

THE CONVERSATION



2017 | Annual stakeholder
report

A YEAR OF RECORD AUDIENCE GROWTH

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Three adjacent revolutions currently affect the cultural and political life of Australia and of western democracies generally. The first (in no particular order) is the economic collapse of newspapers. The second is a collapse in the public's respect for elites. The third is change in the way information is communicated. The Conversation responds to all three.

Newspapers are suffering from the redirection of advertising dollars to Facebook and Google. Some people would expand the endangered population to include television news or even "all traditional medias." But to keep it simple, let's just say that budget constraints are putting newspapers, and their contribution to public discourse, under significant threat. In 2005, for example, Australian newspapers employed approximately thirty-five specialist science reporters. Today there are five. The Conversation has published approximately 600 science and technology articles in the past 12 months – attracting 20 million reads. This is from a total of 4644 published articles.

Optimists point out that The New York Times and The Washington Post are experimenting with different business models and finding larger audiences. Pessimists assert that all this will accomplish – and this brings us to the second revolution – is to heighten the self-regard and insularity of these particular newspapers.

A profitable Washington Post is good news, but it doesn't speak to a single father with two jobs or a displaced factory worker who cannot send her children to university.

The second wave of change flows from the concerns of just such citizens. It includes the Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump, popular distrust of established institutions, louder nationalist and populist voices, "fake news" and the aforementioned "echo chamber" – the increasing propensity of citizens to listen only to those who share their views, whether their preferred source of truth be the New York Times or Fox News. Many Americans are so angry that they vote against their own economic interest in protest. There and in the UK, the major parties seem adrift. An alarmist but defensible summary would be that representative democracy itself has broken down. We may someday call this revolution "The Great Disaffection".

Part of The Conversation's response to the decline of the press has been the creation of an award-winning fact-checking unit, staffed with editors in Sydney and Melbourne. Lately, we've tried to respond to the second wave as well. In order to cover the Queensland election, we deployed fact-checkers to Townsville, where James Cook University lent us temporary space.

Being in a regional city gave the team perspectives they would not have had in a state capital. As one of them

put it, "We ate in local restaurants and talked to the Uber drivers". Any journalist ought to be able to do that. Being analytical journalists, who are not obliged to cover breaking news, enables The Conversation to travel light and be observant.

The third revolution we wish to call out is not just the fact that so much information is now delivered on screens but the ways technology allows it to be delivered. This is part of the "digital revolution" but only an ancillary part.

People don't read any more. They surf. It takes more than good writing to grab their attention. That attention is hard to hold. Text is losing its primacy as it becomes possible to enhance understanding with charts and graphs that move and to imbed videos of supporting speakers. Hovering over a word can take us to its definition. Hovering over a date can call up a summary of important events in that year. All the paths curiosity might take can be explored – but at a speed that makes reflection difficult.

Newspapers will not be replaced with newspapers. Or not with mass newspapers translated onto screens. If public discourse is to be preserved, it must be conducted in new, non-boring ways. The Conversation has a small team devoted to storytelling. One of its members is a cartoonist. We see multimedia capability as fundamental to our mission.

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The Conversation has published approximately 600 science and technology articles in the past 12 months – attracting 20 million reads.

Andrew Jaspan founded The Conversation in 2011 on a simple model: making the knowledge of scholars and researchers accessible to the general public by having journalists commission and edit analytical and opinion pieces written by academic experts – and delivering the resulting stories online. This turned out to be a new form of journalism.

The Conversation has survived for six years. Like all successful innovations, it benefits multiple stakeholders. Universities support it because it helps them achieve their objective of community engagement – the other two being teaching and research – and gives them metrics on the matter. Academic authors like it because it gives them a bigger audience and improves their chances of tenure. In consequence they write for free, put up with being edited and submit far more articles than we can publish. Readers like it because it teaches them new things every day, and helps them understand current events. Society benefits because The Conversation's

flow of fact, analysis and well-argued opinion improves the quality of political debate.

The Conversation's business model is not yet wholly sustainable. It is free, both to individuals who read it online and to republishers. Aside from an academic jobs board, we don't accept advertising. University membership fees cover roughly half our costs. Four thousand readers donated \$400,000 in our recent fundraising drive – and we are working hard to increase those figures. Governments, foundations and major corporations have helped fill the gap but cannot be depended on. The first two have a strong preference for funding specific projects rather than ongoing operations, and corporate donors typically want to take a “fresh look” at their giving every few years.

What we need is an endowment. We aspire to follow the example of the Grattan Institute, which is partly funded by a \$34 million endowment, with major contributions from a consortium of Federal and

State governments, corporations and foundations. A corpus of \$50 million, nominally earning 5% per annum would guarantee The Conversation's viability. Foundation grants could be focused on intellectual entrepreneurship that broadened our reach.

We hope you can help us realise this potential.



Harrison Young
Chairman

A STANDOUT YEAR IN 2017

The past 12 months have been the most successful in The Conversation's short life, with record breaking audience growth, the launch of a raft of innovative new editorial features and continued expansion of the global network.

It has taken just seven years for The Conversation to go from a made-in-Melbourne start up to a highly regarded and innovate media organisation. The original idea, launched in Melbourne in 2011, was to create engagement service to allow Australian universities to share knowledge with the public and fill a gap created by the collapse of quality media.

Those early aspirations were quickly met and we have since built a global network of sites bringing academic expertise to audiences starved of quality content. The Conversation started 2017 with teams in Africa, the UK, the US, France, and Australia. After a period of uncertainty as founder Andrew Jaspan left the project, we launched new sites in Canada and Jakarta and appointed an editor in New Zealand.

We have a united and highly motivated senior management team that has implemented changes to drive audience growth and improve the quality of the editorial product, cementing the global reputation of The Conversation Australia as a trusted brand known for editorial rigour and quality journalism.

Towards 10 million

A key part of the strategy in 2017 has been "Toward 10 million", an ambitious project to double the number of monthly unique browsers to our site. The strategy has delivered staggering growth of 80 per cent in 12 months, with unique browsers increasing from 3.8 million in October last year to 6.8 million in 2017 and 35 million additional monthly reads through republication.

This has occurred at the same time as the introduction of editorial changes to consolidate The Conversation's reputation for innovative quality journalism. Throughout 2017 The Conversation Australia was publishing around 20 per cent fewer articles each week but these articles are attracting a far greater readership than ever before.

This is also due to a new focus on multimedia, with the appointment of Sunanda Creagh as the head of digital storytelling. A greater investment of time in interactive graphics and other forms of multimedia have been key to the increasingly popularity of conversation articles.

Public interest journalism

This year The Conversation also played an active role in the public discussion of how best to support public interest journalism at a time when the business models for many media outlets have placed it under threat.

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The strategy has delivered staggering growth of 80 per cent in 12 months.

