

Evidence and policy judgement in public inquiries

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Declaration

This thesis is my own original work except where noted. It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university.

Sue Regan

September 2019

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Abstract

With public policy issues becoming more complex and cross-boundary, there is a growing need for policy institutions equipped to consider and reconcile diverse evidence. This thesis examines a prevalent, but often overlooked, mainstream policy arrangement – the public inquiry – to understand better the process of reconciling diverse forms of policy knowledge. Established by executive government, public inquiries typically involve a temporary advisory board of external experts who gather and synthesise evidence and provide policy advice. This thesis sheds light on these evidentiary practices by asking: how do actors involved in public inquiries understand, use, and navigate evidence? This question is explored empirically through a comparative study of two Australian social policy inquiries: the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (2004–05) and the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (1999–2000). Using an interpretive approach, the research examines the meanings that actors place on evidence and its use during public inquiries. This research draws on 39 semi-structured interviews and extensive inquiry documentation.

Overall, this thesis seeks to advance current understandings of public inquiries, particularly how they gather and use evidence, and how they develop policy advice. A nuanced and dynamic account of the evidentiary practices of public inquiries is revealed, and this challenges conventional characterisations of public inquiries as either ‘political puppets’ deploying evidence symbolically or ‘impartial advisers’ using evidence objectively and unsullied by politics. Most significantly, this thesis illuminates how diverse evidence is navigated and reconciled. Through exploring how inquiry actors produce policy advice, the practice of ‘policy judgement’ is revealed. This is an iterative and deliberative process which involves collectively weighing evidence in the light of normative, practical, and political concerns. The thesis argues that this policy judgement aspect of public inquiries makes them important sites of evidence reconciliation and of ‘evidence-informed policy’. However, much depends on who gets to be involved and how. If public inquiries are to maintain relevance in an era of growing policy complexity and plurality, then greater attention needs to be paid to their recruitment practices and institutional design.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Evidence and public inquiries

Modern processes of public policy are more plural and complex than ever. Today, the processes of making, implementing, and evaluating public policy involve a complex mix of state, market, and civil society actors often working across sectors and jurisdictions (Rhodes 1997, Torfing et al 2012, Bache et al 2016). Some contend that policy problems have also become more complex, for example through ongoing globalisation or the introduction of new technologies (Eliadis et al 2005, Stone 2008). The communicative landscape in which public policy now operates is highly dynamic and diverse, with an abundance of opportunities for political expression (Ercan et al 2019). This growing plurality and complexity of public policy has broadened ideas about the value of different kinds of 'evidence', policy knowledge, and ways of knowing.

These trends have renewed interest in policy arrangements that are equipped to gather and consider diverse forms of evidence in the policy process. This is manifest in calls for more effective knowledge 'integration' processes which recognise the multiplicity of evidence (Davies et al 2019). It is also reflected in contemporary attention being paid to innovative citizen engagement processes such as citizens' juries that elicit public input alongside other forms of expertise (Setälä 2014). Many public engagement initiatives are about boosting the public legitimacy of policy processes, but they also hold epistemic aspirations: citizen and stakeholder input brings diverse knowledge for policy innovation and problem solving (Noveck 2015). Recent popularity of arrangements that seek to 'co-produce' policy-relevant knowledge (Edelenbos et al 2011) or 'co-design' public policy (Evans and Terrey 2016) further highlights the diversity of what can count as 'evidence'.

This need for policy settings equipped to navigate diverse evidence has become arguably more pressing in a so-called 'post-truth' era of politics in which ideology and emotions are considered to take precedence over 'facts' and reasoned debate (Jasanoff and Simmet 2017). In this context, there has been much public commentary and academic reflection over the potential devaluing of evidence and expertise in public policy (Banks 2018, Clarke and Newman 2017, Brown 2016). Failing to recognise and

accommodate the diversity and contestability of evidence will do us no favours in this regard. Policy settings that can inquire into complex policy issues and that allow diverse evidence to be brought in, debated, and navigated are needed all the more (Nabatchi and Jo 2018).

In democratic political systems there are a number of existing inquiry arrangements that might fulfil this role. This thesis explores one prevalent, but often overlooked, institution – the public inquiry. Established by executive government, public inquiries produce policy advice on matters of public importance. While their use has waxed and waned over time, public inquiries continue to be a resilient feature of contemporary governance in many democratic systems worldwide (Prasser and Tracey 2014, Johns and Inwood 2018, Marier 2009). Public inquiries come in multiple forms and include Royal Commissions, commissions of inquiry, Ministerial taskforces, review panels, and reference groups. While highly diverse in purpose, public inquiries typically include expert members on their advisory bodies and seek to bring evidence and expertise to bear on complex policy issues. They engage publicly and undertake processes of evidence-production, synthesis, and analysis (Prasser 2006). In theory, public inquiries are a policy arrangement that involves diverse evidence being navigated as part of the process of producing recommendations and policy advice.

While public inquiries promise much by way of gathering and analysing policy evidence, relatively little is known about what evidence they use and how. It is not clear what counts as ‘evidence’ within inquiries or what types of ‘expert’ are included in inquiry processes. The public inquiry literature contains numerous descriptive accounts of the evidence-gathering activities of inquiries, but remains largely silent on how different forms of evidence and expertise are used within and during a public inquiry (Johns and Inwood 2018). In this thesis, I investigate the multiple meanings and uses of evidence in public inquiries. My empirical research has focused on how actors involved in public inquiries understand and use ‘evidence’ and this focus has generated broader insights into the role of ‘expertise’ in inquiry work.

In the academic literature and in public commentary, public inquiries are typically portrayed as two contrasting archetypes (Stark 2019, Bulmer 1982, Stone 1994). The first of these views public inquiries as essentially political instruments or political

'puppets' which governments establish to manage or manipulate an agenda. This might be to give the impression of action, to kick a policy problem into the proverbial long grass, or to bring some legitimacy to a policy decision already made. In this characterisation, it can be assumed that the collection and use of evidence is largely symbolic, with evidence being used selectively to support a pre-determined policy position. The second characterisation is that public inquiries are independent and impartial advisers. They are established by government to provide an objective analysis and to produce advice unsullied by political machinations. In this portrayal, the inquiry operates as an evidence 'clearing house' and selected evidence is used instrumentally to inform policy advice and subsequent policy decisions. This second characterisation can be seen as a classic example of 'evidence-based policy' (Prasser 2006). My research findings challenge both of these characterisations and reveal an alternative and more nuanced account of the nature of public inquiries and their expertise and evidence attributes. This alternative account provides insights into the diversity of 'evidence' and how public inquiries operate as important settings for evidence deliberation and reconciliation.

Research question and approach

What counts as evidence in policy is highly contested in the literature. In the context of their recent review of how the evidence agenda has developed over the last two decades, Boaz and colleagues (2019, p 5) highlight that "evidence is a label that becomes attached by different actors to some types of knowledge and ways of knowing." The essence of this quote underpins my approach to investigating evidence within public inquiries. Specifically, I explore the different types of knowledge that different inquiry actors labelled 'evidence'. This attention to 'evidence' rather than 'knowledge', which can be seen as the more foundational concept, also stemmed from hearing the language of policy practitioners. Discussions with actors engaged in inquiry work involve conversations about 'evidence' – although this term carries widely different interpretations as I show in Chapter 4.

This was the starting point which guided my research question and informed my overall approach to research. In Chapter 3, I set out a detailed description of my approach and methods. In this introductory chapter, I provide a brief overview of its main features:

my research question; my interpretive approach; the actors engaged in the research; and its comparative dimensions.

This research has been guided by a central research question. As mentioned above, the public inquiry literature contains many descriptive accounts of the evidence-gathering activities of inquiries and numerous (largely implicit) assumptions about how evidence is deployed within inquiries. But few studies have sought to explore empirically the role of evidence in the work of inquiries. An empirical study of how inquiry actors understand and use evidence can help illuminate the contested nature of evidence and the work involved in navigating¹ diverse evidence. This gap in the literature may seem surprising; however, as I discuss in Chapter 2, there are many holes in the scholarship of public inquiries. Perhaps even more surprising is that this gap in the inquiry literature is consistent with the wider policy studies literature that considers the role of evidence in public policy. A number of scholars – for example, Oliver et al 2014b and Head 2016 – have highlighted that there are relatively few contextual assessments of evidence in practice² and this means we have limited understanding of how evidence is actually used in policy. Much of the literature takes as its starting point a normative position that evidence, usually meaning *research* evidence, should be used and then assesses the extent to which it was used. I have taken a different approach by seeking to understand public inquiries through the eyes of those actors involved in ‘inquiry work’. My guiding research question, therefore, is:

- How do policy actors involved in public inquiries understand, navigate, and use evidence in their inquiry work?

¹ My use of the term ‘navigate’ reflects that ‘evidence’ and the evidentiary landscape can be diverse and contested. Policy actors must ‘navigate’ through this complexity. What this process of navigating evidence looks like in practice is considered in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

² When I use the term ‘practice’, I am referring to practice in the context of policy processes rather than in relation to service delivery.

To explore this question, I have taken an interpretive approach. My intention has been to reveal and explore the ‘meanings’ (Yanow 1996) that inquiry actors place on evidence and its use. Interpretive approaches focus on actors and their agency (Sullivan 2016) and are able to illuminate the complexities and ambiguities often inherent in public policy (Stone 2001). This interpretive and practice-oriented approach has allowed a detailed understanding of the work involved in navigating diverse evidence in public inquiries. My research largely involves inductive rather than deductive reasoning, so I have developed insights and patterns from my data which I then reflect on in the context of existing theory. As is fitting with interpretive research, I have had to be flexible and adapt my approach in the light of inductive insights (Hendriks 2007). This was particularly evident in relation to the actors that I sought to engage in the research, considered next.

The novelty of my research emanates, in part, because of its focus on inquiry *process* and how that is experienced by the actors involved. Unlike many previous studies (for example, Borchardt 1991, Hallett 1982, Prasser 2006), I have conceptualised a particular inquiry not by central reference to the advisory body or its final report, but as a ‘process of inquiry’ which involves a range of activities occurring over a period of time. Emphasising the inquiry process has enabled my research to reveal a dynamism that is largely missing in previous research and brings into view a wider range of actors than is usually considered in inquiry research. I started off my interview plan with members of advisory boards, but during the research many other individuals were suggested as important to the process of the inquiry. These additional actors included members of the official secretariat, other officials working within government (who were involved in the inquiry or subsequent decision making), and external actors who were actively engaged in the inquiry. This has allowed my research to bring to light the perspectives of those individuals who have been largely unacknowledged in the public inquiry literature (Stark 2019).

This wider group of actors are important because they undertake important evidence-related inquiry work. This approach has also provided insights into the different types

of ‘expert’³ engaged in inquiry work and the nature of their ‘expertise’. As already mentioned, my primary focus in this research has been to shed light on evidence in inquiries, but my focus on actors has made the role of ‘experts’ and of ‘expertise’ a consistent thread running throughout the work. This has allowed my research to explore and provide insights into the relationship between evidence and expertise.

This research project has several comparative aspects. A comparative case-study research design has allowed in-depth investigation within real-life contexts (Stake 1995). The case-studies explored in my research are two contemporary Australian public inquiries in the social policy domain: the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (2004–05) and the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (1999–2000). I selected these two case-studies following a wider review of public inquiries in Australia. Both cases involved complex and contested social policy issues, yet the inquiries were able to reach agreement as to the recommended policy advice and the final reports were widely supported. However, initial empirical exploration suggested the selected cases varied significantly in my primary focus of interest – evidence. Two further comparative aspects of the research should be highlighted. In addition to comparing case-study inquiries, I have also sought to compare different types of actors (and experts) and over time. This last dimension, the temporal aspect of the research, merits some further explanation here.

Public inquiries are a process occurring over time and how actors use evidence is an activity that takes place over time. In order to bring a temporal aspect to my analysis, I decided to make two novel moves. First, I structured my interviews using a temporal framework – in interviews, I guided participants through the inquiry process by asking questions about the inquiry establishment phase right through to the implementation of any inquiry recommendations. Second, I analysed my data using a temporal frame to explore, in particular, whether and how the way in which evidence was used changed

³ Given my research is exploring multiple and contested meanings of several concepts, I have had repeatedly to resist the urge to use inverted commas around ‘evidence’, ‘knowledge’, ‘expertise’, ‘expert’, and indeed ‘policy’ – but on occasion this has seemed appropriate when drawing attention to the contested nature of the terms.

over time (through the duration of the inquiry). This approach has added a certain dynamism to our understanding of public inquiries which is largely absent in the current literature. This temporal dimension has also provided insights into the roles of public inquiries in public policy, and how they might usefully allow time for considering evidence but also ‘close-down’ time in requiring an inquiry body to reach conclusions in a pre-determined timeframe. I elaborate upon these temporal insights in the concluding chapter of this thesis, and suggest that, given their temporal attributes and significance, public inquiries occupy a special place in contemporary governance.

