



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

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Melbourne Sustainable  
Society Institute

# MELBOURNE SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

FINAL REPORT 2022

MELBOURNE  
SUSTAINABLE  
SOCIETY  
INSTITUTE

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## **Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute Final Report 2022**

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute (MSSI) is situated on the land of the Woi Wurrung (Wurundjeri) people of the Kulin Nation and conducts its activities on Aboriginal land. This land has never been ceded and the impacts of colonisation are ongoing. MSSI acknowledges Traditional Custodians' continuous care for country, the importance of First Nations' sustainability practices and knowledge, and the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung's ongoing contributions to the life of this city and region. MSSI pays respect to Elders past and present.

### **MSSI's home in the Faculty**

MSSI was hosted by the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning (ABP). In addition to providing access to world class facilities, ABP's collegial approach to hosting MSSI as a university-wide endeavour has been greatly appreciated. The Institute extends its sincerest thanks to all at ABP who welcomed members of the MSSI team and supported their endeavours over the years.

# FAREWELL STATEMENTS

## ACTING DIRECTOR, SANGEETHA CHANDRASHEKARAN

The Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute has made an important contribution to university and public life since 2008. As the doors close on MSSSI we celebrate the work of the University's longest standing Interdisciplinary Research Institute and reflect on the legacy it leaves.

MSSSI has raised the profile of social-environmental issues and made major contributions to knowledge on social sustainability. It emerged through the vision of the inaugural Director, Professor Ruth Fincher, and was ably led by Professor Craig Pearson. Under the subsequent leadership of Professor Brendan Gleeson and Professor John Wiseman, and more recently myself, the Institute's efforts were concentrated on the themes of Future Cities and Climate Transformations, with a focus on interdisciplinary coordination and impact both in and beyond the University. Both themes have recently been recognised in their own right through the establishment of the Melbourne Centre for Cities and Melbourne Climate Futures.

MSSSI worked closely with sustainability researchers at the University and practitioners and stakeholders externally to produce interdisciplinary knowledge and apply this in public and private spheres, policy and community decision-making. MSSSI's impact can be seen in major international events such as the hosting of the ECOCITY World Summit in 2017, the creation of the City of Melbourne

Chair in Urban Resilience and Innovation and the Enterprise Chair in Environmentalism that has harnessed the leadership efforts of the Honorable Al Gore. MSSSI has fostered a highly effective and engaged Advisory Board and we thank past Chairs Kate Auty, Arron Wood and the current Chair Emily Gerrard for their leadership. MSSSI has also undertaken a great deal of behind-the-scenes work curating and convening networks and collaborations that have helped develop the conversation between the humanities and social sciences and the STEM disciplines. By seed funding a range of projects, MSSSI has supported the development of graduate and early career researchers and nurtured big ideas at an early stage that have gone on to have significant impact in Australia and abroad. Through a collegial and values-oriented approach to research MSSSI has fostered an interdisciplinary research community and culture that recognises people and principles at the heart of the research endeavour.

None of this could have been achieved without the stellar efforts of MSSSI's academic and professional staff who have provided inspiration and material support for each of these undertakings. We include here the work of our Honoraries and Associates who extend the vision of social sustainability through research and practice. We also thank MSSSI's Executive Committee and Advisory Board Members for their sage advice and sharing of networks.



## MSSI ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR, EMILY GERRARD

MSSI has not only set a standard for innovative interdisciplinary research in sustainability across faculties, schools, and centres at the University of Melbourne, it has provided a leading example of community, business, government, and broader external engagement in sustainability. This includes drawing on the networks, ideas and feedback of those outside the University via its Advisory Board.

Advisory Board members reflect a diverse range of sectors and populations. As at the end of 2021, Board members included:

**Emily Gerrard**, Chair of MSSI Advisory Board, Director Comhar Group

**Rosemary Bissett**, Head of Sustainability Governance and Risk, National Australia Bank

**Karen Cain**, CEO, Latrobe Valley Authority

**Sue Cattermole**, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

**Lucinda Corrigan**, Chair, Farmers for Climate Action

**Peter Doherty AC**, Laureate Professor, University of Melbourne

**Gran van Egmond**, CEO, Banksia Foundation

**Megan Flynn**, Executive Director, Pollination

**Rob Gell AM**, Director, ReThink Sustainability

**Stan Krpan**, CEO, Solar Victoria

**Joe Morrison**, Managing Director, Six Seasons

**Nicholas Reece**, Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne

**Kane Thornton**, CEO, Clean Energy Council

**Rachel Webster**, Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, University of Melbourne

These members built on efforts of previous Advisory Boards in assisting MSSI to undertake its valuable work.

MSSI leaves a fine legacy, not only in terms of the body of research, publications and outputs it has accomplished, but also in the manner in which its work was undertaken, cultures were fostered and active and effective engagement with external stakeholders was achieved. Advisory Board members are grateful to the University, MSSI leadership team and MSSI's academic and professional staff for the opportunities to contribute, listen, learn and share ideas and expertise. The Advisory Board commends the foresight and leadership of Professor Ruth Fincher, Professor Craig Pearson, Professor Brendan Gleeson, Professor John Wiseman, and Dr Sangeetha Chandrashekeran.

# MELBOURNE SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY INSTITUTE'S VISION

MSSI was established in December 2008 and has been a mainstay of the University of Melbourne's Interdisciplinary Research Institute (MIRI) portfolio through to its closure at the end of 2021. Vested with building institutional capacity around sustainability-focused research, brokering innovative partnerships, and providing a portal between the University and myriad external stakeholders for activities, opportunities, and dialogue at the intersection of planetary health and human and species wellbeing, MSSI's legacy is rich. Interdisciplinarity, collegiality, collaboration, and connecting wide-ranging audiences with thought leadership on issues of sustainability have been central tenets of MSSI's approach. So too has the Institute's unique and insightful focus on the intersection of the humanities and social sciences with environmental and societal issues addressing a range of sustainability pressures, including: natural resources; health; ethics; biodiversity and conservation; climate; cities; and human impacts in the Anthropocene epoch. As MSSI's time draws to a close, this report celebrates the Institute's manifold, unique, and highly influential contribution to the University of Melbourne's sustainability profile.

MSSI's sustainability vision is based on principles of justice, care, and collaboration, and throughout the Institute's 12 years of operation MSSI has promoted critical thinking about the

implications of our actions today on the natural environments, livelihoods, health, and prosperity of future generations. In a global context where the impacts of deteriorating ecosystems, resource depletion, and extreme events are borne disproportionately by the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities, finding just and innovative ways to achieve 'sustainable societies' is a critical pursuit for a public-spirited academy such as the University of Melbourne. Over preceding decades, the concept of sustainable development, introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development's 'Brundtland Report' in 1987, has become part of the vernacular in key government, market, and civil society institutions. The Brundtland Report's premise – that development ought to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs – is amplified within the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goal agenda and underlined by a proliferation of environmental organisations and Corporate Social Responsibility practices in recent decades.

# GOVERNANCE

MSSI's operations were framed by the University's Melbourne Interdisciplinary Research Institutes Governance and Reporting Framework, and the MSSI Advisory Board and MSSI Executive Committee were established accordingly.

## MSSI ADVISORY BOARD

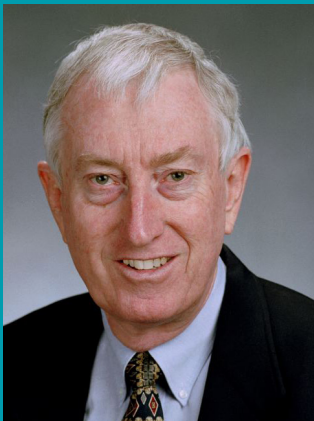
The MSSI Advisory Board was a highly influential and activated network of external stakeholders supporting MSSI in its mission to be a conduit of sustainability knowledge of national and international significance. Members of the Board were experts, leaders, and champions of sustainability from a cross-section of government, industry, and the not-for-profit sector, with roles including a member of the First People's Assembly of Victoria, Deputy Mayor of the City of Melbourne, CEO of the Latrobe Valley Authority, CEO of Sustainability Victoria, Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, CEO of Environment Victoria, and Chair of Farmers for Climate Change, alongside other prominent stakeholders. Members worked collegially to inform MSSI's strategic visioning, support Institute activities, and enable and connect University of Melbourne researchers with myriad opportunities to advance their sustainability research and engagement endeavours. MSSI, and the broader University, is indebted to Advisory Board members for their critical friendship, support, and guidance throughout their respective terms.

## EXECUTIVE

MSSI's Executive Committee comprised sustainability-focused researchers from across the University, providing an internal academic advisory function to assist MSSI in realising its research-connecting and capacity-growing aspirations. The MSSI Executive fostered a collegial space for information and knowledge exchange, interdisciplinary research collaborations, and promotion of activities and events, providing advice to the MSSI leadership team on matters of strategic direction, emerging issues, connecting with critical stakeholders, and prioritising areas for seed-funding investment. The Executive was an invaluable cross-Faculty litmus test for MSSI's organisational relevance, and a font of sustainability research knowledge, and MSSI extends its sincere thanks to all members of the Executive Committee over the Institute's lifetime for their valued contributions.

