



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF
PARLIAMENT GROUP
(Queensland Chapter)***

**THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE: REPRESENTING
REGIONAL QUEENSLAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2022

Brisbane

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Ms MALONE: Welcome to tonight's forum, entitled 'The tyranny of distance: representing regional Queensland in the 21st century'. For those of you who have not been to the Australasian Study of Parliament Group before, I will tell you a little about it. The Australasian Study of Parliament Group is a body that has a charter to bring together parliamentarians, academics, members of the media, parliamentary staff and other interested persons to foster research, debate and understanding of the political system in which we all operate. We have forums such as this about three times a year.

I would like to issue a special welcome from our new chair, Diana McCluskey, who is unable to make it tonight. I am standing in on her behalf. Diana sends her apologies but also her very warm welcome to you.

This is the first forum for 2022. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land. I respectfully acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal people. We pay our respects to elders past and present. We are fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in the world embodied in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

We really have two events this evening. The first is the forum, the panel discussion, on the tyranny of distance. We are very grateful that the people best equipped to tell us about that have generously given their time and attention to us: Cynthia Lui, Lachlan Millar and Robbie Katter—the people with the most distant and most vast electorates in this state. We really look forward to hearing from them in that panel discussion. That will be moderated by fellow ASPG executive member Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach.

The second part of the forum will be a presentation to the recipient of the inaugural ASPG annual prize for parliamentary scholarship. That is to be presented to Janine McPherson. There will be time in this program for Janine to present to us and for us to present to her. I would like to hand over now to Ray to get the panel started.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you, Nonie. Again, I welcome all those here tonight—past and present politicians and all other distinguished guests. We will move straight to our panel for their five-minute speeches. At four minutes I will give them a little reminder that they have one minute to go, because we have a very interesting question time to follow their very informative speeches. For our first speaker, I invite Ms Cynthia Lui, the member for Cook, way up in the north of Queensland, to share her thoughts on the tyranny of distance. Cynthia, over to you.

Ms LUI: Thank you for the opportunity to be here tonight. I will start off by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Cynthia Lui. I am the member for Cook, one of four electorates in Far North Queensland. I cover a vast area of Far North Queensland. My electorate covers over 196,000 square kilometres and takes in the communities of Mareeba and surrounding communities on the Tablelands, Mossman and Port Douglas on the coast, and all of Cape York and all of the Torres Strait. The Cook electorate consists of 14 local council areas as well as one town authority. I have many small communities scattered throughout my electorate.

As a first-term MP I wanted to do and be everything for my constituents and the communities I put my hand up to represent. After being officially sworn in I made a personal commitment to visit every single community in the Cook electorate to say thank you, but I also wanted all of my communities to know me as the local member. That was my way of introducing myself.

It was very important for me to do that in my first year—making that point of contact with all of my communities—but I soon realised that it came at a cost. I think that exercise probably made me learn about self-care. As parliamentarians I think we can all appreciate that you want to put your best foot forward, and that is what I did. I got to the end of my first year and I was exhausted. That commitment to get around to every single community—I think I got to all of the communities but six, which I just could not get to; I did not have it in me physically, mentally or emotionally. I knew I needed to have a break.

The tyranny of distance: representing regional Queensland in the 21st century

It was a big commitment but a worthwhile one. I do not regret it but the take-home message for me was about knowing how important the work-life balance really is. That first year, like I said, was a learning experience for me. Work-life balance was pretty much non-existent. Like I said, it took all of me mentally, physically and emotionally and it was part of my learning process about that transition to being an MP and what it all means.

It is now almost five years since I was first elected and I am still learning. I do not think I have mastered the art of having a good work-life balance, but I certainly try to make it work. The thing for me, if I can be honest in this space, was that I sacrificed family time. The length and the breadth of my electorate meant that a lot of time was taken up by travelling. I did not realise that my family time was actually sacrificed so that I could be the person that my communities elected me to be. I mentioned my health and wellbeing. That certainly took a big toll as well. Knowing what I know now, I think I would have done it a bit differently. For me it was about finding out what my trigger points were, knowing when to stop and being more in tune with my body and what worked for me.

