

Advocates and Persuaders

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EDITED BY
MARK J SHEEHAN

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*Dedicate to my mother, Tess Sheehan, the domestic lobbyist
'All politics is local' very local.*

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Local Government and the Battle for Influence

Kevin Brianton

Sure there are dishonest men in local government. But there are dishonest men in national government too.

Richard M. Nixon

Local government certainly has an image problem. A popular documentary released in early 1996, called *Rats in the Ranks*, showed the political knives being sharpened at Leichhardt Council in New South Wales. The council was revealed as a whirlpool of petty ambition and betrayal in the run-up to 1994 election. The widely watched documentary laid the basis for the ABC TV show *Grassroots*, produced between 2000 and 2003, in which the local council of Arcadia Waters was depicted as a slightly demented form of government, with a somewhat loopy CEO and an odd mix of councilors. The local elected representatives seemed more interested in donning the mayoral robes than in actually achieving anything. The TV satire *Utopia* in 2017 pictured local government as being obsessed with politically correct details in a draft promotional video. It is a standard view that local government is 'clown hall,' with councilors engaged in constant pointless power struggles over minor and peripheral issues. Council staff were mainly lesser league bureaucrats who could not make it in state or federal circles, who blocked sensible ideas and enforced out of date regulations with a pedantic fury.

This view is not just from writers in popular television. Many commentators do not see any serious role for local or regional government. Some have argued that local government was weak almost to the point of powerlessness in Australia (LGI, 2006; Collits, 2012). For individual local governments, this is perfectly true – they are small economic units. Nonetheless, local government as a sector is quite significant. Indeed it is big business, collecting \$14 billion in rates and spending more than \$32 billion over the course of a year. The sector also manages a total of \$165 billion worth of assets (ALGA, 2017). While it only covers approximately five per cent of government expenditure, it is a significant player in the national economy, and by its nature, it is spread right across the country. It is in fact due to its massive spend that local government is subject to extensive lobbying. In particular, its role in planning being crucial for property developers.

Despite the satire and commentary directed at the sector, local government remains more respected than its state and federal counterparts. The Constitutional Values Survey, conducted every two years since 2008 by Griffith University, found that 58.9 per cent of people surveyed had trust and confidence in local government to do a good job. In Queensland, the figure was 62.7 per cent. The survey results show that people rated local government better than state or federal government (LGAQ, 2014). The same results can also be seen around the world (McCarthy, 2014).

While the level of trust is gratifying for those who work in local government, it does hide a more disturbing reality. In 2010, the New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in a damning assessment showed that local government faced a stronger risk of corruption than state agencies. It lacked proper controls key to ensure corporate governance. ICAC proposed a raft of reforms to ensure local government was free of inappropriate lobbying measures. The mixture of lucrative government contracts, key planning decisions and often lax governance standards was a disturbing one. These flaws were an opening for all type of dubious lobbying practices. However, the situation is not entirely bleak. Local councils compare favourably to state agencies with

sound record keeping particularly for gifts, and councils actively enforced codes of conduct (Brown, 2011; ICAC, 2010).

The concerns are not confined to New South Wales. Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass highlighted the failure of Council management to supervise practices; notably where many long-standing council employees operated in small fiefdoms. Managers ignored or simply did not listen to alarm bells. Often corrupt behaviour was not challenged, just out of fear of repercussions for those concerns. Local governments may be the most significant employer and hold the largest contracts in the region. Glass was concerned that minor lapses were often a small step towards major misappropriation (Glass, 2016). Similarly, a report by the Western Australia's Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC) in 2015 has also found that 'systemic weaknesses' in local government sector that was leaving councils vulnerable to procurement fraud and corruption. Given the experience in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria it is fair to conclude that the potential for local government corruption is a problem facing the whole country (CCC, 2015).

On this basis, lobbyists – particularly unscrupulous ones – might consider local government easy pickings for contracts and favourable planning decisions. One highly respected lobbyist once told me – and hopefully, he was joking – that there was no such thing as a long-term running issue with local government, as after one three-year term you should own the council. Certainly, local government is far more accessible than any other form of government. While a state or federal minister may have a plethora of advisors, guarding every approach to the minister, a local Mayor usually has their mobile number printed on the council website, and their home address is too easy to find.

