

THE CONVERSATION
2012 Stakeholder Report



Letter from The Editor.

It's been a difficult year for journalism: an imploding media model, thinning out of newsrooms, and a loss of voices and diversity. A pattern both here in Australia and of course, internationally.

But instead of adding to this narrative of journalist woe, we have offered a possible solution. We now have a flourishing newsroom of 15 editors working with over 4,300 academics, offering a possible solution to journalism's demise, with an ambition to deliver trusted, credible, independent information straight from the experts and direct to the public.

On that front, it's been a powerful year for our brand of independent expert news and views. It was our first Olympics, our first US election and we tackled big series around Australia in the Asian Century (with Ken Henry), Moocs (with Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans), and extensive involvement in the Asylum Seeker Expert Panel. (See some of the other highlights later in this report.) And of course next year we will have our first Federal Election to cover.

And our readers seem to be enjoying the service as this year we've become Australia's largest independent news and commentary site with more than 550,000 unique visits a month. And in just over 18 months.

But there's more we want to do. For 2013, we aim to appoint editors in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Hobart, in addition to those in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. And we want to extend our service by introducing new sections including Arts, Culture and Design; Education; and Sport (Science, Business, Psychology, etc) along the lines of our Olympics coverage.

To do that we hope to secure in 2013 the funding support of the remaining universities.

Those to whom we owe our special thanks (and without whom it wouldn't have happened) include:

Our Partners, CSIRO, Melbourne, Monash, RMIT, UTS, and UWA.

Our Members: Canberra, CDU, Deakin, Flinders, Griffith, La Trobe, Murdoch, QUT, Swinburne, UniSA, UTAS, UWS and VU.

Our Strategic Partners: Commonwealth Bank, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Australian Government, Victorian State Government, AAP and Ernst & Young.

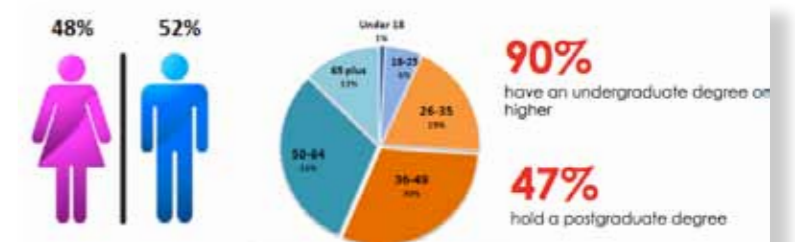
Finally, we hope you have a good rest over the Christmas and summer holiday and we look forward to you joining us in making 2013 a year of even better informed conversations.

Andrew Jaspán
Editor and Executive Director



Q READERSHIP

We're now Australia's largest independent news and commentary site, enjoying a readership of more than 550,000 unique visits a month.



Our readership since launch:

- 65% traffic from Australia; 15% from US, followed by 4% UK, Canada, New Zealand and India follow.

We've published 9,000 articles and had 92,000 comments.

We're creating better conversations: 80% of readers have had a discussion with friends or colleagues after reading an article.
(source: Reader survey)

Our team of 15 professional editors work with over 4,300 authors from 275 institutions, making us Australia's largest virtual newsroom.

This year, we've continued to unlock the knowledge within the university sector and deliver timely analysis and commentary that responds to and sets the news agenda.

We've introduced columnists, podcasts, videos, and infographics and would like to do more next year.

Section highlights of the year include:

Business & Economy

- Popular series on **Future of media**, responding to the imploding media model in Australia – a debate ignited by Gina Rinehart's bid at the Fairfax board and restructures at both Fairfax and News Ltd. Series widely republished, resulted in extensive media (for The Conversation), and saw new audience conversion.
- We looked at the changing nature of the economy and its impacts on Australia in our series on the **Ageing workforce**, and **Future of Work**.
- On mining, Ken Henry wrote on why Australia's non-mining sector will continue to struggle whilst economist Max Cordon wrote on **taxing mining** and **tackling Dutch Disease**.
- We ran 'In Conversations' with: John Hewson, Graeme Samuel, Satyajit Das.
- Other highlights from the year: **Federal Budget** coverage; **women in leadership**; video series on **sport economics**; Ross Garnaut's **response** to the Asian wCentury white paper; coverage on the **fiscal cliff** and ongoing **Eurozone** issues.