Technology is a big aspect and I am very grateful for technology. Because of COVID I was quite restricted in getting in and out of my communities. Zoom, the telephone and whatnot were the only ways I could really connect with all constituents in my electorate. I valued the use of technology in my electorate.

Travel time is always going to cut into everything I do. In terms of balancing how I get around now, I prioritise my communities. In terms of travel, rather than putting a whole week away where I try to visit multiple communities at a time, I will prioritise my community and get in and do overnights. I also use my ministerial visits when my ministers visit the electorate.

The thing that sets my electorate aside from any other in Queensland—and I think the members for Traeger and Gregory can appreciate this—is access. Access is always going to be the biggest topic for people in my electorate. It is roads, affordable travel, access to services and the list goes on. I think all of our work here is to ensure that we do fight hard for people to have better access.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you, Cynthia. That is very insightful, particularly for one of the most difficult electorates in Queensland, way up in the north. Thank you very much for that. We now move on to our next speaker, the famous person in the north-west, the member for Gregory, Mr Lachlan Millar.

Mr MILLAR: The famous bloke from the north-west is this bloke over here, Robbie Katter. I am central west. Thank you so much for coming along tonight. I looked at the title tonight, 'The tyranny of distance', and thought, 'Gee, it would be a good time to have a complain and say "woe is me".' However, I signed up for this. I signed up to be the member for Gregory. I knew how big the seat of Gregory was and I accept it. I have 54 schools in my electorate. I have eight councils. I cover 460,000 square kilometres, which is now the biggest electorate in Queensland. However, that is what I signed up for and I enjoy it.

Yes, it does take me away from my family. I remember when I was first elected John Mickel said to all of us when we were in that room—and JP was there as well—'Make sure you put your wife's birthday and your kids' birthdays in your calendar and don't miss them.' Unfortunately, John, I have. That is what happens. However, it is an absolute privilege and an honour to be the member for Gregory.

There have only been four members for Gregory since 1952: Sir Wally Rae, Bill Glasson Snr, Vaughan Johnson and me. It is an honour and a privilege to be the member and I love this job. Yes, I am away from home a lot. My wife and I have had to deal with some issues because I am away, like every family has to deal with some issues. I do miss the birthdays, the graduations and family life, but they understand what I am trying to do and what we are trying to achieve.

I grew up in the Central Highlands and my family came from the central west. There are Millars buried from Barcardine all the way down to Charleville. I do not know why that is. I just do not think they liked each other because we have family members buried all over the place there. Prior to being an MP, I was off the land. My old man had always said to us three boys—I have an older and a younger brother—'You need to go and get a trade,' and I decided to be a journalist. I wish I was not; I wish I was an electrician or a diesel fitter because they are of more value these days. I do not think journalism is that valued at the moment, I am sorry to say. I worked for the ABC for 12 years. I worked for the *Queensland Country Hour* and I covered areas right across Queensland, so this is something I am used to. I always wanted to advocate for agriculture and for regional Queensland. It plays such an important role.

We can complain about how big our electorates are, but if you go down to Mermaid Beach, South Brisbane or Surfers Paradise they have just as many problems as we have. I think one of the things we deal with is—and I know Robbie and Cynthia will realise this—we get to know everybody in our electorate. If we go to Longreach, Blackall, Windorah, Birdsville, Boulia or Bedourie, we are treated like locals. That is because they need the connection to their representative. It is a privilege to do that.

I am not going to come here and say, 'Woe is me; I have a big electorate.' It is not worth that. It is a privilege and an honour to serve. We have to realise that the seat of Gregory, Traeger or Cook is just as important as the seat of Surfers Paradise or Mermaid Beach or any seats here in Brisbane. It is ironic that we are sitting here in the old Senate that was disbanded 100 years ago. I know it is hard to say to the public, 'We need more politicians,' but maybe we do need a Senate to get more representation across regional Queensland. Maybe that is something that needs to be looked at. I do not think it is going to happen in my lifetime, but the more representation for the regions the better.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you. I did not hear of any tyranny in that whatsoever, so that is a wonderful endorsement for your representation out there in Gregory. It is a great pleasure for me to now introduce the member for Traeger, Robbie Katter, who looks after my old home town of Richmond. He and his dad go back a long way with me. Rob, over to you to talk about tyranny.

