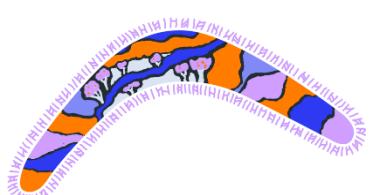sva | consulting

National Forum on Australia's Wellbeing

Summary of the Reflections Session

Prepared for: National Forum on Australia's Wellbeing Participants
Date: 28 November 2025

Acknowledgment of Country

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

'After the Rains' by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024

Introduction

The *Third National Forum on Australia's Wellbeing* was held from 21-23 October, 2025, at the University of Canberra in the ACT. The theme for this year's forum, 'Wellbeing in Action: An economy that enables people, communities, business, and nature to thrive', brought together leaders and practitioners from across sectors to explore how wellbeing can be embedded into Australia's economic and social systems.

Over 200 people participated in the Forum across three days, representing not-for-profit, community, government, private and academic sectors. Sessions were attended both in person and via livestream, reflecting a strong commitment to inclusion and national reach.

The purpose of this document is to collate written insights from that final reflection session, which was attended by over 60 participants in person. The reflection session invited participants to respond to two guiding questions in relation to the Forum:

1. What resonated with you? What was reinforced?

2. What was inside your comfort zone? What was outside your comfort zone?

Participants were organised in groups within the main conference room, and captured their reflections on sticky notes and butchers paper. This document has collated the written reflections verbatim into categories that reflect the narrative of the conference. The intent is to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices while identifying the shared themes that emerged across discussions.

Together, these insights capture a strong collective momentum toward embedding wellbeing as a central economic and social goal, offset by an awareness of the structural and cultural barriers that continue to constrain progress. Participants expressed both optimism and unease, recognising the need for courage, collaboration, and new ways of working to move from reflection to sustained action.

What resonated? What was reinforced?

Shared Momentum & Connection

Across almost all tables, participants highlighted a strong sense of shared momentum and connection. Many noted how reassuring it was to discover others working toward similar goals, often from different sectors but facing comparable challenges. This theme reflected a collective desire to strengthen cross-sector relationships and reduce the isolation that wellbeing practitioners often experience.

"The time is now for the wellbeing agenda."

- Excited to see what is already happening

- We are not alone in the journey and many of us face similar challenges.

- Feeling less alone

- Reinvigorated to spread the message

- Desire to work with likeminded people.

- Wonderful diverse range of points – shining on the need for systems change

- Focus on, elevate and learn from success stories and from people doing really good stuff

Framing & Narrative Shift

Many groups reflected on the importance of narrative in shaping the wellbeing agenda. Participants repeatedly emphasised the need for cultural and conceptual shifts that move beyond growth-centric or traditional economic language. Several tables recognised that without changing the underlying narrative about what matters, policy and practice change will remain constrained.

"Until we change our predetermined narrative, we won't achieve change."

- Wellbeing is not the byproduct of consumption

- Until we change our predetermined narrative, we won't achieve change

- Are we being too polite? Where were the conversations on class, race, justice and inequality?

- Moving away from trade-offs

- Better not more, optimisation not maximisation

- Power & clarity & hope of place-led examples → grounded & tangible

- Use story to build new mental models

- The power of story & qualitative data

- Wellbeing is very complex but also quite straight-forward, push back against quantification

- No difference between evidence & ideology because ideology shapes evidence

Data, Evidence & Learning

Participants across tables pointed to both the opportunities and challenges associated with data. There was wide acknowledgement that data plays a crucial role in credibility, learning, and influencing decision makers, yet many also noted the risk of over-measurement, fragmentation, or relying solely on quantitative indicators. The theme was consistent across groups: data must support action, not delay it.

"So many frameworks, but not as many wellbeing economies."

- How we are democratising data and making it accessible, going beyond conventional political spectrum

- The more we measure the harder it becomes (can never have enough measuring)

- Case studies bring the work to life

- Collecting the right context and evidence to make the argument stronger through weight of perspectives

- Accountability – individual, collective and future generations

Actions & Systems Change

Nearly all groups identified the need for more deliberate, coordinated action to shift systems, not just rhetoric. Participants expressed both a readiness to push for deeper structural change and a frustration with recurring political, institutional, and cultural barriers. This theme captured the strong appetite for moving from ideas to implementation, and for challenging the structures that reinforce the status quo.

"We know enough; now it's about doing the work to change power structures and capital flows."

- New investment models that shift capital back to communities

- Need to write papers as archive – get political

- Start getting political by using my voice beyond publishing papers.

- Government as a barrier: We reach a point of hope or direction, then government gets mentioned and we start to feel down

- Cutting through politics to ensure good ideas aren't rejected on a party basis

- There is a risk of younger generations repeating or living through the same challenges of operating within siloes

- Bringing in business, not just preaching to the converted

- Being pragmatic about what works

- Healthy environment = healthy people

- The system becoming aware of itself

Inside the Comfort Zone

Many groups described activities within their comfort zone as those grounded in existing roles, relationships, and established ways of working. These actions largely involved continuing conversations, sharing ideas with familiar networks, and influencing immediate organisational contexts. Participants expressed confidence in their ability to lead internally, foster dialogue, and build momentum within known environments.

Actions

- Sharing these ideas in my workplace to understand perceptions and questions, deepening workplace opportunity

- Talk to local MP about our takeaways / national conversation / future gen thinking

- Making connections and follow up

- Hold public forums

- Speaking to like-minded people in the team

- Think / chat with the team on radical actions that costs us our comfort

Outside the Comfort Zone

Many participants reflected that stepping outside their comfort zone involved confronting the scale and complexity of systemic challenges, whilst acknowledging the limits of their own influence within these broader systems. This discomfort was paired with a clear recognition that meaningful progress requires moving into more public, political, and community-facing roles. Across tables, participants identified actions such as engaging more proactively with local government and community, challenging the status quo in government systems, advocating beyond their organisational boundaries, and integrating wellbeing considerations into all aspects of their lives. Together, these reflections reveal both the emotional weight of systemic change and the collective readiness to lean into more courageous, outward-facing work.

Insights

- Being comfortable with discomfort

- Confronted with amount of emphasis on climate and the environment

- Thinking about the future where people are going to be worse off

- Holding the tension between the whole system view and the part of the system we are responsible and have power over

- We will still battle the system – while we may not see the change, the people of the future will

Actions

- Being proactively curious about my community & local government

- Grappling with changing the status quo, in government

- Thinking about the mission beyond our corporate role but in all aspects of our lives

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