

Community highlights

Written by Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought discussing.

[Defiant Hanson will test a Coalition government](#)

Pauline Hanson has returned to Australian politics. Amy Maguire [took a look at](#) how Hanson has changed since she was last elected in 1996 and how current leaders will respond to her.

As we wait for an election outcome, the question is whether either potential government will respond similarly. Labor leader Bill Shorten has blamed the Coalition's Senate voting reforms for One Nation's rise. It may be easier for a centre-left leader to reject any alliance with Hanson, because her supporters are from the right wing of the conservative vote.

Turnbull has said that Hanson is not a welcome presence in Australian politics. Hanson has replied that he "must have lost my number", as she has not yet been approached in anticipation of a hung parliament. She expects the government to work with her as an elected senator.

Amy also took part in an Author Q&A, answering questions from and having a discussion with our readers. You'll find a sample below and the rest [here](#).

James Coburg raises the dismissive tone in which people discuss Hanson.

[James Coburg](#) :

Let's ponder if people had fussed less about some Hanson comments in 1996 and Howard had

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not 'dumped a losing candidate who then went on to win - and be prominent for that. As an extreme Liberal back bencher should she actually still have one Oxley in 1996 she would likely have disappeared from 1998 when Labor regained the seat.

The attack on her as a 'fish and chip shop owner' dismayed me then and still does - people could not stick with the issues but did show a dismissiveness that helps garner the vote ever since. The take off of the media approach to Hanson on Frontline was very accurate and relevant.

Arguments which say that Hanson cannot say what she does, and attack her personally (among others for being manipulated - she is a woman after all) only reflect her own approach rather than demonstrating the eventual strength of reasoned argument using information and argument.

Ultimately Hanson is a nationalist building off the latent, unthinking sense of too many that being Australian has more meaning than living on a particular island. Those who want an Australian head of state, a change of flag, feed the same instincts - from Philip Adams to John Howard to Pauline Hanson some common themes.

[Amy Maguire](#) :

Thanks for your comment, James. I agree that patronising Hanson and her supporters in the way you describe is the wrong approach to combating her ideas. Interesting argument you make regarding parallels between different conceptions of 'Australianness' - as a supporter of a republic and a new flag my instinctive reaction was shock and horror!

Kevin Tomkins commented on the media's narrative of "others" and how that fits into Hanson's return to parliament.

[Kevin Tomkins](#) :

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Interesting article Amy.

I think that if you consider the result of having Ms Hanson being voted back into the parliament reflects on a number of issues that have been a recurrent themes through our political landscape of the last 10 to 15 years.

Much has to do with the construction of the narrative around “others” coupled with global events such as 9/11, Bali, Boston Marathon bombing, Charlie Hebdo shooting, the November 2015 Paris attacks and more recently the events in Orlando and Brussels. All of these events help shape the narrative of the “other” and have not been addressed in any meaningful discourse by our political leaders or the media.

Unfortunately, what comments have been made by politicians only reinforce the narrative that “other” are a threat to either our economic prosperity i.e. [taking work away from Australian’s \(Dutton\)](#) or alternatively to our very safety as the somewhat innocuous comments by Turnbull regarding the [lose borders of Europe](#) in the aftermath of the Paris and Brussels attacks.

The net result of the failure of both our media and political systems to address and help reshape the narrative has led to a resurgence in far right political views gaining consider traction not only here in Australia but appears to be a global event as events are unfolding in Europe and the USA can testify. I think that for the short term attempting to counter these far right views will be a considerable challenge and one, I don’t think quite frankly, in the current and foreseeable future, will be possible.

[Amy Maguire](#)

Thanks for your comment, Kevin. It’s troubling how the narrative around the threat of terrorism is shaped by reference to the number of ‘Western’ people [killed in any given attack](#) .

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And I agree with your sad conclusion that it will be very hard to combat far right positions in the present environment.

Catherine Birch asked about the possibility of having more public discussions about immigration.

[Catherine Birch](#) :

Instead of leaving the field of concerns about general (as opposed to irregular) immigration to Pauline Hanson, how about removing the taboo on it as a subject for informed public debate by leading figures?

It is clearly one of the most far reaching issues for all Australians, both current and future, including immigrants.

We really need open public discussion about the level of immigration. What are the financial effects? Who gets the benefits and who suffers the drawbacks? What are the environmental effects? Can they be ameliorated and what will that cost? What are the societal effects, both positive and negative? Can the fracturing of society be ameliorated?

Last but not least - what is the rush? If Big Australia is indeed the way to go, why can't we proceed at a pace that takes more of the population along with it, and allows for effective plans to be implemented to ameliorate the

[Amy Maguire](#) :

Hi Catherine, I think one means by which more open and higher-quality debate about immigration could be promoted would be for the major parties to abandon their race to the

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bottom on the treatment of asylum seekers arriving by boat. Until that happens, I'll continue to be suspicious about the degree to which many members of parliament actually support Australia's current practices.

You'll find the rest of our Election 2016 coverage [here](#) (and a lot of interesting discussions alongside).

Moving animals to new environments

Discussions about relocating animals to new locations to help conserve them popped up on two articles this week: [We can't save all wildlife, so conservation laws need to change](#) and [Koalas are feeling the heat, and we need to make some tough choices to save our furry friends](#).