Editor Misha Ketchell wrote a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Public Interest Journalism and appeared before the Inquiry in August. He proposed defining public interest journalism as an activity that involves the dissemination of quality information essential for democracy and an informed citizenry. The Conversation is exemplary of this type of journalism: a not-for-profit project that shares academic expertise to inform the public, rebuild trust in experts and provide free and reliable information.

Creative and ethical leadership

The Conversation Australia aspires to a culture marked by creativity, ethical conduct and the pursuit of professional excellence.

A recent staff survey revealed that 100 per cent of staff feel motivated at work and connected to The Conversation's mission. In qualitative feedback staff members said they were “passionate about the importance of what we do” and “love the job”.

A new board

TCMG has warmly welcomed the appointment of Harrison Young as our new Chairman and there is a great deal of optimism about our future. We thank outgoing Chairman, Robert Johanson and retiring Directors: Andrew Jaspan, Ben Heyes, Belinda Robinson, David Whiteing, Peter Doherty, Terry Cutler and Vince FitzGerald. With the editorial board, the board is helping us create a robust structure for the future.

Global Leadership

The management team in Australia has taken a leading role in supporting the other members of The Conversation network, with Lisa Watts chairing a recent global meeting of CEOs and editors to agree on new rules for fundraising, licence fees and territorial operation.

Successful partnerships and collaboration

All our 38 university members have continued to support us via membership and we've started pilot projects in Indonesia and New Zealand, with editors

based there working with local academics.

Many other significant organisations support our work including: The Australian Cancer Research Centre, the AMP Foundation, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and The City of Melbourne. Corrs Chambers Westgarth generously provides pro bono legal services.

The Victorian State Government funds us to do high-impact work with the Department of Education mapping our topics to curriculum. This crucial funding also allows us to publish articles on issues that matter to innovators, entrepreneurs, policy makers and thinking citizens everywhere.

More authors, new authors

During 2017 the Australian editorial team commissioned work from 1800 academics who had not previously written for The Conversation. The team has a clear focus on working with early and mid-career researchers who may not currently have a media profile. Editors provide regular free training for academics at partner universities. We also hold masterclasses that provide more detailed instruction on pitching and writing.

Loyal Audience and Donations

And finally, events to launch our annual collection of top articles, published by Melbourne University Press,

have sold out in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. Earlier this year more than 4000 of our loyal readers showed they cared enough about The Conversation to make a donation.

Conclusion

This response to what we do would not be possible if we did not relentlessly pursue quality and produce journalism readers can trust. The executive team is united and the editorial and development teams are highly skilled and empowered to innovate in the pursuit of further success.

We jealously guard our reputation for professionalism, accuracy and quality editorial and we are looking forward to another year of tremendous innovation and growth in 2018. We thank you for all your support and look forward to working with you even more closely in the future.



Lisa Watts
Executive Director



Misha Ketchell
Editor

THE STORY OF 2017

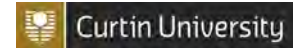
TC editions in AU, UK, US, Africa, France.

Monthly audience of 2.7m users onsite and reach of 23m through republication.

94,000 newsletter, 125,000 Facebook, and 90,000 Twitter followers.



ANZSOG joins as a member!



January

February

March

April

May

June



University of the Sunshine Coast
Queensland, Australia



Friends of The Conversation campaign brings >4,000 supporters.



Global Perspectives

TC Indonesia launches in Bahasa and English.



Launch of Yearbook 2017: 50 standout articles from Australia's top thinkers.



July

August

September

October

November

December

New Zealand Editor appointed.

The University of Waikato, Victoria University Wellington, Massey University and Lincoln University join as members. Royal Society Te Apārangi and The New Zealand Science Media Centre join as media partners.

TC Canada launches.



Monthly audience of 6.8m users onsite and reach of 35m through republication.



Monthly audience of 7m+ users onsite and reach of 35m through republication.

135,000 newsletter, 200,00 Facebook, 135,000 Twitter followers.



UNIVERSITY MEMBERSHIP

As a non-profit, The Conversation relies on the support of university and research institutes who pay an annual membership fee. We're delighted to announce we've secured membership of the vast majority of the sector, with 38 of the 39 universities members to The Conversation in Australia.

In 2017 we welcomed the Australian New Zealand School of Government as a new member.

Member benefits include: metrics that track social impact and engagement; on-site member designation; free events listings; on campus training seminars; access to student internship programs; and advance notice on editorial planning through daily expert requests that invite members to pitch their academics on items we're chasing.

GLOBAL NETWORK

In 2017 we launched two global editions in Canada and Indonesia and enlisted a New Zealand editor.

The Conversation now has editors in 25 cities in Africa, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, New Zealand, France, the UK and the US. Feasibility work is also underway on a Spanish-language edition, due to launch in 2018.

Each local edition is funded by universities and foundations in those countries. Content is shared across editions, giving local academics the potential for increased global exposure to their work.

In August TC Global became known as Global Perspectives, addressing a change in its approach to global, knowledge-based journalism with a continued focus on the Global South, with articles commissioned predominantly via teams in Africa and Indonesia with assistance from other editions. It also includes globally significant articles selected from the six TCs; Canada, France, UK, Africa, US and Australia.

Global
Perspectives



FRIENDS OF THE CONVERSATION

Independent information is vital in a functioning democracy, and trust is an ever-dwindling asset in the media landscape.

This year, more than 4,000 people donated and became a Friend. Thanks to their generous support, we continue our work to improve the quality of public information in Australia and beyond. We can check more facts, report more research and provide more informed explanation of complex problems.

One of our most innovative supporters, the AMP Foundation, invited us to fundraise for their AMP Zipline challenge. Readers could fundraise \$5000 each to ride a zipline between two of Sydney's tallest buildings. We'd like to thank David Moffatt, Lindy Shelmerdine, Rhiannon Shepherd, Adele Storch and James Hutchinson for their bravery and fundraising support.



David, Rhiannon and Lindy after making their big leap.



Brave Adele jumps for science.

AUDIENCE REACH

This year we have seen a large growth in audience traffic, aligned perfectly with our goal to hit 10 million users. In October, we had 6.7million individual users come to The Conversation website - 3 million more users than October 2016. In July, after finally reaching over 5 million users, we coined a digital strategy that would help ensure we'd double our onsite traffic figures.

We've implemented a more aggressive social media strategy, with videos, posts, cross-promotion and opportunity for community interaction. We launched on Google AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages) to increase our search engagement on mobile and we will soon launch on Apple News. Each of these projects is aligned with increasing mobile engagement. We have experimented in producing special newsletters related to different issues/breaking news. We sent out these newsletters on the day the Finkel Review was released, the day before the Queensland elections and when North Korea last tested their ICBMS.

Our republishing network remains strong, and The Conversation has 35 million extra views through other media outlets. The ABC remains our strongest republisher in Australia, with international publications Quartz, Fast Company, CNN, Spain's El Pais and IFLScience remaining some of our largest republishers.

Pieces republished from The Conversation generate substantially higher engagement than typical ABC news stories. The average engaged time for TC articles is 66 seconds, compared to ABC News' average of ~37 seconds. ABC journalist Patrick Wright is embedded in The Conversation office, attending all news conferences and republishing pieces suited to their audience.

