of Culture, History and Society at Australian National University. She has international recognition for her work as an ethnographer of Dalit and fishing communities in Tamil Nadu as a way of addressing issues in the study of religion, women/gender, embodiment and social inequalities.

## EVENTS

# 2025 Gala Dinner



The Academy's annual Gala Dinner was held at the Sydney Opera House on 17 November 2025, with presentations from Professor Tom Calma AO and Australia's Chief Scientist Tony Haymet PhD.

The Gala Dinner celebrated 22 new Fellows elected to the Academy, along with Paul Bourke Award winners Dr Tianze Sun, Dr Erin O'Donnell, Dr Archie Thomas and Dr Kathryn Baragwanath-vogel and the inaugural Rechnitz Memorial Award winner Professor Marcia Langton AO.

Thank you to our dinner sponsors University of Adelaide, UNSW, Monash University and University of Sydney and to everyone who joined us for the social sciences night of nights for 2025.

## Landslide book launch



The Academy hosted the launch of new book, *Landslide - The 2025 Australian Federal Election*, at the National Library of Australia on 16 April with an in-person and online audience of more than 300 people coming together for an engaging discussion between ABC Radio Host Nick Bryant and political scientist Dr Jill Sheppard.

This book is the latest in a series of post election workshops, and resulting books, that have been supported by the Academy since 1996.

**Pictured:** Landslide editors (L to R): Professor Marian Sawer, Dr Jill Sheppard, and Professor John Warhurst

## EVENTS

### Social Science in the region



Between 3 and 5 December 2025, the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC) convened its 26<sup>th</sup> biennial conference in New Delhi, India, in partnership with the Indian Council of Social Science Research. The event brought together over 90 representatives from more than 20 countries, gathering social science leaders, researchers, and practitioners from across the Asia-Pacific and beyond to examine the role of social sciences in shaping sustainable futures.

Professor Adam Possamai represented the Academy presenting a working paper co-authored with Alpha Possamai-Inesedy, *Religion in the Age of AI: A New Agenda for Social Sciences in the Asia-Pacific Region*. Also in attendance representing the Academy were CEO Dr Chris Hatherly, International Director/AASSREC Secretary-General Dr Claire Rioult, and Senior International Manager Ms Anna Devenport. The conference provided a dynamic platform for dialogue on pressing regional and global challenges, with the scene strongly set by Professor Shamika Ravi’s keynote address as a tribute to the work of social science research and its contributions to policymaking in dynamic economies. For full papers, recordings, and image gallery of the conference, visit [aassrec.org/2025biennialconference/](https://aassrec.org/2025biennialconference/).

### Coming up in 2026

Date	Event details
14 July	<b>Rechnitz Memorial Lecture, Melbourne.</b> Guest speaker Professor Marcia Langton AO.
12-20 September	<b>Social Sciences Week</b>
17 September	<b>Great Debate and Great Student Debate, Canberra</b>
11 November	<b>Gala Dinner, Melbourne</b>
12 November	<b>Working Time Symposium, Melbourne</b>

For more information about upcoming Academy events, head to [socialsciences.org.au/events](https://socialsciences.org.au/events).

# Seriously Social: Australia's War History



**Pictured (L-R):**

- Cindy Bin Tahal (Academy Education Director)
- Neil Silver and Lynette Silver (historian and writer)
- Marley Bin Tahal (Academy video presenter)
- Professor Michelle Arrow (Academy Fellow and Chair, Australian Historical Association)
- Dr Chris Hatherly (Academy CEO)
- Archdeacon Andrew Nixon (Department of Veterans' Affairs)
- Professor Kate Darian-Smith (Academy President)
- Professor Frank Bongiorno (Fellow and President, Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences)
- Rachele Willington (ACARA HASS Curriculum Specialist)
- Emeritus Professor Roy MacLeod (Academy Fellow)
- Professor Adam Possamai (Academy Fellow)
- Tristan Black (Anzac Memorial).

Just two months after its launch, Seriously Social's *Australia's War History* curriculum resource is already gaining traction—accessed almost 1,000 times, emerging as a valuable addition to Years 9 and 10 History education.

The launch event, attended by Fellows, members of the education sector and Department of Veterans' Affairs, marked the introduction of a comprehensive national resource designed to support the teaching of Australian war history in secondary schools. Developed with the support of the Department of Veterans' Affairs through the Saluting Their Service Grants Program, the initiative reflects a strong collaboration between researchers, educators and curriculum specialists.