Energy & Environment

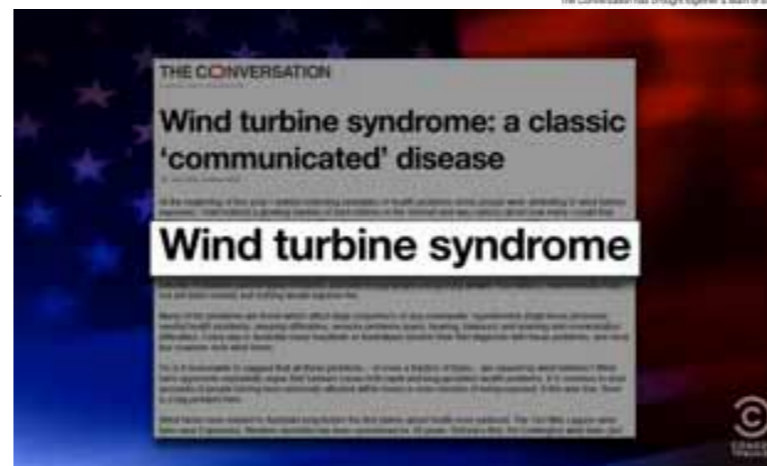
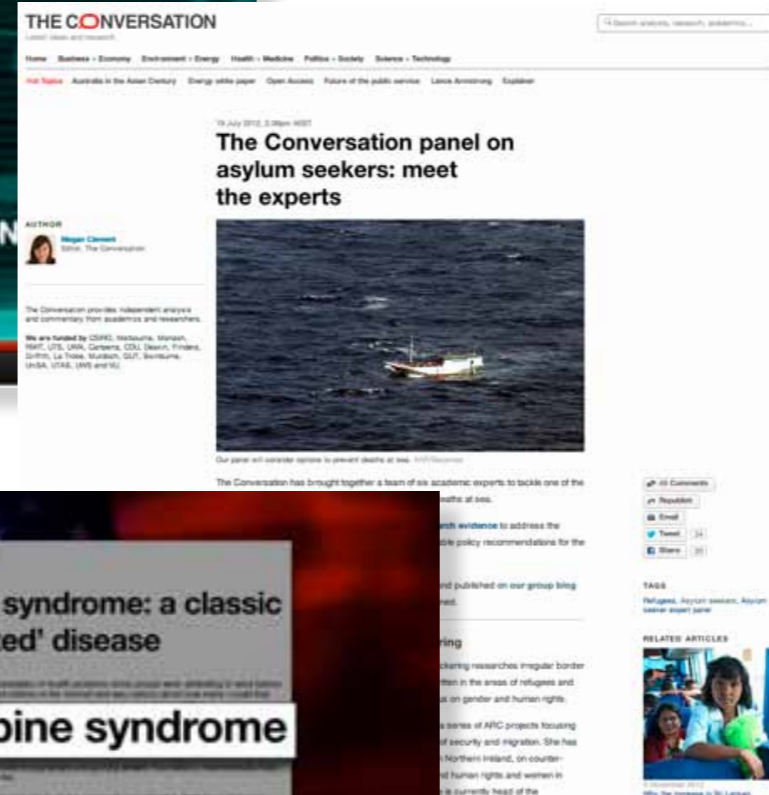
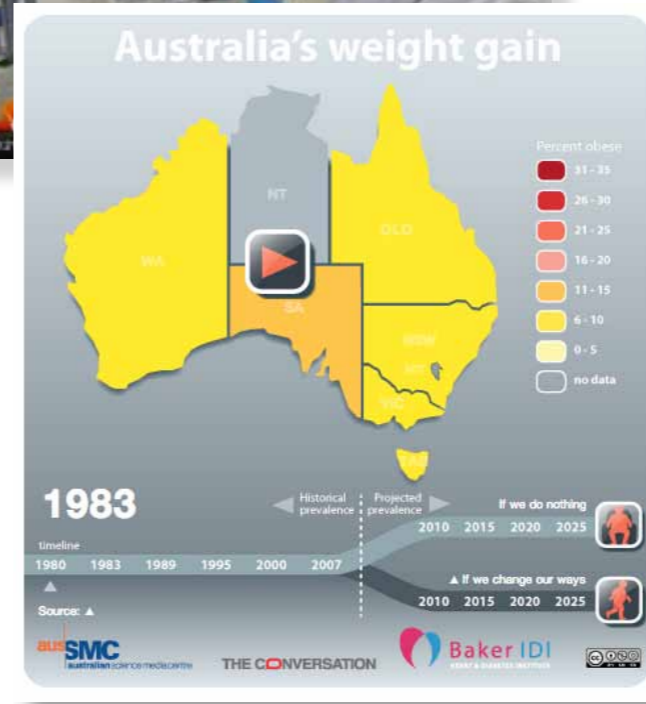
- CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology released their **State of the Climate** report through us: publishing first with us, and then releasing the story to the rest of the media whilst directing them back to The Conversation as their authoritative source of trusted content.
- Our **Hurricane Sandy** coverage included rapid, evidence-based opinion - much from US academics - on the connection between big storms and climate change, how Sandy coverage might affect the US election.
- We had a strong focus on marine issues, with coverage on **Super Trawler** conflict, UNESCO's threat to remove **World Heritage** Listing from the **Great Barrier Reef**, the **shark culling** debate in WA.
- Other highlights from the year: **Murray Darling Basin**; 20th anniversary of **Montreal Protocol** to save the ozone layer; and in collaboration with Griffith Review a series "What is Australia for?".

