

Media Release: New society to challenge public policy decision-making norms

Embargo: 10pm, Thursday, September 18th, 2014

A new society focussing on progress and wellbeing was launched in Sydney today to take on Australian policy makers' and academia's emphasis on economic considerations when recommending and making decisions and enacting legislation.

The Society's inaugural chair, Mr Andrew Gale, speaking at the 2014 Global Access Partners (GAP) National Economic Summit, said too often measures of progress in society were measured in mono-dimensional terms, in particular financial terms.

"Yet there are many aspects of life which are more important than purely financial measures. These include quality of education, health, civil freedoms, quality of life, happiness, the environment and so on. All important considerations of the holistic realm of progress and wellbeing," Mr Gale said.

The **Society for Progress and Wellbeing** came out of a 2011 GAP taskforce of senior government, business and academic executives, chaired by Stephen Bartos, which considered fresh and inclusive definitions of Australian economic and social progress and discussed the importance of integrating them into national policy making.

"Why do non-financial progress and wellbeing considerations not feature as predominantly in the deliberations and decision making of governments and corporations and even individuals?" Mr Gale said.

"And how do we, as individuals and families, assess how we make progress? Is it because measurement frameworks for non-financial dimensions do not exist? Or is it because potential users of such frameworks and concepts don't know how to use them? Or is it simply that there is low awareness and engagement with such issues? "

The Society has been established as a strong membership based organisation which enables like-minded people to champion the concepts of progress and wellbeing as being integral to the thinking and decision making of individuals, communities, businesses and governments in Australia. Members will benefit from connecting with each other through Society facilitated networks, will help advance this cause.

"We have been encouraged by the early interest in the Society and have already attracted a number of Founder Members, Mr Gale said. "We expect this interest to grow significantly over the ensuing months now that the Society has been officially launched."

Founding Members include organisations such as GAP and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand and a growing number of eminent and engaged individuals.

The Society's first item of business will be a Connecting Communities set of initiatives. Mr. Gale said that "This initiative recognises that there is already fantastic work being done by many motivated individuals at a local community level which advances progress and wellbeing. The Society can potentially play a useful role is both assisting them with tools and templates to do what they are doing even more effectively, and also to scale-up and replicate the excellent work already being done at a local level."

Attached: Backgrounder on the Origins of the **Society for Progress and Wellbeing**

For further information, please contact Catherine Fritz-Kalish, **Managing Director, Global Access Partners** on 0411 702 708, or email andrewgale@aspw.asn.au

Background and Origins of the Society

The origins of the Society can be traced back to an inspiring presentation by Professor Bob Cummins of Deakin University at the *National Economic Review* Summit at NSW Parliament House in September 2010, in which he highlighted the importance of measuring the quality of life beyond traditional economics.

In early 2011, public policy think tank **Global Access Partners (GAP)** brought together a taskforce of senior executives from government, business and academia to consider fresh and inclusive definitions of economic and social progress and discuss their integration into national policy making.

The **GAP Taskforce on Progress in Society** found a high level of support amongst policy makers for use of measures of social progress and wellbeing which go beyond monetary measures. In national economic policy, the Australian Treasury's wellbeing framework provides an illustration of the importance of such considerations.

One of the Taskforce's key recommendations was to move the wealth of research work out of academia into the mainstream of Australian social, commercial and political life. The Taskforce advocated the creation of a permanent, membership based organisation – the **Australian Society for Progress & Wellbeing** - to drive consolidation of measurement frameworks, facilitate collaboration between interested parties and channel appreciation of these measures to decision makers.

Such a body was needed to drive the whole sector. It would offer a forum to encourage cross-stakeholder debate and media interest, and create a bridge or connection to improve the design of the measurement instruments, as well as their adoption. International organisations in Canada, France and Britain have indicated their support for a single body offering a community of interest in Australia.

The Society was formally constituted in November 2013, registered with ASIC in January 2014, with the following three broad objectives:

- ▶ Ensure wellbeing receives prominence in determining the progress of Australia and Australians – at an individual, family, community, business and government level
- ▶ Shift social progress and wellbeing considerations from government, supra-national organisations and academia into 'mainstream' consciousness and decision making
- ▶ Build an influence bridge between the designers of progress and wellbeing frameworks and users of those frameworks, especially major decision makers in government, public policy, corporations and significant not-for-profit organisations.

The Society was officially launched at the GAP National Economic Summit on 18 September 2014.

For further details on the Society, its Governance Board, membership and intended activities, please visit the Society's website www.aspw.asn.au