Report:
Prime Minister and Cabinet

Communicating social inclusion: exploring language and context

Proposal submitted by The Open Mind Group
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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to develop a clear understanding of how Australians respond to the language that surrounds social inclusion so that the community and the government can engage in meaningful and productive dialogue on this topic.

The findings are based on conversations with people from very broad and diverse backgrounds across the country including a high proportion who met the criteria of social exclusion. A qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate to engage and discuss complex issues and listen for language with the community. The design relied mainly on small group discussions, with a smaller number of one-on-one interviews with the most marginalised and those with limited English. In all, 14 standard 1½ hour group discussions and 15 depth interviews were conducted across Australia between 30 June and 30 July 2009.

In reading this report, it should be kept in mind that the findings are based on small non random samples and are qualitative in nature. They are indicative rather than conclusive. The sample was split between middle class (five groups) and low SES (nine groups) and an additional 15 one on one interviews with those who may be considered socially excluded.

This study has identified a number of explanatory frameworks that explain responses to the government's social inclusion agenda and hence help identify a way forward for the government in communicating and building support for this agenda. Two key frames are 'agency' and 'we are all equal (fairness)'.

'Agency': There was agreement among respondents that, while circumstance and environment do play a role in shaping people's lives, the most important determining factor in life is how individuals respond to those circumstances. In individual lives this equates to having personal agency: the sense that they are in control of or are directing their own lives. If people have this sense of agency – despite experiencing what might, on the face of it, appear to be high levels of disadvantage – it allows them to own their unique life stories, and not be defined by disadvantage or become subsumed into an impersonal category, a victim of circumstance. While those of mid socio easily accepted the official language of social exclusion, and identify those who are excluded as deserving assistance, those of low SES and especially those who fall into the nominated groups for social exclusion did not.

Where language takes away a sense of agency from those who are socially excluded they become deflated, diminished, as we witnessed repeated across the study. The official government language of social inclusion was perceived to take away their sense of control and agency over their lives, and implied to them that their lives are not considered to be 'measuring up'...

While many of our participants were clearly irritated and upset (or more poignantly, left visibly deflated and diminished) by official language which seemed to suggest they are 'excluded' and not in control of their lives (nor living it they way they should), this was not to say that they didn't see government and others in the community (such as prospective employers) as responsible for giving them access to the opportunities they feel they need. For instance, better housing, education, work, help with raising their families, services etc.

'We are all equal (fairness)': Higher SES respondents generally accepted the language of social inclusion (though accusing it of sounding 'airy fairy') and they accepted all the nominated groups as disadvantaged and deserving' extra help; they also easily made the link to broader social benefits of inclusion. They readily accepted that disadvantage is often beyond the control of the individual.

By contrast those of lower SES were much less likely to, arguing that if they can take responsibility for their lives so can everyone else. It is important to understand that those lower SES groups arguing against treating others differently are not doing so out of a sense of grievance or grudge, but based on an understanding that essentially Australians are 'all equal' or 'the same'. They feel we share a capacity to direct our own lives and, therefore, that we should all be treated the same. In addition, there is also a belief (more strongly held by lower SES) that Australia is a fair country. This concept of fairness and equal access applies to opportunities, but also access to services. Because of these beliefs, help that appears to favour particular groups is seen to be *unfair* and is strongly rejected.

The language and core concepts of social inclusion, as tested in this study, are not a good fit with the explanatory frameworks outlined above (and in further detail in the body of this report). For example, the term 'social inclusion' is unfamiliar. To higher SES, the concept makes sense and they can see the connection with their pre-existing understanding of disadvantage. To the more marginalised lower SES respondents, the term is difficult and harder to understand. For some, the term left them feeling deflated, tested (as though we were introducing the term to test their comprehension). They suspected they were being put

down. While those who are disadvantaged acknowledge that there are times when they feel excluded, being told by others (and especially their government) that they are outsiders moved the discussion, which up until then had been focussed on the overall and complex story of their lives, onto more divisive comparisons. The way they interpreted this language was as thought the government is playing parent, pulling the kid that no one likes into the children's party and insisting the others play with him/her. This was both irritating and diminishing and prompted almost every low SES participant to ask 'who is defining the in group they are being asked to join?'/what sort of lives are *included* ones?. It suggested the goal of government is to have everyone living the same type of life (a 'productive' life) rather than being to facilitate people being happy (which is quite clearly their own goal).