# CONNECTING UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE RESEARCHERS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

A key function of MSSI was 'matchmaking', facilitating strong collaborations across disciplines to address complex sustainability problems of national and global significance. MSSI's collaborative and inclusive approach brought together wide-ranging and sometimes unlikely academic partners within the University, providing invaluable support for researchers to push beyond the constraints and demands of the traditional academy to find common language, shared theoretical standpoints, and appropriate fora to explore innovative approaches to wicked problems.



"...MSSI brings together all the talents and areas of expertise across this large University... We tend to be in silos [and] try to break that down by getting people to share buildings, but what's enormously important is to have structures horizontally, across

an institution like this, to get the various people talking to each other. That of course means the people within those horizontal structures need to have the insight to know who to go to, where to go, and who there is in the University to talk to, and that's why ...an activity like MSSI is so extraordinarily important, so that we make the best use of the resources that we have..."

**Nobel Laureate Professor Peter Doherty,**  
**Department of Microbiology and Immunology,**  
**University of Melbourne**

## MSSI RESEARCH CLUSTERS

MSSI's Cluster model was a primary vehicle for activating interdisciplinary conversations across Faculties, with Cluster Convenors helping shape MSSI's engagement agenda, including events and external stakeholder engagement. A key role of Cluster Convenors was supporting MSSI's leadership in designing the Institute's seed funding call, an annual activity central to MSSI's research enabling approach. In addition to identifying important and emerging sustainability focused themes for MSSI to seed and elevate across the University, Convenors gave generously of their time in reviewing proposals and recommending them for funding, lending their discipline expertise and network knowledge to identifying projects with the most novel approaches and strongest foundations for transformative research.

MSSI Research Cluster membership was open to sustainability researchers from across the University with expertise and curiosity in the thematic area of concern, and a willingness to contribute to achieving key Cluster objectives:

- To strengthen University of Melbourne, Australian, and international research links
- To facilitate and support the development and implementation of interdisciplinary research projects
- To support the production and dissemination of high quality, high impact publications and research findings
- To support research training and teaching
- To facilitate activities and conversations leading to increased understanding of sustainability and resilience trends, challenges, and solutions.

The focus of MSSI's Clusters spanned a range of critical sustainability themes impacting communities locally and globally throughout the Institute's lifecycle. Concentrated efforts in recent years on Climate Transformations and Future Cities achieved extensive reach across the University, laying the foundations for the University's investment in Melbourne Climate Futures, and the Melbourne Centre for Cities, as institutional-level initiatives in their own right.



## Climate Transformations

The impact of climate change on planetary health and the wellbeing of existing and future generations has been a constant concern of MSSI's, formalised through an evolving *Climate Transformations* Cluster that pursued policy linkages and research projects to better



understand and respond to climate change. Early convening was undertaken around topics focused on: climate change trends; climate change adaptation and resilience; and strategies for accelerating the transition to a just and resilient zero-carbon future. Working closely with a broad range of researchers, units, and programs across the University, the Cluster's focus developed further around themes of: climate and energy strategies in Australia; rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement; subnational (city and regional) climate, energy and resilience strategies; economic decarbonisation strategies; and sustainable and low carbon land use.

In 2018, the Cluster undertook a detailed gap analysis of climate change research across the University, targeting research-enabling funds toward emerging interdisciplinary collaborations encompassing themes of: climate and health; legal dimensions of climate change; and land-based carbon sequestration. The *Climate Transformations* group also collaborated with climate-focused research colleagues on developing a detailed needs-based analysis to drive impact on climate change, and a global impact model around Paris Agreement targets and actions, to inform the University's response to the 'Grand Challenge' of climate change. This work underpinned the University's establishment of the *Melbourne Climate Futures* initiative, and in the latter part of 2021 MSSI's *Climate Transformations* Cluster transitioned across to *Melbourne Climate Futures* for them to lead and grow the network through their dedicated platform for climate communication and research-enabling.

"MSSI have been instrumental in building capacity in the area of climate change and health. Within the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences there has been minimal work in this vital area, however with MSSI's support, a team of academics from diverse yet relevant areas has formed. As a cross-faculty organisation and external facing organisation MSSI have the unique ability to link people that otherwise would not cross paths although they work towards similar sustainability goals".

**Associate Professor Melissa Russell, School of Population and Global Health**

## Future Cities

The *Future Cities* Cluster grew from MSSI's inaugural *Cities and Towns* and *Urban Futures* themes, focused on the intersection of physical and social outcomes within population centres. These earlier urban-focused Clusters fostered collaboration with the then Carlton Connect initiative, and hosted an array of roundtables, workshops, and public seminars featuring research, governance, and practitioner luminaries from Australia and abroad. The evolution into the *Future Cities* Cluster refined the group's focus further around key topics interrogating: theoretical and conceptual debates about urban futures; urban sustainability, resilience, and connectedness; and planning, design and governance for sustainability, equity, and inclusion.

*Future Cities* connected University of Melbourne researchers with intersecting interests and expertise around urban sustainability and linked them into an array of external-facing opportunities to influence policy, impact positive change, and foster mutual knowledge exchange between academia, community, practitioners, and government. The Cluster provided a strong platform for pursuing local concerns around sustainable environmental and social development through its support for initiatives such as the Urban Research Infrastructure Network (AURIN), Victorian Eco Innovation Lab (VEIL), and The Centre of Research Excellence in Healthy, Liveable Communities, and fostered early career researchers through seed funding, scholarship activities, and support for the Australian Early Career Urban Research Network (AECURN).

The Cluster's international reach was also significant, including through its support for the University's partnership accreditation with UN HABITAT, its leadership and participation in World Urban Forum delegations to Ecuador and Abu Dhabi to advance the *New Urban Agenda*, and its support for the successful bid and execution of the Ecocity World Summit in Melbourne in 2017. The Cluster's convening expertise, both nationally and internationally, will transition into the Chancellery-supported Melbourne Centre for Cities (MC4C) in 2022, a new initiative fostering responsible, interconnected, and cosmopolitan city leadership in an increasingly urbanised planet.





“The Institute [MSSI] has established a strong and distinctive reputation as a site of novel investigation of the societal challenges in achieving sustainable human influence on Earth. This contribution is notable for its foundation in critical social science and its application of the knowledge obtained through this perspective to understandings of contemporary social, economic, environmental, and political change. A particular feature of MSSI is the Future Cities theme which has achieved prominence through a series of seminars, events, conferences and engagements...At RMIT University we are pleased to enjoy the opportunities of collaboration offered by our proximity to MSSI as well as the wider leadership that the Institute has contributed within the increasingly internationally significant cluster of sustainability and urban research across the university sector in Melbourne.”

**Professor Jago Dodson, Director, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT**

Earlier iterations of MSSI’s Research Clusters encompassed broader foci, bringing together University researchers from all levels and disciplines for knowledge sharing and collaboration around themes of: People and Values; Health Equity; Biodiversity and Conservation; Water Food and Energy; and Sustainability in the Anthropocene.

### People and Values

MSSI’s *People and Values* theme explored the significant impact of people and their values on sustainable living, focused on four key topics: changing populations; attitudes and communication; law, justice and ethics; and resilience and transformation. The Cluster mobilised internally to support activities such as the successful Cooperative Research Centre bid addressing Low Carbon Living, whilst also engaging experts and voices beyond campus to achieve societal transformation through activities such as roundtables and public forums.

### Health Equity

MSSI’s early convening around *Health Equity* integrated health sector expertise with academic perspectives to tackle complex, interconnected problems. Key topics of focus were: health promotion; disease prevention; and health services, with activities including delivering a ‘Creating Healthy Sustainable Societies’ conference and authoring a UNICEF report on related themes in conjunction with the Nossal Institute.



### Biodiversity and Conservation

MSSI’s *Biodiversity and Conservation* theme examined positive and negative impacts of biodiversity on society, and fostered interdisciplinary synergies across the physical sciences, humanities, social sciences, and governance frameworks. Topics in focus included: ecosystem processes and services; pests and invasive species; and, threatened species and habitats, as well as the development of an environmental data resource for Australia with capacity for analysing, forecasting, and managing the effects of environmental change on plants and animals.



## Water, Food and Energy

MSSI's early work on *Water, Food, and Energy* centred around four key topics: rural and urban water cycle; water policy, law, governance, and culture; food policy, safety, trade, and culture; and, food production, quality, and environmental impacts. The group promoted research collaboration through networking opportunities, seed funding, and seminars on related topics, and fostered external collaborations through workshops with academia, government policy makers, NGOs, and private sector leaders, and through knowledge exchange activities with stakeholders like Second Bite via pro-bono research and advice.