The most common form of lobbying occurs when a person or group makes direct contact with a councillor to influence a council decision. Lobbyists approach councillors over a range of large and small issues. Nothing is on a colossal scale of billions of dollars, but local government decisions are important, and the councillors have some influence in the way funds are spent. Professional lobbyists may fancy themselves dealing

with less experienced political operatives. The reality is that mayors and councillors are probably quite seasoned in dealing with every possible type of lobbyist. Councillors are often respected community activists or business leaders with years of dealing with federal and state government bodies, industry associations, community groups and political bodies. Some of the most effective state and national politicians come straight from local government. Many are young people with high political ambitions and connections, and local government is their training ground. The image of the doddering old mayor draped in his elegant chains cutting ribbons is not necessarily true anymore.

Behind the mayor and councillors, are often an administration headed by a CEO – or similar figure – and a senior management team. Many lobbyists contact local government directly through line management. Local government administration was previously the preserve of people who had spent decades working their way up the ladder to be town clerk or town engineer. They were cautious and mostly rule-bound. It is still true to some extent, but CEOs in many councils are often highly trained and well paid managerial leaders, sometimes moving from business or other spheres of government. The restructuring of local government into much more significant units has created economies of scale where high-quality senior managers may be spending their entire careers. They can be ambitious and determined. Indeed a lot of influence rests with the elected officials, but they are backed by some well trained and qualified administrators. Some would argue that it is the administration that has more say in affairs than the elected officials: A type of lower scale ‘Yes Minister’. The locus of influence shifts from council to council, with some administrations holding more sway than the elected officials. In other local governments, the reverse is true. Lobbyists need to tread carefully in this environment, particularly as independent auditors can oversee almost every decision. Corruption commissions can also review determinations, as can various forms of local government inspectors. The scope for dubious lobbying practices is limited.

Aside from being lobbied, local governments must lobby for their own community needs. In doing so, local governments face massive obstacles

when approaching state or federal governments. Local government is usually created through state government legislation. The relationship is not between equals. State governments can and do restructure local governments, dismiss elected councilors and appoint administrators. In certain circumstances, these steps are entirely justified, but in other instances, political expediency drives these decisions. Over the years, councils in Sydney have been chopped and changed for the most trivial of political whims, with many NSW State Governments treating local governments with often barely concealed contempt. In New South Wales, there has been a long-running saga of boundary changes in Sydney. In 2011, while I was editor of the national local government newspaper *Local Government Focus*, the NSW State Government trumpeted a wholesale restructure of local governments based on a 'clear set of criteria'. The Minister's office point blank refused to release the 'clear set of criteria' to the media – or anyone else. The eventual restructure was yet another round of pure political payback. As the ABC's electoral analyst Anthony Green noted later in 2014: 'For decades the council's boundaries have been expanded, divided, further subdivided and expanded yet again. Voting has been switched back and forth between compulsory and voluntary. Wards have been single member, multi-member or done away with altogether. The electoral system has switched back and forth between single member, multi-member winner-takes-all and proportional representation. The non-resident roll has been expanded and contracted and the position of Lord Mayor has sometimes been by popular election and at other times elected by the Council' (Green, 2014). Further restructures have followed from that point: local government remains a plaything for the NSW state government.

The situation is not much better in other states. The Western Australia Government set up Development Assessment Panels (DAPs) in 2011 ostensibly to '*improve the balance between technical advice and local knowledge*'. Critics argued that it was merely aimed to strip already limited planning powers from councils. The reality was that DAPs made key planning decisions for the most significant developments around Perth. The panels contained three specialists and two elected members, with

local governments able to make a non-binding recommendation. The West Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) protested against this approach. When the conservative government lost the election in 2016, the incoming ALP government promised a review of features, but DAPS would stay, and WALGA's lobbying proved ineffectual (Emery, 2016; Shield, 2017; Turner, 2016).

The same unequal power arrangement has always been clear in other states. In Victoria, during the 1990s, the Kennett Liberal Government, following a dry economic agenda, reduced the number of local governments in Victoria from 210 to a total of 78 in January 1995 (Worthington and Dollery, 2002). In contrast to the ad hoc approach employed in NSW, the Victorian Government at least set out clear criteria for its own major restructure of the sector. This approach was no act of respect towards local government, it also sacked every councilor, installing administrators to push through its reforms. It was a clear demonstration of the comparative strength of local government, compared to its state government master.