Overall, the language of social inclusion was felt by these participants to focus on the negatives and the lacks in people's lives, rather than reflecting the optimism and hope for the future that so many have.

TOWARDS A COMMON LANGUAGE[1]

While the current language of social inclusion is not resonating with the respondents in this study, this is not to say that a common language cannot be developed as a basis for a community dialogue. The key tenets of this language include:

a. Voicing a shared goal. For the government to successfully connect with the community it needs to do so as part of an optimistic conversation about the future, based on a shared goal. This goal needs to be expressed according to the common aim shared by *everyday Australians* – of living happy and fulfilled lives.

b. That language should always be cast within a framework of agency. Agency is the key pre-requisite in the story of opportunity (all acknowledge that without this they cannot take up opportunities). The government's role in this story is to help bring everyone up to the same starting point. Rather than talking about 'giving extra help' to some, which is interpreted as 'unfair' and raises all the problems of 'agency', people accept that not everyone starts from the same point: some start from three steps behind. It is therefore only fair to help people get to the same starting point, so as to allow people to set and aim for their own goals according to their own talents and abilities.

c. Action needs to be seen to step around the barriers: There are a number of barriers that need to be considered when building a common language. Addressing disadvantage

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[1] This language has been suggested on the basis that it resonated with respondents across the sample, regardless of their demographic profile.

or poverty is an area that people have seen governments try to address in the past without success: they are therefore cynical about future action (which will need to be described as a *break* rather than a continuation of past efforts). The story will need to use language that feels new, optimistic – for instance, *fresher, smarter ways* to address old problems; ways that involve ingenuity/clever ideas, not just 'throwing money away'. And recognises the need for long-term, consistent commitment ('the long haul'), and not the unrealistic *quick fix.*

d.   The public narrative around action: There are a number of areas that respondents considered to be a credible focus for government action in relation to disadvantage. These include addressing: the building blocks of opportunity (for most this is through providing free and appropriate education and skills training); the needs of the groups that everyone agrees deserve help (i.e. disadvantaged children, people with disabilities, older people) and breaking the cycles of disadvantage.

e.   The narrative also has to use words and ideas that resonate, and to marry words and actions, for example:

Step 1: Creating a narrative...
"*Some people start on the back foot/three steps behind.   We need to make sure everyone starts from the same point/has the same opportunities. Everyone has a right to have a happy fulfilled life and enjoy living in their community. We all know it's not just about money or good intentions. We need to rethink and come up with smarter ways of tackling these problems and breaking cycles of disadvantage. New ways of looking at old problems like unemployment, homelessness, cycles of disadvantage... Education and learning, and access to work that is right for the individual, are the clearest ways of making sure everyone can fulfil their potential* Step 2: And ending on specific actions*
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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In June 2009, the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Prime Minister Cabinet commissioned the Open Mind Research Group to conduct exploratory research with the general population and socially excluded groups. The main goals of the research were to:

a. Explore awareness, understanding and meanings attributed to the idea and the term 'social inclusion', and the concepts and issues this raises across the community

b. Scope the terms and language that surround social inclusion to make sure the government speaks clearly and inclusively when it engages on these topics

c. Discuss and involve people with the government's goals and ideas for achieving social inclusion and explore how they see this being achieved including actions the community might need to take

d. Scope how people feel these issues should be raised and discussed with them, and the role of government in this area

A qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate to engage and discuss complex issues and listen for language with the community. The design relied mainly on small group discussions, with a smaller number of one-on-one interviews.

Fourteen standard 1½ hour discussion groups were undertaken, with six to eight participants in each group. Groups were segmented according to:

- Lifestage: young singles, young couples, young families, older families, empty nesters/retirees
- SES: considering income, education level and employment type
- Gender: to reflect the different ways that men and women talk about social affairs and interact in group situations
- Geographic location: including inner and outer metropolitan respondents, as well as those from regional areas.

Groups were moderated as open, flowing conversations, allowing respondents to openly share their experience and understandings of disadvantage. Respondents were also presented with a series of stimuli that presented some of the key language of social inclusion, as it is reiterated in government speeches and media releases.