Health and Medicine

- Our ever-popular weekly 'Monday Medical Myth' series continued, with collective readership of over 255,000.
- Our nine-part series on **over-diagnosis**, joined the British Medical Journal as some of the only coverage on this emerging international trend.
- We hosted a widely-read debate on **wind turbine syndrome** that was even picked up on US Comedy Central's Colbert Report.
- We analysed the obesity epidemic in Australia with our **Obese Nation Australia** series and interactive infographic (produced in collaboration with BakerIDI, Australian Science Media Centre), which was viewed over 20K times
- Other highlights from the year: Series on **Transparency and Medicine**; plain packaging debate; popular coverage of the **retraction of "gay-cure"** research; **National Disability Insurance Scheme**.

Politics & Society

- This year, we hosted three policy debates, where we bring together our authors with Ministers and decision makers in Canberra so that our experts can inform policy and decision-making. Our policy debates follow a unique engagement model that involves crowd-sourced ideas, public debate, and physical discussions in Canberra. This year, we ran debates on:
 - **Future of Higher Education.** 15-part series culminating in physical symposium in Canberra where Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans and 5 of our authors debated the impact of open online courses in higher education.
 - Readership of 50,000; 2,500 comments or social media interactions; live-streamed symposium accessed by 4000 people; and a Twitter debate involving many hundreds that trended in Melbourne and Sydney.
 - **Australia in the Asian Century.** Five academics in a panel discussion with Dr Ken Henry on the issues facing Australia in the Asian Century, held during the White Paper drafting to inform its development



- **Asylum Seeker Expert Panel.** In parallel to the Government's Houston Panel on Asylum Seekers, The Conversation established its own Expert Panel where six academics debated and formed their own policy recommendations which were made available to the government. Lead panellist Sharon Pickering was subsequently nominated for a Human Rights Award for her contribution.
- We created a popular dedicated section for **US elections**, including weekly podcasts and video collaboration with SBS.
- Patrick Stokes' article "No, you're not entitled to your opinion" went viral and became the most popular (to date!) article ever read, with 200K reads, 33K Facebook likes, and re-tweeted by Richard Dawkins, Ricky Gervais, Tim Minchin... and thousands of others.
- Other highlights from the year: Kevin Rudd leadership re-spill, Lauren Rosewarne's popular column, our coverage of the conflict in Syria.