Mr KATTER: I thought I would start with a fact. A lot has been said about the growing cultural divide between the city and the country. I think it is there and it is growing, which is regrettable. In my family Dad had two siblings. On the Katter side there are seven boys and I am the only one who now lives outside of Brisbane. Out of the girls there is one from five; one of my sisters lives in Armidale and the rest live in Brisbane. I think that says something. There seems to be a lack of willingness of people to move outside the city, and I think that creates political problems for us. Even trying to get services to remote areas is becoming increasingly difficult. Us MPs here at the table get squawky when services are not being delivered, but it is simply getting really difficult. I think a lot of it comes back to that cultural divide. I think everyone would agree that none of that is born out of animosity. It is just indifference. It is often said that we all had a cousin or an uncle who lived off the land whom we used to visit when we were younger, but that does not seem to happen as much now. It is a real problem.

In terms of the remoteness, I am not sure I would agree with Lachie that they are all the same problems. It was going to come up at some point—'poor bugger me'. I do find there is even a difference between Charters Towers, where I grew up, and Mount Isa in terms of the severity of the issues. The more remote you go, people will say, 'I broke my leg last week. I'll go to the doctor next week.' You might say, 'That is pretty serious.' 'Oh yeah, it doesn't matter. I have terminal cancer, anyway. But it's all right.' I think, 'My goodness.' It shocks me how indifferent people are to mortality and things like that in these remote areas.

Dr Clements was up in Karumba at the time of the cyclone a year or two ago and I flew straight up there after Christmas. He said, 'Mate, up here no-one is expecting anything. No-one cares,' and it was true. I felt so horrible. I went up there and I probably did not do a lot, but I think people expect not to get attention. That breeds resilience and it brings as many blessings as it does adversities. It is very real. I find that the problems people come to your office for do tend to be more severe in remote areas. I do find it is very difficult.

It is funny debating in the House sometimes. I am sure I display the same level of ignorance of issues in the city—that is, where I am not across issues. My view is that people miss the mark in parliament when they talk about issues as they apply in remote areas. I would not blame them because it is fairly nuanced. If I go up to Doomadgee and try to sort through issues there, I am a babe in the woods. People say to me, 'How do you go up there? You seem to have it all worked out.' Crikey, I am a long way off having it worked out. I know enough to know how little I know. That is a good starting point, I think.

I find it surprising how far off the mark people are sometimes, but when you reflect on that it probably makes sense because it is pretty hard to get up to Doomadgee regularly to get a sense of what is going on for them. People report to you this, but that was that family and if I had spoken to them I would have been given a different opinion. If you spend just one day there you come back with some idea about things. It makes sense after a while.

Media plays a big part in things. If you want to be effective, I think you have to try to work with the media well and advocate for these remote issues, as we all at this table try to do. We try to engage and make an impact. Literally, camera crews exited Mount Isa 10 or 20 years ago. We now cannot use our

travel allowance to pay for the media to come out to our electorate to report on something. We used to be able to do that. You can do that federally. We cannot do that now. That is a real problem which directly influences your ability to properly represent your area. If you are in Townsville you have the media there so you can raise your issues all the time.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you very much, Rob. You are a long way out there. I can imagine the tyrannies that you face. Ladies and gentlemen, now we are going to move to the second part of tonight's forum, which is the opportunity for you to ask these members hard-hitting questions about the issues in their electorates. We can tease something out. I have James going around with a microphone. If you have a burning question to any of the members, please ask it. I will kick things off with a question. Is there anything that we in the parliament could do to make the job of an MP with a geographically large electorate easier?

Mr KATTER: I hate always defaulting to funding and resources, but it does help. If you can get around your electorate, it helps. The travel budget is not bad. If we had an extra half an EA that would make a difference. If I could not be at Hughenden, Cloncurry or Charters Towers but I could have someone there to get on top of things, it would help. It is not the same as having the MP there, but it helps in terms of getting on top of issues.

Mr MILLAR: I agree with Robbie. If we could get a few extra resources it would help. I also think it is up to the government of the day to understand that Queensland is a big state. It does not stop in the south-east and it does the stop on the coastline going up the coast.

