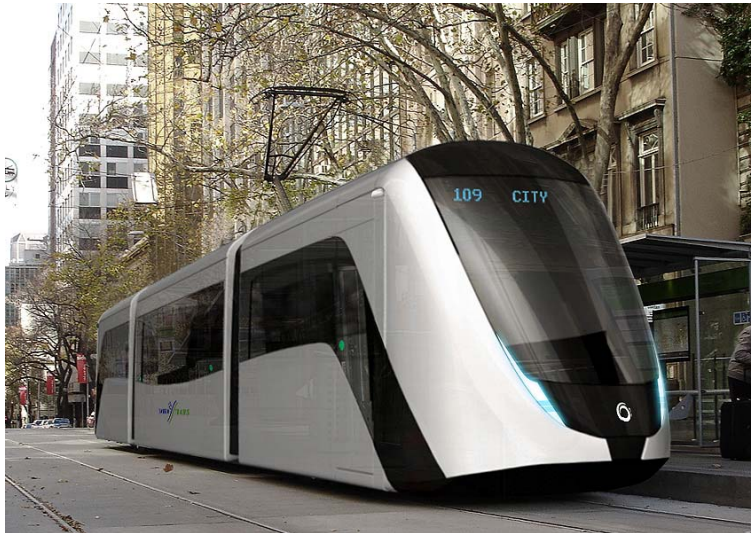


# Design Works: Towards a National Policy

## Reviewing the National Innovation System – A Response from the Sector



***In today's economy, innovation policy is industry policy.***

Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
22 February 2008

***Design shapes the world and makes the world work.***

***Design is the nexus between science/engineering and arts/humanities.***

***Design deals with both functionality and the human dimension.***

***Innovation is its core business – the integration of materials, functionality, form, usability and so on make up design's central methodologies.***

***Design not only innovates but it also facilitates innovation for other sectors.***

***Design is fundamental to industry, business and culture.***

***If design works the world is a better place.***

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### **Australian Design and an Innovative Future – Recommendations:**

The Australian Federal Government should address the role of design as a key contributor to the prosperity of the nation by:

- appealing to stakeholders and seeking champions in industry, government and the broader community
- establishing a national design council
- formulating a national design policy
- developing active programs that promote Australian design, such as the concept that 'Australia needs design'
- increasing funding to the design sector
- introducing design literacy in schools from the early childhood years onwards

Australia is a country with a dynamic, emerging design culture. However, it lags severely behind other countries, which are benefiting greatly from a strategic and holistic approach to design promotion, aimed at building national prosperity. The design professions in Australia would benefit greatly from adopting a less territorial approach to promoting their discipline. A national design policy that focuses on a united voice could provide more clarity and focus for stakeholders such as governments, businesses, investors and the consumers of design. As other countries have already demonstrated, a properly considered and implemented design policy would strengthen the design sector, in turn strengthening Australia's economic position in the world, and advancing domestic prosperity.

## **Introduction**

This paper proposes that within the Humanities and Social Sciences it is the field of Design that best addresses the relationship between innovation and industry and that if the Government is serious about improving the economy through innovation it needs to look to investing its efforts in Australian Design as one of the key sectors that will build national prosperity.

Dr Terry Cutler's outline of the Review of the National Innovation System has asked us to address a number of key questions in our submissions towards a review of the Government's innovation policy.<sup>ii</sup> Some of these are: "can we imagine a better world? could we do everyday things better?" and "how do we develop creative problem solving?" These are the inherent questions of the design discipline. Design shapes the world. It is the nexus between science/engineering and arts/humanities, and deals with both functionality and the human dimension. Innovation is its core business, and the integration of materials, functionality, form, usability and so on, comprise its central methodologies. Its objective is to take what is only vaguely imagined and manifest solutions in the real world. Design makes things work. It achieves this end not only on a practical level, but also within a cultural and aesthetic framework. In terms of its core business design is therefore the most appropriate discipline within the Humanities and Social Sciences to respond to the Government's focus on innovation.

The call for submissions also requires us to address major national challenges and global issues such as climate change, population health and future energy needs. Science has thrown down the gauntlet with a now-or-never challenge for developed countries to take a stand against global warming. It has presented us collectively with a problem that needs to be addressed on many levels. The solutions to this problem have to be imagined by innovative thinkers who can go beyond the awareness of the problem to provide solutions that are attractive enough for people to be engaged with them. Contemporary designers are trained to provide solutions that are aimed at lessening environmental impact and minimising the depletion of non-renewable resources.

The call for submissions acknowledges that as a small country we can't do everything and therefore we need to make choices about where to focus our attention, prioritising our innovation efforts and developing sectoral clusters of activity. The following evidence suggests that if the Government concentrates on supporting Australian design the benefits will be quickly perceptible in an improved Australian economy.

## **Policy Research**

There have been a number of reports on the role of design in Australia commissioned by Federal and State governments that reiterate similar themes and issues that Australia needs to address. The following outlines a few of the most significant studies.

