

Media release

CIS Takes Air Swing at ABS

The economic and environmental indicators included in the ABS's *Measuring Australia's Progress* report are virtually identical to those included in similar reports by other governments around the world and in many local-level projects in Australia, according to Dr Clive Hamilton, Executive Director of The Australia Institute.

Dr Hamilton was responding to the extraordinary and risible attack on the ABS by the Centre for Independent Studies, a right-wing think tank. The CIS has claimed that the ABS has abandoned its traditional neutrality and has adopted a left-wing and environmentalist agenda.

"In fact, in its latest report the ABS has quite properly followed the recommendations of a 1996 Parliamentary report", said Dr Hamilton.

"The CIS says that by including six 'environmental' indicators in its set of 15, the ABS has put too much emphasis on the environment. It argues that Australians don't care that much about the environment.

"There is strong evidence of widespread and continuing concern in the Australian community – including the business community – about the state of the environment, a fact reflected in the structure of government itself.

"Wiser people understand that protecting the natural environment is crucial to the sustainability of economic growth. So indicators such as those for land degradation, water use and greenhouse gas emissions are as much economic indicators as environmental ones.

"The CIS is so concerned about attempts to broaden our understanding of social progress because, after proselytizing for years about free markets and economic growth at all costs, many people from all sides of politics are asking whether we are better off as a result."

Education Minister Brendan Nelson said two years ago: "One of the questions that is not put in the political process by either side of politics, let alone answered is: Towards what are we striving to grow?", and World Bank economists have recently written: "... reliance on GDP as the sole measure of development is seriously limiting."

"I shudder to think what the CIS would include in its set of progress indicators," said Dr Hamilton.

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