The government needs to have regional cabinets. They need to make the point of going to Longreach, Mount Isa and Mareeba and holding cabinet meetings there so that they get to have ownership of these issues. I am the local MP and I am more than happy to host the cabinet. They have done that—and I congratulate them for doing that—but they should do it more often. It has to be more than a photograph opportunity. I am not trying to be critical, but I think the only one to make money out of a regional cabinet is RM Williams in Queen Street because all the ministers go down and get their moleskins, hats and check shirts. They have had a good crack at that. I think there needs to be more commitment to regional cabinets.

Ms LUI: I have to agree with Robbie on this. Having extra resources would certainly help to get to those areas. I mentioned priorities before. In the Torres Strait there are 15 islands. If I could get someone to at least make a connection with those communities, it would certainly help. Obviously the size of the electorate is the size of the electorate and you have to work across the electorate to the best of your ability.

QUESTIONER (Inaudible). One of the things that COVID has thrown up is that there are lots of people who cannot afford technology, do not have access to it or cannot use it. I am just wondering how good it is, how much coverage you have and whether that is something that perhaps needs to be looked at more realistically?

Ms LUI: I think COVID helped me to appreciate the different means of connecting with the community. I not only had all the restrictions that were in place across Queensland; I also had the biosecurity restrictions imposed on Cape York and the Torres Strait given they were deemed our most vulnerable communities. In saying all of that, while I was linking into communities via Zoom or whatever the platform was, I also acknowledge that we have poor connectivity. Robbie will probably agree with me on this. There are areas in the electorate where connectivity is hard to obtain. It made it difficult to connect with some areas. Not only that, we had the challenge of many blackouts. There was a lot of maintenance work that needed to be done during that time which was impacted by COVID. It is an ongoing debacle. I honestly think we are at an age where we should all be working off the same script. Whether you are in Far North Queensland or in Robbie's electorate, we should all have the same connectivity.

Mr KATTER: This will give me the opportunity to tidy up my introduction, which, on reflection, I think was pretty poor. COVID really made you think about how you spend your time. I think you partition into parliamentary time and party time by pushing policies and issues that you are really interested in and then into electorate time, which is fixing crossings, health issues or getting doctors in. It was an energising time then to focus on electorate issues and bury yourself in those. Some of that gets the blood pumping.

It was probably a better time to engage. You were not getting out amongst things as much, but you could still take calls. When I am sitting down at my desk in my office I find I get a lot of things done and action things. I am pretty poor at actioning things when I am out at Richmond, for example, trying to talk to people. It is always a challenge because as soon as you hit the ground you want to talk to people, not be on the phone trying to do media or giving directions on things. The COVID period was a good time to bolt down in the office and tidy up things at that end.

QUESTIONER: Does your electorate have full coverage?

Mr KATTER: Sorry, I misunderstood. It does have full coverage, but Carrum is terrible and Dajarra is terrible. Technically it is there, but it is unusable and that makes it hard to operate.

Mr MILLAR: I can only repeat what Robbie and Cynthia said. One of the biggest problems we have is access to internet and download speeds. As much as we would like to have the same speeds you have in Brisbane, South-East Queensland, Sydney or Melbourne, that is going to take time. We cannot expect miracles overnight. We live in a vast area. We are slowly getting there with NBN and Sky Muster. It would be helpful, but there is nothing better than being one on one with someone. There is nothing better than being in front of the community and talking to someone one on one. Our staff deserve gold medals for what they have to put up with. I do not think they tell us half the things they have to put up with—the abuse and all those sorts of things. They try to sanitise it for us so we do not get upset. I do not have the answer to that. Let us see where it goes.

QUESTIONER (Inaudible) it is education, it is health, it is business, it is everything. It is probably one thing that could be (inaudible). If you cannot get doctors or nurses or whatever, you should be able to get (inaudible).

Mr MICKEL (Inaudible) so they are not reinventing the wheel. It strikes me that one of the things that happens in this place is that people get elected and there is an expectation by some that you know how to help them. That is crap. We have had two landslides that I am aware of. Thank you for gracious comments, but except for that (inaudible) did anybody tell you? The second thing seems to me that, from Elizabeth's story tonight, it is one thing to have a forum but it is another thing to do something about it.