Even though the cards are stacked against them, it is clear that local governments do need to improve their lobbying efforts. Victorian Local Government Minister Natalie Hutchins says that local governments just need to be more professional in the way they approach to issue management. In 2017, the minister set a cap on rate increases at 2.5%, in line with that period's consumer price index, after a decade of uncontrolled rises. Most local governments complained about the capping, released press releases and presented submissions merely condemning the decision. Minister Hutchins said a few councils avoided the rate cap by offering a detailed and professional response to the issue. 'Because of their lobbying, backed by detailed documents, the government included an exemption, based on Ministerial discretion,' she said. Other ministers and advisors have also complained that local government lobbying tends to be a never-ending wish list with no priorities or overall vision. Often lobbying is a simply a vague meet and greet session, with a subsequent press release announcing a valuable discussion 'on a wide range of issues'.

Despite such barriers, some local government organisations are still working hard to influence governments. The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) increased its presence as a Canberra lobby group in 2014. In one example, the association was annoyed with the lack of action by the Federal Government to fund natural disaster recovery efforts. It was concerned that councils used its plant and equipment for recovery works without any payment. The LGAQ lobbied ministers, opposition MPs and crossbenchers to get their message across. It had some impact with Queensland Senator Anthony Chisholm highlighting natural disaster funding during parliamentary debate shortly after the meeting. The association met and lobbied with both government and opposition ministers. The LGAQ argued that this approach was now essential believing that too much attention was now focussed on the ‘10 second TV grab or “killer” tweet’ (Hallam, 2017). It would later claim some success under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

Some other local government lobbying efforts have been impressive and productive. In particular, councils have found that by linking together, they can create coalitions that politicians at state and federal levels cannot ignore. Local governments in Melbourne’s growth suburbs formed the Interface Councils – the interface between town and country – to tackle traffic congestion, inadequate levels of public transport, and lack of community infrastructure. The communities presented a clear case that they face more intense health and education problems, coupled with significant travel congestion as well as having severe domestic violence issues compared to inner parts of Melbourne. The Interface Councils both promoted these problems in the media and lobbied the government to ensure higher levels of funding. It presented a high-level economic analysis of the situation called *One Melbourne or Two: Implications of Population Growth for Infrastructure and Services in Interface Areas*. The impact was so substantial that the Victorian Government launched an infrastructure fund that bore the name of the lobby group. It was an outstanding example of how local governments can integrate their media and lobbying campaigns, combining evidence-based submissions, linked to a media campaign to

pressure governments. It remains one of the benchmark lobbying campaigns for local government (Essential Economics, 2013).

However, there is one apparent limitation to local government lobbying. Councils are not in a position to deliver real and prolonged political pain. The Mining Council provided a massive campaign against the federal government's plan that eventually helped topple Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and reversed a strongly held decision to introduce a mining tax on profits. Even if local governments do create a campaign with the potential for political damage, they can face the prospect of significant retribution on another front – such as funding cuts. It leads to lobbying campaigns that are highly tentative, as any state or federal minister knows they only have to listen politely, and that local governments are not in the position to follow through. Local governments do not have any weapons with which to hit the state and federal government, aside from strongly worded media statements. Council media announcements can be highly annoying for state and federal governments, but being a pest is not the same as effective lobbying.

When local governments do coalesce around an issue, and argue cogently, its impact and power are limited. The only well-resourced and long-term campaign by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) was its campaign for constitutional recognition, which was supported by almost all sectors of local government. It began in 2008 with a constitutional summit organised by the ALGA. Driven by two recent federal court cases, which raised the possibility of some restrictions on direct federal funding to local government, constitutional recognition was seen as a key initiative for the sector. ALGA was supported by an expert panel on constitutional recognition in December 2011. This panel helped foster bi-partisan support to protect the federal government's ability to fund local governments directly (ALGA, 2013).

On 9 May 2013, Prime Minister Julia Gillard called a referendum to acknowledge local government within the Australian constitutional framework. It was a sensible, needed and uncontroversial constitutional tweak that would simply remove some funding uncertainty. It represented

a successful campaign running for more than five years by the ALGA. Laws allowing campaign funding for the referendum passed Parliament on 21 March 2013. On 24 June 2013, with almost unanimous support, the *Constitution Alteration (Local Government Bill) 2013* began the process for a referendum. Given that federal parliament was at its fractious worst, with opposition leader Tony Abbott refusing every government action, the ALGA could rightly claim a significant lobbying victory on an important issue to all local governments, in a challenging political environment.