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare underscored the importance of the project, saying in a written statement 'we live in the best country in the world because of the extraordinary sacrifices by the men and women who came before us to make Australia what it is today. The great work by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia is teaching our kids about our history in a really powerful way.'

The resource aligns with the Australian Curriculum and complements both the New South Wales and Victorian curriculum frameworks, particularly in relation to the First and Second World Wars. Importantly, it situates these conflicts within a broader historical context, beginning with a brief outline of the Australian Wars and extending to a list of examples of Australia's military involvement since 1945, offering students a more expansive understanding of conflict and its legacies.

Academy President and historian Professor Kate Darian-Smith emphasised the scholarly strength underpinning the resource at the launch. 'This module is informed by the very best of scholarly research and serves as a contribution to support the great work of teachers in Australian schools and ultimately the learning of our young people,' she said. She added that the collaboration between educators and social scientists has helped bring complex histories to life for students.

The 84-page module includes themed readings, educational videos, an interactive timeline, student guidance for historic research and reporting and assessment guides. Its development drew on the expertise of 14 Academy Fellows, ensuring both academic rigour and classroom relevance.

Contributing Fellows include Emeritus Professor Bruce Scates, Professor Kate Darian-Smith, Emeritus Professor Joan Beaumont AM, Professor David Lowe, Emeritus Professor David Horner AM, Professor Nicholas Brown, Dr David Day, Professor Michelle Arrow, Professor Raelene Frances AM, Professor Amanda Nettelbeck, Professor Christina Twomey, Professor John Maynard, Professor Penny Edmonds and Professor Russell Tytler.

Award-winning teachers also played a key role in shaping the resource, including historian Lynette Silver AM MBE, 2025 Queensland History Educator Award recipient Peter Lawrence, and Seriously Social Education Director Cindy Bin Tahal.

Cindy Bin Tahal highlighted the project's educational ambition, noting that it encourages students to engage more deeply with both the broad narratives and personal dimensions of wartime experience. 'Our goal is to encourage deeper inquiry into the scale, diversity and impact of Australia's wartime service and sacrifice. War is complex and contested, and its story continues to unfold. Its consequences and interpretations still shape contemporary Australia and the world today,' she said.

Advice and support for the project were provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the History Teachers' Association of Australia, Education Services Australia, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and a national student reference group comprising high school students from across the country.

Now freely available via the Academy's Seriously Social website, *Australia's War History* continues to gain attention as a valuable, research-led resource supporting the next generation of students to better understand Australia's wartime past. The resource can be accessed at [seriouslysocial.org.au/learn/australias-war-history/](https://seriouslysocial.org.au/learn/australias-war-history/).



Pictured in attendance at the Seriously Social, Australia's War History launch event:

- Professor Michelle Arrow (Academy Fellow and Chair, Australian Historical Association)
- Professor Kate Darian-Smith (Academy President)
- Professor Frank Bongiorno (Fellow and President, Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences).

## POLICY UPDATE

# *Social science in the national interest*

Social sciences thrive when they are connected to decision-makers, and to the real challenges shaping our future. The Academy brings together leading expertise from across the social sciences to inform public policy to ensure that rigorous, independent and evidence-informed social science is heard where it matters most.

The Academy's policy work takes multiple forms. One of the most visible is our convening role. Through policy roundtables, symposia and forums, the Academy brings together cross-sector and cross-disciplinary expertise to foster evidence-based discussions on issues of national priority. These conversations are not abstract or academic exercises; they are designed to engage policy-makers, officials, researchers and practitioners in shared problem-solving.

We also provide targeted written input through submissions and briefings. Drawing on the collective knowledge of our Fellows and the wider social science community, these submissions aim to sharpen policy thinking and broaden the evidence base on which decisions are made.

A third and increasingly important stream of work involves projects and collaborative initiatives. Here, the Academy partners with government agencies, research institutions and other stakeholders to lead landmark initiatives focused on the health of the social science sector itself including our research infrastructure, long-term workforce sustainability, and commissioned work where social science perspectives are essential.

Oversight of this work sits with the Academy's Policy Committee, including Chair Professor Mark Western and Deputy Chair Professor Linda Botterill. The Committee provides strategic advice and ensures that our policy activities align with the Academy's principles and commitments. The Committee is supported by a highly capable Policy Team based at the Academy's National Office in Canberra: Andrea Verdich, our Policy Director, and Dr Honae Cuffe, Policy and Projects Manager.

