



AUSTRALIAN PARENTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Measuring What Matters Consultation Feedback

To be completed by meeting host after each meeting and returned to measuringwhatmatters@treasury.gov.au by 26 May 2023.

Meeting details

Meeting host name/ organisation: Australian Parents for Climate Action

Meeting host contact details [phone or email]: David McEwen (Policy & Submissions), david@ap4ca.org; Nic Seton, CEO of Australian Parents for Climate Action, Nic@ap4ca.org.

Meeting host

- ☐ Member of Parliament
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ Non-government organisation
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Academic
- ☒ Community group
- ☐ Individual
- ☐ Other Click or tap here to enter text.

Meeting date: 12-20 May 2023

Meeting location: Online forum open to our members

Participants attending:

- ☒ Member of a community organisation
- ☐ Businesses

- ☐ Academics
- ☐ Union members
- ☐ Individuals
- ☐ Other Click or tap here to enter text.

Number of participants: 24 individuals provided unique and insightful commentary that has been incorporated herein.

What matters to Australians?

1. Did the five emerging policy themes Prosperous, Inclusive, Sustainable, Cohesive and Healthy resonate with meeting participants?

☐ Yes ☒ No if not, why not

Australian Parents for Climate Action represents nearly 20,000 parents, grandparents and carers from across Australia, with representation in every Federal electorate. We are Australia's leading organisation for parents advocating for a safe climate.

Our supporters are from across the political spectrum, across Australian electorates, and from different socio-economic positions. We seek non-partisan responses to climate change and its impacts. We are focused on pushing Australian governments and businesses to take urgent action to cut Australia's carbon emissions to net zero as quickly as possible. We encourage Australia to take a leadership role on the world stage, leading by example and calling for other nations to take the necessary action to protect our children's futures.

As an organisation for parents, we are innately concerned with the wellbeing and conditions that will determine the future wellbeing of our children. Measuring intergenerational fairness should be a guiding principle for equity and security of all ages. We challenge the focus on prosperity and the inferred value of growth, instead favouring indicators that support the quality and strength of our lives, such that we can *thrive*.

We conducted an online forum to seek feedback on Measuring What Matters. Overwhelmingly, the feedback we received was that the framing of the categories lacked appreciation for the severity and implications of the climate and biodiversity crisis we are currently facing.

Around the world, temperature records are being smashed including unprecedented global sea surface temperatures over the past few months. Extreme weather records are being smashed including unprecedented floods, bushfires, droughts, powerful storms and so on. Along with many sacred and beautiful places, the Great Barrier Reef is dying, taking with it unparalleled biodiversity.

Given the ongoing extremes, food and water security is a growing threat. Inflation of many basic foodstuffs has been driven by a combination of sharp rises in fossil energy costs but also crop losses due to extreme weather, changing growing conditions due to climatic shifts, and premium increases in crop insurance.