## Sustainability in the Anthropocene

The *Sustainability in the Anthropocene* Cluster focused on the concept of the 'Anthropocene' as a present-day geological epoch characterised by the pervasive impact of human activity, and facilitated research and dialogue on its implications for sustainability. Questions were pursued around civilisation and society in relation to planetary scope and geological timescale and ecological assessments of present and future risks, with key topics including: conceptual, scientific and political debates about the Anthropocene; representing Anthropocene narratives, aesthetics and ethics; and measuring and modelling the Anthropocene.

## NETWORKS

Beyond the formal theme-based Cluster model MSSI supported a range of networks, providing mentorship, administrative resources, promotion, and research-enabling funds to strengthen the University's contribution to a just and sustainable future through the innovative work of colleagues across the campus. Whilst networks varied in their specific aims, objectives, composition and activities, their common denominator was a strong commitment to overcoming disciplinary silos to inform and strengthen responses to sustainability crises, and to support evidence-based translation of research into real world positive impacts.

## Water

MSSI convened the *Water Futures* network to coordinate academic input into the University's response to a significant philanthropic opportunity around freshwater research, and to develop critical mass for a Hallmark Research Initiative proposal to strengthen freshwater research collaboration across the University. This

exercise recognised the world-class water research undertaken by members of the University whilst underlining the opportunity for a more integrated disciplinary approach to greatly enhance the University's impact in this space. In 2020, *Water Futures* membership grew from 17 to include 50 academics and postgraduate students across eight Faculties. The network supported a range of internal seed funding applications, hosted a number of events, and launched the well-received e-news bulletin *Re:Fresh*, before disbanding at the end of 2020 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic on campus-based activities, staffing, and finances.



## Food

In 2019, MSSI funded a range of activities to amplify the University's cross-disciplinary focus on sustainable food systems and foster its potential to be a leader in food system transformation. Following on from MSSI's hosting of the highly successful *Foodprint Melbourne* Project, the *Sustainable Food Systems Network* connected researchers working on different aspects of food systems through a range of vehicles including: a seminar series; inter-Faculty research scoping workshop; workshop series with external stakeholders on sustainable food system governance; and a pilot project on enhanced policy and industry decision to reduce climate risks associated with food production.

## Environmental Arts & Humanities Network

The *Environmental Arts & Humanities Network* was supported by MSSI in 2020 to establish a platform for early career and postgraduate researchers to connect with practitioners, including through the curation of events investigating intersectional ecological practices and pedagogies, environmental phenomena, climate in/justices, temporalities, narratives, grief, trauma, laws, science, and related Global South activism. The network utilised a seminar series, workshops, reading groups, social media channels and webinars to interrogate how the arts and humanities can catalyse more nurturing approaches to nature and culture, and reimagine 'more than human' worlds.

"MSSI has provided significant development in leadership opportunities for me, as well as allowed me to further significant strategic multidisciplinary and multi-institutional connections within the environmental arts and humanities field".

**Hayley Singer, Environmental Arts & Humanities Network**

volunteers inspires climate leadership across society by training and equipping climate leaders from all walks of life to have a substantive impact on climate change discourse and action. A current and continuing focus of TCRP is on amplifying diverse voices, particularly those within Australian First Nations communities.

"MSSI has provided a wonderful platform of leadership, collaboration and engagement across the University and broader community on sustainability issues. A great strength of the Institute has been the capacity to straddle research across multiple disciplines and at the same time fulfil an important knowledge transfer role by engagement with policymakers, community leaders, and the general public. A key example has been the Climate Reality project which has provided a conduit for the University of Melbourne to engage at an international level on the pressing issue of climate change and to engage with Australian policy makers at the highest level"

**Associate Professor Grant Blashki, Nossal Institute for Global Health**

## Climate Reality

MSSI hosted the Australasian branch of Nobel Laureate and former US Vice President Al Gore's *The Climate Reality Project* (TCRP). MSSI and the University of Melbourne provided a strong evidence-base to inform TCRP's work with their 2000+ strong regional network of trained Climate Reality Leaders. Drawing on world-leading climate expertise from University researchers and climate-focused practitioners, partners, and policy makers, TCRP's network of

## Political Economy

The *Political Economy Reading Group* brought together researchers from the University of Melbourne and other Victorian-based universities to explore environmental issues through a political and socio-economic lens. The group held regular meetings to facilitate information sharing, research presentations, and linkages to collaborative and funding opportunities to advance the work of members.



## Honorary Professor and Vice-Chancellor Fellows Group

MSSI's Honorary Professors and Vice-Chancellor Fellows Group convened regularly, sharing thought leadership, career-spanning knowledge, and high-level connections within community, government, industry, and business to inform the University of Melbourne's sustainability efforts.

## Support for developing University of Melbourne researchers

A central tenet of MSSI's approach to strengthening the University's knowledge, expertise, and connectivity around sustainability-focused research and engagement has been a focus on elevating postgraduate and early career researchers. This was achieved through a range of mechanisms, including mentorship, thesis supervision, work opportunities, scholarship support, events, and awards.

## Postgraduate researcher training

Between 2010 and 2014, MSSI fostered a dynamic and collegial postgraduate research environment for sustainability-focused students at the University through coordinating the Melbourne Academy of Sustainability and Society (MASS). MASS brought together postgraduate researchers and senior academics around emerging issues of sustainability in Australia and the region, encouraging knowledge exchange through seminars and discussions, developing early career leadership capacity through networking opportunities, and building interdisciplinary teamwork and project management skills through collaborative outputs such as peer reviewed publications and workshops. MSSI aided the establishment of the Climate and Energy College in October 2013, supporting this unique researcher training initiative through financial contributions, Advisory Board participation, co-branded events, student scholarships, supervision, mentorship, and a range of other in-kind contributions.

In addition to collaborating with the Climate and Energy College, MSSI researchers co-supervised students across a range of University of Melbourne Faculties, and with external partners including the City of Melbourne, Monash, Deakin, Lund University (Sweden),

Arctic University of Norway, and University of Marburg (Germany). MSSI academics were also involved in the supervision of Master of Environment students, undertook guest lecturing through the Office of Environmental Programs, and supported student-focused initiatives such as the Sustainability Lab at Melbourne (SL@M).



## Emerging researchers as central to the academic community

Beyond formal supervision, MSSI was involved in a range of other structured and adhoc activities designed around mentorship and skill development for the University's ECRs and postgraduate researchers, with a view to reinforcing the critical importance of emergent researchers to the dynamism, relevance, and intellectual growth of the broader academic community.

Postgraduate researchers were engaged in paid Cluster coordination roles to provide experience and access to networks, both internally and externally through exposure to research linkages, events, and opportunities. PhDs stipends and fellowships were embedded within nationally competitive grant proposals led by MSSI, externally funded project roles were prioritised within the Institute for early career researchers, mentorship was provided for emerging researchers in their bids for Discovery Early Career Research Awards (DECRA) and other ECR grant schemes, and specific fellowship funding was secured through opportunities such as the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation Foote Fellowship.





## FOOTE FELLOWSHIP

MSSI's Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation-funded *Footo Climate Solutions* Research Fellowship enabled an early career researcher work program focused on understanding and promoting drivers to encourage climate action within Australia at the State government level, with a view to greater collaboration between international jurisdictions. The Fellowship informed numerous publications on 'clean' economic growth and supported high level roundtable discussions and briefings encouraging thought leadership sharing between State Treasurers and Climate Ministers, economists, climate policy and legal experts, and academics.

MSSI encouraged graduate and early career researcher engagement through a range of focused activities and events, including two research translation grants in 2019 enabling PhD students to communicate their climate change related research in novel ways. Global connections were fostered through mechanisms such as: the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning's Japan-EU & Urban Student Mobility International Program 'Ausmip'; *Future Cities* Cluster scholarships for students and ECRs to participate in the UN Habitat III Conference in Ecuador in 2016, and the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi in 2020; support for the University's selection of scholars to attend the U21 'Water in Society' workshop in Sweden; and Climate Reality sponsorship of 20 undergraduates, masters and PhD students and alumni to attend Al Gore's international The Climate Reality Project's (TCRP) Leadership training in Brisbane in 2019. From their base in MSSI, TCRP brought a strong focus to capacity building and elevating the voices of emergent leaders on critical issues of climate, through activities such as skills workshops, hosting networking events, and training interns in science communication and research translation.

## Adam Majcher Legacy Program

In collaboration with ClimateWorks Australia and Common Cause, MSSI's Climate Reality Project hosted an annual internship for an outstanding university student or recent graduate with demonstrated potential to build collective impact, and to strengthen dialogue around climate solutions in the Australian context. The award is in memory of the late marine biologist, science communicator, and climate advocate Adam Majcher, and through its focus on capacity-building climate leaders of the future honours Adam's belief that together, people can achieve truly wonderful things.