My research puts the spotlight on public inquiries that are established to advise on a particular, often enduring and complex, policy problem. While several categories of public inquiries exist, classification by primary function is helpful. In this regard, we can consider two main types of public inquiries: ‘inquisitorial’ inquiries which investigate particular allegations or catastrophic events, and ‘policy-advisory’ inquiries which advise governments in relation to particular policy problems (Prasser 2006). There are no hard and fast lines between these two types of inquiry. However, my case-studies can be understood as fundamentally ‘policy-advisory’ in nature. As I discuss in the next chapter, ‘policy-advisory’ inquiries seem to be the quiet cousins of the loud ‘inquisitorial’ inquiries (Royal Commissions and other statutory inquiries which tend to be the focus of sustained media attention), and hence are often overlooked in the wider public inquiry literature.

Audiences and findings

This thesis has several scholarly and practitioner audiences in mind, including those interested and involved specifically in public inquiries and a wider audience concerned with evidence and policy. In particular, the findings in this thesis speak to two key debates in the study of evidence in the policy process. First, my research contributes to the literature exploring the *nature* of evidence and knowledge in policy. This includes other interpretive studies (see examples in Wesselink et al 2014) which explore the meaning of evidence in policy (and whose starting point is that ‘evidence’ is socially constructed by actors engaged in policy work), as well as other research demonstrating the multiplicity of types and sources of knowledge that can underpin evidence (for example Head 2008, Pawson et al 2003). Second, the findings relate to research that

explores the different ways in which evidence is *used* in policymaking. In particular, those scholars who have embraced the term ‘evidence-informed policy’ and who view ‘evidence use’ as part of a complex and inherently political policy process (for example, Bowen and Zwi 2005, Nutley et al 2007, Head 2016, Boaz et al 2019), should find much of relevance in this thesis. Further, for those scholars concerned with increasing the use specifically of *research* evidence in policy, my case-study inquiries highlight various strategies for how the profile of research might be elevated in policy work. In particular, the Child Support Inquiry demonstrates the efficacy of a collaborative model of research utilisation whereby researchers and policymakers work alongside each other. For those interested in democratising public policy, this thesis illuminates both the potential and frailties of the ‘publicness’ of public inquiries. It demonstrates that public inquiries typically seek to bring various ‘publics’ into the inquiry process, and yet suggests that the reality of public engagement in inquiries can be limited, both in its inclusive and deliberative ambitions and realities.

This thesis has wider relevance to scholarship in policy studies. As already indicated, and as others have commented (for example, Cairney 2017), how we think about the role of evidence in public policy is contingent upon how we conceptualise the policy process itself. This thesis provides insights into the nature of the policy process in the context of public inquiries, and has what I hope are interesting things to say about the extent to which this is linear and ‘rational’, or iterative and recursive, or just plain messy. Furthermore, given my focus on understanding ‘inquiry work’, my thesis and its approach speaks to the ‘practice turn’ in policy studies which emphasises the activities and practice of policy (Freeman et al 2011, Cook and Wagenaar 2012) and the work of policy practitioners (Colebatch 2006a, 2006b, Colebatch et al 2010). Unpacking ‘inquiry work’, and how actors craft policy advice, reveals insights that I suggest have potential significance in other policy settings and for the skills and capabilities of policy workers more generally. My analysis also provides some broader theoretical insights for policy scholars in suggesting that greater attention to ‘temporality’ as a policy (process) design concept is valuable, particularly in an era of fast policy (Stoker 2016).

Overall, my research findings reveal the complex nature of inquiry work which challenges the main characterisations of public inquiries found in the existing literature.

I come to the conclusion that the inquiries which form my case-studies should not be denigrated as ‘political puppets’ that deploy evidence merely symbolically, nor should they be venerated as ‘impartial advisers’ that use evidence in a strictly objective or wholly instrumental manner. The central argument of this thesis is that public inquiries merit a more nuanced and dynamic account of their role, reflecting: a) the complex evidentiary characteristics of ‘inquiry work’; and b) how they operate as a time-limited process of inquiry within an ongoing policy process (or simply as a ‘process within a process’). I find that inquiry actors have diverse understandings of ‘evidence’ which represent what they consider to be valid knowledge in context. I show that it matters *who* gets to be involved (for *what* counts as evidence) and I show that one of the challenges of inquiry work is how different interpretations of evidence are navigated so that practical policy action can be agreed upon. I document how the way evidence is used changes over the course of the inquiry – sometimes being used to promote debate; at other times to bridge stakeholder interests; and, throughout, to inform the development of policy advice. Furthermore, I set out how ‘inquiry work’ involves actors navigating diverse evidence through the practice of ‘policy judgement’. This involves an iterative and interactive process of discussion and deliberation, thereby enabling diverse evidence to be reconciled with normative, practical, and political concerns. Finally, I make it clear how the practice of policy judgement requires particular skills and expertise.

Outline of argument

Public inquiries remain prevalent and important tools of executive government about which we know relatively little (Stark 2019). This thesis increases our knowledge and understanding of this long-standing policy institution in the context of debates about how evidence is understood and can be used in public policy. The central contribution of this thesis is in furthering our understanding of the inquiry process, its evidentiary characteristics, and the deep, complex, and contentious work involved in producing policy advice. Below, I outline the central arguments in the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I bring together the public inquiry literature with scholarship on the role of evidence and knowledge in public policy. The main aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how my research is addressing an important gap in both the public inquiry

and evidence literature and why this focus on the perspectives of actors is an important contribution. I outline the various accounts of public inquiries found in the literature and demonstrate that the evidence practices of public inquiries have received little scholarly attention. Next, I shift to the broader study of evidence and knowledge in public policy. I analyse the shift in the policy studies literature from ‘evidence-based policy’⁴ to ‘evidence-*informed* policy’ and argue that the literature now gives greater recognition to the diverse and contested nature of ‘evidence’, the multiplicity of policy knowledge, and the complexity of how evidence and policy interrelate. This provides the motivation for my interpretive and practice-oriented approach, which is well suited to studying the complexities of public policy.

In Chapter 3, I set out my methodological approach and the research methods employed. I provide further rationale for taking an interpretive approach and demonstrate how this has allowed my research to reveal the perspectives, experiences, and agency of actors engaging in inquiry work. I show how my conceptualisation of public inquiries as a ‘process of inquiry’ has influenced my research design and methods. I explain my choice of a case-study research design and how I went about selecting my case-studies, and I set out how I sought to pay attention to ‘temporality’ in my study of the public inquiry process. In the second half of the chapter, I offer a primer for each of my two case-studies, which allows later chapters to focus on analysis and interpretation.

Turning to my empirical work, in Chapter 4 I examine how actors in my two case-studies understood evidence in their inquiry work. The novel contribution of this chapter is in illuminating the complex and contested evidentiary perspectives of actors. I identify five discourses of evidence, with a discourse here understood as a shared way of making sense of the world through language (Hajer 2005). I reveal how the different discourses vary in terms of the type and diversity of knowledge that is labelled as

⁴ Throughout this thesis, I use the terms ‘evidence-based *policy*’ (and ‘evidence-*informed policy*’), rather than evidence-based policy-making (EBPM) or evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) to encompass the breadth of the policy process not only the policy formulation or decision-making aspects.

evidence by actors. I demonstrate that actors have a proclivity for particular types of knowledge related to their professional or disciplinary backgrounds. However, I also show that what actors consider as evidence is grounded in context. Then, I explore and compare the overall discursive landscape of each inquiry, and argue that the profile of this landscape (for example, how diverse it is and which discourses dominate) has implications for the breadth of knowledge included in the overall inquiry process and for the challenges that advisory bodies might face in reaching agreement on policy findings and advice (examined in Chapter 6).

In Chapter 5, I analyse how actors report using evidence in the inquiry case-studies. The novel contribution of this Chapter lies in uncovering the dynamic nature of inquiry work and how it relates to the wider policy process. According to the actors in this research, evidence in public inquiries is used in multiple ways and these 'uses' change over the course of the inquiry. Actors in both case-studies describe using evidence to inform policy design and inquiry recommendations. This in itself seems a significant finding given the lack of empirical literature that shows evidence being used to inform public policy. However, actors reported using evidence in other ways: to frame the policy problem; to promote public debate and build legitimacy; to bridge stakeholder interests; to publicly substantiate findings; and to support the subsequent policy reform process. A further significant finding revealed in this Chapter is how actors made sense of using evidence in the context of the wider roles that the inquiry was playing in the policy process. This suggests that the work of inquiring is best appreciated by those involved as a dynamic process interrelated with the wider policy process.

In Chapter 6, I examine the way actors navigated the complex evidentiary terrain of inquiry work and produced policy advice. The novel contribution of this chapter is in revealing the practice of 'policy judgement'. Overall, I do not find a mechanistic process with actors drawing on evidence hierarchies to evaluate evidence. Rather, I discover actors engaging in an iterative and interactive process involving discussion and deliberation. Through the practice of policy judgement, actors are able to navigate and weigh evidence, values, interests, and practical and political concerns. I argue that this policy judgement aspect of public inquiries makes them important settings for 'evidence-informed policy' as it allows the complexity, diversity, and ambiguity of

evidence to be navigated. This chapter finishes with an analysis of ‘inquiry work’ and its requisite skills and experience.

In Chapter 7, I reflect on my research findings and consider their implications for our understanding of public inquiries and their practices, and for the role of evidence in public policy more broadly. Two main messages emerge from this analysis. Firstly, careful attention should be paid to the recruitment practices of public inquiries if they are to be equipped to welcome in, navigate, and accommodate diverse evidence. Secondly, the institutional design of public inquiries matters, in particular that sufficient time is earmarked for the complex and arduous nature of inquiry work. Time allows for a diversity of evidence and expertise to be brought into an inquiry and for this policy knowledge to be reconciled and practical policy action agreed upon. Through gathering and reconciling diverse evidence, public inquiries can be important sites of ‘evidence-informed policy’. I conclude the thesis by reflecting back on how public policy is becoming more complex and plural and how we might deal with the consequent diversity of evidence. I argue that we need to nurture genuinely ‘hybrid’ policy institutions that can accommodate evidence from both public input and systematic research inquiry. My research demonstrates that public inquiries can do this, but much depends on who gets to be involved and how.

Chapter 2: Public inquiries and evidence

Introduction

This thesis is broadly concerned with how evidence is understood and used in policy processes. In the previous chapter, I argued that in the face of increasing complexity and plurality of public policy, contemporary governance needs institutions that are equipped to gather, consider, and reconcile diverse forms of policy evidence. I suggested that public inquiries hold potential in this respect and set out my research question: how do actors involved in public inquiries understand, navigate, and use evidence in their inquiry work? In this chapter, I argue that this question addresses an important gap in both the literature on public inquiries and policy evidence, and how investigating the perspectives of actors makes a valuable contribution.

This chapter has two parts. First, I examine the public inquiry literature. I situate public inquiries in the wider governance landscape and highlight the roles that scholars have ascribed to public inquiries in the literature. This is helpful in setting the scene for how public inquiries might deploy evidence. I reveal that numerous accounts of the ‘evidence-gathering’ activities of public inquiries exist, and that this suggests diverse sources of evidence are entering the inquiry process. Further, we know that public inquiries produce policy advice set out in inquiry reports, and these detail the evidence from which they have drawn. However, I show that questions concerning the inquiry *process* and how evidence is navigated and used *within* public inquiries have seldom been asked in research studies. I argue that public inquiries remain an evidence ‘black box’ and I set out the reasons why a better understanding of evidence in public inquiries is needed.

Second, I consider the policy studies literature on the relationship between evidence, knowledge, and policy. My purpose here is to provide theoretical grounding for my later analysis and to demonstrate how my findings fit in, and contribute to, contemporary debates in the evidence and policy studies literature. I argue that this literature has evolved to give greater recognition of the diverse and contested nature of ‘evidence’, the multiplicity of policy knowledge, and the complexity of how evidence and policy interrelate. This lends credence to my interpretive and practice-oriented approach,

which is well-suited to studying the ambiguities and complexities of public policy (Stone 2001) and for illuminating phenomena or processes that are ‘in the dark’ (Hendriks 2007).