This year we released our **2017 Yearbook: 50 Standout Articles from Australia's Top Thinkers**. We celebrated the release with sold-out book launches in Melbourne, Brisbane, Wellington, Perth, Adelaide and Sydney.



Molly Glassey
Audience Development Manager

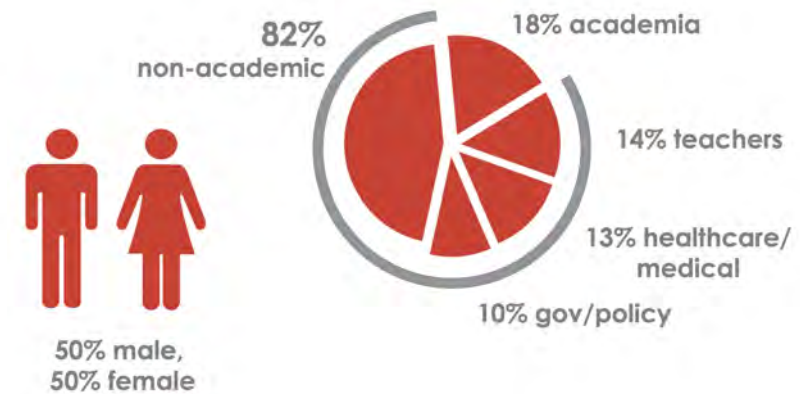
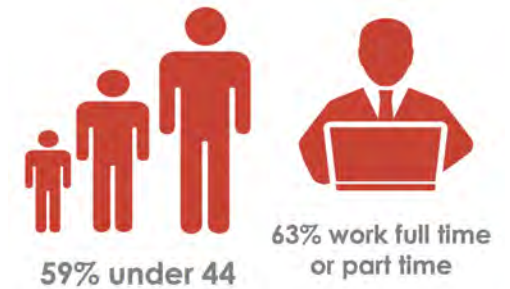
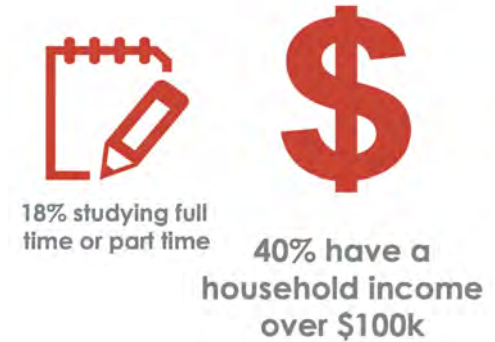
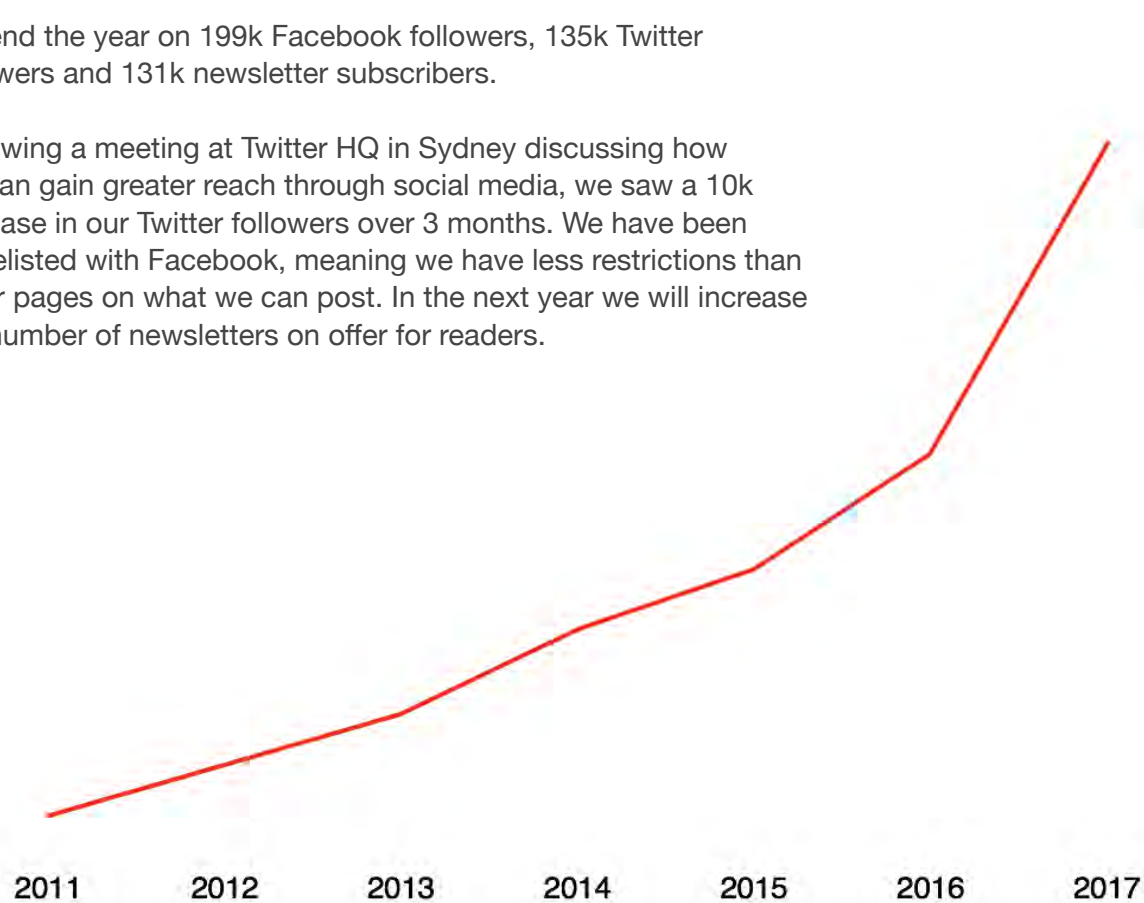


ON SITE READS

Our daily newsletter, Facebook and Twitter channels are our main traffic sources and have all grown well above 100K followers this year.

We end the year on 199k Facebook followers, 135k Twitter followers and 131k newsletter subscribers.

Following a meeting at Twitter HQ in Sydney discussing how we can gain greater reach through social media, we saw a 10k increase in our Twitter followers over 3 months. We have been whitelisted with Facebook, meaning we have less restrictions than other pages on what we can post. In the next year we will increase the number of newsletters on offer for readers.



MEDIA + REPLICATION

We believe quality information should be accessible to all and that's why we publish under a Creative Commons license, which allows anyone, anywhere to republish our articles. This makes it possible to seamlessly distribute, share and reuse creative content which exists in digital form and is distributed online.

In 2017, we put together a short video titled 'Why anyone can steal our articles' explaining why we publish under Creative Commons, and how our republishing works. By allowing open source republication of our content, we speak to the heart of our mission to improve access to quality information in the public domain.