"It was immensely valuable to connect with a variety of people throughout the industry. I learned a great deal through these conversations. It was really helpful to have the space, not only to ask career advice questions, but also to explore my curiosity with a range of topics such as how to communicate well, how to collaborate with others, how businesses operate and what other stakeholders are working on climate change in different ways"

**Melissa Yoon, Adam Majcher legal program 2019**

MSSI-supported early researcher initiatives such as the Health and Sustainability Journal Club, the Urban Research Reading Group, and the Australasian Early Career Urban Research Network (AECURN) through financial and resourcing support and mentoring. Special student-targeted events were also a feature of MSSI's work, with more recent examples including: the convening in 2019 of a University-wide climate-focused PhD workshop aimed at connecting graduate researchers with industry specialists, government policy-makers, NGO workers, and other researchers around themes of interdisciplinarity and research translation; a webinar in 2020 featuring Professor Inger Mewburn, Director of Researching Training at ANU, discussing postgraduate options, research sectors, and how to approach the non-academic job market with confidence; chairing of the 2021 African Studies conference on *Solidarity in Diversity* by MSSI's Research Fellow (Research Translation) Dr Kennedy Mbeva; and support, via AECURN, for the PhD symposium at the 2021 State of Australian Cities Conference.

## AECURN

The Australasian Early Career Urban Researcher's Network emerged out of the State of Australian Cities (SOAC) PhD Symposium held in Sydney in December 2013. A key objective of the network is connecting early-stage (PhD and ECR) urban researchers with other urban researchers to share knowledge and resources. Since its inception, AECURN's hosting of city, state, and national workshops, seminars, lectures, and social events has extended beyond Australia into New Zealand, helping to establish trans-Tasman cross-sectoral links between urban practitioners, academia, and industry. In 2018 and 2019, MSSI made a joint financial contribution to AECURN, in collaboration with the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT, to support the network's Victorian chapter to extend its reach across the state.



## RESEARCH ENABLING THROUGH SEED FUNDING

Seed funding has been an important research-enabling tool in MSSSI's approach to raising the University's public-spirited ambition, fostering cross-university interdisciplinary collaborations to identify and address sustainability issues of societal concern. The allocation of MSSSI seed funding has taken on different formats over the years, and included competitive application rounds as well as targeted funding toward topics or themes with identified potential for capacity-development and enhanced connectivity and impact. MSSSI funded 70 projects over its lifespan, increasing the quantum of funding in recent years to encourage ambitious interdisciplinary research projects with a clear pathway to impact that could 'shift the dial' on sustainability challenges. Seed funding allocations touched every Faculty in the University, with a particular focus on promoting STEM and HASS collaborations.

MSSSI is indebted to Cluster Convenors from across the University for contributing to the shaping of the seed funding program, and for sitting on review panels to select successful proposals for awards. The Institute's thanks also extends to the teams of academics and postgraduate researchers for the huge array of innovative, resourceful and thoughtful project proposals put forward for MSSSI seed funding over the years, and to the professional staff who have supported the administration of seed funding and related project activities. Many of these activities have spawned highly impactful publications, events, and further grants, and a number of these are profiled here.



## 2018 - Maximizing Communication Accessibility in Public Transport Services

**Investigators:** Ellen van Holstein, Crystal Legacy, Ilan Wiesel

**Project Summary:** This project created a new research program by examining existing approaches and future directions in communication accessibility in public transport. Communication of information about transport services is essential to the creation of an accessible public transport system. The project focused on accessibility for people with diverse cognitive and communicative abilities, and specifically people with intellectual disability. It fostered collaborative relationships within the University and with industry, government, and disability advocacy groups to build an interdisciplinary research and practice program.

## 2018 – Climate Change in Myanmar and the politics of the New Yangon City project

**Investigators:** Vanessa Lamb, Alexander Cullen, Tamas Wells, Derlie Mateo-Babiano, Anna Hurliman

**Project Summary:** This project looked at deployment of climate change as knowledge discourse in modes of governance through nation-building projects, rural-urban migration, and processes of transformation under appropriation, within the context of the New Yangon City Development in Myanmar. In examining how the social impacts of climate change in climate-vulnerable areas are driving urban and environmental change, the research team explored urban transformation as a site of political and economic accumulation through climate change mitigation and adaptation policy. Key stakeholder relationships were fostered through this project with civil society partners (PK Forum), NGOs (Renewable Energy Association of Myanmar (REAM), Myanmar Environment Institute, WLE Greater Mekong) and inter/national development institutions (DFAT and JICA).

## 2019 Understanding aquifers through groundwater stories

**Investigators:** Peter Dahlhaus, Amanda Johnson, Eddie Paterson, Tim Peterson, Deborah Wardle

**Project Summary:** This project aimed to enhance scholarly and community knowledge of the place of groundwater in Australian psyche and culture, with a view to ensuring sustainable groundwater resources. Communicating the science of groundwater's vulnerability accurately entailed finding new communication channels and new ways of giving voice to groundwater. The project sought new and innovative communications to express human interactions with groundwater's broad geological and ecological frameworks.

## 2019 - Understanding frames and values in suburban transport politics

**Investigators:** John Stone, Crystal Legacy, David Bissell

**Project Summary:** This project examined transport politics in suburban geographies which are dominated by automobility. The project asked, 'what frames and values underpin transport politics in suburban Melbourne?', examining a suburban site of transport disadvantage where new public transport infrastructure options were being proposed.



## 2020 – Scaling Up Regenerative Agriculture

**Investigators:** Philipp Cormie, Natalie Doran-Browne, Richard Eckard, Rod Keenan, Oliver Miltenberger, Ben Neville, Brad Potter, Naomi Soderstrom

**Project Summary:** Adopting regenerative agriculture methods to reduce emissions across the agricultural sector requires large-scale, upfront investment. This project assessed options to scale up investment for regenerative agriculture. Evidence of likely financial return from investments is required for mainstream investors to confidently allocate funds to regenerative agriculture. This also requires an understanding of how financial and non-financial impacts of such investments interact over time. This project brought together expertise from the Faculties of Science, Business and Economics, and Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences with external partners from Paraway Pastoral, the Central Victorian Regenerative Farmers Inc and more to achieve this end.

## 2020 – Protecting streams in our cities: Understanding how 'general environmental duty' and 'state of knowledge' can help transform stormwater management

**Investigators:** Yung En Chee, Chris Walsh, Rebecca Nelson, Anna Kosovac, with Environmental Justice Victoria, EPA Victoria, Melbourne Water, CRC for Water Sensitive Cities

**Project Summary:** This project was an interdisciplinary investigation into how better integration of legal mechanisms, scientific and socio-technical knowledge can drive transformative stormwater management, so that it protects stream ecosystems whilst producing co-benefits such as climate resilient water supplies, flood mitigation, urban habitat, greening, and cooling. The project examined the incoming Environment Protection Amendment Act 2018, and the transformative potential of two key concepts embodied therein of 'general environmental duty' and 'state of knowledge', in terms of their relationship to stormwater management.

## 2021 - Indigenous youth priorities for future cities: Developing a research agenda

**Investigators:** Meredith Adler, Luke Briscoe, Paola Flores Carvajal, Karen Chapple, Heather Dorries, Paris Hadfield, Derlie Mateo-Babiano, Maddison Miller, Sombol Mokhles, Cathy Oke, Tianna Philippot, Hannah Robertson, Megan Tran, John Verbeeck, Helen Watts

**Project Summary:** This project contributes to the Future Cities theme by co-creating the first Indigenous-youth-led international research agenda (The Agenda) on priorities for climate resilient cities, and a research Delivery Pathways Plan (the Plan) to implement the Agenda in academia. Seed funding will support the co-creation of the Agenda and the Plan through Indigenous-led facilitation of Indigenous youth dialogues and will create research opportunities between the University of Melbourne and University of Toronto. Working across Australia, North America, Latin America and Europe, the Agenda and Plan will build on outcomes from workshops facilitated at the 2020 Daring Cities Congress, and from the 2021 Innovate4Cities Conference hosted by Melbourne Centre for Cities, Student Energy, and the Global Covenant of Mayors.

## 2021 – China's palm oil business in Indonesia: Foreign investor driven transitions, sustainability tensions and local negotiation

**Investigators:** Monica Tan, Mark Wang, Guangyu Qiao-Franco (University of Southern Denmark)

**Project Summary:** This project examines the interactions between foreign [Chinese] investors and local environmental actors in the contentious palm oil industry, posing the questions: what kind of transitions have been brought to Indonesia by Chinese investment in palm oil?; what are the key sustainability issues associated with these transitions?; and what key factors have driven negotiations between Chinese and Indonesian stakeholders in this context?

# ENGAGING EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS WITH SUSTAINABILITY-FOCUSED THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

MSSI was a highly effective portal between the University of Melbourne's world-class sustainability research expertise and critical actors across all sectors of society concerned with planetary and species health and resilience. MSSI engaged stakeholders from community, civil society, government, not-for-profit and industry through a range of mediums and channels, connecting diverse audiences with knowledge, provoking critical thinking and public dialogue, and brokering coalitions and partnerships that cut across social, political, economic and disciplinary interests to envisage a more sustainable future.