Situating public inquiries

To provide context to my research, it is helpful to recognise the long lineage of public inquiry practice and scholarship and to understand how inquiries fit into the contemporary governance landscape.

The practice and scholarship of public inquiries

Public inquiries have an extensive history in many countries with Westminster-style democracies (Prasser 2006). In the United Kingdom, public inquiries have been traced back to the eleventh century and to an ‘inquiry’ into land ownership that helped prepare the Domesday Book (Clokier and Robinson 1937, in Prasser 2006). In Australia, the use of public inquiries dates back to the period between colonial settlement and federation, and the Royal Commissions Act 1902 (Cth) was one of the first acts passed by the Commonwealth Parliament (Prasser and Tracey 2014). Over time, there have been many thousands of public inquiries operating at national and local jurisdictions in several nations, most notably in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Johns and Inwood 2018, Prasser 2006). While the popularity of public inquiries has ebbed and flowed over time, they remain a resilient feature of contemporary governance in several countries around the world (Marier 2009, 2013).

Public inquiries are typically defined by the ad hoc and temporary nature of their advisory boards and that they are established by executive government (Prasser 2006). This distinguishes them from permanent advisory bodies and from inquiries that are commissioned in parliament or from outside of government, discussed further below. Public inquiries vary in duration from a few months to several years (Prasser and Tracey 2014). The nature, organisational form, and nomenclature of public inquiries also varies greatly and include the establishment of taskforces, commissions of inquiry, review panels, reference groups, and Royal Commissions. In Australia, the generic terms that tend to be used are ‘public inquiries’ (in the academic literature) or ‘external review’ or ‘independent review’ (in policy and other documentation). In other countries,

different terms are used, most commonly 'commissions of inquiry', 'governmental commissions', or simply 'commissions' (Inwood and Johns 2016, Bulmer 1983a, Sheriff 1983). Presidential commissions in the United States are of a similar ilk to the formal Royal Commissions found in many countries (Zegart 2004). Truth commissions (or 'truth and reconciliation commissions') are a particular form of public inquiry that investigate past wrong-doing (of state and non-state actors) and help reconcile a legacy of past conflict (Freeman 2006).

Public inquiries have been the subject of sustained scholarship over time. However, there is no coherent body of work in any single social science discipline which could be called 'the field' of public inquiry scholarship (Stark 2019). Public inquiries have long been a focus of study in diverse disciplines including organisational studies (for example, Elliott 2009, Boudes and Laroche 2009), legal and constitutional affairs (for example, Lauriat 2010, Beer et al 2011), political science (for example, Prasser 1994, Gilligan 2002, Prasser and Tracey 2014), and specifically the policy studies and public administration fields (for example, Inwood and Johns 2016, Marier 2009, 2013, Stutz 2008, Stark 2019). In this thesis, I draw mainly from politics and policy-related sources. Public inquiries cover a vast array of topics and hence have been studied in the context of many substantive policy areas such as environmental studies, economic policy, social policy, and criminal justice (Prasser 2006). My case-studies are in the social policy domain and so I also draw on literature that has considered inquiries in this context (for example, Smyth 2005, Stanton 2005, McClelland 2001).

The scholarly literature on public inquiries is highly descriptive and predominantly focuses on a specific inquiry and its role in a particular reform agenda, as noted by key scholars in the field (Rowe and McAllister 2006, Prasser 1994, 2006, Inwood and Johns 2016). Stark (2019, p 3) refers to the 'sorry state of the art' in relation to the study of public inquiries and laments the overall lack of analytical and theoretical social science research into inquiries. Typically scholars seem puzzled by this neglect, although it has been suggested it might relate to their ad hoc and temporary nature (Prasser 2006) or to their sheer diversity (Gilligan 2002). The limited nature of the public inquiry literature extends to questions of evidence and how it is used, as I show further below.

However, the literature has been helpful in illuminating how public inquiries fit in the wider governance arena and the potential roles that inquiries play in the policy process.

Distinguishing public inquiries in the policy landscape

Situating public inquiries in the contemporary policy landscape helps set the scene for how actors might view evidence in public inquiries. A key feature of public inquiries is their advisory function. They are given the task of inquiring into issues of public concern and providing advice to executive government, or as Bulmer (1983a, p 561) succinctly put it “Commissions are expected to inquire and advise.” Therefore, one way that scholars position public inquiries is to view them as part of a ‘policy advisory system’ – an inter-connected set of policy actors and institutions that offer information and advice to government and policy-makers (Halligan 1995). This ‘system’ includes the work of permanent advisory bodies, thinktanks, and consultants, some of whom also undertake ad hoc public inquiries.

Drawing on Bulmer’s quote above, the other critical feature of public inquiries is that they ‘inquire’. As introduced in the previous chapter, there are many sites of inquiry that exist in democratic political systems. The distinctiveness of public inquiries lies in being commissioned by executive government and in being led by an ad hoc and temporary advisory body involving experts from outside of government (Prasser 2006). Other types of inquiry include those undertaken by permanent advisory bodies. So for example, in Australia, the Productivity Commission frequently undertakes inquiries at the behest of executive government (Banks 2013).

Several other types of inquiry exist which are not instigated by executive government. These include parliamentary inquiries undertaken by committees within parliament and which exist in countries with Westminster-styles of government (Benton and

Russell 2012).⁵ Bodies or individuals outside of government, such as thinktanks or academics, also instigate inquiries into matters of public concern.⁶ Then, there is a range of other arrangements which seek to inquire into public policy, although not typically labelled as ‘inquiries’. This includes, as highlighted in the previous chapter, the increasing interest in arrangements and initiatives concerned with bringing the public into policy deliberations through various ‘mini-publics’ (Setälä 2014, Breckon et al 2019) such as citizens’ juries.

The roles of public inquiries in public policy

Understanding the diverse roles that public inquiries play in public policy is useful in making sense of how actors within them use evidence.

Political puppets or impartial advisers?

Two conventional viewpoints on public inquiries persist in the public inquiry literature and in public commentary (Stone 1994, Stark 2019). In the Introduction to this thesis, I labelled these ‘political puppet’ and ‘impartial adviser’. The first viewpoint (political puppet) is that public inquiries are established for purely political ends to manage an agenda. Here, public inquiries are viewed essentially as political vehicles that governments use for largely symbolic purposes, for example to delay a difficult decision, distract attention, or appease stakeholders. The second conventional viewpoint (impartial adviser) is to understand an inquiry by what is typically its overt or stated purpose: to impartially assess a policy problem and to give independent advice to government.

⁵ These inquiries are of a different ilk given they take place in parliament and are undertaken by parliamentarians with the assistance of a secretariat. It is worth noting that there is often an interplay between parliamentary inquiries and public inquiries, with policy problems frequently being sequentially, or even sometimes simultaneously, examined by both parliament and the executive.

⁶ A recent example in Australia is Per Capita’s *People’s Inquiry into Privatisation* (Per Capita 2016). In the UK, the current Commission on Social Security (2019) is led by ‘experts with experience’ (the commissioners) who are from user-led organisations and who are supported by a small number of individuals drawn mainly from academia.

These two viewpoints pervade much of the literature. For example, Bulmer (1982) distinguishes between what he calls the 'ideal-typical' view of inquiries as "an independent body whose task it is to form an authoritative and objective judgement of the policy problem" (p 96) and the 'critical' view of inquiries which sees inquiries "as a means of political manipulation" (p 97). Owens' (2012, 2015) study of the UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution also draws attention to these characterisations. She relates her conceptual work to 'advisory bodies' rather than public inquiries, but it remains relevant. Owens points to the enduring nature of the characterisation of 'impartial adviser' or in Owens' words they act as "...rational analysts, furnishing authoritative, dispassionate advice for the benefit of those in power" (Owens, 2012 p 6). Owens shows how this role is associated with a 'linear-rational' view of policy formulation and with the understanding that the 'objective' analysis of the advisory body is provided to government separated from any political considerations. Owens flags the shortcomings of this model in its presumption of 'technical' rationality, and then points to accounts which highlight inquiries as instruments of 'political' rationality, echoing the above depictions of 'political puppet' and which sees inquiries as essentially serving political ends.

In the literature, these characterisations include little explicitly about how evidence might be being understood and used in public inquiries. However, implicitly, I suggest these characterisations contain important assumptions about evidence. In the 'political puppet' account, the collection and use of evidence might be understood as largely symbolic, with evidence being used selectively to support the pre-determined policy position. In the 'impartial adviser' explanation, the inquiry might be seen to operate as an evidence 'clearing house' with evidence being used instrumentally to inform policy advice and subsequent policy decisions. In this sense, this second characterisation has been described as an example of 'evidence-based policy' (Prasser 2006). I draw out these assumptions here because they provide a useful point of reference for my empirical findings about how actors report using evidence in my case-study inquiries (Chapters 5 and 6).

More nuanced viewpoints

Although these two characterisations dominate the literature and popular debate (as many authors have noted, for example, Prasser 2006, Stark 2019, Owens 2012), some inquiry scholarship presents a more nuanced and wider array of policy roles (for example, Johns and Inwood 2018, Prasser 2006). Two particular roles that can be found in the literature merit some further attention here as they provide insight into why public inquiries are interesting sites for exploring diverse policy evidence.

Firstly, there is also an emerging body of work on public inquiries as sites of 'boundary work'. This perspective is derived from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and draws from Sheila Jasanoff's work on science–policy relationships and her empirical research on scientific advisory committees (for example, Jasanoff 2004). Returning to Owens (2012, 2015), she revealed that the UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution acted in many ways like a 'boundary organisation', bridging the scientific community and policy worlds. In the context of *parliamentary* inquiries, Turnpenny et al (2013) explore the boundary work of the UK Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee and find that the committee operated across several boundaries, including (they argue) across the evidence–policy interface.

Secondly, some scholars highlight how public inquiries are important sites for policy debate, contestation, and reconciliation of different interests. Prasser (2006, p 101) includes 'mediation and conflict management' as one of the key functions of public inquiries and argues that the contribution an inquiry makes might be related to how it has helped secure agreement between different interests (inside and outside of government) rather than through the contents of the final report. Other scholars have made similar arguments through revealing how public inquiries can include 'discursive spaces' (Hardy and Maguire 2010, p 1383) whereby different actors can put forward their views for debate and where different interests can be reconciled (Smith and Weller 1978, Degeling et al 1993, Rowe and McAllister 2006). Much of this analysis relates to the role of public inquiries in reconciling contested *interests*, rather than my focus on diverse *evidence*. It remains helpful in illustrating how public inquiries can be sites where debate, argument, and deliberation take place. However, this research says

little about how processes of reconciling interests proceed and in what form. As I argue below, inquiry scholarship has largely failed to look *inside* public inquiries.

Public inquiries and evidence

Next, I turn to what is known about the nature of evidence and how it gets used in public inquiries. Through surveying the existing literature, I show that the central contribution and novelty of this thesis is illuminating what goes on *inside* a public inquiry and how actors interpret evidence and its uses within the inquiry process. The public inquiry literature that considers evidence is limited by being mainly focused on the evidence-*gathering* processes of inquiries, rather than how evidence is then used throughout the process of inquiry.

An evidence black box

It is well-documented in the literature that public inquiries typically involve a process of evidence-gathering (for example, Weller 1994a, Stark 2019). Studies that focus on a single case-study in the context of analysing a substantive policy reform agenda often detail how the inquiry went about seeking evidence. Activities typically include collating existing research, putting out a ‘call for evidence’, and hosting public forums. These often involve the hosting of public hearings, expert workshops, and other public and stakeholder meetings and gatherings. Sometimes, depending upon the inquiry timeframe, new research is commissioned. The amount of information gathered by public inquiries is often extensive (Prasser 2006).

This knowledge that public inquiries involve a wide range of evidence-gathering activities was a helpful starting point for my research. As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, it signals that public inquiries receive diverse sources of evidence, which includes scholarly research and public input. In the Australian context, Head and Di Francesco (2019, p 308) have pointed out that “inquiry mechanisms have also been an important channel for eliciting and synthesising expert research and stakeholder information.” Drawing from research concerned with inquiries in the child welfare arena, Humphreys et al (2014) argue that public consultation activities helped ensure that the evidence base being considered by the inquiry was ‘multi-dimensional’. They demonstrate that this included empirical research evidence but also evidence as defined

by public stakeholders. Although these scholars helpfully draw attention to the potential diversity of evidence in public inquiries, knowledge about how evidence is interpreted and used *within* the process of public inquiries remains a significant research gap.