These group were complemented by the conduct of 15, one hour, qualitative depth interviews, which were conducted in-home with those who had been selected as being demographically more likely to be marginalised and therefore not comfortable in a group setting) and those with limited English. Similar content areas and moderation techniques to those described above in relation to the discussion groups were used, however, the nature of the depth interview also allows for a greater understanding of the respondent's personal story. A selection of these have been presented at Appendix one.

Fieldwork was conducted 30 June and 30 July 2009.

A note on reading this report
In reading this report, it should be kept in mind that the findings are based on small non random samples and are qualitative in nature. They are indicative rather than conclusive. The sample was split between middle class (five groups) and low SES (nine groups) and an additional 15 one on one interviews with those who may be considered socially excluded.

RECRUITMENT DESIGN

The final recruitment design, as achieved, is provided overleaf.

DISCUSSION GROUP RECRUITMENT DESIGN TOTAL = 14 GROUPS

	Melbourne	Mildura	Sydney	Newcastle	Brisbane	Gympie
Young singles, 18-30yrs						
Mid SES: Post school education, in work or tertiary education	Women: inner metro					Women
Low SES: no post secondary education, casual part-time work/no work; some receiving income support payments				Men		
Young couples, 25-40 yrs						
Mid SES: post school education, in work or tertiary education			Men: inner metro		Women: outer metro	
Low SES: no post secondary education, casual part-time work/no work; some receiving income support payments	Women: outer metro					
Young families, 25-40 yrs						
Mid SES: post school education, in work or tertiary education			Women: outer metro			
Low SES: no post secondary education, casual part-time work or no work; some receiving income support payments		Women, some sole parents			Men: outer metro some in blended families	
Older families, 40-65yrs						
Mid SES: post school education, in work or tertiary education		Men				
Low SES: no post secondary education, casual part-time work/no work; some receiving income support payments	Men: outer metro		Men: outer metro			
Empty nesters/retirees, 60-70 yrs.						
Mid SES: post school education, in work or tertiary education						Mix gender
Low SES: no post secondary education, casual part-time work/no work; some receiving income support payments				Mix gender		

QUALITATIVE DEPTH INTERVIEWS DESIGN TOTAL = 15 INTERVIEWS

	Melbourne	Mildura	Sydney	Newcastle	Brisbane	Gympie
Socially excluded: receiving benefits/living in public housing /not worked in 3 years+/sole parents/not completed yr 10/poor literacy and/or English language skills/temporary Visa holders	3	3	2	3	2	2

FINDINGS

PERSPECTIVES ON DISADVANTAGE

WHO ARE THE DISADVANTAGED? PEOPLE WHO ARE WORSE OFF THAN ME

- This study uncovered rich and varied understandings of what disadvantage (the colloquial term that most approximates 'social exclusion') looks like in Australia. Respondents did not readily identify *themselves* as disadvantaged. When asked, 'who are the disadvantaged?' they nominate those who they perceive as 'worse off' than themselves (even those who might be predicted to fall into the category of the 'socially excluded' on a demographic basis). Indeed, the framing of disadvantage by participants was often unexpected, as evinced by the jobless families who say that they consider that children from families where both parents work are worse off because of lack of parental attention and care.

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- This across this sample the higher the socioeconomic circumstance the more inclined to accept disadvantaged groups as deserving additional assistance. The more disadvantaged the individual the less inclined to accept others as deserving of additional support. Those who were most likely to define themselves as disadvantaged were those who were working but on low incomes: their perspective is that people who are not working receive a great deal of assistance, while they 'miss out'.

- A small number of respondents who had been recruited as socially excluded also identified as being disadvantaged. They spoke of feeling 'judged' and 'stigmatised' (because of who they are or where they live) and of being without the resources that would enable them to achieve their goals in life. Such resources include skills training and networks of influence.

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* In this report, italics will be used to denote respondent quotes or language.

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- Interestingly, however, people were much more inclined to compare themselves to those who have less (presumably because this makes them feel 'average' which is the category most people want to be described as). There was some discussion of those who have a lot (especially in the context of not feeling comfortable with these people because they 'don't know us'/'aren't like us'), but by and large envy or criticism was not reserved for them: it was much more likely to be directed at those perceived to be 'taking advantage' and getting an unfair amount of help (that is more than themselves) from government. Criticism was much more likely to be directed as employers (who don't give them a chance) or to government agencies (who don't support them the way they feel they should).