Two days later on 26 June, a successful leadership challenge toppled Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Shortly afterward, her successor Kevin Rudd announced an early election on August 4, which ended the referendum, as it had to be held in a strict timeline. The ALGA was not consulted. Rudd saw a political advantage in holding an earlier election. Local government was not a factor at all in these calculations, and the entire issue received only minor or scattered coverage. It showed clearly that local government was irrelevant in serious political moves at the federal level. Six years of concerted political lobbying vanished, and the most critical campaign of local government's peak body was ripped from the political agenda. The ALGA was left to campaign for costs associated with the failed attempt at a referendum. Despite bi-partisan support, and substantial efforts, it has never reappeared. The loss of constitutional recognition was the most definite sign of the weakness of local government in the decision-making process.

Overcoming the power relationships is difficult enough, but councils are often their own worst enemy. In recent times, local governments have campaigned and lobbied on high-profile issues such as moving Australia Day, a part of a #changethedate campaign. As a catalyst, Fremantle Council aimed to move Australia Day celebrations from 26 January 2017. Facing a backlash, the council changed tack, holding a citizenship ceremony while looking for alternatives. Mayor, Dr Brad Pettitt, acknowledged that consultation could have been more extensive, but he was happy to start the conversation (Turner, 2017). Fremantle's efforts did start a discussion in local government circles. Following a move by Hobart Council, a move to

shift Australia Day passed 64 to 62 at an ALGA National Representatives meeting in Canberra in June 2017 – a razor-thin margin indicating some clear divisions over the issue. The motion aimed to encourage local governments to consider options as a basis to lobby the federal government (Whitson, 2017). In July, the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) moved against a similar proposal, 27 votes to 26. Some councillors demonstrated they were highly adept at the killer grab. Hobart Lord Mayor Sue Hickey revived a classic slur calling her opponents being ‘pale, male and stale’, and grabbing front-page newspaper coverage around Australia (McIntyre and Pigram, 2017).

To be effective, such lobbying campaigns on sensitive, divisive and complex problems require years of considered effort coupled with a communication plan to explain the necessity for the change. Alliances need to be built within the community and across the sector. With the voting patterns, any considered analysis would have suggested a step back to gain stronger sector and community support. The initial push was for a national discussion, but this changed quickly in August, when Yarra City Council, an inner urban council in Melbourne, voted to replace its citizenship ceremony. It aimed to:

- hold a small-scale, ‘culturally sensitive’ event featuring a smoking ceremony on January 26.
- adopt a communications plan that focuses on ‘broader community education to help people better understand Aboriginal community experiences of January 26’.
- refer to the day as ‘January 26’ until another term is adopted nationally.
- officially support the #changethedate campaign in council publications and social media.
- consider ways to lobby the Federal Government to change the date of Australia Day.’ (Clure, 2017)

Darebin City Council followed suit. In reaching this decision, Yarra Council did not even employ rudimentary steps of polling, and consultation as the basis for their lobbying. Yarra Council had surveyed about 300 people in a street poll before making its decision – a deeply suspect method of gathering information. Darebin had reportedly surveyed 81 people (Gomes, 2017). The communication plan followed from the decision – no real attempt was made to take the community with them before making the decision. Given the response in Fremantle, the result was predictable for such a divisive issue. After making its announcement in August, the council received a backlash of negative media commentary, community complaints, and even right-wing protests. Campaigns of this type bolster the media profiles of councillors, raise the ire of Coalition politicians, conservative media commentators and talkback radio hosts, to create a hostile media environment. Social media added to the volume of the coverage of these issues and conservative media commentators such as Andrew Bolt were prominent in condemning the action (Bolt, 2017).

Such a strong negative media reaction may not have troubled the councillors advocating the change; they may even have expected it. These councillors felt passionate about issues of indigenous and non-indigenous reconciliation. Given the progressive political nature of the inner urban municipalities, which were driving the change, many in the community would support Yarra Council's initiative. However, this campaign was compromised from the outset. Local governments were sharply divided over the issue and without clear community support, the campaign had no force, and it is not surprising that the federal government shrugged off these efforts. After shifting the Australia Day ceremony, Yarra and Darebin Council were stripped of its citizenship powers, and the campaign spluttered out. Some local governments still made some supportive noises, but the issue had lost momentum. In November 2017, the federal government even moved a further 54 citizenship ceremonies to Australia Day (Masanauskas, 2017). The lobbying campaign to shift Australia Day by local government could have been a significant symbolic action to highlight the issue of indigenous reconciliation. It could have been the

starting point for a national discussion. However, the lobbying campaign was executed so appallingly, it had no chance of even limited success. With its fragmented nature, a couple of local governments could undermine a national lobbying effort, with a poorly thought out campaign.