This is consistent with the wider neglect of questions of *process* in the inquiry literature. For example, in Stark's (2019) work on the policy learning potential of public inquiries, he shows that existing literature has tended to explore either the processes through which knowledge is generated by an inquiry or how government responds to the recommendations of an inquiry – a basic two-step process of lesson-learning (Stark 2019, p 28). Salter (1989, 2007) and Johns and Inwood (2018) have similarly argued that the inquiry process has received little research attention.

A few researchers have sought to 'fill the gap' between what we know about how public inquiries gather evidence and the impact of the final report. For example, Whitford and Boadle's (2008) study of Australia's Rural Reconstruction Commission (1943–46). They analysed transcripts of oral evidence and inquiry correspondence and revealed the role that the inquiry played in negotiating between different stakeholders and across jurisdictional boundaries throughout the inquiry process. Degeling et al (1993) provide a participant account of the Drug Evaluation Review in Australia and highlight the negotiation and bargaining between stakeholders that the inquiry actors facilitated. In relation to a child support *parliamentary* inquiry, Cook and Natalier (2014) explore how legitimacy was afforded to different kinds of evidence in the inquiry process, and argued that what mattered to committee members in terms of whether evidence was considered legitimate (or not) was whether it aligned with their *a priori* understandings of the nature of the world and the policy problem. Finally, some studies have reflected on the report-writing process and how this latter stage of an inquiry is time-pressured and typically requires reconciliation of diverse views, although these authors acknowledge this has rarely been the focus of empirical investigation (Salter 1989, Prasser 2006).

In light of the above discussion, I argue that public inquiries are essentially an evidence 'black box'. We know that typically diverse evidence enters a public inquiry and that

advice is produced and drafted into a final report. However, we know very little about what happens in between. This thesis seeks to address this research gap.

Why we need a better understanding of evidence in public inquiries

But why does it matter that we know little about how evidence is understood and used in public inquiries? I argue this research gap is problematic for a number of reasons. First, as discussed above, our current understanding of public inquiries contains important assumptions about how evidence might be used. Indeed, the two dominant characterisations of public inquiries contain conflicting assumptions about how evidence might be used: instrumentally to inform policy advice or symbolically to support a pre-determined position. These assumptions have not been probed by empirical research, and this is of concern. For example, if evidence is being used in a purely symbolic fashion, then many actors who provide evidence to inquiries may justifiably feel they have wasted their time and resources, or they might not bother to provide input in the first place. Conversely, if evidence is being used to inform inquiry advice, then this raises a different and more fundamental question, which is what ‘evidence’ is being included?

This leads to my second reason for caring about the research gap, which is that what gets labelled as evidence within inquiries has implications for the types of knowledge and ways of knowing that are being valued. Put simply, if evidence is informing policy advice then it matters what gets counted as ‘evidence’ and whose knowledge is included. It matters for democratic values (of inclusion and representation) and for epistemic reasons (for example, a limited view of evidence might lead to less informed policy). Understanding more about the knowledge that gets used in the development of inquiry advice is all the more important given empirical research showing that many public inquiries do indeed have influence and policy impact (for example, Prasser and Tracey 2014, Inwood and Johns 2016) and can lead to policy learning (Stark 2019). And, as a more general point, it remains concerning that so little is known about a public institution that is highly prevalent, often influential, and always costly to the public purse.

My final reason for wanting to illuminate evidence within public inquiries relates to the wider concern highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis – that is, in the face of

growing complexity and plurality of public policy, we need policy arrangements equipped to navigate diverse evidence. Nutley et al (2019, p 313) argue there is now “greater urgency around identifying relevant forms of multi-actor involvement and effective ways of integrating the diverse forms of knowledge that are gathered together.” I have assumed that public inquiries might be interesting in this regard because we know they receive diverse sources of evidence. But we don’t know what happens next. Through an in-depth analysis of the practices of public inquiries, we can learn more about if and how they accommodate diverse evidence.

The diversity of public inquiries

Before concluding this section, it is important to acknowledge here that public inquiries are diverse in several ways, and this is likely to have implications for how evidence is understood and used. Public inquiries have been deployed in relation to a vast range of policy issues and public inquiry advisory bodies come in many forms: a single commissioner or a diverse multi-person taskforce; a highly formal Royal Commission with statutory backing and authority or an informal reference group (Prasser 2006). To make sense of this diversity, various ways of categorising public inquiries have been suggested, for example by their organisational or institutional form or the powers they have at their disposal (for example, Hallett 1982, Borchardt 1991, ALRC 2009). One common classification of inquiries, as mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, is based on their core function (Prasser 2006): *inquisitorial inquiries* which investigate particular allegations or catastrophic events, and *policy advisory inquiries* which advise governments in relation to particular policy problems. In Australia, inquisitorial inquiries are mostly set up under statute (the Royal Commission Act 1902 (Cth) or the Public Service Act 1922 (Cth)), whereas policy advisory inquiries tend not to have a statutory basis and are established at the discretion of a government minister or Prime Minister (Prasser 2006).

As with most classifications, there is no hard and fast line between these two types of inquiry. Inquisitorial inquiries usually provide policy recommendations; and policy advisory inquiries can seek to establish the facts or ‘truth’ of a particular policy problem (Prasser 2006, Johns and Inwood 2018). However, the main aim of policy advisory inquiries is to provide advice to government on a particular policy problem and they

tend to adopt a more informal style than inquisitorial inquiries. For example, they tend not to engage in formal public hearings nor have legislative power to summon witnesses (Prasser 2006). The advisory bodies of policy advisory inquiries typically have multiple members and are appointed for their relevant expertise. As such, the advisory bodies usually include people from a wide range of backgrounds including academia, government, interest groups, and private professionals. This contrasts with inquisitorial inquiries which are frequently set up as a single member (the ‘commissioner’) who is typically an eminent lawyer (Borchardt 1991).

The different foci of policy advisory and inquisitorial inquiries is likely to have implications for how evidence is understood and used. For example, Fraser and Davies (2019, p 203) refer to recent examples of inquisitorial public inquiries in the United Kingdom and suggest they “often draw on legal approaches to the production and evaluation of evidence, and they prize expert submissions.” I considered that my interest in arrangements that might be equipped to navigate diverse policy evidence would be best served through an empirical focus on policy advisory inquiries.

Therefore, my research puts the spotlight on policy advisory inquiries and my case-studies can be categorised as such. Much of the analytical inquiry literature either focuses on inquisitorial inquiries (for example, Stark 2019, Gilligan 2002) or tends not to differentiate between types of public inquiry (for example, Stutz 2008). As highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis, policy advisory inquiries seem to be the quiet cousins of the loud inquisitorial inquiries (the Royal Commissions and other statutory inquiries which often receive extensive media attention) and are relatively neglected in the wider public inquiry literature. Given the continued prevalence of policy advisory inquiries (Prasser and Tracey 2014), and how they are enduring sites of inquiry into complex policy issues, I argue they deserve closer analytical attention of their own.⁷

⁷ I use the generic term ‘public inquiry’ throughout this thesis, including when referring to the case-studies which are policy-advisory in nature.

Evidence and policy

I turn now to the literature that explores relationships between evidence and policy. The discussion here provides important theoretical grounding for my research and subsequent analysis.

A broad overview of the literature suggests that the study of evidence has been dominated by a particular view of the policy process (as a ‘rational’, linear, and technical process), by a particular view of evidence (as research evidence), and by a particular perspective (that of the researcher seeking to get evidence *into* policy). However, I argue here that the contemporary literature has evolved over recent times and there is now growing appreciation of the complexity of the relationship between evidence and policy and greater recognition of the diverse and contested nature of ‘evidence’ itself. These developments highlight how evidence is ‘situated’ and needs to be understood in context. I conclude this chapter by arguing that, in light of these developments, an interpretive approach that puts actors’ perspectives at the heart of the research makes an important and novel contribution.

The evolution of ‘evidence-based policy’

The use of evidence in public policy has long been a concern of scholars and practitioners (see discussions in Boaz et al 2019, Head 2008) and is underpinned by enduring debates about the relationship between science and policy (Jasanoff 2004) and the role of knowledge in policy (Radaelli 1995, Freeman and Sturdy 2015). The ‘evidence-based policy’ movement that emerged in the late 1990s drew from ‘evidence-based medicine’ (Donald and Black 2001) and from earlier research utilisation scholarship from the 1960s and 1970s (see discussion in Weiss et al 2008, Kay 2011). Challenges to ‘evidence-based policy’ have come from two main fronts: one empirical and the other normative. Increasingly, therefore, scholars argue that policy is rarely ‘based’ on evidence nor should it be. My purpose here is to examine these critiques to argue that they reveal growing awareness of the complexity of the relationship between evidence and policy. This provides the ‘jumping-off point’ for my research, which seeks to shed further empirical light on this complexity and to explore how policy actors navigate diverse evidence in practice.

The evolution of ‘evidence-based policy’ in response to common normative and empirical critiques needs further discussion. The advance of ‘evidence-based policy’ is associated with the period following New Labour coming to power in the UK in 1997 and the actions of the incoming government to reshape policy development (Head 2010). Many other countries then followed suit in advancing an agenda to raise the profile of evidence in policymaking (Head 2010, Sanderson 2002). In Australia, it became prominent following the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007 (Banks 2009, Kay 2011). At its core, the interest in ‘evidence-based policy’ reflects a normative agenda to promote the use of evidence in policy (Head 2010, Davies and Nutley 2000, Nutley et al 2007), the argument being that this will lead to better policy decisions and ultimately outcomes (Newman and Head 2015, Parkhurst 2017). ‘Evidence-based policy’ has gained much traction and it has been argued that it is now entrenched in public administration rhetoric (Head 2010, Davies 2012) and has generated a set of professional tools and practices within governments (Head 2016). However, it has also been identified as a political slogan that seeks to legitimise policymaking by drawing a contrast with policy that is based on ideology or anecdote – what is sometimes referred to as ‘policy-based evidence’ (Sanderson 2011, Cairney 2017).

It is important to acknowledge that there are multiple interpretations of ‘evidence-based policy’ and ‘evidence-based policymaking’ (Kay 2011). Head (2016) delineates two camps among scholars who endorse the promotion of evidence in policymaking. The first camp advocates the application of rigorous program evaluation and research evidence on ‘what works’ (for example, Banks 2009, Coalition of Evidence-Based Policy 2015). The second camp supports improvements to the quality of evidence for policy, but does not contend that policy decisions could or should be based mainly on evaluations and research findings. Those in this camp argue that policy should be informed by a broad conception of evidence which includes professional expertise (for example, Head 2008, Pawson 2006) and which understands policymaking as operating within a political system that involves complex dynamics between evidence and policy (Lindblom 1959, Majone 1989, Weiss 1979, Head 2010). Much of the critique of ‘evidence-based policy’ relates to the first interpretation. Those in the second camp might now be associated with ‘evidence-*informed* policy’.

There are strong empirical grounds for questioning 'evidence-based policy'. In studies of the policy process, the linear and 'rational' model often assumed in 'evidence-based policy' has increasingly been found wanting (Sanderson 2009). Challenges to a strictly rational approach to policymaking have a long legacy. Simon (1947), Lindblom (1959), and Forester (1984) have all made strong arguments that rationality will always be limited or 'bounded' by cognitive and practical constraints. More recently, authors have suggested that there is a need to move beyond a 'naïve rationality' (Russell et al 2008) which assumes that evidence is somehow outside politics. Tenbensen (2002) argues for 'rich' interpretations of rationality that allows for values and policy ends to emerge through an iterative policy process and includes a wide range of types of knowledge. Similarly concerned with an excessive focus on 'instrumental rationality' in the literature, Kay (2011, p 238) argues for recognition of multiple rationalities in which "rationality animating the policy process is situational and contextual, rather than technocratic and uniquely authoritative". Contemporary empirical research into whether policy-makers draw on evidence to inform decision-making provides little support to the purely 'technical-rational' models of policy-making often assumed with 'evidence-based policy', and illuminates more complex, social and political processes at play (for example, Radin 2000; Landry et al 2001, Lewis 2003). In the policy studies literature at least, it now seems well understood that policy emerges from an interplay between evidence, political values, argument, norms, and power (Majone 1989, Stone 2001, Head 2010).