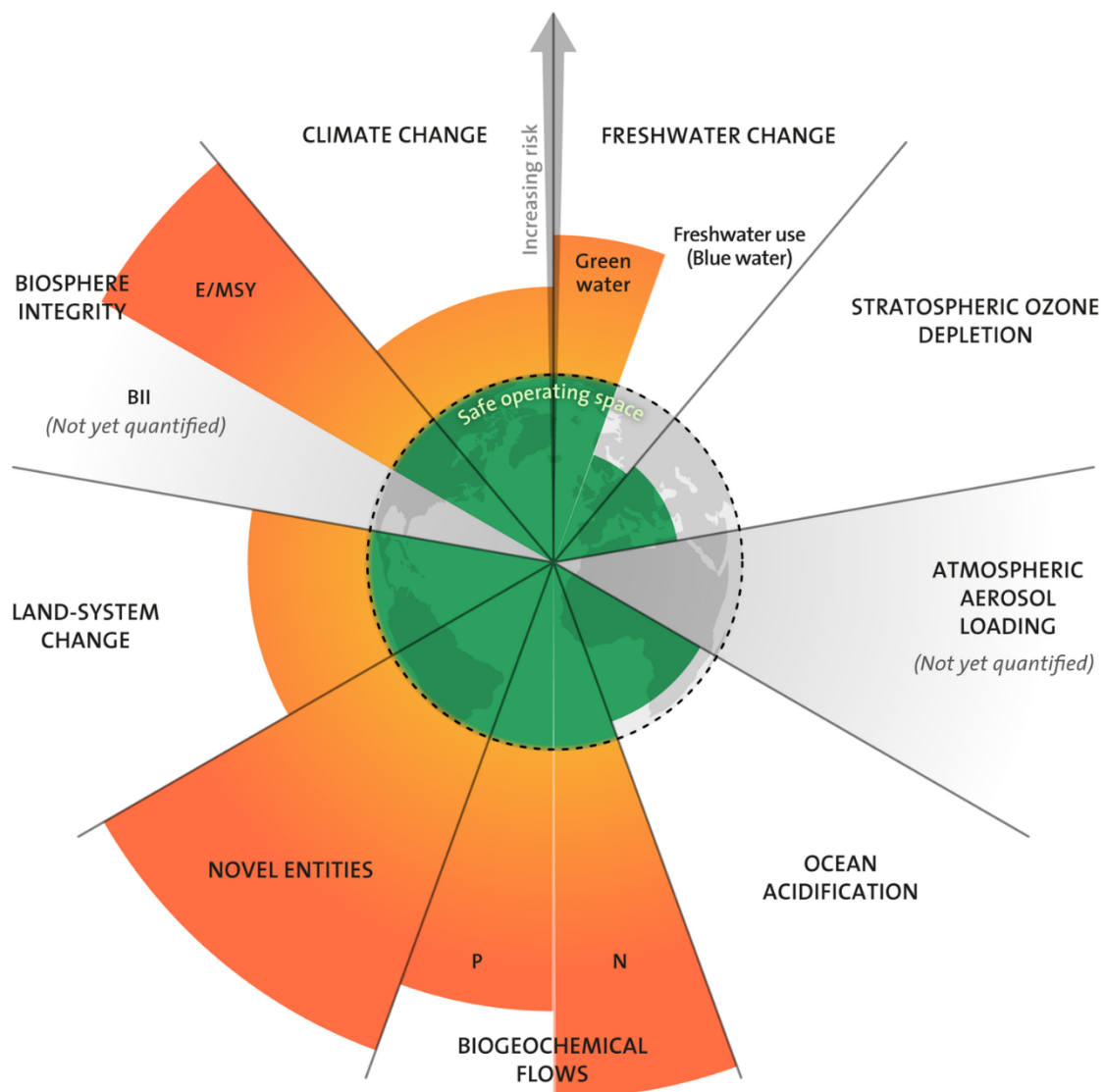
Company directors have enforceable fiduciary duties to assess and manage climate risks, which are considered by regulators such as ASIC, APRA and Australian courts to be foreseeable and material. Physical climate risks can be chronic (trend changes in average temperature, rainfall patterns, etc.) or acute (specific extreme weather causing sudden losses). However, just as a few centimetres of river

rise can make the difference between a damaging flood and a river staying within its levees, chronic climate risks are also subject to sudden shifts as climate systems and ecosystems reach specific tipping points.

As governments around the world fail to rein in greenhouse emissions, we are getting increasingly close to triggering dramatic tipping points, which will see the world and Australia lurch into unknown and dangerous territory, with profound consequences for our fragile and flawed economic system. Already, we are seesawing violently between destructive heat/drought/bushfire and flooding cycles, lately with little stability in between. It only gets worse from here, unless genuine net negative emissions are achieved globally.

“Prosperous” Won’t Lead to Prosperity

Putting **Prosperous** first on the list, with its clear focus on “growing,” is fundamentally flawed. We live on a planet with finite resources. We live on a planet that scientists [say has breached six out of nine key limits that are fundamental to the survival of all living things](#), as shown in the figure overleaf (source: Stockholm Resilience Centre Planetary Boundaries Framework).



Yet the proposed MWM framework does not even acknowledge these limits beyond simplistic references to climate change. Australian metrics related to the nine planetary boundaries should be front and centre of any measurement scheme.

Clean air, water and soils free from harmful pollutants are fundamental to our current and future health, safety and happiness. And yet the proposed MWM framework attempts to bracket the natural environment as a sideshow under the thoroughly greenwashed term “sustainable”, while remaining fixated (as evident through the order and descriptions) on perpetuating the myth that endless growth is desirable.