To date, some 20,000 sites have republished our articles. This republication network delivers us a massive readership of 35 million each and every month.



DIGITAL STORYTELLING

The Conversation launched its flagship podcast program titled Trust Me, I'm An Expert to instant success.

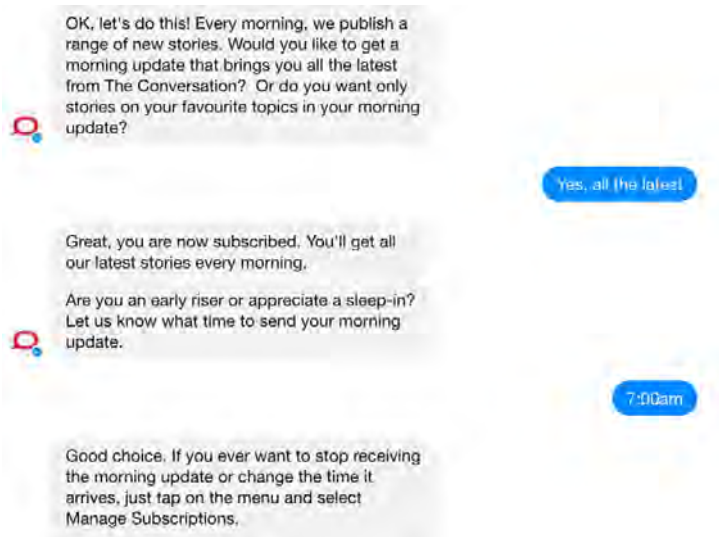
Produced by editors across the sections and presented by Sunanda Creagh, the monthly podcast showcases the best stories from Australia's brightest academic minds, asking experts to reflect on evidence that helps us better understand the big issues in the news.

Our first episode, which included three stories on the theme of same-sex marriage, garnered more than 6000 downloads in its first week. It was listed among the top 30 Australian podcasts by Apple iTunes and among the top 6 in the news category.

Trust Me I'm An Expert is the result of a collaborative effort among editors in Australia and its success shows the value of experimenting with non-text media, such as audio, to bring academic expertise to new audiences and drive our overall traffic.



INTERACTIVES



Chatbot

Our chatbot works like this: users open up the Facebook messenger app, and send a message to The Conversation. In a short space of time, our chatbot acquired 1000 new users.

Videos

Short videos, informed by academic expertise, have proved extremely popular for our audience, mostly through Facebook but also through Twitter and onsite.

Molly Glassey has produced the lion's share of these videos, which deliver informative stories

in a fun way using a distinctive Conversation house style—a familiar set of colours, fonts and text arrangements that has helped build our brand.



Sunanda Creagh
Head of Digital Storytelling

AUTHORS

We have a growing community of more than 58,900 academics and researchers from 2,218 institutions who write for The Conversation. In 2017 we have published 4644 articles from 3628 Australian academics.

Five authors featured in the The Best Australian Science Writing 2017; Peter Ellerton, Rob Brooks, Robert Fuller and John Long.

Alice Gorman, featured with her piece Trace Fossils: The Silence of Ediacara, the Shadow of Uranium, which we republished from Griffith Review State of Hope.

The essay won the Bragg UNSW Press Prize for Science Writing 2017, which recognises the best short, non-fiction piece of science writing for a general audience.



The article *Conservative amendments to same-sex marriage bill would make Australia's laws the world's weakest* was discussed for 28 minutes in the Senate November 27, 2017. The piece by Brendan Gogarty and Anja Hilkemeijer from the University of Tasmania was referred to by Senator Anne Urquhart while debating the same-sex marriage legislation.



That Conversation article I wrote about Medicare and the dark web led to me testifying before the Senate committee on the breach.

Robert Merkel, Monash



I always find writing for The Conversation to be very easy and straightforward, and a pleasurable process. I always really appreciate the advice from editorial staff, and am always keen to see what minor suggestions or changes are made so I can improve my writing in the future.

Bryan Cranston, Swinburne University of Technology



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ENGAGEMENT

Congrats all on the Factcheck production – this was a long effort but worth it. Apart from the almost 4,000 readers today, I was at the ARENA Parliamentary Showcase event here tonight where amongst others, Mark Butler mentioned that he'd read it.

Kenneth Baldwin, Australian National University



“ There was an immediate reaction from media globally with requests for interviews and photos, and the article was instrumental in kicking off the broader media interest. Several scientists I know said they had read my article, and after it was republished by the ABC, everyone I know read it.

Within about an hour of the article going online, I was contacted by a scientist from Queensland, who had some sunfish information which turned out to be very valuable for the paper I am now working on.

Marianne Nyegaard, Murdoch University

After writing an article

66%

of authors are contacted by media



52% print media



27% television



36% web media



83% radio

PITCHING & WRITING MASTERCLASS

We continued to deliver our highly successful Pitching and Writing Masterclass.

Designed in collaboration with the University of Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education, the paid full-day workshop teaches participants how to persuade influential people outside their field – including funding assessors, politicians, the media, industry and the public – that their work matters.

After learning the basic principles of clear, concise communication, participants workshop their 'pitches' -- summaries of their research that can be pitched to editors for broader media coverage or used to distill findings in grant applications.

Three masterclasses were conducted - one at Macquarie University, one at the University of South Australia and one at the University of Melbourne.

In post-workshop surveys, every participant in 2017 rated the masterclass as either 'excellent' or 'outstanding'.



CURIOUS KIDS

'Curious Kids' is a series where we ask kids to send in questions they'd like an expert to answer. We ask an expert in the field to answer and explain in simple, easy-to-understand language.

In the past twelve months, The Conversation published 25 'Curious Kids' articles by more than 30 authors resulting in over 290K reads.

Our most popular pieces were republished by Science.com, ABC Splash, Australasian Science and others.

The series has become popular with adults too. We received so many questions that we've launched a follow-up series titled ***I Have Always Wondered.***

29 INTERNS

Our internship program gives prospective journalists the opportunity to gain practical experience and actively contribute to our newsroom. Twenty-nine interns from 15 universities went through our popular internship program this year.

Interns are in each editorial section, multimedia, audience engagement and data journalism.

Interns join part time for 12 weeks and complete a structured program of recruitment, induction, and mentoring. Interns are exposed to the full range of editorial activities, including: pitching ideas, research, commissioning, fact checking, editing, publication, and social media.

The intern program is managed by our Deputy Editor, Charis Palmer.

“ Freedom to work, support in workshopping article ideas and seeing the results of publication.

“ The Conversation provided much more support and guidance before and during the internship than I have experienced in any other placement. The Conversation takes the time to clearly set out how they do things, what they're looking for and how to succeed.

We have 8 former interns on the editorial team.



“ Internships like this have the power to influence real change in the world, and I would (and have) strongly recommended to my peers.

Julie Carli, Podcast Production Intern 2017



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2017



HIGHLIGHTS: ARTS + CULTURE

This year we asked a range of classical musical scholars to explain major works in our series Decoding the Music Masterpieces.