## SUPPORTING THREE TIERS OF GOVERNMENT



### Local

MSSI fostered strong connections with Government through a range of unique collaborations. Among key outcomes at a local level was the successful negotiation of a joint Professorial Chair, co-funded by the City of Melbourne and University of Melbourne Chancellor, with additional resourcing from the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning. Professor Lars Coenen was the inaugural incumbent in this important strategic role bridging the University and its host City, commencing as the City of Melbourne Chair of Resilient

Cities in January 2017. During his term, Lars and his team built national and global awareness of the City of Melbourne's ambitious resilience endeavours, with contributions including academic input into the *Resilient Melbourne and Knowledge City* strategies, facilitating 'Economic Transitions' dialogues with Metropolitan mayors and CEOs, representing Melbourne in the Rockefeller 100 Resilience Cities network, delivering keynote addresses in Australia and abroad, and producing podcasts, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other scholarship and translation outputs.

"The University is well known for its depth of academic strength and we have seen that MSSI is able to bring that to bear in a lot of our work. It ranges from activities in the built environment through a project we have called Resilient Communities, and using the skills of MSSI to evaluate a whole number of our projects..."

**Toby Kent, former Chief Resilience Officer, City of Melbourne**

MSSI's interaction with local governments and related agencies was extensive and impactful. Support ranged from the provision of financial and academic support for undertakings such as the City of Melbourne Arts House 'Refuge' project and a user-focused study on 'Making the City of Melbourne more inclusive for people with Disability', to completing commissioned research for the Municipal Association of Victoria to better understand the impact of population growth in Greater Melbourne and developing an 'Ecological Footprint' tool for the City of Port Phillip. By ensuring the presence of a local government voice on the MSSI Advisory Board since its inception in 2014, MSSI further strengthened the relevance of its work within the geographical community in which it sits, whilst also advancing the 'Place' aspirations of the University's *Advancing Melbourne* strategy by maintaining a strong working relationship with the Mayoral Office.

"The intensity, frequency and devastating impact of 'natural' disasters across the globe has clearly demonstrated that this is not simply an environmental issue. The impacts are felt in the economy, human and ecosystem health, national security, mental health, and agricultural industries, and they do not recognise geographical or cultural borders. We are all in this together and it is going to take a multi-disciplinary, cross-sector response based on sound research and data. This means the work of MSSI is arguably more important than ever."

**Arron Wood, former Deputy Lord Mayor of Melbourne and MSSI Advisory Board Chair 2016 - 2020**





In February 2021, Professor Sarah Bell assumed the role of City of Melbourne Chair in Urban Resilience and Innovation, with early priorities including: consolidating an Urban Resilience Framework for the City of Melbourne; examining the current resilience context; identifying the major shocks and stresses facing the city to inform responses; and building on work undertaken by the University’s Connected Cities Lab with the City of Melbourne on Sustainable Development Goals. In November 2021, the team launched an Issues Paper and Briefing Paper in collaboration with the City of Melbourne on ‘Urban resilience for local government: Concepts, definitions and qualities’, and their work in growing this critically important relationship with the City of Melbourne will continue through their new base at the University’s Melbourne Centre for Cities into 2022 and beyond.



**State-focused work, Enterprise Professor in Environmentalism**

MSSI hosted the Enterprise Professor in Environmentalism Don Henry from 2016 to 2021, supporting Don in his remit to strengthen the University’s research and outreach on climate change issues both locally and globally. During this time, key government, private sector, and community influencers of the Paris Agreement have utilised MSSI briefing papers and in-person high-level roundtables conducted by the Chair, drawing on expertise from the University’s Centres and Faculties to inform policy positions on Paris Agreement implementation. As part of this suite of work, MSSI has worked with Premiers, Ministers, and senior Public Servants from Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, NSW and the ACT, providing a neutral platform and analytical support to convene and identify opportunities for accelerating clean economy growth and raising Paris ambition.

Recent work supported by the Lord Mayor’s Charitable foundation included the analysis and publication of a briefing paper examining and recommending action across 10 functions of state governments that would dramatically accelerate action on climate change. It is also catalysed an economic analysis of *Australia’s Clean Economy Future: Costs and Benefits* in collaboration with ANU and SGS Economics & Planning (2019), the launch of which coincided with a visit by the Hon Al Gore and the convening of two state government ministerial roundtables – one for Climate Ministers and the other for Treasurers or their representatives, exploring how to accelerate climate action and adapt mainstream economic agencies to support clean economies.



These high-level forums were followed in February 2020 by a senior Treasury and Treasury Corp official’s roundtable attended by all east coast states and South Australia, exploring climate risk management and clean economy possibilities and laying the foundations for greater state government stimulation of clean economies as part of COVID recovery planning.



The Chair’s role as a University representative on the Queensland Premier’s Advisory Council on Climate Change represents a further contribution of thought leadership and engagement expertise at the State-level, as does the heading of the Victorian Forestry Industries Roundtable of industry, union, and environment representatives in 2016 to provide advice to Government on advancing forest policy in Victoria:

“The [Forestry Industry] Taskforce has dealt with difficult issues and I recognise and appreciate the hard work of all involved. ... Whilst recognising the independent nature of the Taskforce’s work, I ask that it work closely with the Special Minister and the Department of Premier and Cabinet over the coming months to ensure the Government is well positioned to effectively respond to these complex issues...”

**The Hon Daniel Andrews, Premier of Victoria [to Professor Don Henry]**



### **New Urban Levers to Address the Homelessness Crisis program**

In 2017, MSSI’s Professor Brendan Gleeson, with colleagues from the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning and external partners from SGS Economics & Planning, Housing Choices Australia, MGS Architects, and Launch Housing collaborated on a study investigating ‘New urban levers to address homelessness’. This study interrogated the complexities of Melbourne’s worsening homelessness problem and related community concerns, social conflicts, and wide-scale deterioration of the city’s most vulnerable. The team reviewed whether there is a case for a special purpose agency to target provision of last resort housing, and produced papers that informed state decision-making in this area:

“...We welcome anything that helps quantify not just what’s the right thing to do socially, but the right thing to do economically...we would see this report as backing in our already \$646 million worth of investment in the last year in housing and homelessness support...”

**Victorian Minister for Housing Martin Foley, ABC News, March 2017 (referencing MSSI Issues Paper ‘The Case for Investing in Last Resort Housing’)**

### **Informing Victorian environmental sustainability**

MSSI Associate Professor Janet Stanley’s extensive work with State-based Emergency Services and groups like the Gippsland Arson Prevention Program informed her submission to the Victorian government inquiry following the devastating bushfires of the 2019/2020 summer. Using MSSI as a platform, Janet also influenced State-level evidence-based decision making, publishing Issues and Briefing Papers through MSSI’s in-house series to elevate pressing sustainability concerns such as *Strategic Planning for Melbourne’s Green Wedges*, and *Melbourne: How big, how fast and at what cost?*

### **Supporting Victoria’s Climate Change Future**

MSSI’s role as a trusted leader in research, translation and dialogue around sustainability issues was reflected in an approach from the Office of the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in May 2021 to host a webinar outlining the Victorian Government’s new Climate Change Strategy. The Hon Lily D’Ambrosio was joined in conversation by the Hon Greg Combet AM, Tennant Reed (AiGROUP), Danae Bosler (Trades Hall Council), Professor Jacque Peel from Melbourne Climate Futures, and Professor Don Henry in a MSSI-hosted webinar to discuss the implications of Victoria’s ambitious climate targets for jobs, economic recovery, and the environment.



“The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning strongly values the role that MSSI plays in building relationships and connecting government policy development and strategic research and advice. In addition, the national and international connections of MSSI staff are a significant strategic asset to Victorian and Australian policy makers, researchers and business groups.”

**Adam Fennessy, Former Secretary, DELWP**

## Informing Federal responses

MSSI built extensive and reputable networking capability, and the Institute's academic and engagement expertise informed a range of Federal level responses to sustainability related concerns.

### Indigenous-led conservation and land management in Northern Australia

Professor Don Henry's ongoing work with Traditional Owners, Indigenous representative bodies, government, and environmental organisations in Northern Australia is an example of MSSI's 'enterprise' expertise in action. Through engaged consultation and advice, Professor Don Henry and the Melbourne School of Design assisted the Mirrar of Kakadu in securing an additional \$200m of federal support for land management in Kakadu National Park, and informed the re-purposing of Jabiru township from a mining town to an Indigenous culture and nature engagement and tourism future. Professor Henry's collaboration with Professor Mick Dodson of ANU to successfully engage the CEO and Board of Australia's leading resource company, BHP, to support the 'Uluru statement from the Heart' is further evidence of MSSI's expertise in bringing disparate groups into constructive dialogue.



### Focusing federal funding on energy and land use

Utilising the MSSI team's extensive engagement networks and expertise, the Institute supported key academic partners within the University in leveraging significant federal funding for sustainability-focused research. In August 2016, MSSI initiated and hosted a round table with then Ambassador for the Environment the Hon Patrick Suckling, laying the foundation for the Australian-Germany Energy Transition Hub to be located within the University with \$4m of support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. MSSI also supported colleagues in the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences in securing a portion of \$5m from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, to investigate agriculture emission-reduction options to support Paris Agreement implementation in Vietnam and Fiji.