Science and Technology

- We created a new, dedicated section for the **Olympics and Paralympics** with expert behind-the-scenes analysis of the sport, science, business, environment and politics of the Games. Our coverage included **Team Blog**, and a series of videos in collaboration with SBS. Attracting 178K reads we also reached new audiences who stayed with us after the Games.
- Our **Tour de France** coverage on the science of hill climbing, drug use and others was widely republished by SBS Cycling Central.
- We closely followed the announcement of the **Square Kilometre Array**, and our coverage included rapid turn around analysis by those at the centre of Australia's bid.
- Our ever-popular 'Explainer' series continued with pieces on chaos theory, memory, black holes, dreaming, radio astronomy, 4G and more.
- Heading into space, we ran popular coverage on **Mars Curiosity Landing** and also on **SpaceX** launching the first commercial space rocket to the ISS.
- Other highlights from the year: discovery of a **Higgs-boson** candidate particle, the **Transit of Venus**.

HIGHLIGHTS

January:

We begin our first full year of operation with partner support from CSIRO, UniMelb, Monash, RMIT, UTS, UWA and members from Deakin, Flinders, Murdoch, UniSA, UTAS, QUT, VU

February:

- Swinburne University join as a member.

March:

Celebrate our 1st birthday.
- La Trobe University join as a member.

April:

Australia in the Asian Century policy debate and roundtable in Canberra.

May:

Caring is sharing: viral pick up on Reddit with 38,800 reads.

June:

Debate over future of media, kick started by Fairfax or Gina-fax debate.

- Charles Darwin University join as a member.

July:

Olympics and Paralympics coverage in dedicated section attracts 178K reads, including video collaboration with SBS.

- Griffith University join as a member.

August:

Our Asylum Seeker Expert Panel reports recommendations to Government.

- University Western Sydney and Canberra University join as members.

September:

US Election coverage, including video collaboration and podcasts.

October:

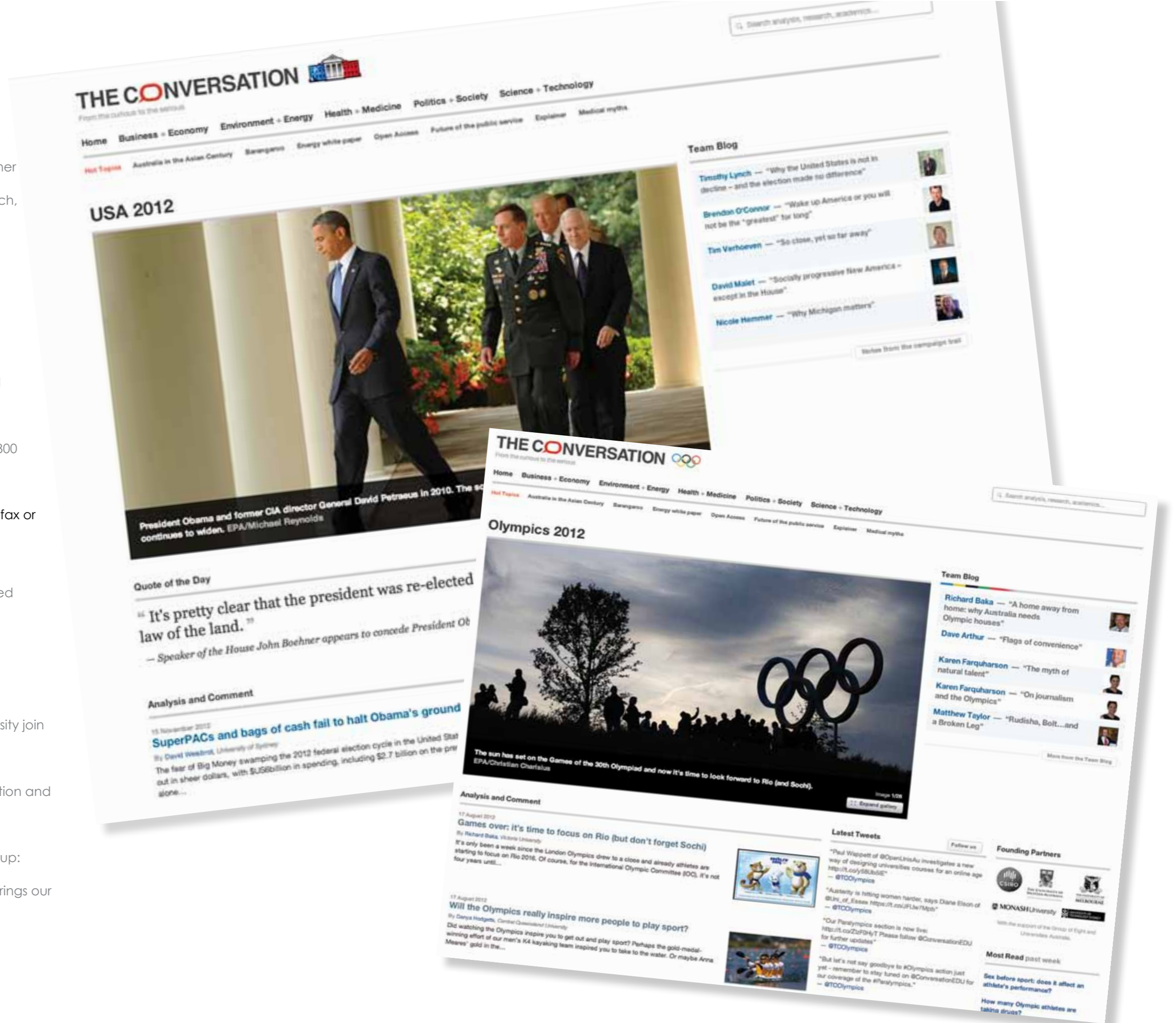
No, you're not entitled to your opinion: viral pick up: 300K reads, 33K Facebook likes, re-tweeted by Richard Dawkins. Higher Education symposium brings our authors together with Minister Chris Evans to debate future of higher education.

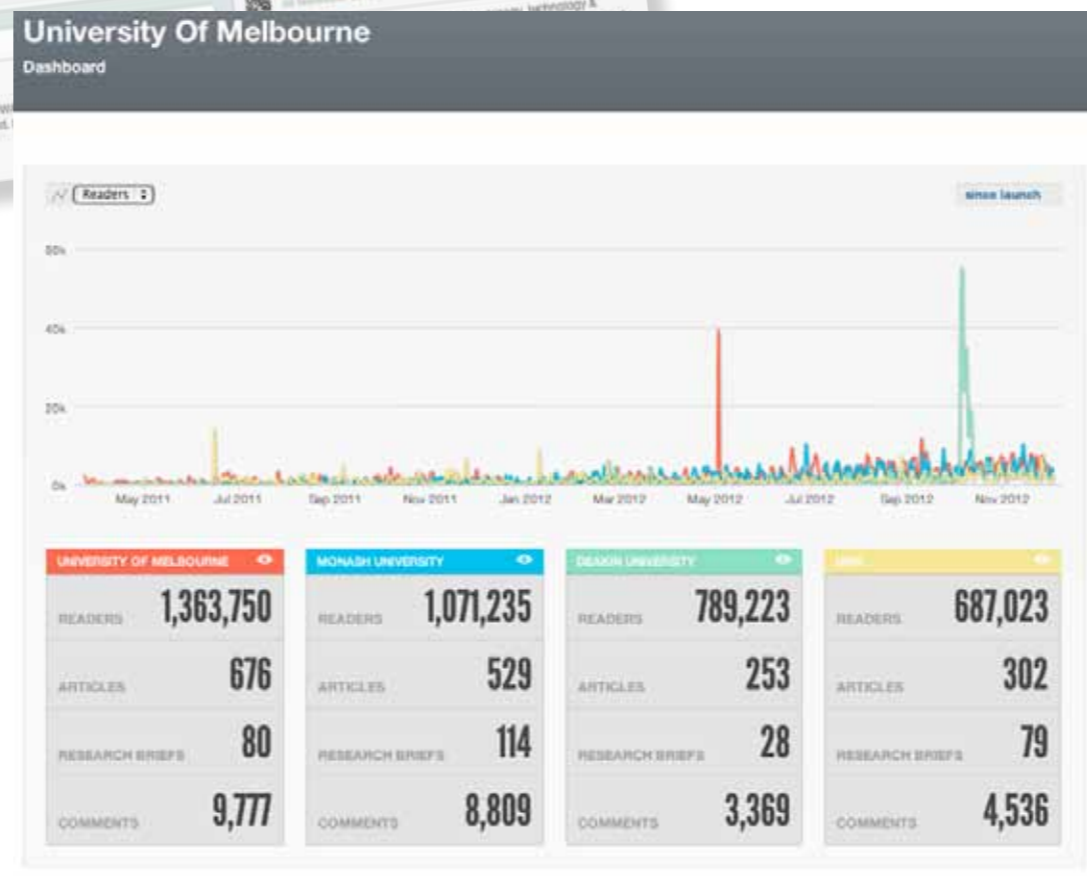
November:

10 million visits to the site.

December:

Our 275th institute registers to write for us.





DEMONSTRATING ENGAGEMENT, REACH AND IMPACT

Amid increasing international competition for funding, staff and students, universities are under growing pressure to demonstrate a return on their research and teaching investment.

From the UK to the US, the EU to Brazil, Canada to Japan, the push to systematically measure engagement and impact is building worldwide.

In Australia, consensus is growing that research impact and engagement should be considered along with research excellence, and several initiatives are underway to measure return on research investment:

- CSIRO has begun measuring how long it will take to achieve economic, environmental and social outcomes of large-scale research projects in a world-first impact measure aimed at managing innovation.
- The Australian Technology Network and the Group of Eight universities conducted an impact trial this year that found impact can be measured and Australia's research has generated significant economic and societal benefits.
- The Commonwealth is conducting a research stocktake with ANU and the University of Melbourne to determine whether a systematic approach can be taken to measure the return on research funding.

The Conversation collaborates closely with the sector to tell the stories that demonstrate the impact of research. We also provide our authors and partner institutions with public engagement metrics and dashboards that increasingly are being used to support promotions, funding applications and outreach KPIs.

REPUBLISHING

We're putting experts – new voices with new ideas - into the public arena with the simple aim of generating and informing better public conversations.

By publishing under Creative Commons, we're able seed the media, including an increasingly thinned-out mainstream media, with:

1. High-grade independent content, able to be republished by anyone free of charge. This has become hugely attractive particularly as the media reduces specialists in areas such as science, environment, health and education. 69% of all articles have been republished. 2000 sites have republished our content, and more than 20,000 sites worldwide refer traffic to us.

2. A source of ideas, the most sought after commodity in any newsroom. Our content gives the media ideas that they can follow through their own editorial. We encourage them to do this.

3. A source of experts: new voices, rather than relying on the same usual suspects. 42% of our authors have been contacted by other media as a result of writing in The Conversation, leading to subsequent interviews in other media.