James Montier, while an analyst at investment firm GMO, wrote an essay in 2014 called “[The World’s Dumbest Idea](#).” That idea was the mantra of shareholder value maximisation (SVM). It’s worth noting that it was the once-legendary CEO Jack Welch who said in 2009 that “shareholder value is the dumbest idea in the world.”

We would commend the Treasurer and his Advisors to read the [linked article](#). It’s only 14 pages but it destroys (with data) the notion that shareholder primacy leads to outcomes that most in our society would consider useful. SVM doesn’t deliver increased returns to shareholders, but it has vastly increased inequality, degraded our society, and led to the precipitous decline in our biosphere. The one and only life support system humanity has is now itself on life support.

As such, we would contend that prosperous be dropped as a category. In constructing the specific metrics, we would be delighted to see the “scorecard” *exclude* gross domestic product. Because what sort of society values a metric that goes up due to the reconstruction needed following disaster? What sort of society values a metric that relies on destruction and exploitation and the pursuit of which has mainly delivered rising inequality, species extinctions, the loss of sacred and beautiful places, rising social division, and the now existential risk of climate change?

We were astonished as we read through the MWM consultation pack, that there is not a single mention of words we think are fundamental to the success of a nation or society. Words like:

- Purposeful
- Caring
- Content
- Happy

We believe people who are purposeful, caring and content want for little. They enjoy great relationships with those around them and have positive interactions with their natural environment. As a result, they should experience intrinsic happiness. Yet many people seem to have been persuaded by incessant advertising and social media that happiness is contingent on achieving some extrinsic goal. Our society has been set up as a competition, where we are told that happiness is contingent on acquiring the next thing.

What Matters Most?

What struck us as we read the consultation paper was the lack of an overarching theme or vision. What is the essence of Australia and its people? How do we want to be regarded? Are we to remain a competitive, somewhat mean-spirited society (treatment of refugees, for example), whose people are exhorted to buy more and more, because that will allegedly bring them fulfilment and happiness? Are we content with so many people undertaking meaningless, so-called “[bullshit jobs](#)” that do nothing to improve society, so that they can make just enough to never quite be able to afford the ever-increasing cost of housing?

Is it right that there are more private jets and super yachts and mega mansions and billionaires in Australia than ever, but far more families living well below the poverty line? Is it right that people are buying groceries on Afterpay? Is it right that we support and subsidise (to the tune of [over \\$11 billion](#)

[a year](#)) the very industries whose products are destroying the Great Barrier Reef? Is that truly what Australians want and value?

We don't think so. Four decades of failed neoliberalism has seen us lose our way.

To this end we propose **Thriving** as an umbrella category. A thriving society would work to ensure that all Australians can thrive, including inter-generationally. We can't thrive unless our ecosystems do too, because we are wholly dependent on them. We cannot thrive individually unless the whole of our society does, because high levels of inequality undermine social cohesion and democracy: it breaks the social contract.

For us, **thriving** steps away from the pursuit of endless growth, money and possessions. It is underpinned by what is necessary to satisfy our needs and ensure those of future generations can also be met:

- Healthy and thriving ecosystems that are not constantly under attack by expansionist development or the ravages of climate change (measures based on the planetary boundaries framework).
- Clean air and water and rich, regenerated soils.
- Nutritious and affordable food.
- Secure, *healthy* and affordable housing.
- Equitable access to high quality health care.
- Equitable access to high quality, evidence-based education.
- Access to *meaningful* and *purposeful* work for all those who want it.
- Access to a basic income that allows a dignified and participatory life for those who don't or cannot work.
- Time to connect and appreciate deep, loving and fulfilling relationships with family and friends.
- Access to rich and diverse artistic, cultural, spiritual, active and nature-based experiences, and time to appreciate them.
- Safety and freedom from harassment, intolerance, persecution, discrimination and corporate influence.
- A truly participatory and representative democracy that is free from the influence of corporations, donations and lobbyists and has high levels of trust.
- Politicians and public servants who consistently act with the highest standards of truth, transparency, integrity, and in the best interests of *all* Australians, including those not yet born.
- Companies that are obliged to put the foregoing societal values ahead of shareholder value maximisation.
- Lives that are rich in meaningful endeavour and experience, happy (regardless of what we have or have not), caring and content. In short, lives that allow people to live with dignity, high self-esteem and to be the best that they can be (hat tip to Maslow's hierarchy).