### Sustainable Australian cities

MSSI was home to world-leading expertise in Urban Policy and engaged in knowledge sharing at a federal level to inform the future of Australian cities. The foundations for this approach were set in one of MSSI's earliest Issues Papers, authored by critical friend of MSSI Professor Patrick Troy AO, which unpacked a perennial sustainability challenge, namely: 'People will need to be convinced that their own interests may be better served by taking into account the bigger picture'. In 2018, MSSI's Future Cities Research Cluster coordinated a university-wide submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the Australian Government's role in the development of cities. At the request of the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities three Cluster convenors – Professor Carolyn Whitzman, Professor Stephan Winter, and Professor Lars Coenen – provided expert witness to a committee hearing, alongside Vice-President of Policy and Projects Dr Julie Wells. The Committee's final report references the University's submissions and evidence more than 20 times, and advocates for numerous national policy changes that echo the recommendations and research provided by the University. MSSI was a constant contributor to the bi-annual State of Australian Cities Conference (SOAC), and in 2021 former MSSI Director Professor Brendan Gleeson was awarded an Australasian Cities Research Medal for his sustained and outstanding scholarly and service contribution to Australasian urban research.

## Engaging internationally

MSSI's sustainability focus extended from the local to the global, and the Institute's thought leadership and reach on issues of planetary health and just transitions was enhanced through collaborations with international luminaries.

"[MSSI] hosted a roundtable on international climate change action and just transitions for economies and workers coinciding with a visit I was undertaking to Australia. The roundtable brought together Australian Union, business, and community sector leaders along with researchers from across the University of Melbourne and others. I found this a very useful and informative opportunity to share learnings and needs from around Australia and the world and commend the University for this highly valuable engagement. As the international peak body for trade unions, we have also benefited from briefing papers prepared by MSSI focused on countries key to the Paris climate Agreement... The University of Melbourne is to be highly commended with its efforts, through MSSI, to make cross-disciplinary knowledge accessible to and to engage with all sectors of society on the great sustainability issues of our times"

**Sharan Burrow, General Secretary,  
International Trade Union Confederation**



### The Hon Al Gore and The Climate Reality Project

MSSI's enduring relationship with Nobel Peace Prize recipient and former Vice President of the United States the Hon Al Gore was initiated through Enterprise Professor Don Henry, who plays a key advisory role for Mr Gore. The Institute was pleased to host a number of visits by Mr Gore, including: a keynote presentation at the MSSI-led ECOCITY World Summit; the receipt of an honorary doctorate from the University of Melbourne; networking with leaders from all fields in climate policy and action; a celebration of ten years of The Climate Reality Project with Climate Reality Leaders; and bearing witness to the signing of a Climate Leadership Declaration by the Victorian, ACT, Queensland and South Australian Governments. Mr Gore has also participated in MSSI roundtables, bringing together international academics and policy experts from South Africa, Indonesia, India, Fiji, France, China, UK, and Australia to share expert knowledge, experience, and opportunities for collaboration around Paris Climate Agreement implementation.

"Through the work of Professor Don Henry, MSSI has also provided valued ongoing advice and assistance with my Climate Reality trainings around the world. Don has also assisted me with research briefing papers and participation in the annual United Nations Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the meeting that concluded the Paris Agreement. Throughout the many years I have known him, Don has been one of my trusted advisers – on both Australian and international affairs... Through all these activities MSSI has provided high quality leadership, effective engagement with community, business, and government leaders, and excellent knowledge, advice, and support for the essential task of informing and inspiring action on the climate crisis and its solutions. I am pleased to continue my work with MSSI, commend University of Melbourne for its contribution to society through MSSI, and wish them well..."

**The Hon Al Gore, Nobel Peace Prize Recipient and  
former Vice President of the United States**



### ECOCITY World Summit

In July 2017, MSSI led the University's co-convening of the ECOCITY World Summit in Melbourne, in collaboration with Ecocity Builders and the Institute for Culture and Societies at Western Sydney University. The summit brought together over 900 delegates from more than 30 countries who engaged with over 300 presentations on conceptual and practical aspects of sustainable urbanism. Showcasing thought leadership from Victorian Climate Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, Planning Minister Richard Wynne, Deputy Lord Mayor of Melbourne Arron Wood, former Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Professor Kate Auty, and Nobel Peace-Prize winning climate campaigner Al Gore, the summit provided a platform for connecting Melbourne's expertise with the world, and opportunities for academics, professionals, civil society groups and government to work collaboratively to make cities more resilient.

MSSI has hosted the Australasian branch of The Climate Reality Project since 2017, and through doing so has connected the University with the science communication and engagement expertise of other Climate Reality branches in Africa, Brazil, Canada, China, Europe, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico and Latin America, the Philippines, and the United States. A strong focus on regional



capacity building has enabled Climate Reality to forge strong relationships with leaders from government, civil society and environmental NGOs across The Pacific, and pursue climate justice for our most vulnerable neighbours:

In October 2021, Climate Reality hosted an online forum for Pacific voices to be heard, championing ambitious climate commitments at the Glasgow COP 26 climate negotiations. The ‘Blue Pacific to Glasgow Forum’ featured US Vice President Hon Al Gore, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Hon Henry Puna, Fiji Prime Minister and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum Hon Frank Bainimarama, and the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches Rev James Bhagwan, among other prominent government and civil society leaders.



### 100 Resilient Cities [100RC]

Between 2017 and 2019, the City of Melbourne Chair worked with the Resilient Melbourne Office to study the impact and innovation of the activities of the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities network, including as the Melbourne delegate to the 100 Resilient Cities Summit in Rotterdam. The team presented the City of Melbourne’s Living Melbourne initiative – an urban forest strategy for a more liveable Melbourne – and demonstrated the high value of networked efforts that connect local experiences to international agendas.

### International linkages, from The Lancet to the United Nations

MSSI’s contribution to dialogues around sustainability issues of global importance has been realised through a range of formats. A recent collaboration with the Melbourne Centre for Cities, ICLEA Local Governments for Sustainability, and the City of Melbourne in delivering a UN Habitat-led webinar on *Oceania Cities and Climate Resilience* highlighted MSSI’s expertise as a channel for connecting the Melbourne city experience with international audiences. Similarly, the Urban Resilience and Innovation Research group’s participation in the forthcoming Lancet Global Health Series, measuring policy and spatial indicators of health and sustainable urban environments across 25 cities in 19 countries, is supporting better global health outcomes through interdisciplinary authorship collaboration.



Janet Stanley’s recent completion of a United Nations-commissioned review of sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban passenger transport for Asia and the Pacific is a further example of the Institute’s capability in coordinating and translating local expertise for international impact. MSSI’s Enterprise Fellow in Environmental Diplomacy, Dr Janine Felson, has also linked MSSI and University of Melbourne expertise into influential global thought leadership arenas, connecting social, economic, and environmental issues with global governance frameworks through her leadership roles in the Caribbean Community, and the Alliance of Small Island States at key multi-lateral negotiations. This includes

the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the inter-governmental negotiations for a legally binding instrument on conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.



### **Postgraduate researchers forging international linkages**

MSSI supported postgraduate researchers in building their overseas networks through the provision of strategic scholarships and supervisory support for international-focused project work. Recent examples include: Alexei Trundle's 2020 thesis on *Endogenous Climate Resilience: Information Adaption Pathways in the Pacific's Small Island Developing Cities*, encompassing

fieldwork in Honiara, Solomon islands, and Porta Vila, Vanuatu; Mia Dunphy's investigation of *How the shift of indigenous youth into 'off farm' livelihoods impacts family and village level control of forest landscapes and livelihood security*, in collaboration with the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in Bogor, Indonesia; Sue Hang's exploration of *Resilient food systems for Malaysian cities*; Danial Naqvi's project on *Integrating urban sustainability and digital platforms: Comparing strategic urban responses and implications in Greater Manchester and Greater Melbourne*, in collaboration with the University of Manchester; and Claudine Lagier's PhD project on 'How climate change is engaged in primary education in Victoria' as part of the large international project 'Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Communication and Education (MEECE)'.

# MSSI CHANNELS FOR SHARING SUSTAINABILITY KNOWLEDGE

MSSI utilised a range of platforms, channels and formats to connect the Institute's broad stakeholder-base with the knowledge, expertise, opportunities and optimism for strengthening present-day actions for a more sustainable future.



## MISSIVE

MSSI's e-news bulletin *MiSSive* had a subscriber-base of more than 10,000 individuals, and was consistently praised for its high quality, relevance, connectivity, and for being an all-round good read. Featuring researcher and project profiles, new publications, articles, events, accolades, and links to funding and other opportunities, *MiSSive* was based on principles of elevating the sustainability-focused work of MSSI's University colleagues and own team, as well as linking the University's sustainability expertise with critical external stakeholders and opportunities. The Institute is indebted to Events and Communications Coordinator Claire Denby for the inception and ongoing production of *MiSSive*, and for growing the Institute's readership through facilitating this research translation portal.