## 1995 – The National Design Review

In 1995 the Keating government commissioned a review of Australian design entitled *Competing by Design, The National Design Review Report*.<sup>iii</sup> The report acknowledged the need, then, for Australia to take a more strategic role for design as a matter of urgency, and argued that this would be fundamental to Australia meeting its national trade challenge (p. 3). The report emphasised that a general lack of awareness of design amongst the broader industry sector and the Australian community were significant barriers to the advancement of design in Australia. Its final finding stated:

There is evidence that the absence of a broadly based and adequately funded national body for design has contributed to the lack of substantial progress in Australia's design agenda (p. 11).

This study was presented to the Minister one year prior to the Labor government's demise. The Keating government did not take up the recommendations nor were they taken up during the years of the Howard Liberal government. The Rudd government needs to revisit this report and a number of more recent studies that have largely reiterated these same themes.

## 2003 – Victoria's Design Capability

A Victorian study in 2003, *Developing Victoria's Design Capability*, commissioned by the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, has acknowledged design as a major economic contributor to the State of Victoria.<sup>iv</sup> Design employs as many people as in the information and communication technology industry, encompasses around 3,000 dedicated design organizations and includes over 200 design-related courses at universities, TAFE and private colleges across the State (p. 3).

The authors argue that design's role is a critical and value-adding step for transforming ideas into commercial outcomes and boosts the competitiveness of emerging industries. Like the 1995 study, the report states that some of the key challenges to industry that design faces are the lack of awareness of design's value amongst industry, the lack of significant international investment and the fragmentation of the sector (p. 4). The challenges posed to education include the lack of design literacy in schools restricting flow-on effects and postponing the development of talent in this area until the secondary school years where design training is patchy at best. The research examines post-secondary school design training and makes a number of suggestions (p. 34). Overall, it proposes that it is up to government to step in to address these challenges in order to further develop the sector, implying that the sector will drive innovation and lead to greater prosperity (p. 36).

## 2005 – The Ecology of Queensland Design

A Queensland study, *The Ecology of Queensland Design*, was undertaken in 2005 by the Creative Industries Research and Application Centre, QUT.<sup>v</sup> Its focus was directed towards mapping the industry within the State. This study claims that design can be viewed as a ‘leverage’ industry, enabling other industries to achieve commercial success (p. 3). It argues that industry can benefit from taking a more proactive attitude towards the incorporation of design in manufacturing, a view shared by both the Victorian study and the 1995 study. It acknowledges that Queensland is the third most important design state but could fall behind if it receives insufficient government support (p. 8). This study also insists that design awareness amongst industry needs to be significantly improved and that government needs to undertake strategies towards this end (p. 114).

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### The Problem

#### **The biggest problem is the fragmentation of the Australian Design Sector.**

- Currently, the objectives of the Australian design industry are differently defined depending on which state and which aspect of the industry one is looking at.
- A number of research bodies locate design under their umbrellas but each body has a different perspective on design’s role and its contribution to the cultural and economic fabric of Australian society.
- The Design Institute of Australia have stressed that the *fragmentation of the sector* is one of the key barriers to its national success.<sup>vi</sup>

### The Solution

- The creation of a national design body would address this problem and bring a national focus to design
- Investment in the sector by government and industry would have a direct impact on Australia’s wealth creation.

The Rudd government should be advised to take heed of the recommendations made in the different reports and move quickly, otherwise it risks the fate of the former Keating government, of waiting until it is too late to make use of the research.

The Rudd government should also be advised to take note of the successes in other countries where national governments have concentrated their efforts on this sector.

## Design in the International Sector: Some Models for Consideration

- A number of countries are heavily investing in design by establishing national design initiatives, which promote human centred design and broker relationships between designers and business.
- Governments and corporations increasingly acknowledge design as an important economic and cultural driver while also respecting the role it can play in improving the human condition.

### Singapore

Singapore has positioned itself as the design excellence gateway to Asia.<sup>vii</sup> DesignSingapore, established in 2003, is a national initiative that recognises that the promotion of design excellence is a key driver of national competitiveness and creativity in an ideas-driven economy.

The DesignSingapore Council involves leaders and individuals from the various industry stakeholders, the design community and government, which steers the national design agenda.

### Japan

The Japanese government has promoted the integration of design with industry by fostering a number of key bodies such as the Japan Design Foundation and the Nagoya International Design Centre. These centres promote design-related activities and interests, foster public awareness of design values, present future visions through design works and foster global exchange programs.<sup>viii</sup>

### Korea

Korea implemented a national design industry strategy in 2003, known as Design Korea. It has focused on the knowledge-based design industry as the main next-generation industry.<sup>ix</sup> The establishment of this initiative was to lay the foundation for Korea to be the design center of northeast Asia.