Two recent examples illustrate how this approach translates into real influence on national discussions and decision-making.

The first is the Academy's contribution to the House Standing Committee on Education's inquiry into *Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond*, adopted in September 2025. This inquiry went to the heart of Australia's strategic, economic and cultural engagement with our region. On the same day the inquiry was announced, the Committee Chair published a piece outlining the scale of the challenge and the urgency of action.

The Academy's submission to the inquiry was informed by an open call to all Fellows, ensuring that it reflected a broad and deep range of expertise. Central to our argument was the distinctive contribution that social science knowledge makes to developing a nuanced understanding of Asian regional dynamics and Australia's place within them. The submission set out nine concrete recommendations aimed at strengthening existing capabilities and addressing the structural, policy and funding barriers that continue to limit our potential.



Professor Mark Western



Dr Honae Cuffe



Andrea Verdich



Professor Linda Botterill

That contribution led to an invitation for the Academy to appear before the Committee in March, alongside the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Academy President Professor Kate Darian-Smith and Fellow Professor Kate McGregor represented the Academy at the hearing.

The second example sits within a longer arc of engagement: the Intergenerational Report (IGR). Since 1998, successive Treasurers have been required under the Charter of Budget Honesty to publish an IGR every five years. These reports examine the long-term sustainability of current policies and explore how structural trends—demographic, economic, social and environmental—may shape Australia’s future.

The Academy has a strong history of engagement with the IGR, including a 2021 roundtable that led to the publication of *More than Fiscal*, which argued for a broader, more socially informed understanding of intergenerational wellbeing. On the strength of this work, the Academy was approached directly by the Treasury to provide advice ahead of the 2026 Intergenerational Report.

That engagement culminated in a roundtable titled *Resilient Futures: Priorities for the 2026 Intergenerational Report* that brought together leading scholars and policy thinkers to consider how social resilience, equity and institutional capacity should be reflected in long-term national planning. The forthcoming IGR, due for release later this year, will reveal the impact of those conversations.

Across all of this work Academy Fellows play a central role. Fellows contribute across all three streams of policy activity through submissions, participation in forums, and leadership of collaborative initiatives. Their expertise is the foundation of the Academy’s capacity to speak authoritatively and constructively to government and to the broader public.

## Information Resilience Report

In late 2024, the Academy convened an Expert Working Group of Academy Fellows and leaders from the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector to produce a report for government on research relating to the role of cultural and community institutions in countering mis- and dis-information. This report was commissioned by the Office of the Chief Scientist on behalf of the National Science and Technology Council—chaired by the Prime Minister—as part of a series of evidence-based reports to inform government thinking and decision making with respect to the pervasive challenges posed by the spread of inaccurate or intentionally mis-leading information circulating through social media and online.

The Expert Working Group was co-chaired by Academy President Kate Darian-Smith and Academy Fellow and historian Distinguished Professor Lynette Russell AM. The report was presented to and well-received by the National Science and Technology Council in 2025, and along with other reports in the series, is available on the Chief Scientist’s website.

Read the report and find out more at: [socialsciences.org.au/news/the-role-of-cultural-and-community-institutions-in-building-resilience-to-mis-and-dis-information/](https://socialsciences.org.au/news/the-role-of-cultural-and-community-institutions-in-building-resilience-to-mis-and-dis-information/).

*“The Council has ... drawn on the report to deliver independent advice to government on information resilience. We are confident that the Academy’s findings will play a key role in shaping future policy development in this area.”*

**Professor Tony Haymet FTSE, Australia’s Chief Scientist**

**Find out more about the Academy's policy work, submissions and reports at [socialsciences.org.au/our-work/policy](https://socialsciences.org.au/our-work/policy).**

## INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

# *Boosting Social Sciences in the Indo-Pacific Program*



Policy Paper Series Contribution: Advancing Disability-Inclusive Climate Adaptation and Policy: Case Studies from Fiji, Bali, and Indonesia

In 2023, the Canadian Government's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) contracted the Academy to deliver on behalf of the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC) a research capacity building program in the Indo-Pacific region. The goals of this program, *Boosting Social Sciences and their Contribution to Better Lives across the Indo-Pacific*, were ambitious—to map research systems and capacity, to establish long-term regional collaboration, and to support vital social science research initiatives, all within the Indo-Pacific region and in particular, low- and middle- income countries (LMICs). At its core, the objective of the program was to strengthen the role of ‘home grown’ social science in improving lives.