Noisy lobbying efforts also detract from critical campaigns such as 'cost shifting' where state governments have re-allocated billions of dollars' worth of services to local government without proper compensation (MAV, 2017). Local Government NSW has argued: 'that cost shifting continues to place a significant burden on councils' financial situation'. Cost shifting means a lack of funds for emergency services, public libraries, and child care (Local Government NSW, 2014). As a result, local governments do not have enough funds to assess development applications accurately, control animals, or adequately implement any of the myriad of services it is meant to provide. In short, cost shifting is a direct threat to delivering baseline services to local communities, and it places intense pressure on rates. Such campaigning to redress these issues requires detailed and forensic analysis to present a clear case to the public, the media, and the government. It is not controversial or suited to the killer grab or gaining colourful front-page coverage. Organisations such as Local Government NSW and the Municipal Association of Victoria have issued report after report highlighting the seriousness of the issue, yet it cannot gain traction. Such media exposure is essential to obtain political leverage as a basis for a lobbying campaign. Cost shifting remains the most crucial element in the financial relations between councils and state governments, and it is barely on the agenda.

Local government could undoubtedly improve its basic lobbying skills. But no amount of improvement can redress the fundamental power imbalance between local and state governments. The political reality means that local governments are not in a position to effectively lobby state or federal governments. This situation is unfortunate, as local governments can represent the views of communities in a way that other bodies just cannot. They can be a voice for their community to show the often savage or poor impact of state or federal government decisions. Local

government can help set the political agenda. Rather than being clown hall, local governments should be a vital part of the political discussion. The reality is that they remain minor players, and the Australian political discussion is more impoverished as a result of it. While there is a lot of talk of partnership between the spheres of government, the imbalance in power arrangements often leads to poor decisions at the state and federal level – with plans then poorly implemented at the local level. It is a truism to say: ‘Local government is the level of government closest to people,’ but it deserves a lot more respect than it is currently getting. Some of its problems are self-inflicted by grandstanding on issues that create more heat than light while neglecting systemic issues. It needs to research its lobbying and media campaigns and think through issues. To succeed as a lobbyist, local government needs to be respected. If it wants to change its image, local government must lobby more professionally, focusing on critical issues. It needs to research, strategically plan and act in a uniform manner. The real challenge for local governments is to build on its considerable community trust to change its image to gain that respect.

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Interviews

Victorian Local Government Minister Natalie Hutchins, 27 September 2017

Contributors

Kevin Brianton is head of the media and communication department at La Trobe. He has worked for more than 30 years in journalism, market research and public relations with a special interest in communication between communities and their governments. He developed a community consultation framework that was used in various forms across Australia as well as Asia, the UK and Canada, for which he gained a Public Relations Institute of Australia national award. He has also won PRIA awards in issues and crisis management, internal communications, community relations, event management and has worked extensively in developing annual reports in quadruple bottom line communication. Kevin was made a fellow of the PRIA in 2012. He holds a Master of Arts and a PhD from La Trobe University, as well as a Graduate Diploma in Public Relations from RMIT.

Sophie Buchanan is passionate about creating change through advocacy and communications, working over the past decade on issues as diverse as workplace safety, alcohol harm, and workplace discrimination. If this work has taught her one thing, it's that change doesn't happen overnight – but through careful, systematic and evidence-informed effort. Sophie's previous role as Head of Prevention with RSPCA Victoria focused on raising awareness and understanding, changing behaviour, shifting social norms, and building stronger legislative frameworks to improve the lives of animals. She recently commenced work in the infrastructure sector in a major communications role.

Mark Civitella lectures in political communication at La Trobe University and is a Fellow of the Public Relations Institute of Australia. Mark has

worked on many political campaigns as a consultant and political researcher. He has been a Director of research companies specialising in political and issue research. Mark has been a media commentator on public and political affairs for over two decades.

David Hawkins (Dip T, MA (Comms), Managing Director, Socom) is one of Australia's most respected issues and crisis managers. He has assisted organisations manage high-profile incidents such as the installation of SmartMeters in Victoria, recovery from the 2016 Census website outage, Marriage Equality Postal Survey, Mars and Snickers extortion, the Indonesian mudflow disaster, the Cranbourne landfill gas leak and the Black Saturday Bushfires. A key part of his work is undertaking post incident reviews including the Federal Government's Home Insulation Scheme and a major power outage in New Zealand.