### Taiwan

Taiwan has been focused on national policies for design since the late 1970s. It established a National Design Centre in 2004 which has developed cooperative mechanisms among domestic industries, government agencies, academic and research institutes to fully exploit their design talent and elevate Taiwan on the international design stage.<sup>x</sup>

### Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Design Centre was established in 2001 by the Hong Kong

Federation of Design Associations. Its principal financial supporter is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. It promotes awareness of the value of design amongst the business/industry sector, promotes excellence in design through design award schemes and exhibitions, and facilitates design incubation projects.<sup>xii</sup>

## India

India released a National Design Policy in 2007. They will set up specialist Design Centres and Design Innovation Hubs for the various design sectors and establish the India Design Council.<sup>xiii</sup>

## United Kingdom

The UK has a Design Council that is the national strategic body for design funded by the UK government. In 2005 Sir George Cox was appointed to conduct a review of Creativity in Business. The review noted that the growing threat from the Asian economies such as China and India was not restricted to their capability for cheap exports, but that they had shifted towards investing in creative skills and a knowledge-based economy. This has placed pressure on the UK design industry, which, while it can claim a tremendous record for its collective creativity, has not been so successful in the commercialization of this talent.<sup>xiv</sup>

## Denmark

Denmark was an international trendsetter in design in the 1950s and 1960s, though lost ground in the wake of new trends in the design discipline. Recently, the Danish government has taken a number of initiatives aimed at restoring Denmark to the international design elite. These include the establishment of the Commission of Danish Design Promotion in 2005, a radical reform of design study programmes, the BornCreative export promotion scheme and the establishment of the world's largest design award show, INDEX: Design to Improve Life, in Copenhagen.<sup>xv</sup>

## New Zealand

The New Zealand government set up a Design Taskforce in 2003 to develop a strategy to boost economic growth through the better use of design for its exported goods. The taskforce found that New Zealand was under-using its design capabilities. It recommended a range of initiatives that were implemented including an injection of \$12.5 million over four years and a *Better by Design* team established in 2005 to deliver the program to the business and design community.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Design Research in the International Sector

If Australia is to formulate its own national strategy it should pay attention to the shifts taking place within design research as these shifts will lead the industry into its next phases. International academic research has demonstrated that design can go well beyond being merely a service industry to become more significant in terms of broader intellectual enquiry.<sup>xvi</sup> Through extensive international collaboration and lively debate at conferences and in academic journals, design researchers have been grappling with the concept of research in, through and by design since the 1990s. Some of the driving forces that have propelled design research into the 21<sup>st</sup> century include:

- a steady accumulation of PhDs in the field
- a focus on human-centred rather than technology-centred design
- a consciousness of design's ethical responsibilities
- a focus on environmental issues rather than resource-demanding concepts

In the academic sector design is perceived as having shifted from an exclusive focus on a problem-solving methodology into the realms of intellectual enquiry where it now deals with questions associated with the contribution of artefacts towards the sum of human knowledge.<sup>xvii</sup> Such shifts have the capacity to place the discipline of design in an ideal position to address the significant questions confronting humanity in the decades to come. Questions that deal with how we negotiate our collective imprint on the planet and the tension between human needs, environmental concerns and the role of industry and business can now be addressed by a design sector that is intellectually sophisticated and self-reflexive. The Australian design sector has the capacity to be at the forefront in addressing these urgent issues.

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## Lessons for the Australian Design Sector

Australia needs to take note.

Without a national strategy on design it lags far behind its competitors in terms of taking up the current economic challenges.

Australia is better placed than other countries in the region in terms of its design educational facilities and its proliferation of design organizations. However, the problem of fragmentation within the industry, as the Australian studies have noted, should be addressed.

Australia, with its advanced educational training in design and growth in the role of research degrees in the field, is well placed to take up higher-level approaches to the role of design. This educational nexus will play an important role in determining the evolving nature of design in society.

Design has been proven to be a key to national economic development. By undertaking the series of measures suggested on page 2 of this document the Rudd government can propel Australia into an innovative and prosperous future through a focus on the role of design.

## Endnotes

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[https://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/\\_assets/main/lib60040/04\\_design\\_capability\\_facts\\_figures.pdf](https://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/_assets/main/lib60040/04_design_capability_facts_figures.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> Peter L. Higgs, Stuart D. Cunnigham, Gregory N. Hearn, Barbara A. Adkins and Karen R. Barnett (CIRAC), *The Ecology of Queensland Design*, technical report, QUT, 2005.
- <sup>vi</sup> The Design Institute of Australia has revisited this theme in its recent publications addressing the fragmentation of the sector and the splitting of funding between diverse bodies as “the single biggest issue that prevents the design sector from effectively supporting its member base.”  
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- <sup>vii</sup> *DesignSingapore*  
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- <sup>xi</sup> *Hong Kong Design Centre*  
<http://www.hkdesigncentre.org/>
- <sup>xii</sup> Press information Bureau, Government of India  
<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=24647>
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*INDEX: Design to Improve Life*  
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- <sup>xv</sup> *Better by Design*  
<http://www.betterbydesign.org.nz/aboutbbd/background/>

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<sup>xvii</sup> K. Krippendorf, *The semantic turn. A new foundation for design* (London, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006).