After two and a half years, this program wrapped up in April 2026. A collaborative partnership between the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC) and the Global Development Network (GDN), with generous funding from the IDRC, the program has made significant inroads towards this objective and demonstrated a clear path forward for future work.

***The most rewarding aspect of the AASSREC program was its strong emphasis on regional collaboration and interdisciplinary dialogue. It provided a meaningful platform to connect with scholars across Asia who are addressing shared social and cultural challenges through innovative research.***

Over the course of the program, this collaborative approach delivered tangible results, seen in strong regional uptake, sustained engagement, and a growing culture of cross-border collaboration. Highlights of the program include the delivery of two major grant schemes, the identification of regional social science priority themes, and the establishment of the Policy Paper series. These components have been achieved by the AASSREC Secretariat (hosted by the Academy) in tandem with GDN's *Doing Research Assessment programs*.

## Supporting regional collaboration through funding

The program's two flagship grant schemes – the *Priority Social Science Research Grants* and the *International Social Science Collaboration and Development Grants* – attracted strong interest. Respectively, these schemes funded six projects each awarded about \$50,000 AUD, and eighteen projects each awarded about \$6,000 AUD, decided through a highly competitive selection process by a review committee of leading social science experts from around the region. Both schemes featured multinational and gender-diverse research teams: most applications and awarded projects were led by women, and all included leadership and participation of researchers from LMICs. Together, the schemes established connections and lay the groundwork for future regional research collaboration – notably, 86% of survey respondents who participated in the program reported increased collaboration with other researchers in the region, saying they expect to maintain those connections in the future.



Priority Research Grant project with a team of researchers from Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia.

## Setting a regional agenda

Through consultations at the 2024 Regional Funding Summit held in Bangkok, AASSREC members identified five priority themes for the region's social science agenda:

- 1. Advancing Gender Equality**
- 2. Sustainability and Climate Change**
- 3. State and Social Transformations**
- 4. Indigenous Knowledge Systems**
- 5. Intergenerational Inequality**

## Targeting critical issues

The Policy Papers Series initiative has seen the publication of nine targeted papers on critical policy issues within each of the priority areas in 2026. The series consists of six papers from a strong cohort of open-call submissions, and three from the Priority Research grant recipient teams. Each paper was developed over a staged peer-review process that has supported social scientists to translate their national or multi-national research findings to policy recommendations with regional relevance. The papers are openly accessible under a Creative Commons license and designed for a broad audience, extending the program's influence well beyond its formal conclusion.

A survey of participating researchers points to the program's lasting impact, from stronger research careers to new partnerships and ongoing regional collaboration. Researchers reported that as well as deepening their subject-matter expertise and research skills, the program provided capacity-building in terms of people management (of international and multidisciplinary research teams), and grants/funds management (navigating administrative and bureaucratic requirements, challenges and delays). The program has enabled genuine cross-country research that reflects local realities while maintaining regional relevance, yet would have been strengthened by increased networking and peer-learning sessions. Imperatives for future programs therefore include more structured opportunities for interim research exchange and thematic workshops where grantees can share their progress, methods, and policy insights, as well as skills development in operational and administration capacity.

The completion of the program is situated in a moment of heightened regional flux: societies across Asia and the Pacific are being reshaped by climate vulnerability, demographic shifts, widening inequality, rapid digital transformation, and evolving geopolitics that unsettle national research systems and cross-border cooperation. The program has already made a significant contribution to social science in the region, and its ongoing value lies in what comes next: sustaining the connections it has sparked, creating more opportunities for collaboration, and continuing to reduce barriers to the participation of underrepresented and marginalised groups in regional social science research and cooperation.

# Q&A

## with Professor Alex Broom

### What drew you to take on the role of Academic Director at the ARC?

A few different things.

I have been a member of the ARC College of Experts for four years and really enjoyed it. I feel a strong sense of responsibility to do my bit for the Australian research ecosystem, and ensure it is well supported, fair decisions are made, and we support up-and-coming researchers to make a real world impact. Humanities and social sciences can sometimes have a lower profile than other fields of research, and I feel a responsibility to ensure our best HASS researchers are supported and the value of HASS is effectively communicated to publics, industry and governments alike. On a personal level, ARC-funded research opportunities have played an important role in my academic career, and I would not be where I am today without it. I was able to research areas of life I care very deeply about, including care for the dying and the bereaved, and their families. Australia consistently produces world-class research and punches above its weight. I find it inspiring seeing the incredible impact Australian researchers have nationally and internationally. It is a privilege to contribute to a system that supports that work. An innovation economy is really the only way we get ourselves out of the polycrisis humanity finds itself in, and the ARC is a critical part of that.