- While these participants were very clear about what disadvantage is, there appears to be a real difference between self-diagnosis and being told, particularly by 'government' that they are disadvantaged. Maintaining the distance between 'self' and 'disadvantaged other' appears to have an important effect on the type of self-story that people are able to tell about their own lives. While this distance is maintained, self-stories can be rich and complex, and yet still allow identification as 'normal', 'average' Australian. Collapsing the distance, and admitting, or being forced to admit, that *I am disadvantaged*, reduces such possibilities. When people are *told* that they are disadvantaged they appeared to lose their sense of control over their life circumstances – and hence their sense of optimism about the future and their unique personal story.

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- Interestingly, a higher proportion of those who identified as disadvantaged had not been specifically recruited as socially excluded, but instead were working on lower incomes. This segment say they are feeling left-out, squeezed between the unemployed who receive income support and other government assistance – and who they suspect may actually be economically better off than they are – and the higher SES population whom they aspire to join – and who they consider are supported by

government through tax breaks etc. They are attempting to *do the right thing* by having a job, but are not feeling as if they are being rewarded for doing so.

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FRAMING PERSPECTIVES ON DISADVANTAGE

◉   Within this broader understanding (that the disadvantaged are worse off than I am) another distinction can be made: the further people are from disadvantage, the more broadly they define it and the more they support the idea of additional assistance for these groups. Higher SES[2] respondents across this study defined disadvantage quite broadly and supported assistance for a much wider range of people they define as disadvantaged. For instance, their definition of disadvantage often extends to people who are Indigenous Australians, homeless, unemployed, refugees/migrants, and those who have drug and alcohol addictions, groups who do not tend to be seen to be particularly disadvantaged by those who are lower SES. This higher SES perspective is impersonal – shaped by lack of personal experience of those who are disadvantaged – a distance that is mirrored in the abstract language they use to describe disadvantage. While it is a sympathetic view, it also tends to objectify the disadvantaged (who are considered as categories of disadvantage rather than individuals in their own right).

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◉   By contrast, lower SES respondents had a much more personal perspective on disadvantage: they talk about individuals, people they know or are related to, who could be described by these classifications. They tend to set much narrower limits on who should be considered disadvantaged and also on the 'extra' assistance they should be offered.

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[2] Broadly defined in this study as having over median household income, tertiary educated, in white collar/professional work.

● Those lower SES who are in work see very little difference between their own circumstances and those of people who are out of work. Many speak of growing up in similar, difficult circumstances and of improving their own lives through hard work and determination. Therefore the idea that other groups are being given more assistance from government seems unfair... a very important concept to many of our participants. This is a context in which lower SES workers feel that they are disadvantaged compared to those in similar situations who receive more services.

● Across the board however, the 'disadvantaged' groups who are almost always seen to deserve (more) help are: old age pensioners, children of dysfunctional families and people with disabilities... because these are individuals who lack agency, and cannot be 'responsible' for their situation.

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● Those who might be demographically predicted to be more likely to be socially excluded[3] are particularly unlikely to see a group as disadvantaged if they themselves fall into that category, i.e. jobless families, single parents... As members of that group they do not feel disadvantaged, ergo, they say, membership does not automatically make for disadvantage. Their experience makes them sceptical of groups that appear to have the same or similar access to services or resources as themselves but are not coping as well. Again, this limits those groups who are considered not to have a

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[3] And were recruited as such for the purposes of this study (see 'Background and methodology' for sample definitions).

choice in their experience of disadvantage – and therefore deserve assistance to – old age pensioners, children of dysfunctional families and people with disabilities.

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● While disadvantage tended to be understood by respondents in relation to types of people, most can also name areas of disadvantage. In regional centres these tend to be housing commission estates but can also be suburbs in cities. Disadvantaged areas were associated with the idea of a cycle of disadvantage by higher SES respondents, who talk about people who are *trapped* by the lives they were born into. This scenario prompts sympathy but also a sense of helplessness (it appears almost impossible to break this cycle). Lower SES workers have empathy for children in this situation, but little for adults. They either say: *I broke free, why can't they?* or if they are living in these same areas, deny that the disadvantage is general. Their definition of 'breaking free' does not necessarily involve work or moving away from the area. People who live in these areas dispute the effect on them personally, or point to other areas –just over the road, or down the way - that are worse off.