Alongside the empirical critique of evidence-based policy is a normative appraisal of the idea. Several scholars (for example Strassheim 2017, Marston and Watts 2003) have questioned 'evidence-based policy' on the grounds that it depoliticises the policy process and is a revival of what Deborah Stone called the 'rationality project' (Stone 2001, p 4). This speaks to wider debates which challenge attempts to turn policymaking into a technical and value-free domain, and which have spurred the 'argumentative turn' in policy studies (Fischer and Forester 1993, Fischer and Gottweis 2012) and the emergence of deliberative policy analysis (Hajer et al 2003).

Both the empirical and normative critiques of evidence-based policy have led to what has been described as a new 'realism' in the evidence literature (Sanderson 2009, Head

2010). As highlighted above, many scholars concerned with the use of evidence in policy now adopt the term ‘evidence-*informed* policy’ (Bowen and Zwi 2005, Nutley et al 2007, Head 2016, Boaz et al 2019) which connotes a less deterministic role for evidence in policy. Others have devised alternative theories for the way in which evidence and policy do or should interact, for example, Sanderson’s (2009) notion of ‘intelligent policymaking’ or Ansell and Geyer’s (2017) framework of ‘pragmatic complexity’⁸. These and other scholars have developed frameworks that seek to build democratic concerns (for representation and accountability) into how evidence is sought and used in policy (Sanderson 2002, 2009, Ansell and Geyer 2017, Parkhurst 2017). For example, Parkhurst (2017) has argued for a more explicit recognition of the nature of politics which he shows has been missing from much previous work promoting evidence use, and sets out a normative approach (termed the ‘good governance of evidence’) which seeks to increase the use of evidence that is representative of, and accountable to, the publics being served by policies. Similarly, Boswell (2014) argues that the goals of evidence-based policymaking and democratic policymaking might be further aligned by enabling and empowering lay citizens to engage in the production and deliberation of evidence. A theme that runs throughout this thesis is that what counts as evidence (and whose evidence is valued) has implications for democratic concerns (for example, for inclusion) as well as having knowledge effects (for example, that including experiential knowledge of affected publics might lead to more-informed and ‘better’ policy).

These developments clearly have implications for how we conceptualise the relationship between evidence and policy and our understanding of ‘evidence use’. I consider this in further detail now, as this is a key debate which this thesis addresses.

Understanding ‘evidence use’

The ‘research utilisation’ literature that emerged during the 1970s remains a useful source of insight into the complexity of the evidence–policy relationship (Caplan 1979,

⁸ Both Sanderson (2009) and Geyer (2016) draw on ‘complexity theory’ to progress understanding of the evidence–policy relationship, as do other authors, for example Cairney (2019) and Smith and Joyce (2012).

Caplan et al 1975, Weiss 1977a, 1979). Following extensive empirical investigations, in the late 1970s Carol Weiss identified seven meanings of the concept ‘research utilisation’ (Weiss 1979, p 427). I set these out in full here as they remain one of the best demonstrations of the diversity and complexity of how research might inform policy, and indeed are frequently invoked in contemporary scholarship (for example, Rickinson et al 2019). Weiss’s seven models are: 1) Knowledge-driven model, with research identifying a policy problem then addressing it; 2) Problem-solving model, which involves the direct application of research to a policy decision; 3) Interactive model, whereby the use of research is seen as “only one part of complicated process that uses experience, political insight, pressure, social technologies, and judgement.” (p 429); 4) Political model, using research to support a pre-determined position; 5) Tactical model, where the content of research is irrelevant and research is invoked merely because it is being done; 6) Enlightenment model, whereby research concepts and theories permeate policy over time; and 7) Research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society, with social science and policy interacting, influencing each other, and being influenced by wider intellectual thought.

These seven models have been conflated in subsequent research to three broad conceptualisations of ‘evidence use’. These three uses are typically defined as: a) instrumental – where evidence directly informs policy; b) political – where evidence is used selectively to substantiate or legitimise a policy position; and c) conceptual – where knowledge affects policy slowly and indirectly (Head 2008, 2013, Cherney 2009, Amara et al 2004). Some authors have argued that the political use of knowledge has not been systematically explored (Boswell 2008, Daviter 2015) and that much of the literature suggests that ‘politics’ “constrains the use and counteracts the effects of knowledge in policymaking” (Daviter 2015, p 492) rather than the view that politics and knowledge can interrelate in a range of ways (Radaelli 1995). Drawing on his study of UK drugs policy, Monaghan (2010) argues that established models of evidence use operate at too high a level of abstraction to capture the political nature of evidence use. During my research, it became clear this conflation of uses into ‘instrumental, political, and conceptual’ loses some of Weiss’s original insights and I reflect on her original models in my subsequent analysis.

In more recent scholarship, Nutley et al (2007) shows how a set of research findings can be used in different ways over time by a range of different actors, and Best and Holmes (2010) discuss three generations of ‘knowledge-to-action’ thinking which concerns how research might get used in policy. First-generation thinking relates to rational–linear models; second-generation thinking adopts relational approaches; and third-generation thinking deploys system-wide approaches. As Boaz and Gough (2011, p 400) remark, contemporary research into the relationship between evidence and policy continues “to put a distance between current debates about evidence and policy and the first-generation linear tradition of knowledge transfer.”

These developments suggest that research needs to engage more fully with the complexity of policy itself and with different conceptualisations of how policy works. How evidence, knowledge, and policy are understood to interrelate in practice is imbued with various theories of the policy process. As discussed above, underpinning much ‘evidence-based policy’ literature is a technical and ‘rational’ view of the policy process which assumes that evidence of ‘what works’ leads to policy decisions (Newman 2017). Other scholars draw attention to explanations of the policy process that illustrate the complex interplay of evidence, policy, and politics (Cairney 2019) and which describe policy as being much more than a technical process and reveal its communicative and argumentative character (Fischer 1990, Dryzek 1990). Part of what makes Weiss’s original models interesting is how they theorise the policy process in relation to evidence. While some of her models portray a ‘rational’ and essentially technocratic account of how research enters the policy process (the problem-solving and knowledge-driven models), her other models depict views or aspects of the relationship, including how politics might be dominant (the political and tactical models) or how the relationship might be far from linear (the interactive model.) Throughout this thesis, I have been mindful of the various accounts of the policy process.

Overall, there seems to be growing recognition in the literature of the complexity of the evidence–policy relationship and of the multiple ways in which evidence can get used in the policy process (Boaz et al 2019, Davies et al 2019, Head 2016). Next, I argue that accompanying this trend is increasing acknowledgement of the diversity of what can

count as 'evidence'. This is another fundamental debate in the literature to which my research contributes.

Greater recognition of the diversity of 'evidence'

A further criticism of the 'evidence-based policy' literature is that much of it (explicitly or implicitly) equates evidence with research or evaluation results (Oliver et al 2014b). However, I argue here that accompanying the shift to a more modest role for evidence (captured in the phrase 'evidence-informed policy') is increasing appreciation that different types of knowledge can count as evidence beyond 'scientific' or research-based evidence (the mainstay of the 'evidence-based policy' agenda). In their latest work, Boaz et al (2019, p 5) adopt this 'inclusive definition' of evidence.

Several studies shed light on the possible multidimensionality of what can constitute evidence. For example, Head's (2008) work proposing 'Three lenses of evidence based policy' illustrates the different types or 'perspectives' of evidence that are relevant to policymaking, suggesting these derive from three bodies of knowledge: political knowhow; scientific and technical analysis; and practical and professional field experience. Similarly, other authors consider evidence in relation to the knowledge on which it is based. So for example, Pawson et al (2003), in their work exploring evidence use in social care, theorise five foundations of evidence: organisational knowledge; practitioner knowledge; user knowledge; research knowledge; and policy community knowledge. One of the early UK Cabinet Office documents promoting 'evidence-based policy' in the late 1990s advocated that evidence should be based on information from several sources, including expert knowledge, research and statistics, stakeholder consultation, and evaluation of previous policies (UK Cabinet Office 1999). Tenbenschel (2004) highlights the diverse nature of evidence and argues that we should not assume that the relationship between different types of evidence in policy practice will be coherent or complementary. Drawing on a study of health priority-setting in New Zealand, Tenbenschel (2004) reveals the divergent nature of evidence that had to be managed, and he argues that greater attention needs to be paid to understanding the tensions between different types of evidence and policy knowledge. This thesis addresses this concern through illuminating different meanings of evidence and the process of navigating diverse evidence.

Other scholars, such as Wesselink et al (2014), posit that evidence is socially constructed by actors engaging in policy work. Significantly, in the three systemic reviews on evidence-based policy referred to earlier (and summarised in Oliver et al 2014b), all three reviews identify that policymakers' definitions of 'evidence' often do not match academics' definitions of 'evidence'. Majone's (1989, p 10) work draws attention to the 'situated' nature of evidence and he conceptualises evidence as: "...information selected from the available stock and introduced at a specific point in the argument in order to persuade a particular audience of the truth or falsity of a statement". This discussion all points to the value of understanding evidence through the eyes of those involved in policy practice; and of the value of undertaking research that illuminates how actors interpret and use evidence in context.

Researching evidence in policy

As other scholars have observed, much of the evidence literature has been concerned with how externally generated evidence can make its way *into* the policy process (Freeman and Sturdy 2015, Oliver et al 2014b). This thesis is primarily concerned with researching evidence *in* policy, rather than asking how evidence gets *into* policy. Studies which provide in-depth contextual analyses are rare, although there are notable exceptions – such as Nedlund and Garpenby's (2014) analysis of evidence in framing health policy in Sweden and Lennon's (2015) examination of evidence in land use policy in Ireland – both of which I draw upon in my later analysis.

This focus on understanding evidence 'in situ' picks up on one of the themes in the contemporary literature, which is the role of 'context' in understanding evidence and how it is used. Nutley et al (2007), in their extensive review of how research is used in policy, suggest greater attention needs to be paid to the different ways in which policymakers negotiate contextual factors. Empirical studies demonstrate how policy practitioners 'read' the context and mobilise multiple sources of evidence in response (Wesselink and Gouldson 2014). Interpretive scholars have argued that what counts as policy-relevant evidence cannot be separated from context (Wesselink et al 2014). As Wesselink et al (2014, p 342) conclude, " 'evidence' is unlikely to be neutral and unproblematic: its definition is part of the policy process and depends heavily on context." In Davies et al's (2019) insights on the last twenty years of evidence literature,

they reflect (inter alia) that contextual considerations are still key to how evidence has influence in policy.

Given the importance of contextual influences, several scholars have argued that we need to undertake more research that studies evidence in context. Drawing on their review of previous systematic reviews of the evidence literature in the health domain, Oliver et al (2014b, p 1) suggest that: “The agenda of ‘getting evidence into policy’ has side-lined the empirical description and analysis of how research and policy interact *in vivo*.” They point to how much of the research has focused on ‘barriers and facilitators’ of ‘research’ being used in policy, rather than contextual assessments of the use of evidence. The systemic reviews of ‘evidence-based policy’ (Orton et al 2011, Innvaer et al 2002, Oliver et al 2014a) on which Oliver et al (2014b) draw, all claim the current literature is inconclusive in a number of regards. Much of the literature fails to define ‘evidence’ or ‘policy’, and survey methods are typically used which reveal attitudes and beliefs about whether evidence is used but not actual behaviours or experiences. They call for more research which explores how evidence is used as part of policy processes through studying the practices of policymakers. Similarly, Head (2013) argues that relatively little research has been undertaken into how policy workers use information and, for example, how they incorporate feedback from stakeholders and politicians. He points to gaps in knowledge about what happens *inside* government agencies in relation to producing and assessing evidence. In a similar vein, my research seeks to look *inside* public inquiries to understand better how actors understand evidence and how it is used in policy practice.

In focusing on evidence in practice, my approach speaks to the ‘practice turn’ in policy studies which aims to examine the everyday activities of policymakers (Freeman et al 2011, Cook and Wagenaar 2012) and to exploring the ‘work’ of policy practitioners (Colebatch 2006a, 2006b, Colebatch et al 2010). As Colebatch et al (2010) point out, many people undertake work which is oriented to policy beyond the ‘policymakers’ and ‘policy analysts’ that operate within government. In my research, a focus on the inquiry process reveals the ‘inquiry work’ that a wide variety of actors undertake during a public inquiry. This is a form of ‘policy work’. My research can be situated within this

field of studying policy practice and within interpretive approaches to policy research, considered further in the next chapter (Chapter 3).