### What is your vision for the ARC over the next few years under your academic leadership?

I am really keen to support ambition in the system, including thoughtful risk-taking and processes that are as clear and efficient as possible for researchers. I am particularly interested in seeing curious and surprising collaborations – for example, between an artist and a physicist, or an engineer with a social justice scholar. I think these types of collaborations that break the mould also break new ground, and put Australia on the international stage, whilst also helping to address complex social, economic and technological challenges.

### What message do you want to send to early-career researchers who rely on ARC funding?

You are a key priority, including Indigenous early-career researchers. Research careers are demanding and competitive, and setbacks are part of the process. Persistence matters, and many successful projects are the result of refining ideas over time and reapplying. The ARC is committed to supporting a strong and diverse pipeline of future research leaders. And, if at first you don't succeed, try again!

### What lessons from your academic career will you carry into this role?

An academic career, and a career in research in particular, is incredibly hard. There is less and less career security, and most people pursue it as their passion, rather than for financial reward. This competition-through-scarcity can lead to perverse incentives in universities, and greater inequities across the sector. We need to enact processes which nourish our research ecosystem, maintain infrastructures which sustain diverse scholarship, and support people to get the best start possible. If we don't do this, we will see a decline in the status of Australia in the global knowledge economy. We will also lose our best and brightest, either to overseas, or to other industries. The ARC has a critical role in helping to sustain the research environment and protect Australia's knowledge base and the incredible talent we have.

### And outside of work - how do you recharge your batteries?

I have a seven-year-old son and an eight-year-old daughter. Most of my time beyond work is with them. I am soccer coach this year and terribly ill-suited to the role, and yet no-one seems to mind and we love spending time together. I love the fact that kids live in the moment, and embrace life as it rolls on, and they help me do that to.



**Professor Alex Broom** joined the Academy as a new Fellow in 2025. He recently joined the Australian Research Council as Academic Director: Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences.

## MEET THE ACADEMY PRESIDENT

# Professor Kate Darian-Smith

One year into Professor Kate Darian-Smith's three-year term as Academy President, we reflect on her achievements as a distinguished historian and her tireless advocacy for social science research.

Kate's extensive body of work has contributed to Australia's understanding of its own social and cultural fabric. She is internationally recognised as the author/editor of 30 books, and over 150 journal articles and chapters across Australian history, cultural heritage, and memory studies, including histories of war and society, settler-Indigenous relations, childhood, education, media, and migration. Her most recent publication is the co-authored *Migrants, Television and Australian Stories: A New History* (Routledge, 2025), and she is collaborating on an ARC-funded project on how access to higher education has shaped modern Australia.



As a senior academic and university leader, Kate has championed interdisciplinary collaboration and consistently argued for the relevance of the social sciences and humanities in addressing contemporary challenges — from social inequality to democratic resilience. After several years as Executive Dean and Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Tasmania, Kate is currently a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne, the institution where she has spent much of her career. An award-winning research mentor, she is committed to strengthening research capacity while also ensuring that scholarship remains connected to the wider community.

Over the past 12 months Kate has prioritised engagement between the Academy and our 750+ Fellows. The feedback from the Fellows survey and consultation sessions, held during Kate's early months as President, has informed a range of new initiatives for the Academy including the launch of *Socium* magazine, a new website, a stronger focus on policy engagement and refreshed committees and nomination processes.

### **What are you enjoying most about being Academy President?**

The Academy's Fellows, and their deep expertise and broad experience, are the heart of the Academy and all its activities. It's been a privilege to meet with and learn more about the amazing research and ideas of so many Fellows. I've also enjoyed collaborating with the presidents of the other Learned Academies, and with ACOLA, on shared responses to the Strategic Examination of Research and Development and other higher education and research priorities.

To contribute, in a small way, to the efforts of the Academy's Committees and National Office staff in driving the workshop, education, international and policy programs has been very rewarding.