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DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES: DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING BY AREA AND LIFESTAGE

● In general, the understandings of disadvantage described above were true of all the different locations in which the research was undertaken and across the different lifestage groups included in the sample. Some slight differences by location and lifestage were detected and are described below.

● Gympie: Disadvantage appeared to be less invisible to higher SES groups in Gympie. They variously reported knowing, working with, or volunteering to assist the 'disadvantaged', which appeared to give them a more nuanced perspective of what life

is like for those classified as disadvantaged. Gympie respondents also reported a strong sense of government 'inability' to achieve change – respondents were extremely sensitive to 'spin': talk without action. A lack of opportunities in relation to work and post-school education seems to be driving resentment between the working poor and the unemployed.

- Mildura: Visibility (or lack thereof) appears more of an issue than in other regional areas (especially in relation to perceptions of homelessness), with low SES respondents feeling that disadvantage is 'covered up' to preserve the tourist town's image. However, there are also well-known areas of disadvantage (e.g. the Hornsey Park housing estate) and very visible Indigenous Australian and refugee populations who are seen as disadvantaged by higher SES and resented by lower SES. Seasonal agricultural workers are also resented as competitors for work opportunities (especially in the face of declining demand due to drought). Indigenous Australian respondents in Mildura reported a different understanding of opportunity (with more family connections in the area, particularly in positions of power, leading to more opportunity and higher status).

- Newcastle: Disadvantage is strongly associated with several very visible public housing estates. While Indigenous Australians are raised by lower SES as a group receiving 'unfair' support, there appeared to be less friction in relation to refugees/migrants than in other locations. Older, low income workers spoke of lack of work opportunities, saying that their old skills are no longer relevant and they don't have access to retraining (especially in IT skills), however the young were much more optimistic. Proximity to Sydney is also considered to affect opportunity (particularly to do with housing costs).

- City (Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney): There appeared to be little difference between the three major metropolitan capital cities in which this research was undertaken. The size of cities means that disadvantage is largely invisible to higher SES groups, so that it becomes abstract and distant (but also increasing expressions of 'understanding'). Those living in disadvantaged areas identify as being of a different 'culture' and do talk about being out of place or unwelcome in more well-to-do areas.

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- Lifestage: Older people in the sample appeared less optimistic about changing their circumstances compared to younger people. This was especially true for older lower SES who talked about feeling less able to cope with changing employment goalposts. However, having said this, most of our respondents, both older and younger, report feeling in control, living the lives they have chosen/are directing.

KEY THEMES: EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORKS

- This study has identified a number of explanatory frameworks that explain responses to the government's social inclusion agenda and hence help identify a way forward for the government in communicating and building support for this agenda. These are:

  - A sense of agency
  - We are all equal (fairness)
  - The goal is happiness
  - Money is not the solution
  - The way of the world

- A sense of agency
  There was agreement among most respondents that, while circumstance and environment do play a role in shaping people's lives, the most important determining factor in life is how individuals respond to those circumstances. In individual lives this equates to having personal agency: the sense that they are in control of or are directing their own lives. If people have this sense of agency – despite experiencing what might, on the face of it, appear to be high levels of disadvantage – it allows them to own their unique life stories, and not be defined by disadvantage or become subsumed into an impersonal category, a victim of circumstance.

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- Where language takes away a sense of agency from those who are socially excluded (when it says: 'you are excluded' or 'you are disadvantaged') they become deflated, diminished. This explains the disconnect between the respondents in the sample (particularly those from lower SES backgrounds) and the official government language of social inclusion: the latter does not make sense because it specifically tells the 'socially excluded' that they do not have agency. In the world created by the language of social inclusion the disadvantaged can only be objects to be acted on, not subjects writing their own life dramas..

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- **We are all equal (fairness)**
  Higher SES respondents are more likely to accept that some people/groups experience disadvantage outside their control (and so need extra help). In contrast lower SES are less likely to accept such argument (if they can take responsibility for their lives, their argument goes, so can everyone else). It is important to understand that those lower SES groups arguing against treating others differently are not doing so out of a sense of grievance or grudge, but based on an understanding that essentially Australians are 'all equal' or 'the same'. They feel we share a capacity to direct our own lives and, therefore, that we should all be treated the same.

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In addition, there is also a belief (more strongly held by lower SES) that Australia is a fair country. This concept of fairness and equal access applies to opportunities, but also to access to services (education, health, etc.) Because of these beliefs, help that appears unevenly distributed across particular groups is seen to be *unfair*.