# MSSI EVENTS



Coordinating and delivering high quality events, bringing together innovative thinkers from different disciplines and viewpoints to consider the sustainability challenges of our time, was central to MSSI's engagement success. MSSI delivered, and co-delivered, a huge array of events over the lifecycle of the Institute, spanning postgraduate researcher networking opportunities, book launches, seminar series' and panel discussions, through to high level roundtables and international conferences. MSSI events were carefully curated and executed, and in the final two years of operation reached significantly larger and more diverse audiences through pivoting to online delivery throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

## MSSI ORATIONS

In 2016, MSSI hosted a visit by the former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who delivered the Institute's inaugural oration on *Climate Justice After Paris*. As president of the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice, and the former UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Climate Change, Mary Robinson played an important role in the Paris climate conference process. During her two-day visit with MSSI she shared these experiences with a high-level roundtable, co-hosted by the EU Centre for Shared Complex Challenges and comprising leading local academics, business representatives and civil society actors. Whilst in Melbourne, Mary was interviewed by ABC News Breakfast and ABC Radio National on the climate change related issues she raised during the Oration, and was also quoted in The Mercury, The Conversation and The Guardian.



MSSI's 2018 Orator was Professor Lars Coenen, City of Melbourne Chair in Resilience, who shared his cutting-edge perspectives on *Resilience in the face of sustainability crises*, highlighting an urgent need to reframe innovation as a collective problem-solving effort across all levels of society, not just something that's done by heroic entrepreneurs. The 2019 address was delivered by Rebecca Huntley, one of Australia's foremost researchers on social trends, who explored questions around *Renewing democracy in a time of environmental crisis*, and specifically how people's attitudes to democracy and the role of government impact their responses to climate change.





## SUSTAINABILITY CRISES THROUGH AN ARTS LENS

MSSI supported a broad range of events profiling compelling artistic interpretations of, and responses to, the sustainability crises of our time, including many book launches and exhibitions. As a principal knowledge partner in the 2015 Art+Climate=Change Festival, MSSI collaborated with CLIMARTE, the Ian Potter Museum of Art,



and the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning to present leading British designer, artist, and filmmaker David Buckland's exhibition *Discounting the Future*, alongside other events. MSSI academics regularly lent their expertise to a range of literary and culturally-focused panels, including the Transitions Film Festival, Melbourne Writers Festival, and the Sustainable Living Festival, and the Institute was a strong supporter of Art House's *Refuge* series of events, providing research facilitation, funding, academic expertise, and promotion for this six year project inspiring new ways to rally as a community and prepare for climate crisis. In 2019, MSSI seed funding supported *Hacking the Anthropocene IV*, a series of curated research and engagement events designed to establish a transdisciplinary approach to intersecting issues of ethics, equity, and epistemology as they relate to the concept of the 'Anthropocene'. MSSI also hosted the launch of many books.



In 2018 author and climate scientist Joelle Gergis launched her book *A Sunburnt Country* at a sell-out event co-hosted by MSSI and the Faculty of Science.

## ENGAGING SEMINARS, AND THE TRANSITION TO WEBINARS

MSSI was renowned for fostering innovative sustainability dialogue - from within the University, and via extensive external networks of researchers, civil society actors, government representatives and policy makers, artists, and community - through thoughtfully created seminars, panel discussions, and more recently via webinars.



In 2018, MSSI hosted the Australian launch of the *Nature Sustainability* journal, where Chief Editor Monica Contestabile and a panel of sustainability experts discussed the crucial interface of sustainability policy and research. Monica introduced the new online journal from Springer Nature, one of the world's most influential publishers of nature-based research. This was followed by an open discussion with the audience and an expert panel.

In addition to the many stand-alone seminars the Institute hosted each year, MSSSI's Clusters delivered a range of 'seminar series' spanning themes of sustainable planning (2012), communicating climate change in complex and resistant contexts (2013), biodiversity (2013, 2019), climate 'brown bag' presentations (2014), creating a better future for Melbourne (2014), sustainability in the Anthropocene (2014, 2015), climate conversations (2015, 2016, 2017), sustainable food systems (2019), climate action for the crucial decade ahead (2020), and global conversations on the road to COP26 Glasgow (2021).



In 2019, MSSSI hosted a five-part Biodiversity Seminar Series, attracting large public audiences to each instalment. Seminars addressed topics encompassing: implications of the IPBES Global Assessment report; the climate and biodiversity nexus, and implications for land-based mitigation; practitioner perspectives on biodiversity governance; biodiversity management in the Budj Bim Cultural landscape; and the Extinction Rebellion movement's potential for transformational climate action beyond grassroots politics. Speakers included Damien Bell, CEO of the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Emily Gerrard, Principal Lawyer and Director of Comhar Group Pty Ltd, and Brendan Wintle, Professor in Conservation Ecology in the Biosciences School at the University of Melbourne and Director of the National Threatened Species Recovery Research Hub.



The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 saw MSSSI make a nimble transition to online seminar delivery, enabling many positive gains. With geographical constraints largely removed, both presenters and webinar attendees became immediately more accessible, allowing MSSSI to bring international and interstate voices into sustainability-focused dialogue around pivotal events of global concern happening at the time. In the lead up to the US election in October 2020, MSSSI hosted a discussion with two US-based experts - Catherine Flowers, board member of the Natural Resources Defence Council, and Roy Neel, US President Clinton's former Deputy Chief of Staff - around the implications for the Paris Agreement and 2030 horizon. Leading up to the Glasgow climate COP26 in 2021, MSSSI's TCRP team coordinated government and civil society leaders and participants worldwide in discussions via the *Blue Pacific to Glasgow Forum*, whilst MSSSI's Dr Janine Felson lent her thought leadership and practical expertise to preliminary discussions for both the Glasgow COP, and the Biodiversity COP15 in China, from her base in Melbourne.

Other presenters able to connect across borders with MSSSI audiences during the pandemic included First Nations cultural flow experts Melissa Kennedy and Brendan Kennedy, social researcher Rebecca Huntley, leading exponent on climate change Tim Flannery, CEO of Clean Energy Finance Corporation Ian Learmonth, and ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Sophie Lewis, among many others. The benefits of transitioning online extended beyond removing spatial limitations, by also providing the opportunity for live captioning and other accessibility requests from the public. Webinar recordings have since enabled many hundreds of additional views of MSSSI events after their original broadcast, and the Institute strongly endorses the University expanding its online delivery platforms into the future. In addition to reducing the carbon footprint of events that necessitate travel to campus, such delivery is reflective of a public-spirited institution taking measures to make the academe and its knowledge bases more accessible to the communities we serve.

# SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH WITH REAL WORLD IMPACT

## FACILITATING RESEARCH

An important part of MSSI's role has been supporting University of Melbourne sustainability researchers to advance their work by connecting them with partnership and funding opportunities. Through the provision of research enabling funds, mentorship, supervision, knowledge, expertise, access to networks, and other resourcing, MSSI has helped colleagues define critical sustainability questions of our time, develop and test responses to existing and emerging sustainability issues, and inform policy and practice for sustainable societies into the future.

MSSI's advice and support for successful nationally competitive grants has covered a range of topics, spanning *Megadrought likelihood and water resource impacts in Australia* (ARC Linkage), *Responses of invertebrates to climate variability and climate change* (ARC Discovery), *The evolutionary and cultural-historical underpinnings of human cooperation* (ARC Discovery), *Advanced Manufacturing of Prefabricated Housing* (ARC Centre), *Low Carbon Living* (CRC), and *Australian Bushfire Prevention* (ARC Linkage, CRC), to name just a handful.

### Integrated planning for bushfire prevention

MSSI's Associate Professor Janet Stanley supported colleagues in securing two Commonwealth funded programs focused on bushfire prevention. As a Chief Investigator (CI) on the *Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC*, Janet worked with a team from the University of Melbourne, ANU, Adelaide University, and end-users from Emergency Management Australia, the Australian Local Government Association, the SA Department of the Environment, Water and Natural Resources, MWH Global, and the SA Metropolitan Fire

Service, to identify the limits and potentials of integrated urban planning for natural hazard mitigation in Australia. Janet was also CI on ARC Linkage Project *Building an integrated system for Australian bushfire prevention*, working with colleagues from the University of Melbourne and Swinburne in partnership with Crime Stoppers Victoria.

Beyond nationally competitive schemes, MSSI supported research colleagues in securing funding from a range of other sources, including DFAT's \$4m contribution to the Energy Transition Hub, \$1.7m from ACIAR for climate and agriculture-focused projects, \$1.3m from the City of Melbourne for a joint-Chair with the University, as well as a third trench of funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation's for the Foodprint Melbourne project (total \$549k).

### Foodprint Melbourne

Foodprint Melbourne commenced in 2017 under the direction of Dr Rachel Carey, with colleagues Jen Sheridan and Kirsten Larsen, and came under MSSI's auspice in 2018. Funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, the project investigated the importance of Melbourne's food bowl-fringe to the city's food supply. In addition to working with local government and producer partners to create a roadmap for a sustainable future food system, the team produced a well-received set of secondary school curriculum resources for the Year 9 Geography subject 'Biomes and food security'.