In 2017, he was a member of the Prime Minister's Cyber Security Taskforce to improve Australia's resilience to a cyber-attack.

David's 30 years of experience covers a broad range of sectors including government, energy, infrastructure, health, agriculture, food, construction and waste.

David is highly awarded, both nationally and internationally and has won the highly coveted International Association of Business Communicators highest accolade – the Golden Quill Business Issues Award for his work on the Mars and Snickers extortion.

Dr Mitchell Hobbs is Lecturer in Media and Public Relations at the University of Sydney. An award-winning lecturer and researcher, Mitchell's current research projects are concerned with social media, political lobbying, strategic communication strategies and communication power. Mitchell also possesses high-level experience in media and public relations. Most notably, he worked in political public relations for Prime Minister Julia Gillard from 2011 to 2012. In this role, he was responsible for the implementation of the Hon Julia Gillard's media and communication activities in her electorate in Melbourne. He was also responsible for

managing key stakeholder relationships. Mitchell's professional experiences and research activities have given him unique insights into the consequences and uses of new communications technologies, especially in regards to their capacity for social and political change. He is the Degree Director for the Master of Strategic Public Relations at the University of Sydney.

Judy Ryan (B Bus RMIT) has worked in marketing, communications and publications at BHP and Charles Sturt University, and in the secondary school and health sectors. She established You're Welcome Relocation Service to relocate and retain professionals and families transitioning to regional Victoria.

She has volunteered with many organisations including Wellsprings for Women, Yarra Community Friends, Caritas Australia and a variety of community campaigns for change.

Judy was an independent candidate in the 2016 City of Yarra local government election, supporting the trial of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in North Richmond and Abbotsford after observing an escalation in drug overdoses in her neighbourhood. With three other residents, Judy formed Residents for Victoria Street Drug Solutions (RVSDS) in November 2016. RVSDS now has a core team of 15 members as well as hundreds of local residents as supporters.

Dr Clare Shamier teaches at Swinburne University of Technology in the Media and Communications Department. Her research area focuses on international development and communication, exploring the nexus between security, development and media management. Clare has also worked on a number of projects and as a consultant for international organisations, as well as authoring academic publications across political economy, feminist and development studies.

Mark J Sheehan is currently a senior lecturer in public relations in the School of Communication & Creative Arts at Deakin University, Australia. He is a Fellow of the PRIA and also a member and APR of the Institute of

Public Relations Malaysia. He is former chair of the National Education Committee of the PRIA 2009–16. Since 2016 he has been senior counsel for Resonate PR a Melbourne based consultancy.

From 2004 to 2015 he edited the *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* and has published widely in the areas of lobbying, investor relations, crisis communication and public relations history in Australia.

He is the author and editor of over 30 publications on public relations including books, book chapters, articles and conference papers. Prior to joining Deakin he worked in senior communications roles in the finance, professional associations and publishing sectors.

Lukasz Swiatek is a Lecturer in Communication and Public Relations in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University, New Zealand. His research interests include strategic communication, recognition, and entertainment. He has taught a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in New Zealand and Australian universities. Previously, he worked in Australia in publishing and news (as a reporter and editor) and in integrated communication, in both the corporate and not-for-profit sectors.

Noel Turnbull has had more than 45 years' experience in communication strategy and issues management and was a Parliamentary Press Secretary before establishing his own public relations consultancy. The company, initially known as Turnbull Fox Phillips and then as Turnbull Porter Novelli, became Australia's largest public relations consultancy. Noel was TPN's CEO, Chairman and a Porter Novelli International Global Director until his retirement. He was an Adjunct Professor in the School of Media and Communications at RMIT University for many years and has published widely on communications.

Peter Volker (BSc (Forestry) GradDipSc PhD MBA (Professional)) is a professional forester who spent three years (2013–16) as an adviser in the Abbott and Turnbull governments, primarily for forestry and related

portfolio matters. He spent six years (2005–11) as the National President of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, a voluntary position, during a tumultuous period for the forestry sector in Australia. During this time he was involved in making presentations to State and federal Governments in formal inquiries and informal meetings with politicians of all persuasions. As a ministerial adviser he gained experience in dealing with advocates and persuaders who were seeking support or favours from government, including from industry lobbyists, individuals, parliamentarians and their staff (other Ministers, government backbenchers, opposition, minor parties and independents).