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◦   **The goal is happiness**

While rationally, some (particularly those from higher SES backgrounds) do understand and prioritise the need to contribute economically and enhance productivity (implied in participation and other social inclusion language) this is a goal that is not personally relevant and can sound cold and diminishing, as though the only reason to 'support' a person's life is to get something back from them. Instead, the key goal is always expressed in terms of happiness, living an enjoyable and satisfied life. This can involve a larger 'contribution' – and indeed a sense of contribution is often deeply rewarding and intrinsic to identity – however, contribution is defined in people's own terms.

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◦   **Money is not the solution**

There was a firmly held belief among all respondents that spending more money is not the solution to disadvantage – after all, this has demonstrably not worked in the past.

A recurring refrain was that: *governments have been throwing money at this problem for years.* This belief can become a barrier to acceptance and support of actions to reduce disadvantage if it is not addressed.

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●   It's the way of the world
Any implication that the goal is to 'eradicate poverty/disadvantage' is seen as naïve, unrealistic. While the respondents in this study would like to live in a world without disadvantage they see its continuing existence as a truism. They say that there have always been and will always be differences between poor and rich because the size of the issues associated with disadvantage are so large. In addition, Australia is seen to be doing better than most in relation to other countries. They compare Australia favourably to countries such as the United States or third world or communist countries which are less egalitarian, harder to get ahead in, etc.

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SOCIAL INCLUSION: MEANINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

●   The language and core concepts of social inclusion, as tested in this study, are not a good fit with the understandings of disadvantage and explanatory frameworks outlined above.

●   Social inclusion: This term is unfamiliar. When respondents try and puzzle out a meaning they say it implies a range of ideas, including socialising, having friends, being part of things, social cohesion and multiculturalism. For some it can also imply a suggested homogeneity of experience: that there is a right way to live in order to be socially included.

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- To higher SES, the concept makes sense and they can see the connection with their pre-existing understanding of disadvantage. This includes a broader understanding of the social and economic impacts of disadvantage (such as crime, inequity, long-term costs). However, the breadth of the concept also undermines its relevance, it does not feel like a dynamic or particularly active concept, which suggests government spin rather than government action.

- To the more marginalised lower SES respondents, the term is difficult and harder to understand. For some, the term left them feeling deflated, almost tested... they suspected they were being put down.

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- As with 'disadvantage', when the term is applied to others it can be accepted. However, when applied to themselves – as it was in this study – it can cause polarisation. While those who are disadvantaged do acknowledge that there are times when they feel excluded, saying that they are not socially included leaves them feeling diminished and moves the discussion, which may have been focussed on opportunity, onto more divisive comparisons.

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- Social exclusion: This term is easier to comprehend, and is understood as being about disadvantaged groups. However, the term is patronising and demeaning to people if it is a label that is applied to them. For all but the higher SES groups, it is a divisive term if applied to others, as it drives conversation back to the notion of deserving and undeserving disadvantage and unfair treatment of certain groups.

◦ Participation: When it is defined as being 'for all Australians' or in the context of social inclusion, this term does not imply that people will be participating on their own terms, in the hope of fulfilling their hopes and dreams (happiness and satisfaction in life – the key aim). It implies economic productivity, which people can see as a very mechanistic way of viewing life, and which reduces them to cogs, component parts of the system.

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◦ Disadvantage: Is better understood as a term than social inclusion (and hence its use earlier in this report), as is poor; however, as discussed above, lower SES individuals find being labelled with these terms demeaning: the terms strip away the stories they create of a life that has all sorts of interesting twists and turns and all sorts of possibilities.

◦ Learn/Work: Together, having the (opportunity) to have an education and to work are seen as the obvious pre-requisites making up opportunity, and are therefore a valued aim. However, in isolation they appear an 'obvious' and 'old' focus – this is not a new area for governments to talk about or prioritise (however it is an area in which government plays a key role).

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◦ Engage/connect: Respondents agree that the social, as well as the economic, aspects of life are important in shaping opportunity. They speak of parental nurturing and involvement as being important in creating ambition and drive in a child, the need for social networks to find jobs or support them in times of trouble and the joy they derive from local festivals or events. It is important to note that engagement/connection is not just defined by physical communities. Communities of shared interest that exist across locations can be just as important in fulfilling this need. However this is not well conveyed by the terms 'engage/connect' – belonging is a

stronger word in this context. Taking action in this area is something that people and communities (and perhaps local governments) have to do for themselves – at the most there is a funding or facilitation role for federal government.