One highlight has been the Academy's support for early career researchers through its Paul Bourke Awards, and for First Nations scholars through the Rechnitz grants and Award, both demonstrating the importance of recognising exceptional contributions from social scientists. Another has been the expansion of Social Sciences Week, with events around the country that bring universities, researchers and the community together.

## MEET THE ACADEMY PRESIDENT

### **How is social sciences education faring in Australia?**

The Academy will be releasing the *State of the Social Sciences 2026* Report later this year, providing an update on its landmark 2021 stocktake. Early findings show that 51% of all university enrolments, and almost 70% of all student equity categories, are in a social science program. Graduate outcomes, including in the professions, are strong.

However, the impact of the Jobs Ready Graduate policy on some social science disciplines and core degrees, and on the levels of student debt, continues to be of great concern and has been raised by the Academy in relevant government submissions.

### **What do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges for the social sciences in coming years?**

In a world undergoing upheaval and transformation — in geopolitics, environmental issues, technologies, growing inequalities — the social sciences are crucial to how we navigate these changes now and in the future. Social science knowledges and methodologies help us understand social and economic complexities and human behaviours. They provide evidence for good decision-making and policy implementation.

But this can't happen in isolation. There are big opportunities for social science researchers to collaborate with the humanities, science, technology and medical fields across a multitude of areas to create a good life for future generations and the health of our planet.

There are significant challenges. The value of the social sciences to policy and innovation is often overlooked or misunderstood by government and industry. The policy and advocacy work of the Academy aims to turn this view on its head, by demonstrating how social science research is necessary for Australia's future growth and its sovereign capability. Another challenge is to ensure that early and mid-career scholars in universities and research organisations are supported to achieve success in their careers.



From L-R: Professor Kate Darian-Smith with Professor Louise Baur AM PresAHMS, President of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences; Professor Stephen Garton AM FAHA FASSA, President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities; Dr Cathy Foley AO FAA FTSE, President of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering; and Professor Chennupati Jagadish AC PresAA FRS FREng FTSE, President of the Australian Academy of Science.

## GET TO KNOW THE CURRENT

# Committee Members

Get to know the current members of the Academy's Policy and Education committees. For all committee lists go to: [socialsciences.org.au/about/committees-of-the-academy](https://socialsciences.org.au/about/committees-of-the-academy)

POLICY COMMITTEE		TERM	
		1 JAN TO 31 DEC	
Professor Kate Darian-Smith	President	2025	2027
Professor Mark Western	Chair	2024	2027
Professor Linda Botterill	Deputy-Chair	2022	2027
Professor David Kalisch	Member	2023	2028
Professor Jenny Lewis	Member	2024	2026
Professor Amanda Barnier	Member	2024	2026
Dr Harry Hobbs (2022 PBA winner)	Member	2024	2026
Professor Jeff Borland	Member	2025	2027
Professor Jacqui True	Member	2025	2027
Professor Adam Graycar	Member	2026	2028
Professor Rob Raven	Member	2026	2028
Dr Chris Hatherly	CEO		
Andrea Verdich	Policy Director		

EDUCATION COMMITTEE		TERM	
		1 JAN TO 31 DEC	
Professor Lyn Yates	Chair (Academy Fellow)	2026	2028
Professor Julie Henry	Member (Academy Fellow)	2023	2028
Professor Martin Mills	Member (Academy Fellow)	2024	2026
Professor Russell Tytler	Member (Academy Fellow)	2025	2027
Professor Barbara Comber	Member (Academy Fellow)	2026	2028
Professor Steve Houghton	Member (Academy Fellow)	2026	2028
Dr Chris Hatherly	CEO		
Cindy Bin Tahal	Education Director		

## New South Wales



Professor Marian Baird



Professor Michele Ford

# FELLOWSHIP STATE EVENTS: *State Convenors*

## Victoria / Tasmania



Professor Greg Bamber



Professor Jenny Lewis

## Australian Capital Territory



Professor Linda Botterill

## South Australia



Professor Andrew Goldsmith



Professor Tracey Wade

## Queensland



Professor Neal Ashkanasy

## Western Australia



Professor Loretta Baldassar



Professor Kanishka  
Jayasuriya



Professor Garry Rodan

#SSW2026



# Social Sciences Week 12–20 September



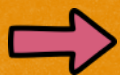
Host an event



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A network diagram consisting of various sized grey circles (nodes) connected by thin grey lines (edges), forming a complex web-like structure across the top half of the page.

# *Socium*



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