Obviously, truth telling and celebration of Australia's First Nations wisdom and culture would be deeply embedded within the above.

From the foregoing it should be clear that sustainability (both restoration of the environment and social sustainability), inclusivity, cohesiveness and health are fundamental to a thriving society and biosphere. Growth based notions of prosperity, on the other hand, have consistently worked against the best enduring interests of Australia.

We are often reminded of a well-known quote: "budgets are about choices, and you show what you value through the choices you make." The latest federal budget was a sad reminder of how little Australia appears to value a functioning biosphere, and how much it appears to value growth, inequity and destructive extractivism.

We also believe that the so-called trade-offs in the budgetary process are artificial given the ability of a sovereign nation to create fiat money. There is mounting evidence that fiscal constraints and

classical monetary policy are purely artificial constructs. To expand on this, below is a summary compiled by one of our members of a timely conference just held in the EU Parliament.

The trade offs are also the result of pursuing GDP growth as an objective. As noted above, we contend that it is not sufficient to add new measures to the existing GDP framework but to remove GDP all together. There is not currently a lack of other indicators of well-being and a thriving society it is simply that they are trumped by the pursuit of GDP which, as is very clear, is no measure of well-being at all.

Measuring what matters for children, and future generations

As a parent organisation our primary motivation to advocate for policy change is the well-being of our children now and into the future, this extends to all generations to come.

The OECD has reported that 40% of young people in OECD countries have increased levels of mental distress. Of course mental health is a complex issue and no doubt the covid-19 pandemic is a contributing factor but so too is all global government's failure to adequately respond to the climate crisis.

In the OECD WISE framework they reference, in the "[Measuring what matters for children](#)" context, that "Well-being measures must include children's views and perspective" and that "Policies may also play a role in influencing children's perceptions and aspirations, or raise awareness regarding key challenges children and adolescents may face for their well-being now and in the future."

How governments are choosing to respond, or not, to the polycrisis of climate, biodiversity loss and inequality, is directly impacting the mental well-being of young people in a negative way. With every new coal mine or gas project approved children's concerns for their future on a habitable planet escalate.

To this end it is vital that any measuring indicators take into account the biophysical limits of the planet which economies must ultimately live within. This is vital for planetary health but failing to do so is also extremely detrimental to the health of children now and for all future generations.

Beyond Growth European Union Parliamentary Conference 15-17 May 2023

The whole world is right now looking toward moving beyond GDP as a metric of success. At a three-day conference in the EU Parliament in May 2023, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared, "a growth model centred on fossil fuels is simply obsolete." Of course, it is very clear in 2023 that growing fossil fuels is not just obsolete into the future but an entirely dangerous pursuit right now.

However, the end of fossil fuel driven growth, any fossil fuel expansion, is not all we must urgently consider. The pursuit of growth itself, without reference to the well-being it might deliver and the social and economic harms it very often brings is also dangerous.

It is 50 years since the publication of "The Limits of Growth" and it is clearer every day that "the only technology that will fix this is a time machine to go back 50 years, and change course. It is not technology we need. We need to change the economic paradigm. And we need political leadership." Sandrine Dixon-Declevé, Co-President of The Club of Rome.

Also speaking at the opening plenary was Jason Hickel, economic anthropologist. He reminded all present that growth itself is not delivering prosperity. On the contrary, "the social and ecological costs of growth are externalised to vulnerable communities. This arrangement is wildly destructive and wildly unjust". The current "economic system is fundamentally undemocratic. Our productive

capacities are controlled by capital and mobilised around what is profitable to capital rather than what is necessary for human well-being and ecology.”

Adelaïde Charlier, youth climate Justice and Human Rights campaigner followed Hickel and urged the sitting members present that “it’s time to lift our nations from the quicksand of unlimited growth to the solid rock of inclusive prosperity.”