## LEADING RESEARCH FROM WITHIN THE INSTITUTE

As MSSI's connectivity capability grew over time so did its capacity to lead projects from the Institute's own floorplate, and to contribute directly to Chancellery's return on investment for a University of Melbourne-influenced sustainable future.

### Cities work with global reach

#### Degrowth in the suburbs

Dr Samuel Alexander and Professor Brendan Gleeson's compelling work on degrowth connects the sustainability practices of the local urban with global thinking around post-growth economics, voluntary simplicity, grassroots theories of transition, and the relationship between the culture and political economy. In addition to traditional peer-review journals, Sam, with Brendan, publishes widely through publicly accessible platforms such as The Conversation, Arena, and other cultural outlets, fostering awareness and dialogue around the possibilities of a 'culture of sufficiency' born from scaled-back and localised resource use. As an example of public reach, Sam's 2021 article on the impacts of Australia's 1% most wealthy on social justice and planetary survival approaching 40,000 reads in its first 24 hours of publication by The Conversation.



#### Disability Inclusive City

Professor Brendan Gleeson and colleagues from the Melbourne School of Design, School of Geography and Latrobe University were awarded an ARC Discovery Project in 2017 *Investigating the impacts of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) on Australia's cities and urban regions*. The study assessed the impact of the NDIS on urban policy and mainstream service-delivery, with a view to better understanding the agency of people with lived experience of disability as participants in mainstream services, and urban context factors influencing their participation.

#### Greater Melbourne Urban Exchange

Building on earlier work informing the Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust (LMCF) on themes to support Melbourne's transition toward a more sustainable and healthier city, Professor Brendan Gleeson, in collaboration with Professor Michele Acuto and the Connected Cities Lab, were engaged by LMCF to develop a scoping analysis and business case for a *Greater Melbourne Urban Exchange*. Recognising Melbourne as home to internationally esteemed cities research capability, this concept brings together the City's distinct evidence-bases, laboratories, and knowledge institutions to tackle the critical social and environmental issues of our time.

"Our partnership with MSSI makes a lot of sense for us. Essentially, we're looking for opportunities with multiple social and environmental outcomes. MSSI has the expertise, the networks, the connections to academia and others to

**Daniel Padiaditis, former Senior Program Manager  
Environment and Sustainability,  
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation**

#### Urban Resilience and Innovation

As the City of Melbourne Chair in Urban Resilience and Innovation, Professor Sarah Bell brings world leading expertise in transdisciplinary, bottom-up community co-design practice to the University's critically important relationship with the City of Melbourne. The work of the Urban Resilience and Innovation team amplifies *Advancing Melbourne's* notion of 'Place' as an 'expression of the idea that a shared future binds the University both to the open search for knowledge and to the desire to serve its communities'. Their *Urban Retrofit* partnership with the union movement, design consultants, developers, construction contractors, government and communities is promoting Melbourne as a leading force in job-creation through transition to sustainable, climate resilient cities.

Professor Bell's recent collaboration with the Melbourne Centre for Cities, ICLEA Local Governments for Sustainability, and the City of Melbourne in delivering a UN Habitat-led webinar on *Oceania Cities and Climate Resilience* highlights MSSI's role as a channel for connecting the Melbourne city experience with issues of global significance. So too does Urban Resilience and Innovation Research Fellow Dr Melanie Lowe's contribution to the forthcoming Lancet Global Health Series, where she is part of the Executive for the Global Health and Sustainable City-Indicator Collaboration, measuring policy and spatial indicators of health and sustainable urban environments across 25 cities in 19 countries with a view to better global health outcomes.

## From the regional to the global

### Energy transitions

Professor John Wiseman's work on energy transitions - including with colleagues from ANU's Crawford School of Public Policy in collaboration with France's IDDRI Think Tank and colleagues from China, India, German, South Africa and Poland - has aimed to bring a deeper understanding of the implications of climate change mitigation activities for coal production and consumption globally. Research has interrogated socially acceptable policy and practices promoting economic renewal throughout the transition from coal to renewable energy sources, building knowledge and acceptance of new narratives around strategies for phasing out coal for a better climate future.



### GS3

The Gippsland Smart Specialisation Project (GS3) led by Professors Lars Coenen (to 2019) and Leo Goedegebuure connects regional co-innovation with national and international translation

opportunities. Working closely with the Victorian Government's Latrobe Valley Authority, and the European Union Centre of Excellence at RMIT, the team have directly involved 1000 people from the Latrobe Valley community in applying the EU's Smart Specialisation Strategy to identify the region's unique competitive strengths, and realistic growth potential, whilst transitioning away from coal-based employment. A quadruple helix approach encompassing representation from industry, government, research, education, and community was applied to a bottom-up Entrepreneurial Discovery Process under the banner of 'Connecting Gippsland - Local and Global', identifying food and fibre, energy, health and wellbeing, and the visitor economy as highly viable areas for pursuit. The project's co-design of a shared vision for the region's future prosperity, environmental sustainability and social wellbeing has been recognised by the Victorian Government as an exemplar of 'Place-based approach in action', and Gippsland is the first region outside Europe to be registered on the EU's Joint Research Centre's Smart Specialisation Platform, encompassing 150 regions from around the world.

### 'Place' in the Life Course

Under the direction of Professor Brendan Gleeson, a 'Places' program was established in 2020 to complement the 'People' and 'Opportunities' programs in a second iteration of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families across the Life Course Centre (the Life Course Centre, LCC). Hosted by the University of Queensland, in partnership with the Universities of Melbourne, Sydney, and Western Australia, the LCC was awarded the \$32.5m over seven years to interrogate deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia.

A LCC research collaboration with Tati Tati Traditional Owners in Robinvale, led by Dr Sangeetha Chandrashekeran, alongside Melbourne Enterprise Principal Fellow in Cultural Economies and Sustainability Brendan Kennedy, Research Fellow (Participatory Research and Engagement) Melissa Kennedy, and Dr Julia de Bruyn,



is a co-designed, place-based project bringing together Indigenous knowledge and settler policy frameworks to understand the impact of water rights, agency and stewardship on Tati Tati peoples' health and wellbeing. Utilising geographic life course interpretations of connection to Country through a sustainability lens, the project aims to produce learnings with local, national, and international resonance on First Nations rights and wellbeing.



### Climate Reality

Led by Professor Don Henry, the Australasian branch of The Climate Reality Project connects locally-based climate leaders across Australia and the Pacific with science communication training, tools and platforms to drive change within their communities, industries and sectors. The Climate Reality project hosted a global training event with Al Gore in Brisbane in 2019, bringing over 880 people from more than 30 countries into dialogue and action on climate change. In sharpening its program design, development and delivery to focus increasingly on critical issues for the region, Climate Reality aims to bring diverse voices and Indigenous knowledge systems to the fore. The project recognises that the 'best' Climate Reality leaders are not reached through mass marketing, but rather through well-networked and key positions of influence in their respective communities, supporting the principle that every person has an important role to play in tackling the climate crisis.

## CONVENING INTERNATIONALLY FOR FAR-REACHING IMPACT

MSSI embodied *Advancing Melbourne's* aspiration to 'lead, convene and collaborate through strategic partnerships on a global scale' through providing an international platform for University of Melbourne research, engagement, and translation activities. As outlined in this report, MSSI has fostered the University's relationship with a range of global entities, including: coordinating delegations to UN-HABITAT; completing commissioned reports for the UN; securing Gippsland as the only non-European listing on the EU's Joint Research Centre's Smart Specialisation Platform; participating in global COP negotiations on biodiversity and climate; informing the work of global influencers such as Al Gore and the International Trade Union Confederation; and connecting evidence based thought leadership from Melbourne with Climate Reality branches around the world. These are just a few snapshots of MSSI's global reach, which is further complemented by ongoing research collaborations, international honorary fellows, and postgraduate researcher-led projects within the region.



# MSSI'S LEGACY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Through a strong commitment to networked knowledge rather than silos, MSSI supported the University of Melbourne in remaining at the frontier of knowledge creation, translation, dissemination, and activation within a context of shifting knowledge hierarchies.

MSSI's understanding of the world and approach to addressing key sustainability challenges impacting our planet transcended the traditions of the academe. By incorporating cross-cutting themes informed by Indigenous knowledge systems, cross-sector expertise, policy drivers and community views, MSSI's focus on the contribution of the humanities and social sciences to sustainability challenges cemented the Institute as an innovative thought leader and valued partner for visioning and achieving a sustainable and resilient future.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Stephan Winter (2014-2020)

Alison Young (2017-2021)

## MSSI ASSOCIATES AND AFFILIATES

MSSI has benefited from the interest and involvement of leading academics, bureaucrats, and business people. We formally recognise a small number of these people striving for a more sustainable society.

Guy Abrahams, CEO, CLIMARTE

Fiona Armstrong, Convener, the Climate Health Alliance

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