

Submission to the COVID-19 Response Inquiry

To the members of the panel,

I do not say Independent Panel, because the Panel is, clearly, not independent. The Covid-19 response in Australia was a mindless disaster. Politicians, public servants, the medical profession and the media fell competed to parrot the latest and most medically and socially dangerous policies from a selected range of overseas jurisdictions, excepting those few, like Sweden, that took an approach of humanity and sanity.

The independence required of such an inquiry as this is independence from the groupthink and mutual backslapping and support that created this disaster in the first place.

Yet the panel Chair, Ms Robyn Kruk AO, is a woman who “brings a wealth of relevant senior executive experience in the health and social care sectors and whole of government policy and operational areas including emergency management to the Inquiry. [She] has led state and Australian Government agencies, including as the Secretary of New South Wales Health, Secretary of Department of Premier and Cabinet, Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, and was the inaugural CEO of the National Mental Health Commission.”

Even imputing the best of motives to Ms Kruk, this appointment is of a Public Service insider’s insider, and it alone has sent the unambiguous message that the COVID-19 boat will not be rocked, quite apart from the risible Terms of Reference. This for the simple reason that anyone so deeply connected with Public Service networks has no incentive and a strong disincentive to issue the kind of severe criticisms that the terrible events and policies of the COVID years demand.

Yet the placing of Ms Kruk’s reliable administrative hand on the tiller is as nothing compared to the dropping of Professor Catherine Bennett into the boat.

“Professor Catherine Bennett’s infectious disease epidemiology career cuts across health, university and government sectors, including outbreak preparedness and response with NSW Health and the Australian Government...”

“Catherine has been a prominent public analyst during the COVID-19 response, keynote speaker, and advisor to industry, governments, and institutions globally.”

Surely a Professor of such standing would have castigated the draconian measures that destroyed Australia’s international reputation as a country that treasured freedom and democracy, whose people had been prepared to die to defend that reputation and reality. The holder of a Chair in Epidemiology might have been expected to stand with more famous epidemiologists like Professor John Ioannidis, possibly the best-known epidemiologist in the world, or Professors Jay Bhattacharya, Sunetra Gupta and Martin Kulldorff, primary signatories of the Great Barrington Declaration, Which eventually accrued over 930,000 signatures. It is summarised as:

As infectious disease epidemiologists and public health scientists we have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies, and recommend an approach we call Focused Protection.

The “prevailing COVID-19 policies” were precisely those which were put into effect in Australia, and most egregiously in the State of Victoria, in which Professor Bennett resides, works, and was a “prominent public analyst during the COVID-19 response.” Scenes from Victoria’s black-shirt tyranny horrified audiences around the world.

Did Professor Bennett draw the attention of the public to the Great Barrington Declaration, if even to explain why it should be ignored? Did she bring it to the attention of the “industry, governments, and institutions” to which she was an adviser? If so, no hint of it has surfaced in public.

For a flavour of Professor Bennett’s speaking truth to power, see [this article](#) from 3rd of July, 2021, featuring a lead item and photograph of Professor Bennett.

‘Prof Catherine Bennett recalls being in a supermarket the first time she was recognised. “A woman called out acknowledging she’d seen me on TV. She screamed out, ‘I love you!’” ... Bennett...is one of a number of Australian experts who have been thrust into the spotlight by the Covid-19 pandemic.’

Dan Andrews maintained broad public support by adjusting his policies, as we now know, not to any scientific advice, but to the results of constant polling. This is called “following the Science.” Many people in Victoria were, in effect, calling out “I love you” to Dan Andrews, as he trashed Victoria. Professor Bennett basked in the sleazy ambience of Dan Andrews black-shirt government.

Her appointment is an utter disgrace, and if she wishes to recover any shred of professional integrity from the pit of the COVID years, she should resign from the Panel.

My comments about the inappropriateness of Ms Kruk’s appointment apply also to Dr Angel Jackson, Lead Economist at Impact Economics and Policy. She started “her career as an economist at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Angela has worked across tax, fiscal and social policy. As the Deputy Chief of Staff to the Australian Finance Minister, Angela provided policy advice across fiscal policy and all areas of social policy, including National Health Reform.” Enough said. Another truly independent voice on the Independent Panel.

I note that the Human Rights Commissioner has been critical of the scope of this Inquiry.

I support the position put by the Citizen Go submission, and I have signed that organisation’s submission.

Peter West