One of the things that this group maybe should be doing is pressing and getting behind all these members with the Remuneration Tribunal to make sure they have more staff or more flights. I am all for one-vote one-value, but I am also for equal opportunity. I recognise that in Logan it was not the same as what (inaudible). I am prepared as a taxpayer to pay for extra resources so that the vote of my former people is the same for anyone.

It is really two things. Did anybody help? Out of tonight, maybe you should think about a resolution to put to the Remuneration Tribunal to give these guys and gals extra resources, whether that be extra flights or extra staffing. What I am hearing now is that what we used to put up with is getting worse—that is, members of parliament are no longer members of parliament in the electorate; they are social workers, without the training to be social workers. You have worked for Robbie and I bet your training is not in social work. I think that is something we have to get our heads around—that notion that the job has changed.

Ms LUI: I appreciate those two questions. Coming in I did get a lot of help from a former state MP, but I think the time when that person worked compared to now—with social media and all that sort of thing—has changed considerably. There were things that I could take from them as my personal learnings and implement, especially in terms of engaging with communities and things that are important. Then it was the case of finding my feet. We are very different people with very different personalities. I am the type of person who will just get my head into the job and run with it, and that is what I did. While I have taken on the learnings from past MPs—and that certainly did help—I needed to find my own feet as well to be able to make this suit me.

I hear your comment about whether we are politicians or social workers. I come from a background where I was heavily involved in the social sector. Given my history, it was easy for me to be pulled into the thinking of how to work with communities. Almost five years in, I can see that my role has probably more taken the shape of being a social worker rather than being a politician. How do you bring the two together? I am still figuring that one out. There are others in here who do it really well—I think Robbie does it really well—but you have to have that political knack to be able to pull it apart. It will certainly help in this role, but I think it comes back to my background and my history as to how I shape the style of my work in this term.

Mr STEVENS: John, just to address the second part of your question in relation to perhaps a resolution coming from the ASPG and this branch, only the Remuneration Tribunal deals with salaries. It would be a matter for the DPC—the Department of the Premier and Cabinet—in terms of resources or perhaps even the CLA, the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, to make a decision to assist. At the end of the day, it will be the DPC that does the funding for the matter and you would have to get a resolution recommended from here to the CLA to recommend it to the DPC. That is the—

QUESTIONER (Inaudible).

Mr STEVENS: Yes. Thank you. Further questions? I think Robbie wants to answer that one as well.

Mr KATTER: I think Cynthia did an excellent job of that, but I think I am a good person to answer this because I was a really bad combination of probably not outward cockiness but internal self-belief, thinking, 'I've got this sorted.' I thought, 'My grandfather did it and dad's doing it,' but I had no idea and so I probably was not ready to listen. I wish I could go back to my younger self now and say, 'Listen to some of this training you're getting.' It would have saved me a lot of time and heartache. I see the value in it, but I think most MPs by their nature have a bit of an ego when they get elected and it is hard to break into that space to say, 'Trust us in terms of the advice we're giving you.' I think that will always be a barrier, if we are being honest with ourselves.

I think that is an excellent advocacy for the tribunal because, whether I am in this seat or whoever is there, it acts as some counterpoint. To reinforce the point again, if Cynthia is buried in social work as an MP it limits her ability on a policy level, as it does for Lachie, to come down here and advocate for structural change to a system that is creating this population decline in your electorate but you are so bogged down. I think you could launch a very strong argument—I could almost convince you—that on most of the metrics on crime, health, mortality rates and everything we would be the worst. There would be a direct correlation between remoteness and the worst. It could be that we are pulled more into that space and have less ability to try and turn things around, so I think that argument for resources is pretty legitimate.

Mr MILLAR: Thanks, Robbie. To your first question, yes. I am very close to Vaughan Johnson. He has known me since I was about that high and he is always in contact when he needs to be. He does not want to interfere; he just feels he wants to separate himself from politics for a bit. You know Vaughan: he wears his heart on his sleeve and he is a genuine top bloke. To the second question, yes, we do need resources, but how do we get them? There is a lot of stretch on the budget at the moment, whether it is health, police, welfare. How do you convince the public that you need to pay politicians not more money but give them more resources? That is a difficulty that any government will have when it comes to that. I think this is something that needs to happen. I would welcome it, but I am not going to bank on it. I think it is going to take some time.