On the latter, Peter Ormonde [mentioned](#) Tasmanian Devils being moved to New South Wales and the difficulties faced when trying to take action on conservation research:

An excellent and thoughtful article - with relevance well beyond the existential dilemma facing koalas (or woolibuddhas as I call 'em).

But there is a problem in the solution proposed - it's not just funding that is the dependant variable - it is legislation.

We are currently in the midst of the best documented and researched mass extinction event in global history. We have a pretty good idea of exactly what's happening for most of our threatened and vulnerable species... habitat loss pure and simple. Research and data is fine and absolutely necessary - but of itself it is no solution. Someone has to listen. Someone has to act. We must choose between more of the same and a ecologically informed alternative.

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Fragmentation of populations, overcrowding, incursions by dogs, predation by foxes and, most likely, disease outbreaks all become significant when the populations are made vulnerable by habitat loss.

I'm living in spitting distance of a spectacularly successful relocation project for Tassie Devils up in some high country in NSW. Shows what we can do when circumstances demand it. I hope it doesn't come to that for koalas.

If we are not careful we will find ourselves in an impoverished landscape - devoid of iconic species, fractured and broken ecological functions and drastically reduced productivity and fertility. We will be trying to pop remnant populations into national parks making them something like a wildlife museum.

On [We can't save all wildlife, so conservation laws need to change](#), Mike Swinburne, Chris Owens and Phillipa McCormack, one of the article's authors, talked about the risks and benefits of introducing a new species into a new environment.

[Mike Swinbourne](#) :

I have a massive problem with the concept of moving a species to an area outside its normal distribution.

The thing is, there are already species at the new location - species which are not adapted to living with the intruder. And even with the best of intentions, we cannot be sure that the intruder will not have an adverse effect on the animal and plant species in the new area. Just consider koalas on Kangaroo Island for a perfect case in point.

How many times do we have to interfere with ecosystems in this way before we learn our lesson? I understand about the desire to conserve species that may not be able to migrate to a new location. But this should not come at a cost to other species.

[Chris Owens](#) :

Mike you are comparing this proposal to an introduction (koala) made in the 1920's when conservation science was in its infancy. By comparison there are several small hoppers introduced to offshore islands that would be extinct now if we had sat on our hands. Any proposal needs to be carefully considered and the welfare of the existing wildlife and vegetation at any location an important consideration. Many species at risk are keystone species that may help ecological function at the new location.

The speed of climate change and the islands of habitat in a sea of agriculture will mean many species will not be able to adapt or move. We can either debate options to help or continue watching them slide away.

[Phillipa McCormack](#) :

Hi Mike and Chris

Thanks for your comments.

The impact that a species introduction might have on a receiving environment is definitely a significant part of the necessary risk assessment process. One thing to keep in mind is that proposed receiving locations will also be changing as the climate changes. As Chris mentioned, species may be introduced into new places to fill ecosystem roles that used to be played by a now-extinct native species. This has already been implemented in Madagascar where a non-native tortoise species was introduced to replace the functional role of a now-extinct native tortoise. The introduction [completely transformed](#) the heavily degraded ecosystem.

Conservation sciences have learnt a lot since foxes and cane toads were introduced to Australia and there are many examples of introductions that have been successful for the target species and benign for receiving locations (Jeff Short's [report](#) discusses a whole range of them.

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I agree, Mike, whether we think moving a species to somewhere 'new' is a good or bad thing is a matter of perspective. This article suggests that if the perspective of our law is that the only 'good' conservation is conservation in situ - in historical locations and assemblages - maybe that's not going to cut it as things start to change (and disappear).

[Caught short: we need to talk about public toilets](#)

Finally, Lisel O'Dwyer wrote an article discussing public toilets, their importance to daily life and how little attention we pay to them.

We don't tend to talk about toilets much, even though we all use them. Yet not only do public toilets meet our voiding needs when we go out, but they are the site for many underlying social processes and behaviours, especially those related to gender roles. They also represent unspoken boundaries between public and private (eyes front! Avoid noises! Wash hands!).

The lack of attention to public toilets means we know very little about how they meet local needs and social participation in Australia.

[Lorna Jarrett](#) raised the "unequal burden" women faced in regards to the limitations of public toilets:

I find it extremely odd that the article doesn't specifically mention the unequal burden on women of lack of public toilets. For evidence - a quick perusal of the typical massive queues at womens' toilets in any transport hub, shopping centre or entertainment venue.

Most of the "people caring for small children" are female. Add in the need to change sanitary products for those of reproductive age, increased urination frequency and urgency for those who are pregnant, and the high rate of stress incontinence of multiparous women - and the result is a much greater need for toilet access than for men. But because urinals for women are virtually non-existent, we have to make do with fewer facilities than men.

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And no - we don't "enjoy bonding" in the queues.

Changing all gendered facilities to unisex (as is common in many countries) would have the effect of making men share the queues. Maybe then something would be done about them.

To which Lisel [responded](#) :

Hi Lorna, you are spot on about the gender differences and I have paid a lot of attention to this in my work. Unfortunately space limitations precluded covering everything. In fact, I think the gender issues associated with public toilets merit an entire piece to themselves! One interesting point that came up in my research is the lack of facilities for men to discreetly dispose of used continence products. And of course there are biological differences and different rates of urinary conditions such as cystitis between males and females.

See you next week.

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