On a different note, we looked at classic albums in the *My Favourite Album* series and considered canonical works of Australian theatre in The Great Australian Plays.

Our Friday essays continued to resonate with readers. These longer essays explored a variety of topics including the decline of political cartooning in Australia, the story behind the creation of Prussian Blue, the cultural meanings of wild horses, the depiction of characters with autism on TV and the contents of Germaine Greer's mail.

We covered major news events such as the sudden deaths of John Clarke, Bill Leak and Dr G. Yunupingu and issues in the news such as the state of the ABC; the lack of local children's television drama and the decline of the public intellectual. As debate continued around the question of how we value Australian culture, we looked at the federal government's funding of opera, the importance of independent theatre and the mindset of the cultural cringe.

Other stand out articles considered the New Zealand convicts sent to Australia; the older gay men opposed to same-sex marriage and what Gogglebox tells us about Australian English. We wrote in praise of grammar pedantry and took an in-depth look at the archaeological detective work behind the Budj Bim eel traps World Heritage bid.

This year we broadened the scope of our arts criticism, reviewing events such as the Adelaide Cabaret Festival and the third National Indigenous Arts Triennial alongside the flagship festivals in Perth, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne. We covered literary prizes such as the Stella and Miles Franklin and reviewed a wide range of arts events across Australia.

During NAIDOC week, we published an article in Warlpiri. On

Anzac Day, we considered the hidden lives of queer people in the military and the practice of men's trauma embroidery. On Valentine's Day, we mounted a spirited defence of romance fiction.

Our *Guides to the Classics* looked at classic works of literature such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Epic of Gilgamesh and we continued our popular *Mythbusting Ancient Rome* series.

High impact articles

Soldiers, thieves, Maori warriors: the NZ convicts sent to Australia

Kristyn Harman, University of Tasmania 95,265 readers

Friday essay: from the Great Wave to Starry Night, how a blue pigment changed the world

Hugh Davies, La Trobe University
38,347 readers

Terrorist or hipster – what does a beard mean?

Cherine Fahd, University of Technology Sydney
160,860 readers

Friday essay: reading Germaine Greer's mail

Lachlan Glanville, University of Melbourne
47,276 readers

Gay rebels: why some older homosexual men don't support gay marriage

Peter Robinson, Swinburne University of Technology
110,532 readers

Editor SUZY FREEMAN-GREENE

Deputy Editor JAMES WHITMORE

HIGHLIGHTS: BUSINESS + ECONOMY

If the scrutiny of Australia's big four banks was intense last year, it peaked in 2017 with a budget announcement of a levy and series of reforms aimed squarely at banking.

Our experts were on hand to analyse the impact of these measures and for the first time we had a Facebook live question and answer where readers could interact with Vital Signs economist Richard Holden from the halls of Parliament House on budget night.

We changed the format of the Business Briefing podcast to bring listeners new kinds of audio stories with different themed podcasts on everything from workplace etiquette to the business of cricket.

Our comic explainer on the housing bubble brought together five economists' views on the pressure in the property market and we also collaborated with economist Ross Guest and data scientist Ben Hacey to look at the outlook statements of company heads during company reporting season for our bi-annual Face Value series.

With major data releases such as the Census and HILDA survey, we worked with researchers to unpack what this told us about our debt, jobs, home ownership, wealth and poverty.

We delved into the issues strongly felt in the Australian economy, asking why wage growth is at record lows, whether economic inequality is increasing, why it's so hard to buy a house and how the labour force is changing.

We also looked at the way we track our economy and how to read key economic indicators for our series The Way We Measure and showed the various ways technology is changing our day to day lives in the series Algorithms at Work.

We also separated hype from reality with the arrival of US giant Amazon on Australian stores, followed the controversy engulfing accountants body the CPA and explained the disruption created by blockchain and Bitcoin.

High impact stories

The research on hot desking and activity-based work isn't so positive

Dr Libby Sander, Bond University 236,268 readers

The rise of the corporate campus

Agustin Chevez and DJ Huppertz, Swinburne University of Technology 212,938 readers

Not everyone wins from the bank of Mum and Dad

Rachel Ong, Curtin University, Gavin Wood, RMIT University and Melek Cigdem-Bayram, RMIT University 52,339 readers

Three Charts on The Great Australian Wealth Gap

Trent Wiltshire and Danielle Wood, Grattan Institute 136,821 readers

Introverts think they won't like being leaders but they are capable

Peter O'Connor and Andrew Spark, Queensland University of Technology 121,323 readers

How to ask for a pay rise

Mara Olekalns, Melbourne Business School 105,145 readers

Editor JENNI HENDERSON

Deputy Editor JOSH NICHOLAS





HIGHLIGHTS: ENERGY + ENVIRONMENT

Energy policy was the year's dominant theme, with previously obscure terms such as 'dispatchables' and 'intermittency' suddenly becoming a hot topic around Australia's kitchen tables.

Chief Scientist Alan Finkel handed down his long-awaited review of the National Electricity Market in June, recommending a Clean Energy Target. The Turnbull government chose instead to unveil its National Energy Guarantee. We provided "at a glance" graphics, analysis, and rapid reaction, as well as a glossary of the energy debate to help readers make sense of this complex policy area.

The energy issues didn't end there, with the government battling an east coast gas crisis (a confected one, according to much of our analysis), while the closure of Hazelwood power station provided a focal point for the slow demise of coal.

While state and federal politicians bickered over Elon Musk's big batteries, our experts calmly set about recommending clean energy solutions such as pumped hydro storage and demand response, several of which have since been adopted in Canberra.

We asked questions of Adani's controversial coal mine proposed for Queensland's Galilee Basin, looking at economic, emission, and legal issues.

The Great Barrier Reef suffered more mass bleaching, while the federal government was criticised over its plans to redraw the zoning of marine parks. Elsewhere on the water, our authors offered some suggestions to fix the mess over Murray-Darling water rights, while across the oceans we reported on the destruction wrought by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, as well as the monsoons and typhoons that brought flooding to Nepal, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

In July the world watched in fascination as an iceberg twice the size of Luxembourg broke free from Antarctica's Larsen C ice shelf. But as we pointed out, the most worrying thing about this event is what it means for the glaciers flowing behind.

As weather records continued to tumble worldwide, our Climate

Editor MICHAEL HOPKINS

Deputy Editor MADELEINE DE GABRIELE

Fingerprints column by Andrew King aimed to tease out the human contribution, while Marc Hudson's Hot Mess column tried to make sense of climate policy, and Alan Pears's Energy Nerd column offered a constructive critique of the energy transition. And we crammed 800,000 years of carbon dioxide data into a three-minute video, to put the current atmospheric changes firmly in context.

We launched our Sustainable Shopping series, helping readers buy eco-friendly versions of everything from cars to coffee. And we helped to make being green a little bit less arduous, as 250,000 readers sighed with relief at the news that no, you don't have to rinse your recycling.