Mr STEVENS: I have to ask: can we take one more question, Chair?

Ms MALONE (Inaudible).

Mr STEVENS: We can take one more question if we can have a short one, because we are on a bit of a schedule here and the chair has already smacked me for letting it go. So one more question.

Ms McGOVERN: Are you able to influence the prioritisation of infrastructure in your electorate?

Ms LUI: I think it is planning. I think it is a bit of both. It is planning and it is that ongoing maintenance. When I spoke before about accessibility, access is probably the only word that I could think of that sets my electorate aside from any other communities. I am probably similar to Robbie and the member for Gregory, but I think there is always a need for infrastructure in my community. I see it as an opportunity generator for my community. It allows industries to come in to not only build but also thrive, and we have to have the right infrastructure in place. I feel that Cook has always been in the too-hard basket, and I think the others can appreciate as well that it has always been in the too-hard basket, because we constantly have to work against the challenges of remoteness and isolation, but infrastructure is an important one. We have to maintain the infrastructure that we have, but we also have to plan for future developments.

Mr KATTER: I will try to be brief. There is no easy answer. I think it is like trying to give someone a plan of how to be a good politician, because I believe you very deliberately have to move outside the square. A textbook would say, 'Engage your local economic groups, regional economic groups and your councils,' but the reality is that as a state MP—it does not matter what brand you are—you are going to have half the mayors against you or almost deliberately going against you just because you are saying it, so it is a complicated space.

Again, I do not even think it matters what party or brand you are. For instance, one of the things that we want to see is a transmission line that connects to the national electricity grid in the north-west. That is way too big for one politician. Even if you are the Premier of Queensland, it is hard to just divert \$1.5 billion to one project in a remote area where it is not going to feed a lot of voters. With a lot of that stuff you really have to be strategic and play the long game. It does sort the wheat from the chaff, because if you are trying to push a poor project for 10 years it is not going to get there, because the more people learn about it the better chance it has. If it has chinks in the armour it will just fall over anyway, so you want to be careful

about what you select in the first place. You really have to play the long game and be strategic and not just think, 'Technically I'll just sign off the council to do this and this,' and have this scientific or mathematical model. You have to be creative and I think it is a real art form, not a science, when you are trying to achieve infrastructure.

Mr MILLAR: And I will be very quick because I can see Ray. Do not get between me and a bucket of money when it comes to infrastructure. I will fight, and I will fight hard. Any money we can get into regional Queensland we need, so money and infrastructure are very important.

Mr STEVENS: Thanks, Lachie. Thanks, Kerry, for that last question. I ask you to give a big hand for our presenters. They did a wonderful job. I will now pass back to our chair, Nonie, because she has some wonderful aspects to present.

Ms MALONE: Thank you. I would like to introduce to you Janine McPherson, the winner of our ASPG inaugural annual prize for parliamentary scholarship. Janine is to be awarded a prize of \$1,000. This whole venture was instigated by Ms Beryce Nelson, a former member of parliament who is a long-time ASPG member, who generously donated half of the prize money. Janine is a student at the University of Queensland studying for a masters in governance and public policy. The topic of her prize-winning paper is 'Challenges presented by federalism: public policy delivery—a case study of work health and safety laws in Australia'. It is fascinating how we do these things differently and together. Janine will tell us about the substance of her paper and then when she is finished that we will proceed to the presentation.

Ms McPHERSON: Thank you. I know I am standing between everyone and drinks and nibbles, so I will not keep you hostage for too long. I will be brief. I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, and I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

Thank you for the award. It is a real honour. With working full-time, studying part-time and family commitments, it is nice to be acknowledged for the hard work studying and working. I am halfway through my masters of governance and public policy at UQ and my essay was about the harmonisation of work health and safety laws in the context of federalism. I started working in the work health and safety policy space about a year and a half ago, and I guess upon starting in the role I became curious about how and why we ended up in this space of harmonised laws for a topic that is often experienced quite differently across jurisdictions. There is not always consistency, so how did we end up with a consistent set of laws?