Conclusion

My research contributes to what is an important gap in both the public inquiry and evidence literature. Public inquiries have a rich history and remain relevant today. The inquiry literature suggests they undertake important evidence-related work: typically, public inquiries carry out extensive evidence-gathering activities and the final report contains advice supported by multiple sources of evidence. However, I have shown we know little about what happens in between. The *process* of public inquiries has rarely been studied and I argue they remain an evidence ‘black box’.

This research gap is highly problematic. We know that public inquiries and the advice that they produce can be influential (Johns and Inwood 2018), but we know little about what evidence has shaped that advice or how. As discussed, this matters on both democratic and epistemic grounds. In the context of increasing plurality and complexity of public policy, we know that sites of inquiry are needed that can accommodate diverse policy evidence. This contention is supported by the contemporary evidence literature which increasingly acknowledges the complexity of the evidence–policy relationship and the diversity of evidence itself. Yet, we know little about a longstanding and prevalent institution that might or might not be equipped to navigate the complexity and diversity of evidence in policy. We do not know how public inquiries might improve this role nor what other sites of inquiry might learn from them.

Through a critical reading of the scholarship concerned with the relationship between evidence, knowledge, and policy, I have argued that an interpretive and practice-focused research approach provides an important contribution. Only by hearing from actors involved in inquiry work can we learn what was considered to be relevant evidence and begin to appreciate the work involved in navigating diverse evidence in practice. In the following chapter, I discuss the value of an interpretive approach to studying inquiry work and I set out my research methods in full.

Chapter 3: Researching evidence in public inquiries

Introduction

Public inquiries and the relationship between evidence and policy can be understood and researched in numerous ways, as illustrated in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I provide the rationale for my research approach and design and I describe the methods employed to collect and analyse data. Throughout, I refer to my guiding research question: how do policy actors involved in public inquiries understand, navigate, and use evidence in their inquiry work?

I start the chapter with a discussion of my interpretive approach and my intention to reveal and explore the meanings that inquiry actors place on evidence and how it gets used. Next, I explain my choice of a case-study research design and how I went about selecting my two case-studies for comparative purposes. I outline how there are other comparative aspects to the research design, including consideration of i) different types of policy actors, and ii) variations over time. I conclude the chapter by offering a primer for each of my two case-studies. By setting out the background and main features of the case-studies here, subsequent chapters can focus on analysis and interpretation.

An interpretive approach

As discussed in the previous chapter, much of the empirical literature on policy evidence starts from the normative position that evidence (mostly understood as *research* evidence) ought to inform policy, and then examines the extent to which it does so. This has led to an extensive literature focusing on the barriers to, and facilitators of, evidence use in policymaking. Rather than measuring the ‘gap’ between a normative position (that is, how evidence ought to be used) and practice, my approach has been more bottom-up and grounded in the experiences and understandings of policy actors engaged in policy inquiries.

An interpretive approach involves a focus on meaning and what policy events, actions, and texts ‘mean’ in their human and historical context (Yanow 1996, 2007, Fischer 2003). By focusing on actors and their agency, an interpretive approach is able to facilitate a deep exploration of the intentions, meanings, and experiences of actors’

individual and collective endeavours (Sullivan 2016). An interpretive approach shifts the focus away from institutions and functions of public policy and public administration towards the practices and actions of interconnected actors (Rhodes 2014). Given these attributes, interpretive research is well-suited to help illuminate the complexities and ambiguities of public policy (Stone 2001, Hendriks 2007). As Ercan et al (2017, p 198) have highlighted, interpretive research is useful “for in-depth, close-up, context-specific studies that illuminate a phenomenon or experience that is ‘in the dark’ ”. As I showed in the previous chapter, the literature on public inquiries suggests they are an evidence ‘black box’ in need of illumination.

The interpretive approach in this thesis involves several characteristics (after Ercan et al 2017). First, as already highlighted, the research is concerned with meaning, not measurement. The research is not evaluating the extent to which public inquiries deploy particular forms of evidence that I have predefined; rather, it is exploring how actors engaged in public inquiries understand and use evidence. To provide insights as a researcher, I take on the role of ‘the interpreter of interpretations’ (Sullivan 2016). In Chapter 4, I identify a range of ‘discourses’ understood here as a shared way of making sense of the world (Hajer 2005, Dryzek 2013) to help interpret and communicate the diversity of evidence meanings I have encountered.

Second, in taking an interpretive approach, I am emphasising contextuality rather than generalisability. My research has sought to understand evidence in the context of specific real-world inquiries. I have used insights from exploring this situated practice to inform theory and to open up new lines of exploration and inquiry (Flyvbjerg 2001).

Third, my research is based primarily on inductive rather than deductive reasoning (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013). I did not start with a particular theory drawn from the literature which I then proceeded to test. Rather I identified insights and patterns from my data and these have provided theoretical insights. So for example, I inductively identified and characterised the ‘discourses of evidence’ set out in Chapter 4. However, as Hendriks (2007) has explained of interpretive research more generally, my research did involve reflecting on the data in the light of my knowledge of the academic literature and it evolved through moving to and fro between practice and theory (using inductive and deductive reasoning). The most interesting and challenging aspect of my research

was to allow this ongoing activity (of analysis and reflection of the data, reading literature and theory, then returning again to the data) while still making sure I could complete this thesis! It has been somewhat reassuring that my purpose in taking an interpretive research approach is not to 'settle' debates but rather to 'stimulate' debate through creative insights (Fischer 2003).

Fourth, my interpretive approach has served well in illuminating the 'multiplicity' inherent in policy work and the multiple interpretations that can emerge among groups of policy actors (Yanow 2014). In my research, it has helped shed light on the multiple meanings associated with evidence and how actors interpret using evidence.

In undertaking interpretive research, I am adhering to a constructivist ontology. This means I do not believe there is a reality 'out there' that can be discovered and which exists value-free, objectively, and independently from the researcher (Yanow 2007, Wagenaar 2011). A central tenet of interpretive approaches, therefore, is paying attention to the researcher's own 'meaning-making', and as such the 'positionality' of the researcher relative to the situation and the actors being studied is of analytical concern (Yanow 2007).

In this regard, a number of personal experiences are relevant to how I interacted with my research, its participants, and documentation. I mention these experiences in recognition of the importance of disclosing and reflecting on research positionality (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013). Immediately prior to starting my PhD candidature, I was seconded to the Australian Department of Social Services to support a public inquiry – the second Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2013–15). I worked alongside some of the actors I subsequently interviewed, and had extensive prior knowledge of the previous Reference Group on Welfare Reform (1999–2000) – which is my first case-study. I had worked professionally with a number of the interviewees who were members of the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (my second case-study), who are now based at the Australian National University (ANU) and who I also interviewed. The deputy chair of the Child Support Inquiry was David Stanton AM FASS, who is now an Honorary Associate Professor at the ANU and was one of my PhD supervisors. Before moving to Australia in 2010, I had worked in Whitehall (as a civil servant and a special adviser), thinktanks, and the voluntary sector. I have some direct

practical experience of ‘policy-advisory’ inquiries in the United Kingdom, including the Pensions Commission which reported in 2005 (Turner 2005). All these experiences have shaped how I designed the research and interpreted findings. Further, this prior experience may have brought benefits to the research, for example in creating trust with interview participants and in deepening insights.

Research design and methods

As set out in Chapter 1, the empirical research in this thesis involves two comparative case-studies. Below I discuss my rationale for using a comparative case-study design, how I went about selecting case-studies, and the approach I took to gathering and analysing data.

Comparative case-studies

A case study research design involves in-depth investigation within a real-life context and allows the discovery of meaning and understanding of experiences in context (Stake 1995, 2006). This fitted with my goal of exploring actors’ interpretations of evidence and its use within the specific policy context of a public inquiry setting.

My case study research is comparative in the sense that I wanted to contrast the perspectives of actors involved in two public inquiries that appeared to differ in their use of evidence – in the anticipation that this would provide useful insights.

My two case-study inquiries are:

- The Reference Group on Welfare Reform (1999–2000) – the Welfare Reform Inquiry
- The Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (2004–05) – the Child Support Inquiry.

The cases were selected following a review of public inquiries into social policy that had taken place in recent decades in Australia. This high-level review covered 36 inquiries

concerning social policy that had been held in Australia since the 1970s⁹. Both of the selected case-study inquiries are ‘policy advisory’ public inquiries (Prasser 2006) that took place in a common reform period (during an extended period of Coalition governments) and involved complex and contentious social policy problems. The cases varied in terms of my primary focus of interest – evidence – as I discuss further below.

My first case is the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (Australia, 2004–05) which had been suggested was an exemplar of evidence being used in policy – that is, an example of ‘evidence-based policy’ (Stanton 2005). The rationale for choosing this case is aligned with Flyvbjerg’s (2006) validation of ‘extreme cases’ whereby an atypical case can dramatically throw the research questions into relief. My initial research revealed the extensive empirical research undertaken by the Ministerial Taskforce, with several reports existing of how this had informed the inquiry’s recommendations and the subsequent policy reform (for example, Smyth 2005, Harding and Percival 2007). My second case is the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (Australia, 1999–2000). The Welfare Reform Inquiry seemed an altogether different sort of endeavour. Again based on my initial research, the main stated purpose and documented activities of the Welfare Reform inquiry were to engage the community in a discussion about the direction of welfare reform (Newman 1999, McClure 2000b), which suggested that inquiry actors might view evidence differently.

A further motivation for the selection of these two inquiries was pragmatic: the inquiries were contemporary but initial investigations suggested that enough time had passed for actors (inside and outside of government) to be open about the use of evidence (a subject not without political sensitivity).

A note here on whether the cases are ‘atypical’ or ‘typical’ is warranted. By describing the Child Support Inquiry as an ‘extreme case’ above, I am suggesting it is ‘atypical’. In the previous chapter, I showed how the public inquiry literature reveals the great

⁹ For an account of the major social policy inquiries in Australia since the 1970s, see Regan and Stanton 2019.

diversity of advisory bodies and activities that can make up a public inquiry. Scholars have identified common features and functions of inquiries, but struggled to articulate what a 'typical' inquiry looks like or to make analytical generalisations (Prasser 2006, Gilligan 2002). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight what might be some 'atypical' and 'typical' aspects of the case-studies, as they are relevant to my subsequent analysis and insights.

The Child Support Inquiry was perhaps unusual in a number of regards. First, as identified above, the extent of new empirical research undertaken during the inquiry made it an interesting candidate for studying evidence use. Second, the advisory body (the Ministerial Taskforce) was made up largely of technical experts, with advocacy organisations making up a separate Reference Group (which was not responsible for inquiry recommendations). This arrangement is not unprecedented but it is relatively novel (Stanton 2005). Third, the inquiry was 'public' in having publicly available terms of reference and inquiry documentation being made public, but it did not involve a consultation exercise with the broader community. (The reasons for this are discussed below.) Finally, virtually all the recommendations of the inquiry were implemented by government (Smyth 2010). The likelihood of a government adopting inquiry recommendations is extremely variable (Prasser 2006) and inquiry reports have been known to sink without trace (Stanton 2005). In some regards, the Welfare Reform Inquiry had more typical features: the advisory body (the Reference Group on Welfare Reform) had a diverse membership drawn from within government, academia, the private sector, and community organisations; the inquiry involved several rounds of public consultation; and the recommendations were only partially implemented by government (McClure 2011).

It should be flagged at this stage that my initial impressions of the two case-studies did not entirely stand the test of empirical scrutiny. At the outset of my research, I had considered the case-studies essentially as being polar opposites in relation to evidence, seeing the Child Support Inquiry as having been driven by empirical research evidence and the Welfare Reform Inquiry as a community engagement exercise, with priority given to public input. What actually emerged in my research is set out in subsequent chapters. However, the point to raise here is that differences did emerge between the

case-studies on how actors viewed and used evidence, although there was greater commonality across the cases than I had anticipated. The two case-studies showed many common traits which, ultimately, I suggest have provided the more novel of insights. That preconceived, expected differences between cases do not materialise once the researcher has embarked upon data analysis is not unusual in interpretive research (Hendriks 2007).

A final note on my cases studies. I have used them in both an 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' sense (Stake 1995). They are 'intrinsic' in that they provide insights into the inner workings of a real world policy inquiry, and 'instrumental' in that they raise interesting theoretical insights into how evidence and policy processes interrelate. My aim has been to provide an account of how actors understand and use evidence in my case-study inquiries which is sufficiently deep and meaningful to contribute to theoretical debates about how evidence and policy processes interact. I have explored the complexities of the inquiries through 'thick descriptions' (Gertz 1973), emphasising the experiences and context of inquiry actors.