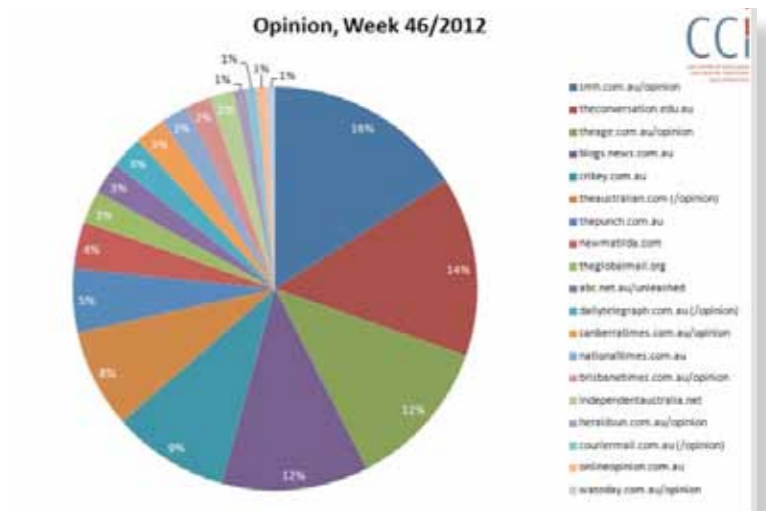
69% of all articles have been republished on over 2,000 sites, and over 20,000 sites worldwide refer traffic to us.



SOCIAL MEDIA

This year we've continued to grow an active social media presence. This has enabled a discussion in social media on the ideas raised in our editorial content, and also builds our audience.

- Tens of thousands of our articles have been shared through Twitter and Facebook.
- The Conversation is consistently in the top three tweeted Australian opinion sites, alongside the SMH and The Age, and ahead of Crikey, ABC/unleashed, Global Mail and others. (source: Australian Twitter News Index).
- On our own channels, we grew by:
 - 18K followers on Twitter and
 - 5K followers on Facebook.
- We now have 23K subscribers to our daily newsletter



Richard Dawkins @RichardDawkins
No you're not entitled to your opinion. Or you're not entitled to have it taken seriously unless you have evidence. bit.ly/OaLtxl

Ricky Gervais @rickygervais
I wish everyone had to read and understand this before they were allowed to talk to me bit.ly/OaLtxl @RichardDawkins @SamHarrisOrg

The Conversation @ConversationEDU
The PM has announced a royal commission into child abuse in churches. So what is a Royal Commission & how do they work? theconversation.edu.au/royal-commissi...

INTERN PROGRAM

We want to inspire the next generation of journalists with this new model of trusted, credible journalism.

Our Intern Program has expanded considerably this year, with over 70 editorial interns participating in our program at our Melbourne newsroom.

Part-time over three months, our interns gain practical experience in a busy newsroom, and from day one are involved in all elements of the editorial cycle: from generating ideas, to commissioning content, right through to editing and publishing articles. They also contribute to social media.

As a non-profit organisation, interns are invaluable support to The Conversation and actively contribute to its running.

Our graduating interns have gone on to paid roles and internships at ABC, SBS, Business Spectator, 3AW, Herald Sun, and others.

The internship program is open to all Partner and Member organisations. Inter-state universities are welcome to send students for intensive placements in winter and summer breaks.

What our interns are saying:

"The team at The Conversation were absolutely fantastic to work with. In terms of industry experience, the program is also a good way to become well known and renowned as the industry's next generation."

"The Conversation staff treated me as a valued part of the organisation. I was given meaningful tasks and responsibilities to address; had my ideas and feedback solicited and listened to; and strongly felt that I was making a genuine contribution."

"The three months I spent as an intern was an inspiring experience. The internship is unique in that I felt valued as a part of the editorial team, and was given real responsibility and autonomy to pursue some of my own ideas."

"I learnt many skills that weren't being taught at University. It is real-life experience that cannot be found anywhere else."

JOBS

Our Jobs Board was launched late 2011.

Showcasing jobs primarily from higher education and research institutes, we have also advertised roles in government and non-government organisations.

- Advertised nearly 3,000 jobs.
- Attracted 69,000 visitors.

Partner organisations receive:

- Access to The Conversation job board for a 6-month period with no fee.
- Branding rights and benefits, including a logo on every job detail page.
- Access to a Jobs dashboard to track number of page views and clicks.

"I would recommend the internship to all journalism students."

Partners and Members

We're grateful for the generous support of our Founding Partners, Strategic Partners, and Members.

Founding and Strategic Partners



Members



We'll soon be offering readers and others the opportunity to support us through donations. If you'd like to discuss ways to support The Conversation please contact Lisa Watts on 0417 593 389.