I guess work health and safety policy is one of those issues where economic and social policy collide. On the one hand, you have the social policy issues of workers needing to be safe at their place of work and being able to come home to their families and also workplaces being a safe place for the general public but, on the other hand, you have the economic investment required of business to make a workplace safe, and that can be make or break for business. I think this push-pull tension causes a few considerations. Firstly, you need to regulate but not overregulate. You need to have consistency across jurisdictions but also have the ability to address specific localised risks and you need to have the ability to be agile and address new and emerging risks. I explain in the essay how these things essentially led to the perfect opportunity for the Commonwealth to leverage vertical fiscal imbalance, so the ability for the Commonwealth to direct state spending to raise the profile of work health and safety policy to a national issue from something that was originally dealt with by separate jurisdictions.

In my view, it is at odds with the intention of the Constitution. Section 51 talks about the responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the residual responsibilities going to the states, but I think it is this policy domination of the Commonwealth that means that it sets the scene when it comes to jurisdictional policy coordination and decides when something does or does not become a national issue. In the case of safety, the Commonwealth was dealing with businesses that were concerned about the growing economic costs of safety—there were fatalities—and on the flip side you had unions that were very strong and very powerful and wanted the best safety results for the members they represented. This led to the harmonisation of the work health and safety laws.

There are some benefits to harmonisation such as pooling of resources, information sharing and consistency across jurisdictions, but there are also some pragmatic factors to consider, and that is due to the dualist nature of Australia as a Federation, so it can mean that there are blurred lines of accountability when it comes to the central and then the regional governments. An example of that is that in Queensland we have a very specific local safety risk which is the Great Barrier Reef. We have a very big snorkelling and diving industry. It is very specific to Queensland. It is a huge contributor to the economy. There have

also been a lot of fatalities and the harmonised work health and safety laws do not address this at all, so Queensland has had to implement its own specific jurisdictional suite of legislation to address that risk outside of the harmonised framework and it is a bit messy.

In the essay I take the lens that federalism in Australia is a type of pragmatic federalism, meaning policy-making is problem driven, regardless of other really important considerations like the intentions of the Constitution. I think this vertical fiscal imbalance of that ability to direct state spending by the Commonwealth paves the way for the principles of pragmatic federalism to raise the profile of work health and safety and is perpetuated by things like party politics, problem representation and problem framing and it raised it to a national issue for the Commonwealth to dominate this policy space in a field where states originally had the power to make their own laws.

In summary, the evolution of work health and safety policy followed general federalist trends of Commonwealth intervention, domination and control, and changes to interpretation of the Australian Constitution have paved the way for this issue to be perceived in a national light. I think there are some commonsense principles that need to guide the influence of harmonisation in the space going forward. Firstly, how do we address the potential for local or regionalised risks? I mentioned snorkelling and diving as an example for Queensland. We need to have clear accountability measures for new and emerging risks. In the WHS space at the moment are things like silicosis, which is deemed the new asbestos, and the gig economy that fall under this portfolio. Because these risks are caught up in this harmonised framework, it can be extremely difficult for states and territories to address what should really be their responsibility to address in the first place. Thank you for your time and thank you for listening.

Ms MALONE: Thank you very much, Janine, and thank you so much for submitting the paper in the first place. I know the panel was thrilled with the quality of Janine's paper and thrilled to be able to make this award. On behalf of the ASPG—and I know Diana would really have loved to be doing this herself—and the chair, Diana, I would like to present you with your certificate. Thank you very much for presenting to us tonight and for the work that you have done.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the three panellists tonight. Let's give them another round of applause. Thank you so much. It has made for a fabulous evening with much to think about. Hopefully it will foster better understanding of your needs and the things that will make things easier. We have a small token of our appreciation for you. Thank you very much.

I would also like to thank everybody who has come tonight. It has been wonderful to have you here and to hear your questions. We really appreciate the spirit in which everybody has participated. I would like to invite everyone to join us for light refreshments on the other balcony across from here. Thank you very much.