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• **Have a voice:** Lower SES respondents rejected the implication they do not having a voice now, which is completely at odds with the experience, or at least perception, of most ... On a personal level most feel they are controlling their own lives. Emphasising differences with the political/ruling group was better accepted: *I'd like to see politicians try to live round here, they have no idea!* However, the focus this implied, from the point of view of these participants is in the wrong place: its not that they lack a voice, but that government fails to listen or act on what they have to say.

Overall, the language of social inclusion is felt by these participants to focus on the negatives and the *lacks* in people's lives, rather than reflecting the optimism and hope for the future that so many have.

TOWARDS A COMMON LANGUAGE

• While the current language of social inclusion was not resonating with the respondents in this study, this is not to say that a common language cannot be developed as a basis for a community dialogue. The key tenets of this language include:

a. **Voicing a shared goal:** For the government to successfully connect with the community it needs to do so as part of an optimistic conversation about the future, based on a shared goal. This goal needs to be expressed according to the common aim shared by *everyday Australians* – of living happy and fulfilled lives. This aim recognises that people will make contributions, but on their own terms (which are not limited to or will even necessarily include participation to achieve productivity gains).

b. That language should always be cast within a framework of agency. Agency is the key pre-requisite in the story of opportunity (all acknowledge that without this they cannot take up opportunities). The government's role in this story is to help bring everyone up to the same starting point. Rather than talking about 'giving extra help' to some, which is interpreted as 'unfair' and raises all the problems of 'agency', people accept that not everyone starts from the same point: some start from three steps behind. It is therefore only fair to help people get to the same starting point, so as to allow all Australians to set and aim for their own goals according to their own talents and abilities. This story meets the needs of the disadvantaged (*I have control over my life*) low income workers (*this story includes me, we are all taking responsibility for our own lives*) as well as higher SES (*everyone can realise their potential*).

c. **Action needs to be seen to step around the barriers**: There are a number of barriers that need to be considered when building a common language. Addressing disadvantage or poverty is an area that people have seen governments try to address in the past without success: they are therefore cynical about future action (which will need to be described as a *break* rather than a continuation of past efforts). The story will need to use language that feels new, optimistic – for instance, *fresher, smarter ways* to address old problems; ways that involve ingenuity/clever ideas, not just 'throwing money'. And recognises the need for long-term, consistent commitment ('the long haul'), and not the unrealistic *quick fix*.

d. **The public narrative around action**: There are a number of areas that the respondents in this study saw as a credible focus for government action in relation to disadvantage. These are:

- Addressing the building blocks of opportunity. For most this is through providing free and appropriate education and skills training that match preferences and abilities, and retraining later in life when needed so that people are able to get jobs. Ensuring that the economy is well-run and that jobs are available is also an obvious key focus here, perhaps especially in regional areas.

- Addressing the needs of the groups that everyone (and not just higher SES) agrees deserve help – disadvantaged children, people with disabilities, older people.

- Breaking the cycles of disadvantage: this is a strongly attractive idea to all, although it is seen as being hard to achieve ... the idea of government developing solutions that integrate services, include local communities in designing their own solutions and not relying on 'one size fits all' were helpful.

e. The narrative also has to use words and ideas that resonate, for example:

- *Cycles of disadvantage, circumstances life throws at you, times in life when we need a hand.*
- *Not everyone starts at the same point, some start three steps behind; we need to bring everyone to the same starting point.*
- *In order to be happy, everybody wants to be part of and contribute to their community in their own ways.*
- *We know it takes much more than just throwing buckets of money. We need to rethink, time for smarter solutions, new ways of tackling old problems.*
- *Education is the best way of/breaking the cycle, making sure everyone reaches their full potential.*

f. To build connections with the public on these issues, the dialogue will need to marry narrative and actions, for example:

Step 1: Involving creating a narrative...