In the second plenary session “Changing the goal: from GDP growth to social prosperity”, Romina Boarini, the Director of the OECD WISE Centre, summed up the true existential threat of the current economic model well: “the many interconnected challenges that all societies, all countries of this world are facing today, those challenges come from this very unbalanced economic model. We have a problem. It’s not just the economy, it’s society. This is actually endangering the democracy. If we can’t show the value that our shared values, that our democratic societies are bringing to us, then we are obviously going to create a real breakdown of the social contract. In the absence of very very immediate systemic changes we are going to have a further increase in inequalities.”

Boarini urged that “changing the goals is an emergency”. She also argued, however, that what we need is not just a reorienting of what we measure but “big system change and that only comes through interventions in governance.”

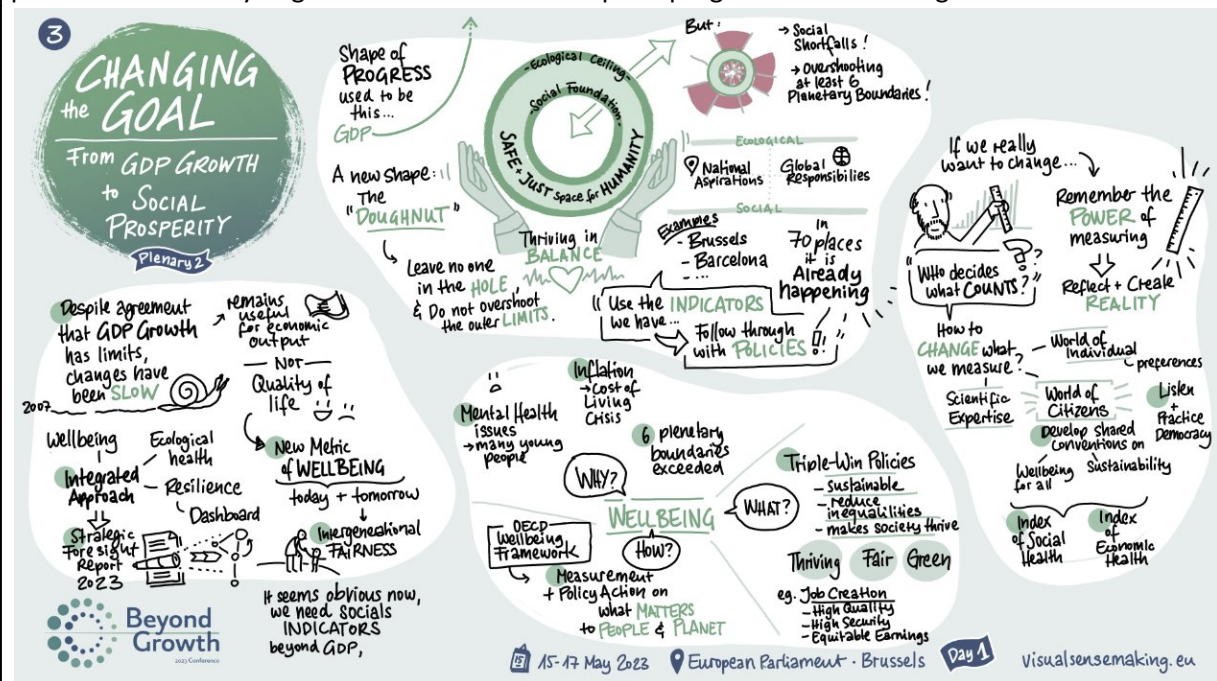
There are already established alternative models to the pursuit of economic growth as a goal. Perhaps the best known of these, with over 70 cities and regions globally operating within the framework, is Kate Raworth’s Doughnut Economics model. Raworth, speaking at the conference, demonstrated the urgency of reshaping the economy away from the pursuit of exponential economic growth to one that recognises social and ecological limits. “Surely this is our shared existential goal. This is a new shape of progress because it’s not endless growth it’s thriving in balance between the social foundation and the ecological ceiling.”

Raworth illustrated that we indeed need new metrics that tell us where to go, but moreover we need “policies that actually take us there”. Yes, new monitoring indicators but these must be followed up with policies that change their trajectory.

One such example, operating within the ‘doughnut’ is the city of Brussels. They are “changing the rules, the regulations so that only businesses that respect the planetary boundaries can do business there.” They are shifting public funding such that ‘from 2030 public money will only flow to companies, and fund research, that are actually coming into this space’: the ecologically and socially thriving space.