Data collection

My primary sources of data were semi-structured interviews with a range of policy actors involved in each inquiry, supported by publicly available inquiry reports (interim and final), inquiry papers (for example, research and discussion documents), and media reports. I was also given access to some non-confidential, internal inquiry documentation.

As set out in the previous chapter, I have conceptualised an inquiry not by central reference to the 'advisory body' but as a 'process of inquiry' which involves a range of activities occurring over a period of time at the government–public interface through its 'insider–outsider' status (Salter 1989). This approach brings into view a range of actors beyond those who are members of the advisory body. It involves those undertaking inquiry work inside government and those from outside government who are actively engaged in inquiry work.

In summary, I engaged four types of actor in my interviews:

Type A: Member of the inquiry advisory body (these were actors who made up the appointed advisory body and included the chair of each inquiry)

Type B: Member of the inquiry secretariat (these were government officials operating within the commissioning department who provided support to the inquiry body)

Type C: Other government officials (these were other actors within government who were involved in establishing the inquiry, inquiry-related work, or implementation activities)

Type D: External policy actor (these were actors outside of government who were actively engaged in the inquiry).

A wider group of actors (interest groups and members of the public) are typically involved in public inquiries through consultation and/or written submission processes. And, of course, Ministers are involved through commissioning public inquiries. However, I did not involve these actors (wider publics and Ministers) in my study as I was interested in those who had actively participated in inquiry work, through being on the formal advisory body or undertaking inquiry-related work in other supporting roles.

When asked to complete the Participant Consent Form, interviewees were asked to identify as one of these types of actor set out above. For the Child Support Inquiry, I interviewed some members of the associated Reference Group (made up of interest groups and professionals – further detail is provided below and in Appendix A), and who were identified as Type D. As Stark (2019, p 7) has indicated, Types B and C (or as he describes them, those involved in the design of the inquiry and those who staff them) are largely unacknowledged in public inquiry research. Other research suggests we know little about how ‘insiders’ view public inquiries (Johns and Inwood 2018).

It is important to note here the other comparative dimensions that are present within my research. In addition to comparisons between the case-study inquiries, it has also

been possible to draw comparisons between actors. Analysis in terms of my defined categories of 'actor types' has provided some insights. However, other actor characteristics (such as professional background and experience) were more useful comparative characteristics in other parts of my study. In Chapter 4, I discuss this further in the context of how actors adhered to different discourses of evidence.

Following initial documentary analysis of both inquiries, I drew up a list of possible interviewees – a 'purposive sample' (Flick 2018). A semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow participants to express their views freely and to define and discuss what was important from their perspective (Kvale 2008). I had a pre-prepared list of questions (see Appendix B), but interviews were conversational in manner. The interviews involved a discussion about how actors gathered and used evidence during the inquiry and the activities undertaken in the process of developing policy advice. As discussed below, I guided interviewees by loosely structuring each interview using a temporal frame in order to encourage a discussion of the *process* of each inquiry from its initiation through to the period following the publication of the final report. Early on in my interviews, I became aware that actors viewed evidence in the context of the activities being undertaken and the wider policy roles that the inquiry was understood to be playing. In interviews, I allowed these broader contextual discussions to develop.

At the end of each interview, interviewees were asked to suggest other people who they thought would provide insights into the case-studies. This method of 'snowball sampling' (Flick 2018) was used as I considered it likely that many actors, particularly those working inside government, were 'hidden' and not cited in public inquiry documentation. Additional interviewees were selected on the basis that they were voices not yet captured or allowed exploration of emerging themes (for example, I interviewed some individuals who were involved in the implementation of inquiry recommendations to explore the policy role of the inquiries after the final report had been submitted and the advisory body had been disbanded.) This process of identifying interviewees and undertaking interviews was continued until 'saturation' (Rubin and Rubin 2011), whereby I assessed that any further interviews were unlikely to provide additional insights.

Overall, I conducted 39 interviews across the two case-studies (this included interviewing one participant twice as he was involved in both inquiries.) Most interview participants requested confidentiality and so throughout this thesis I have referred to all actors by their role in the inquiry. On average, each interview was between 60 and 90 minutes in duration (the shortest was 30 minutes; the longest just over 2 hours). The majority of interviews were face-to-face and took place between February 2017 and March 2018. I took detailed handwritten notes throughout each interview and all interviews were electronically recorded. Below, I discuss how this data was analysed to produce 'interview records'.

In line with my research ethics protocol, all interviewees received a Participant Information Sheet and given the opportunity to raise any concerns about the research prior to the interview commencing. All interviewees completed and signed a Participant Consent Form.

Data analysis

The analysis of my data was iterative and recursive, as is typical of qualitative and interpretive research (Creswell and Poth 2017, Ercan et al 2017). The initial phase of my research involved analysis of inquiry documentation and media coverage. This analysis informed interview design and selection of interview participants. The case material was also brought into subsequent analysis and is drawn on throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis. There were then two further phases to the analysis: preparation of 'interview records' and repeated analysis of these records alongside inquiry documentation and the existing academic literature. This latter phase of analysis continued into the drafting, and re-drafting, of the chapters of this thesis.

To develop interview records, I drew mainly from the detailed notes that I took during interviews, which I complemented through listening and re-listening to the interview recordings. Working with the original audio material enabled me to bring intonation, pauses, and the 'mood' of the interview into the analysis. For some interviews (around

10), where the quality of the written notes was not as high¹⁰, the digital recording was fully transcribed (using a transcription service) and I was able to use this as back-up material.

The outcome of this process was a set of detailed 'interview records' that captured each interview as it occurred, that is, the records gave the chronological flow of the interview. These interview records could be considered 'selective transcripts' (Ochs 1979, in Davidson 2009). Given the nature of my research, I judged that verbatim transcripts were neither necessary nor desirable. Each interview record was approximately 5–10 pages long and captured the appropriate level of detail needed for my analysis. To get the participant quotes used throughout this thesis, I went back to the original audio or used the full transcript where available.

My next stage was to read all these interview records thoroughly and develop a set of initial codes which reflected themes or patterns in the data. I then coded the interview records using these initial codes. This process created further insights. As already highlighted, the analysis of the qualitative data was an iterative process in which I moved back and forth between the interview records, other case material (inquiry reports and other inquiry documentation), and the existing academic literature. As new themes and linkages emerged, I re-read the interview records, listened to the audio recordings, and re-coded relevant sections.

At the start of my research, I set up two electronic case-study databases where I stored the interview records and all case-related material. I undertook my coding manually using colour-coding techniques to categorise the data. This involved working with the Word documents of the interview records and using Excel so that I could analyse the data with reference to the different comparative dimensions: that is, across case-studies; by actors and actor type; and over time.

¹⁰ For example, because the interview had been held in a public place (a café) or over the phone.

As my research progressed, I tested out ideas with my colleagues and supervisory panel and presented initial findings at research seminars and international conferences. All of this generated feedback and insights which I have reflected upon in writing this thesis.

A temporal perspective

A distinctive aspect of my research design is that I have conceptualised public inquiries as a process over time. To operationalise this temporal perspective in my research involved two aspects. First, I structured my interviews using a simple temporal framework. I asked interviewees questions (see Appendix B) in relation to three stages of an inquiry:

- the establishment phase (this concerned the period leading up to the announcement of the inquiry and reflections on the genesis of the inquiry);
- the operational phase (this involved all the activities undertaken during the inquiry that culminated in the final report being submitted to government);
- the post-report phase (this included the report being published, the government's response, and implementation of any inquiry recommendations).

Second, and subsequently, I analysed my data in terms of these three phases. This, in effect, created another comparative dimension to my research. I was able to explore whether actors' interpretations of evidence and how it was used changed throughout the inquiry, and I could evaluate differences across the three phases. This temporal approach sheds light on the dynamic aspects of public inquiries that has not hitherto been fully appreciated in previous studies.

In a sense, I have 'stretched' the duration of an inquiry by extending back into the establishment period and forward into the period following the report being published. This has allowed insights to be generated into important inquiry work that occurred prior to the formal advisory board being established and after it was disbanded.

Introducing the case-studies

I turn now to introduce my case-studies. This section provides a brief primer for each case-study and, in subsequent chapters, I compare the three main analytical themes across the cases: the meanings of evidence (Chapter 4); the uses of evidence (Chapter

5); and the practice of inquiry work (Chapter 6.) Each primer starts with the background and policy focus of each inquiry, and then briefly describes the progress of the inquiry using the three phases identified above (the establishment; operational; and post-report phases). The material drawn on in these primers is largely from the public inquiry documentation, with some reference to media coverage and occasional insights from my interviews. I introduce the case-studies in the historical order in which they took place, and so I begin with the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (1999–2000) and then continue on to the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (2004–05).

Throughout this thesis, the public inquiries overseen by the ‘Reference Group on Welfare Reform’ and the ‘Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support’ are referred to respectively as the ‘Welfare Reform Inquiry’ and the ‘Child Support Inquiry’. In line with my analytical focus, this distinguishes the ‘process of inquiry’ from the ‘advisory body’.

As mentioned above in my discussion of case selection, both inquiries were complex and contentious social policy inquiries that took place in Australia during the extended Prime Ministership of John Howard and his Coalition (Liberal–National) governments. During this time, the social policy agenda was being shaped by conservative norms and values (Ryan 2005, Disney 2004) and neo-liberal economic policy dominated (Manne 2004, Brett 2007). Another significant contextual factor during this period was Prime Minister John Howard’s advocacy of a ‘social coalition’ approach to public policy. This involved trying to harness the resources of government, individuals, the business community, and voluntary organisations in tackling policy problems (Hazlehurst 2001). One manifestation of this was the use of public inquiries by the government, a common occurrence throughout this time (Prasser 2006).¹¹

¹¹ For an overview of the many public inquiries established by the Howard Governments (March 1996 – December 2005), see Prasser 2006.

Case-study 1: The Reference Group on Welfare Reform (1999–2000)

The economic conditions in the decade preceding the Welfare Reform Inquiry is important context given its influence on social policy at the time (Herscovitch and Stanton 2008). The recession of the early 1990s had led to an increase in the numbers of people receiving social security payments, with both the extent and duration of unemployment rising dramatically (Dawkins 2001).¹² As the 1990s progressed, the economy recovered significantly but the numbers of people receiving social security payments continued to increase (Whiteford and Bond 2000). In 1996, the incoming Coalition government abandoned the previous Labor government's Working Nation initiative and a new reform program was introduced. This included a reshaping of employment services into a fully contestable market, with the Commonwealth Employment Service being replaced by the Job Network (Cooper 2011).

As the decade ebbed, the economy continued to improve but concerns remained about certain groups (lone parents and people with disabilities, in particular) receiving pension-type payments (Herscovitch and Stanton 2008). These concerns manifested themselves in extensive negative coverage in the media about the possible direction of the government's welfare reform agenda (Hazlehurst 2001). This provides the backdrop to the Welfare Reform Inquiry.

¹² Following the 1993 election, the re-elected Labor Government set up an expert committee to advise how best to deal with the unemployment crisis. The Committee of Employment Opportunities was chaired by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and included the Secretaries of the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training, the senior social policy adviser in the Office of the Prime Minister and three academics – two labour economists and a social policy analyst (Edwards 2001). The Committee released a discussion paper which was followed by *The White Paper on Employment and Growth* (Keating 1994a) and the companion report *Working Nation: Policies and Programs* (Keating 1994b). The Working Nation initiative was subsequently introduced progressively by the Labor government.

Figure 1: Overview of the Welfare Reform Inquiry

Official title	The Reference Group on Welfare Reform
Policy focus	The income support system and associated social support services
Chair	Patrick McClure (at the time CEO of Mission Australia)
Advisory body	The seven members of the Reference Group were drawn from the community sector, business, academia, and government
Key dates	29 September 1999: the inquiry was announced 16 August 2000: the final report was published

The focus of the inquiry was ‘welfare reform’, which relates to the design of the social security system and how it links with employment and the labour market. Some of the key tensions that are prevalent in welfare policy, and which provide important context to debates in the Welfare Reform Inquiry, are: the design and adequacy of social security payments and how these affect an individual’s financial incentive to work; the fiscal sustainability of welfare systems and the targeting of payments to certain groups; the nature and extent of ‘welfare dependency’; and the concept of conditionality and its incarnation as ‘mutual obligation’ (which is broadly concerned with how responsibilities between individuals and the state flow both ways (Taylor et al 2016)). All these issues are highly contested in the academic literature and in policy debate.¹³

¹³ For an analysis of the themes and tensions in reforming welfare policy at the time, see Saunders (2000).