High impact stories

The three-minute story of 800,000 years of climate change with a sting in the tail

Ben Henley, University of Melbourne and Nerilie Abram, Australian National University 71,907 readers

Why you're almost certainly wasting time rinsing your recycling
Trevor Thornton, Deakin University 252,806 readers

For whom the bell tolls: cats kill more than a million Australian birds every day

John Woinarski, Brett Murphy, Stephen Garnett, Leigh-Ann Woolley, Charles Darwin University, Sarah Legge, Australian National University and Tim Doherty, Deakin University 117,043 readers

Just ten MPs represent more than 600 threatened species in their electorates

James Watson, April Reside, Brooke Williams, Hugh Possingham, Martine Maron, Michelle Ward, Richard Fuller, Scott Consaul Atkinson and Stephen Kearney, The University of Queensland 15,576 readers

Don't worry about the huge Antarctic iceberg – worry about the glaciers behind it

Chen Zhao, Christopher Watson and Matt King University of Tasmania 95,633 readers

HIGHLIGHTS: HEALTH + MEDICINE

It's been a big year in health and medicine, with a new health minister and health policy once again in the spotlight. The Conversation's experts have been prolific in commenting on the big issues of the day, with a piece on the proposed drugs to be used if assisted dying is legalised in Victoria being republished by the ABC, SMH, The Age, Canberra Times, WA Today and Medical Observer, among others.

Our coverage on the severe flu season and flu vaccine has also garnered a lot of attention, with a piece on why people should get the flu vaccine attracting more than 300,000 reads.

Always important to The Conversation's health desk is ensuring health research is properly reported.

A piece on overblown reporting of a mouse folate study garnered 35,000 reads on The Conversation, and was featured on Media Watch as being one of few media outlets to accurately reflect the implications of the research.

The Conversation has also published six health "Research Checks" which are articles examining research reporting and its accuracy. The pieces are reviewed by another academic, and widely appreciated as cutting through the sensationalism of much health reporting in the mainstream media.

The Conversation has also run many series in 2017, including one on blood in conjunction with the Red Cross Blood Service, one on the evolution of disease that attracted nearly 200,000 readers, and one on gender medicine looking at the different ways medicine treats both sexes, that attracted nearly 100,000 readers.

Our favourite article for the year was one outlining research showing sadness is good for us, and why it's good to be in a bad mood sometimes. The piece attracted 230,000 reads and was republished by the ABC, SBS, IFL Science, and at least 16 other republications.

High impact articles

Why bad moods are good for you: the surprising benefits of sadness

Joseph Paul Forgas, UNSW 225,739 readers

Pregnant women shouldn't start taking vitamin B3 just yet: reports it prevents miscarriage and birth defects are overblown

Claire Roberts, University of Adelaide 36,208 readers

Explainer: what are blood groups and why do they matter?

Erica Wood and Lucy Fox, Monash University 185,814 readers

Flu vaccine won't definitely stop you from getting the flu, but it's more important than you think

Allen Cheng, Monash University and Kristine Macartney, University of Sydney 307,007 readers

Dying a good death: what we need from drugs that are meant to end life

Betty Chaar and Sami Isaac, University of Sydney 33,889 readers

Editor **FRON JACKSON-WEBB**
Deputy Editor **ALEXANDRA HANSEN**





HIGHLIGHTS: **POLITICS + SOCIETY**

When is an MP not an MP? It may sound like the start of a joke, but in fact it turned out to be very serious issue, and one that has occupied the parliament and public debate for a large part of 2017.

It all started when two Greens senators, Scott Ludlam and then Larissa Waters, resigned from parliament on discovering they held dual citizenship - something that is not allowed under Section 44 of the Australian Constitution. As one after another MPs came forward to say that they, too, were under a citizenship cloud, our authors - especially constitutional law experts - were able to explain what the Constitution holds on these issues and how it might be resolved.

Another great debate occupying the political sphere - and many of our authors - this year has been the marriage equality survey. In a debate that has been fiercely contested and at times vicious, our authors were able to take a cooler, dispassionate look at what was at stake, and examine the arguments put forward by either side.

One of the most significant events of the year was the First Nations Constitutional Convention at Uluru, and its “statement from the heart”, as Australia continues to search for meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Meanwhile, the world has been anxiously watching the exchanges between the United States and North Korea this year, particularly as Kim Jong-un launched provocative missile tests over Japan and Donald Trump launched provocative tweets from the White House. As tensions ran high, we examined the nature of the North Korean threat and the US response to it, plus what role China plays - or ought to play - in it.

This has been a year of deep uncertainty in much of the world, with ongoing strife in Syria, Myanmar, Iraq and many other countries, all of which were examined by our authors. We also looked at the separatist movement gaining momentum in the Catalan region of Spain, and covered elections in the UK and France in collaboration with our colleagues at The Conversation UK. Both of these yielded unexpected results, one way or another, disrupting the idea that conservative populism was sweeping the globe, but reinforcing the idea that electoral uncertainty was very much in vogue - as demonstrated by the rise of Jacinda Ardern to Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Away from politics, our authors wrote about policy on transgender players in AFL, the Harvey Weinstein scandal, media reform and Rebel Wilson’s defamation case, among many other issues. We also ran series on the politics and laws around charities and the nature of Australian identity in the modern age.

In short, 2017 has felt like a chaotic year in Australian politics, and one in which policy progress has been swamped by other distractions. We can only hope that 2018 is calmer and more productive.

Editor **AMANDA DUNN**
Deputy Editor **MICHAEL COURTS**

HIGHLIGHTS: CITIES & POLICY

Reflecting the rise of city-focused public agendas, both nationally and internationally, The Conversation established a Cities section in March 2017.

More than half of the world's people, and nearly 90% of Australians, live in cities today. That means cities are pressure points for many of the world's most pressing problems. Some issues are common to all cities, but each also has its own particular problems and advantages. The "global city", though, increasingly measures itself against global benchmarks. They all aspire to be competitive, sustainable, smart, creative, resilient, carbon-neutral and liveable.

Our series *Making Cities Work* focused on critical infrastructure (roads, transit systems, communications, water, waste) and the impacts of changes in government approaches over recent decades. Other services and features are equally essential to maintain urban health and well-being. This includes the quality of public space, green space and, of course, housing – the subject of scores of articles in 2017. "The Conversation has published pieces by most, if not all, of Australia's leading housing academics," a senior academic observed.

High impact articles

To Christians arguing 'no' on marriage equality: the Bible is not decisive
Robyn J Whitaker, University of Divinity 475,719 readers

Five assumptions we make about North Korea – and why they're wrong
Benjamin Habib, La Trobe University 92,457 readers

The Hanson effect: how hate seeps in and damages us all
Denis Muller, University of Melbourne 169,789 readers

Hugh Mackay: the state of the nation starts in your street
Hugh Mackay, Charles Sturt University 72,336 readers

Listening to the heart: what now for Indigenous recognition after the Uluru summit?
Harry Hobbs, UNSW 6,977 readers

Given the rapid growth of Australia's big cities, many see higher-density development as both an inevitable and desirable way to ensure cities remain workable. Many Australians, though, question the premise of growth, a debate highlighted by the series *Is Australia Full?*

And not all higher-density development is desirable. Two of our series, *Equitable Density* and *Reinventing Density*, made this clear. Innovative and consultative approaches will be needed to deliver higher-density cities without losing the urban values that Australians treasure.