This is policy following goals, measuring what matters but acting as if it mattered, as Raworth added: “It is time to put these ideas into practice, to take all the indicators we have and follow through with

policies that actually begin to deliver this new shape of progress that is thriving.”



Tim Jackson was on the panel that concluded the conference. He reminded us of what we miss, about who we are, when we fail to measure what matters. “The care and attention of one human being to another and to the conditions of living lies at what Nancy Folbre called ‘the invisible heart of the economy’. While Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ is busy insisting that we’re all selfish consumers, Folbre pointed out that without care we are nothing. Our children would lead stunted lives ... the sick would find no respite, the dying no solace.... Without care there is no economy, not even at the most basic level”

Other quotes we urge you to contemplate from the conference:

“The power of measuring is it both reflects and creates our reality” - what we measure actually shapes our reality.

“The wellbeing economy we want is focused on meeting the fundamental needs and rights of all, providing a safe and just space in which everyone can thrive, within planetary boundaries. It delivers purpose, dignity and fairness in a participatory way. To us, a wellbeing economy is an economic system that is no longer structurally dependent on economic growth. It is still a mixed-economy system with strong state, private and third sector actors, but one designed with a very different set of goals, values, and incentives.”

“An economy focused on wellbeing significantly frees us from the time, energy and financial strains we are currently incurring trying and failing to fix the environmental and social harms caused in the relentless pursuit of growth. It would be preventative by design, stopping further harm from occurring to people and the planet in the first place. “

“The governments of New Zealand, Finland, Wales, Iceland, Scotland and Canada have formed the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) partnership to deepen their understanding and advance their shared ambition of building wellbeing economies.”

“These indicators offer new ways to evaluate economic and societal progress and to identify policy interventions for systems change . However, indicators are not enough: they need to move beyond monitoring and inform structural change of our economy and welfare state.”

"Global trade, taxation and financial policies that provide equal opportunities, rights, power, and the fair distribution of wealth within society, between countries and across generations."

"Policy design, implementation and evaluation prioritising human and planetary wellbeing."

Sources:

<https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Imagining-Europe-Beyond-Growth-May-2022-1.pdf>

2. Which of the following themes are most important to you? (Select three)

☐ **Prosperous:**

~~A growing, productive and resilient economy~~

☐ **Inclusive:**

A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate

☒ **Sustainable:**

A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations

☐ **Cohesive:**

A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation

☐ **Healthy:**

A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future

3. Which themes or descriptions were most frequently discussed? (Select three)

☐ **Prosperous:**

~~A growing, productive and resilient economy~~

☐ **Inclusive:**

A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate

☒ **Sustainable:**

A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations

☐ **Cohesive:**

A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation

☐ **Healthy:**

A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future

4. What do you see as the most important issues for future wellbeing? Are these captured by the emerging policy themes?

Please refer to our response in question 1. Of the 31 draft descriptions, the ones that resonated most strongly with our group included (in order, and noting key modifications):

1. A healthy natural environment for current and future generations, protected from the damage being caused by climate change.
2. A society that ensures the health and development of its children.
3. ~~A society that sustainably uses our natural resources, on track to reach to net zero emissions. This should be modified:~~ "A society that prioritises the regeneration and protection of our natural

resources, with science-based emissions reduction targets aligned with keeping global temperature rise within 1.5 degrees, mindful of Australia's obligation as a wealthy country with extremely high per capita emissions to significantly outperform the global target."

4. A society that values the social, cultural and *vital life-support* ~~economic~~ significance of our natural environment.
5. A society that allows all people to ~~afford~~ *obtain* life's essentials (*including clean air, water and soils, nutritious food, secure and healthy housing, quality education and healthcare, and time to enjoy deep relationships with family and friends and experience rich and diverse artistic, cultural, active and natural experiences.*).

5. How might the descriptions be amended to best reflect our priorities?

Please refer to our response in question 1

6. Are there any indicators and existing data sources that will be critical to inform the emerging policy themes?

Please refer to our response in question 1

7. Is there any additional information you would like to see in the Measuring What Matters Statement? If so, please outline.

Please refer to our response in question 1 (Note in particular the planetary boundaries framework)