"Some people start on the back foot/three steps behind. We need to make sure everyone starts from the same point/has the same opportunities. Everyone has a right to have a happy fulfilled life and enjoy living in their community. We all know it's not just about money or good intentions. We need to rethink and come up with smarter ways of tackling these problems and breaking cycles of disadvantage. New ways of looking at old problems like unemployment, homelessness, cycles of disadvantage... Education and learning, and access to work that is right for the individual, are the clearest ways of making sure everyone can fulfil their potential

Step 2: And ending on specific actions →

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982
INFORMATION ON RIGHTS OF REVIEW

1. APPLICATION FOR INTERNAL REVIEW OF DECISION

You have the right to apply for an internal review of a decision refusing to grant access to documents in accordance with your request, including a decision to defer access, or a decision to impose fees and/or charges. If you make an application for review an authorised officer of the Department (not the person who made the original decision) will conduct a review and make a fresh decision on the merits of the case.

You must apply in writing for a review of the decision within 30 days of receipt of this letter. You must also send an application fee of $40 and you may request that the fee be remitted. You may apply for remission for any relevant reason, including one or both of the following reasons:

* payment of the fee, or part of the fee, would cause, or has already caused you financial hardship;

* the giving of access to the documents requested is in the general public interest or in the interest of a substantial section of the public.

The application itself will not be processed until the fee is paid or has been remitted.

If you seek remission on any ground it would be helpful to provide supporting details, for example: brief details of your current financial position (weekly or monthly income and expenditure, money in the bank or other accounts, debts, etc); substantiating detail for a claim that it would be in the general public interest to give access to the documents sought.

You do not have to pay any other fees or processing charges for an internal review, except for providing access to further documents released as a result of the review (for example, photocopying, inspection).

No particular form is required to apply for an internal review although it is desirable (but not essential) to set out in the application the grounds on which you consider that the decision should be changed.

Application for review of the decision should be addressed to:

> The FOI Co-ordinator
> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
> PO Box 6500
> CANBERRA ACT 2600
>
> Telephone: (02) 6271 5849
> Facsimile: (02) 6271 5776

2. APPLICATION TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS TRIBUNAL

If the decision on internal review is not to grant you access to all documents in accordance with your request, you would then also be entitled to seek review of that decision by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. You will be further notified of your rights of review at the time you are notified of the internal review decision.

If you make an application for internal review and a decision is not made by us within 30 days of receiving the application and the application fee (or of the application fee being remitted), you will be entitled to make an application within a further 60 days to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for review of the original decision.

You are also entitled to appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal if we do not advise you of our decision on your original request within 30 days of receiving a valid application and the application fee. Note that certain periods, such as the period between the day we give you advice of any processing charges in respect of your request and the day we receive any deposit on those charges, do not count towards the 30 day time limit.

The decision-making period may also have been extended by up to a further 30 days if certain 3rd parties needed to be consulted. If you make an appeal to the Tribunal on the basis that the decision has been delayed, and you receive notification of our decision before the Tribunal has dealt with your application, the Tribunal may extend the proceedings to review the decision.

The Tribunal is a completely independent review body with the power to make a fresh decision. Your application should be accompanied by a filing fee of $682, unless you are granted legal aid or you come within an exempt category of persons (check with the Tribunal registry in your State). The Registrar or Deputy Registrar may waive the fee on the ground that its payment would impose financial hardship on you. The fee may be refunded where you are successful. The Tribunal cannot award costs either in favour or against you, although it may in some circumstances recommend payment by the Attorney-General of some or all of your costs. Further information is available from the Tribunal on 1 300 366 700.

3. **COMPLAINTS TO THE COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN**

You may complain to the Ombudsman concerning action taken by this Department in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the Freedom of Information Act. There is no fee for making a complaint. The Ombudsman will conduct a completely independent investigation of your complaint.

You may complain to the Ombudsman either orally or, preferably, in writing, setting out the grounds on which you consider that the action taken in relation to your request should be investigated.

The Ombudsman's address is:

> Commonwealth Ombudsman
> GPO Box 442
> CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601
> Telephone: 1 300 362 072

The Ombudsman usually prefers applicants to seek internal review before they complain about a decision.

4. **ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS**

You are entitled under the Freedom of Information Act to seek access to documents concerning this decision. A request would be treated as a completely new request. If you wish to do so, you should apply in writing to the FOI Co-ordinator at the address given above and should send a fee of $30. You may seek remission of the fee, either before or at the same time or afterwards, for the same reasons described above. Processing charges may be imposed on the request.