Another important consideration, explored in multiple articles, is how to preserve and build urban identity and sense of community in growing and changing cities.

Cities as a whole are contested spaces. And that's where the Cities section comes in: highlighting the issues that demand our attention and presenting the best available knowledge to inform the often self-interested and invariably passionate debates about life in the city.

Editor **JOHN WATSON**

HIGHLIGHTS: EDUCATION

Funding reform for schools and higher education dominated much of the conversation in 2017.

The federal government set out an extra \$18.6bn for schools over the next decade in the Federal Budget, while announcing it would be saving money on higher education and lowering the mandatory HELP debt repayment threshold to \$42,000. Concern about Australia's decline in performance on tests like PISA created great interest, Safe Schools programs sparked heated debates, and concerns about China's influence in our universities continue to surface.

There was a lot of talk of Gonski 2.0 this year, a reboot of the original needs-based funding model proposed in the 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling. We followed Education Minister Simon Birmingham's proposed higher education reform bill this year as well. While the bill was not passed in mid-October, Senator Birmingham is undoubtedly back in the bunker coming up with a revised version. *Are we making progress on Indigenous education?* series looked at policy, Indigenous leadership, history books, bilingual education and the impact of boarding school.

The same sex marriage debate raged on this year, and we fact checked whether Safe Schools would be mandatory if it is legalised. We found no link between the federal Marriage Act and the Australian Curriculum.

Assistant Editor **SOPHIE HEIZER**

HIGHLIGHTS: SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY

There are always thrills and challenges in covering Science and Technology, and this year has been no exception.

We've featured many great examples of new research, unique analysis and compelling stories of human endeavour and innovation, not just in the modern era but also looking back in time and gazing outwards into space.

The 2017 detection of gravitational waves generated by collapsing neutron stars was heralded as one of the biggest science stories in around half a century. Global interest in this discovery was phenomenal. We published analysis not just on the science itself, but also personal reflections that shared the excitement, the collaboration and the tenacity required when you're a researcher.

Still in space, scientists and science-lovers alike watched the bittersweet finale of the Cassini space probe in 2017, as it plunged into Saturn after 20 years of travel and data transmission. But we also took comfort in the fact that Australia is the only country positioned right to communicate with the Voyager space probes as – 40 years post launch – they talk to us from the edge of our Solar System.

The Federal government's announcement that Australia will have a space agency seemed hastened by the International Astronautical Congress taking place in Adelaide in 2017. We analysed Australia's space activities in our series *Australia in space*.

Digital technology featured heavily in our lives in 2017, creating a somewhat uneasy mix of delight and trepidation. We're shopping faster, travelling easier and communicating quicker. But who owns our data, should governments be allowed to view it, and do we understand the place of machines in our lives? Our series *Algorithms at work* and *Fighting crime across digital borders* tackled questions around data, the law and ownership.

But getting online still divides us - delivery of the NBN and

access to the internet is inequitable in Australia. Governments and the private sector are still working out the best way to tackle this as both a social and a technological problem.

Getting back to nature, our research story about dolphins in Australian waters developing a unique approach to catching and eating octopus attracted attention from around the world. Geology seemed similarly popular, showing that even very complex science analysis can be enjoyed when presented in the right way. Video footage and great images are always vital in this regard.

In 2017 Jenny Graves became the first woman to win the Prime Minister's Prize for science. Jenny is well known for her suggestion that the male Y chromosome will self-destruct, and is a highly respected genetic researcher and mentor in Australian science. She is a regular author at *The Conversation*.

The stories of indigenous Australians are increasingly told through science. In 2017 we published analysis showing the first Australians were living and using technology in northern Australia around 65,000 years prior to the current day. Fossilised teeth in Indonesia present a similar time frame for humans migrating into this region. But science too reveals the worst aspects of human nature, with a unique study showing that Indigenous stories of a massacre in Western Australia in the early 20th century are supported by forensic evidence.

The very nature of what science is, what it isn't and how to report science appropriately continues to present challenges to scientists, journalists and the general public. Our series *How we edit science* tackled many misconceptions head on, and will prove useful now and in years ahead. More broadly, other analysis looked at how to apply evidence, and what you need in terms of strategy to be able to participate effectively in public discourse relating to important social issues such as same-sex marriage and anti-science. We submitted an analysis of science journalism in Australia to a parliamentary inquiry into the future

of public interest journalism.

Science and technology are central to our past, to how we operate as a society and to our path into the future. We hope you can join us in 2018 to enjoy the ride further.

High Impact Articles

At last, we've found gravitational waves from a collapsing pair of neutron stars

David Blair, University of Western Australia 8,283 readers

A look back at Cassini's incredible mission to Saturn before its final plunge into the planet

Tanya Hill, Museums Victoria 31,920 readers

Tackling the kraken: unique dolphin strategy delivers dangerous octopus for dinner

Kate Sprogis, Murdoch University and David Hocking, Monash University 268,860 readers

A map that fills a 500-million year gap in Earth's history

Alan Collins, University of Adelaide and Andrew Merdith, University of Sydney 366,206 readers

Buried tools and pigments tell a new history of humans in Australia for 65,000 years

Chris Clarkson, The University of Queensland, Ben Marwick, University of Washington, Lynley Wallis, University of Notre Dame Australia, Richard Fullagar and Zenobia Jacobs University of Wollongong 73,746 readers

Editor SARAH KEENIHAN
Deputy Editor MICHAEL LUND

HIGHLIGHTS: **FACTCHECK**

This January will mark the fifth anniversary of FactCheck at The Conversation. And there's plenty to celebrate.

In March, our FactCheck unit became the first fact-checking team in Australia and one of the first worldwide to be accredited by the International Fact-Checking Network, an alliance of fact-checkers hosted at the Poynter Institute in the US.

The accreditation reflects our high standards of non-partisanship and fairness, our commitment to open and honest corrections, and the transparency of our funding, sources and methods.

In July, FactCheck was invited to join media organisations from 53 countries at Global Fact 4 in Madrid, the fourth annual fact-checking summit hosted by the International Fact-Checking Network.

There we joined fact-checkers from The Washington Post, BBC Reality Check, PolitiFact, Africa Check and many more, including our Australian friends from RMIT/ABC Fact Check.

We heard from representatives from Google News Lab, Facebook, Duke Reporters' Lab and First Draft News, as well as reporters and academics, about best practices in fact-checking. We were pleased to have the opportunity to share The Conversation's unique fact-check model with more than 180 international journalists, editors and fact-checking experts.

