

From **The New Matilda's POLICY PORTAL**
Editorial: the TAAA principle

By: Miriam Lyons
22 December 2006

The policy portal has come a long way since July 2005 when we added a separate policy section to the website and the weekly email. After the launch of *Reclaiming our Common Wealth* and the creation of a separate policy edition in June this year, the policy portal has evolved into a virtual think tank; developing new ideas, stimulating debate, and promoting policies that are both practical and sustainable over the long term.

One of the benefits of sites like New Matilda is the freedom to step outside the daily news cycle – or the mind-numbing minutiae of technocratic policy debates – and look at the bigger picture. This is important, because behind the day to day tussles over specific reform agendas, there is always a deeper and more fundamental struggle, where every debate about solutions to long-term unemployment is also a debate about human nature; every debate about poverty alleviation is also a debate about what constitutes an acceptable level of inequality; and every debate about the level of social spending is also a debate about whether there is such a thing as society, and, if so, what a good one would look like.

For a long time the advocates of fair and sustainable policies have, on the whole, been losing this debate – in parliaments, in the mainstream media, and in significant chunks of Australian society. A huge amount has been written – much of it in New Matilda – about why this is so. Some possible explanations are that:

- a lot of time is spent saying 'no' without articulating what 'yes' might look like. More energy is invested in defending the status quo or 'turning back the clock' than in developing new ideas for positive change;
- when alternatives are proposed, they often turn into 'shopping lists' – demands are made for more funding or specific incremental reforms, without explaining the underlying values on which those demands are based;
- we often suffer from the same short-term thinking that we criticise in our political parties, by failing to plan for and invest in the future.

New Matilda's policy portal is an attempt to overcome some of these problems by going back to first principles: Why do we have a public health system? What rights *should* we have at work? What is the purpose of a public broadcaster? In this way we hope to reinvent public policy to fulfil its original purpose – enabling citizens to cooperate to build our common wealth in ways that disconnected individuals and unfettered markets cannot.

Next year the Policy Portal will continue its transformation into a pluralist, public-interest think-tank. This will involve a few changes. We'll be releasing more policy proposals and discussion papers. The policy edition will be published monthly instead of weekly, with a greater variety of articles and an even stronger focus on new ideas. We'll be holding more events and engaging more actively in public debates, particularly in the lead-up to the federal election.

New Matilda readers will probably be familiar with the argument that the short-term thinking of Australian governments is damaging our long-term interests. Too often election announcements are nothing more than vague promises shaped to reflect the latest polls of swinging voters or marginal seats, yet insubstantial enough to be easily forgotten after the election - we can expect more of this in 2007. We deserve better.

In response to every major policy announcement by either major political party the Policy Portal will be asking questions like:

- Does it rob from the future to feed the present?
- Is it based on consistent principles and honestly held beliefs or is it a marketing campaign dressed up as policy?
- Does it give more people the chance to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, or does it concentrate power and influence in fewer hands?

For every criticism of the policies on offer we will follow the TAAA principle: There Are Always Alternatives. We will provide a permanent home for our readers and contributors to seek out, develop, and spread the word about those alternatives.