In 2017 we continued our collaboration with the ABC on Q&A, live-tweeting fact-checks during the weekly broadcast and working with academics on new fact-checks to examine contentious claims and counter misinformation.

In November, we became the first organisation in Australia to have our FactCheck verdicts highlighted in Google search results. In this way, The Conversation is supporting Google's efforts to deliver authoritative information in response to searches about public claims, and to make it easier for people to distinguish fact from fiction. Google's decision to promote Conversation FactChecks is further recognition of our high standards.

Also in November, The Conversation spent two weeks based in Townsville to fact-check the Queensland election. With the support of James Cook University, we closely followed the election campaign and provided Queenslanders with accurate information in the leadup to polling day.

Throughout the year we checked claims made by politicians, interest group leaders and public figures of every stripe. We checked claims on issues including same sex marriage, climate change, energy policy, voluntary euthanasia, gun laws, Indigenous incarceration, Safe Schools, welfare, taxation, employment, penalty rates, childcare and education.

Every year we continue to be encouraged by the growing readership of Conversation FactChecks, and the number of requests from members of the public who ask us to verify, clarify and correct claims made by powerful Australians.

Most importantly, we thank the many academic experts who acted as FactCheck authors and blind reviewers, and who

made all this possible. Their generosity in sharing their time and knowledge is deeply appreciated by the whole team at The Conversation. Each of these experts has played an important role in combatting misinformation and disinformation in 2017, and has provided Conversation FactCheck readers with information they can trust.

Claims we FactChecked

- Are Indigenous Australians the most incarcerated people on Earth?
- Was it four degrees hotter 110,000 years ago?
- Will Safe Schools be mandatory if same sex marriage is legalised?
- Was Christian Porter right about welfare spending and income tax?

FactCheck 

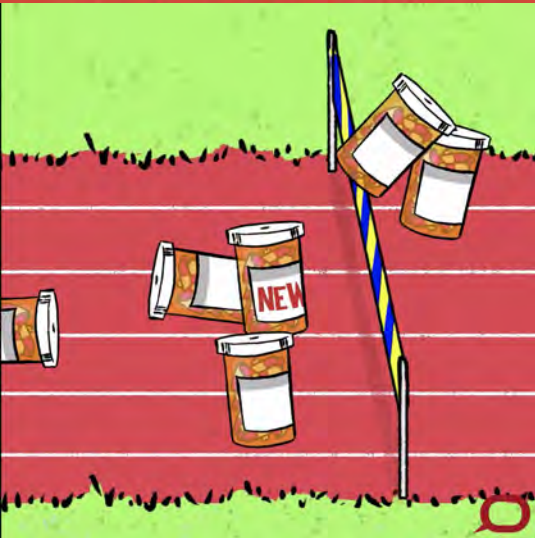
Editor **LUCINDA BEAMAN**



A drug's journey



HOW DRUGS GET FROM THE LAB TO THE MARKET



HIGHLIGHTS: MULTIMEDIA

The Multimedia team works across all sections, supporting commissioned articles and generating original content. We collaborate with many authors on a wide range of topics.

Experimentation with digital storytelling formats was the major focus for the Multimedia team in 2017. Building on the successes of the gut microbiome animated video and the comic explainer on memory in late 2016, we continued to develop new styles and techniques this year.

Our focus shifted back to video formats this year, especially animations. This format is popular with readers and suits our workflow and model particularly well. We have very limited access to video resources and footage, so the animated style allows The Conversation to work with experts from all over Australia and elsewhere relatively easily - there is no need to send a camera crew (which we do not have) to a location shoot far from our offices.

We published several animated videos in 2017, experimenting with different styles and lengths.

Examples of animated videos include:

- Animation of 800,000 years of temperature and carbon dioxide data
- Where money comes from, which was part of the newly launched Curious Kids series
- An explainer on nuclear fusion and fission weapons
- How drugs go from tests in labs onto our pharmacy shelves

Other new formats we explored included the interactive scrolling explainer on blood groups, and the video explainer on the Chinese Communist Party's 19th National Congress where we experimented with a longer video explainer format incorporating a piece-to-camera from Ryan Manuel (an expert on Chinese politics from HK University). The video was republished by the New York Times in their piece *Xi*

Jinping Opens China's Party Congress, His Hold Tighter Than Ever.

In terms of data projects, the federal budget is always a key news event. This year we developed a new interactive format for the 'Budget at a glance', and also published a successful collaboration with Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre's Alan Duncan and Rebecca Cassells analysing government spending.

The release of the 2016 ABS Census was the other major data event for the year, and our comprehensive coverage included a series of animated GIFs looking at the major trends.

The plan for 2018 will be to continue developing new storytelling formats and refine those that our readers like and those that work well on our platform.

Editor **EMIL JEYARATNAM**
Deputy Editor **WES MOUNTAIN**

HIGHLIGHTS: **NEW ZEALAND**

New Zealand joined The Conversation in June 2017 and got off to a great start in the first week with an article about the latest research on the Alpine Fault, the country's most hazardous faultline. It runs for 650 kilometres along the spine of New Zealand's South Island and has, on average, ruptured every 300 years, producing an earthquake of about magnitude 8. The last time it did this was in 1717, when it shunted land horizontally by eight metres and uplifted mountains by a couple of metres. Geologists had drilled deep into the fault to "see" what happens as it builds up to the next quake – and their piece remains the most-read of all articles written by New Zealand-based authors so far.

The next big event was the election and subsequent coalition negotiations, which generated plenty of debate as Jacinda Ardern rose from newly elected Labour party leader to Prime Minister in the space of less than two months. Apart from the election results and change of government, authors explored a unique feature of New Zealand politics, which reserves representation of the indigenous Māori people in special seats in Parliament, and they looked at how well the electorate and politicians have adjusted to the country's mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system.

Other standout articles considered New Zealand's fisheries quota management system and its faults, how borrowings from Māori have shaped New Zealand English, and how art can enhance science – particularly in Antarctica.

New Zealand authors have also contributed to coverage of international current affairs, including a piece about cyberspace aggression from North Korea, the threat to democracy in Cambodia and the plight of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. From across the Tasman, they have analysed the impact on New Zealanders of changes to citizenship and tertiary fee agreements with Australia, and they made a popular contribution to Australia's debate about same-sex marriage. These articles in particular have prompted strong engagement from readers.

New Zealand's contribution would not be complete without articles about the country's weird and wonderful wildlife, which is arguably best represented by the sweet-smelling, flightless night parrot kākāpō.

If you're a New Zealand-based academic or researcher doing work that's relevant to a broad, global audience, register and pitch your article.

Editor **VERONIKA MEDUNA**



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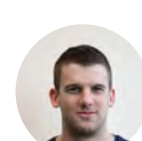
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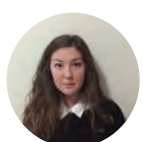
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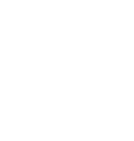
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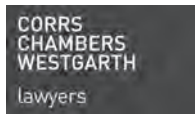


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