These challenges have been the subject of many inquiries over time in Australia, such as the Social Security Review led by then Associate Professor Bettina Cass (1986–88) and the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty led by Professor Ronald F Henderson (1972–76)¹⁴. They are all issues which were at the heart of debates in the Welfare Reform Inquiry and on which evidence was sought and contested.

Establishment phase

On 29 September 1999, Senator Jocelyn Newman, the then Minister for Family and Community Services, announced during a speech to the National Press Club that the government would be establishing a high-level Reference Group to review Australia's welfare system (Newman 1999). The Reference Group was chaired by Mr Patrick McClure, CEO of Mission Australia, with Wayne Jackson, a Deputy Secretary at the Department of Families and Community Services as deputy chair. At the time of the announcement, Minister Newman argued that 'welfare dependency' was putting ever greater burdens on government expenditure and damaging the life chances of many recipients. She stated that the aim of the inquiry was "to guide the development of a comprehensive Green Paper on welfare reform" (Newman 1999, p 8). The reform principles to guide the inquiry were also set out as part of Minister Newman's speech. By late October 1999, the full membership of the advisory group and the terms of reference were confirmed and published. The full terms of reference, the reform principles, and the membership of the Reference Group are set out in Appendix A to this thesis.

During this time, a Welfare Review Team was established within the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), which operated as the Reference Group's secretariat (Jackson 2003). An interdepartmental committee (IDC) was also set up and chaired by FaCS, which included representatives from various departments across government (Jackson 2003). As one member of the secretariat reported during an interview, the gathering of evidence for the inquiry began within government during

¹⁴ For an overview of inquiries covering welfare policy since the 1970s, see Regan and Stanton (2019).

the establishment phase, particularly data that sought to illuminate the problem of 'welfare dependence' and which analysed the length of time people stayed on welfare payments.

Operational phase

In subsequent chapters the specific activities undertaken during the inquiry are considered. However, it is helpful here to provide a summary of the main activities in order to put this analysis in context. The Welfare Reform Inquiry involved several public engagement processes. This included advertising for public submissions relevant to the terms of reference and holding meetings with organisations representing disadvantaged people, business, and service providers, and setting up focus groups with income support recipients (McClure 2011). As set out in the final report, a range of research activities were undertaken including literature reviews, evaluations of existing policies, and surveys of international practice (McClure 2000b). During interviews, some inquiry actors recounted a seminar being held jointly with the Melbourne Institute that explored interactions between the tax and social security systems and the potential of 'tax credits' to better incentivise return to work; other actors recalled a survey being commissioned by the department into attitudes to mutual obligation.

In March 2000, an interim report was published which included a set of arguments about the need for fundamental reform (McClure 2000a, p 2), backed up with data on employment and income support receipt and wider economic and social trends. The interim report also set out the key tenets of a new 'Participation Support System' (foreshadowing the final recommendations) and included a number of hypothetical case-studies of how the changes might affect individuals. The publication of the interim report prompted a further round of public consultation, which included the receipt of over 300 written submissions and further stakeholder meetings (McClure 2011).

Post-report phase

The final report of the inquiry was presented to the government in July 2000 and publicly launched in Parliament House on 16 August 2000. The final report of the inquiry was widely welcomed with the vast majority of the media coverage being positive (see McClure 2011, Hazlehurst 2001). The report advocated a Participation

Support System, with a central theme of ‘social and economic participation’. Specific proposals focused on a simplified and integrated income support system, more individualised support services, enhanced obligations on parents of school-aged children to seek work, and improved financial incentives for participation in work. The report pointed to the strong community feedback that secure and adequate income support should be the basis for social and economic participation. In addition to the policy recommendations, the final report also set out the desired reform process, suggesting staged implementation over the short, medium, and long-term, and stressing the importance of on-going research and evaluation (McClure 2000b).

In order to guide the government’s response, an internal cross-government taskforce was established, chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to advise on the response to the ‘McClure Report’, as the final report soon became known (Jackson 2003). The government also established a new external body – the Welfare Reform Consultative Forum – made up of a wide range of community, business, and departmental representatives and tasked with considering the McClure recommendations and their implementation. The ensuing Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) process led to a government statement on welfare reform in December 2000, followed by the *Australians Working Together* (AWL) package which was part of the May 2001 Budget and which entailed a cross-portfolio package of measures (Vanstone and Abbott 2001). This reflected some of the recommendations in the McClure report around the social support system (see discussion in FaCS Annual Report 2001, p 216) but did not pick up on measures to simplify the payment system. The broad consensus around the McClure report and its recommendations was not sustained, and the Budget measures received a mixed greeting (see for example, Kinnear 2001). The Budget announcement was the start of a further period of extensive consultation, with the Welfare Reform Consultative Forum continuing in its role and government undertaking a community consultation process at 43 locations across Australia (Jackson 2003).

Much can be, and has been, said about subsequent policy reform (for example, see Saunders 2017) but this is not the focus of this thesis. However, it should be noted that there was a further Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2013–15), again chaired by

Patrick McClure, announced following the Abbott Coalition government coming to office in 2013. This second inquiry considered many of the same themes as the first (McClure 2015).

Case-study 2: The Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (2004–05)

Child support has been the subject of much domestic and international scrutiny and reform (for example, Skinner et al 2008). In Australia, there have been many advisory groups and reviews of child support¹⁵ and a parliamentary inquiry was instrumental in the creation of my case-study inquiry. This was undertaken by the House of Representatives Committee on Family and Community Affairs which published their report into child custody issues (House of Representatives 2003) in December 2003. This inquiry involved extensive public consultations, hearings, and site visits. Their final report made a number of recommendations pertaining to family law and advised that a Ministerial Taskforce be set up to examine child support. This report gave further impetus to calls for a review of the child support scheme that had been made by fathers' groups over many years, based on what they perceived as the unfairness of the scheme (Stanton 2005).

The remit of the new inquiry was the Australian child support scheme, with a particular emphasis on advising on the child support formula¹⁶. Child support is the payment that non-resident parents (usually fathers) make following parental separation to contribute to the costs of raising their children. Child support policy is highly emotive, controversial, and technically complex. Emotive because it involves the well-being of children often caught in the middle of situations of parental conflict; controversial given that it requires the balancing of the various competing interests and needs of children, resident parents, non-resident parents, and the State; and technically complex because

¹⁵ These include reports and evaluations from the Child Support Consultative Group (1988), the Child Support Evaluation Advisory Group (chaired by Justice Fogarty, 1992), and most recently the 2014–15 parliamentary inquiry (House of Representatives 2015). For an overview, see Edwards et al (2001) and Edwards (2019).

¹⁶ The child support formula is used to calculate the level of child support payments.

it sits at the intersection of the social security and tax systems (Smyth 2010, Parkinson 2007).

Figure 2: Overview of the Child Support Inquiry

Official title	Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support
Policy focus	The child support scheme, with a particular focus on the child support formula
Chair	Professor Patrick Parkinson, at the time Professor of Law at the University of Sydney
Advisory body	The eight members of the Taskforce (the advisory body) were primarily drawn from academia and research institutes, and the eleven members of the associated Reference Group mainly represented key interest groups
Key dates	29 July 2004: the inquiry was announced 14 June 2005: the final report was published

Establishment phase

On 29 July 2004, the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, announced that the government would be establishing a Ministerial Taskforce to review the child support scheme (Parkinson 2005). On 16 August 2004, Larry Anthony, the Minister for Child and Youth Affairs, announced the membership of the Taskforce and an associated Reference Group. Both groups were chaired by Professor Patrick Parkinson who was an academic lawyer at the University of Sydney, with David Stanton AM FASS (a former senior public servant and former Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies) as deputy chair. One member of the Taskforce was a senior public servant, Wayne

Jackson, who had also been a member of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (Parkinson 2005).

As referred to above, a notable feature of this inquiry was the complementary use of a Reference Group. The Taskforce was made up of people with expertise in social and economic policy, family law, family policy, and research. Membership of the Reference Group was drawn from advocacy groups and professionals with experience in issues such as parenting after separation, relationship mediation, and counselling (Smyth 2005). The Reference Group was advisory and not responsible for the recommendations of the Taskforce (Stanton 2005). Membership of both bodies, alongside the terms of reference and guiding principles, is set out in Appendix A to this thesis. The secretariat was drawn from officials within the Department of Family and Community Services (Parkinson 2005).

Operational phase

The specific activities that took place during the inquiry are considered throughout this thesis. However, a summary is again helpful here. The Taskforce reviewed existing research and practice from across Australia and internationally and undertook three studies into the costs of rearing children (Parkinson 2005). They also commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to conduct a survey of community attitudes towards child support (Smyth and Weston 2005) and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) at the University of Canberra to develop a micro-simulation model to analyse the operation of variants of the child support scheme and how they might interact with the tax and income support systems (Harding and Percival 2007). The Taskforce developed a set of principles designed to inform their work and recommendations (Parkinson 2005).

As noted above, one of the atypical features of the Child Support Inquiry was that it did not involve public consultation. The final report of the inquiry makes reference to having analysed the submissions on child support received by the preceding parliamentary inquiry and to examining unsolicited submissions to the Taskforce and Ministerial correspondence (Parkinson 2005, p4). How inquiry actors viewed the different sources of evidence is a theme explored in the following chapter.

Post-report phase

On 14 June 2005, the then Minister for Family and Community Services (Senator the Hon Kay Patterson) released the report of the Taskforce – ‘In the best interests of children? Reforming the child support system’ (Parkinson 2005). The report had 30 recommendations with the first of these being a detailed description of a proposed new child support formula. In interviews, members of the Taskforce reported that the proposals received broad support in the media, and newspaper editorials were nearly universally supportive of the recommendations, with only the Canberra Times offering a dissenting voice (Murray 2005).

The Government announced reforms to the child support scheme in February 2006. As highlighted previously, the reforms closely mirrored the recommendations of the Taskforce. During 2006–08, the proposals of the Taskforce were implemented in three stages, with the reform process culminating on 1 July 2008 when a new child support formula became fully operational (Smyth 2010).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the approach and methods of this study and introduced my case-studies. I have shown that the research is comparative in several respects. In this thesis, I draw comparisons between the two case-study inquiries, between different types of inquiry actor, and over time. In order to compare insights over time, I have adopted a temporal approach to collecting and analysing data.

As an interpretive project, this research aims to illuminate situated meanings and to consider the implications for the practice and theory of evidence in inquiry work. As expected from interpretive research, I have had to be flexible and adaptable throughout the study. Going back and forth between my data and the literature has been challenging, but ultimately led to novel insights. In this chapter, I have discussed the benefits of such an iterative approach, and demonstrated how I have systematically and rigorously collected and analysed research data. In subsequent chapters, I set out and discuss the empirical research findings (Chapters 4, 5, 6) and then consider further implications of these findings in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4: The meanings of evidence

Introduction

The way we label different types of knowledge as ‘evidence’ has implications for the influence that knowledge might have on policy processes and outcomes (Parsons 2002, Solesbury 2001). For example, when a particular kind of knowledge is labelled as ‘evidence’ it potentially raises its status over other, more implicit, types of knowledge. In this chapter, I engage in these ideas through an empirical exploration of how actors involved in public inquiries understand ‘evidence’ in inquiry work. When I began my empirical research, it was apparent that actors were not referring to the same thing when they talked about ‘evidence’. In the interviews, I intentionally did not define evidence, but allowed actors to offer their own interpretations of what they meant by this term. In this first empirical chapter, I make sense of these different meanings of evidence, teasing apart the different knowledge claims evoked by the label ‘evidence’.

To support my analysis, I identify and characterise several ‘discourses’ of evidence within my case-studies, with a discourse here being understood as a shared way of making sense of the world (Hajer 2002). This analysis is informed by the interpretations of actors as revealed during interviews and by inquiry documentation. The distinction between the different discourses relates to the types of knowledge that actors labelled as evidence and its breadth, that is, the range of knowledge types that actors viewed as evidence.

My analysis sheds light on the complex and contested discursive landscape in which inquiry actors operate. Within each inquiry, actors adhered to multiple discourses and there was a different dominant discourse in the two inquiries. Through exploring the characteristics of actors that adhere to particular discourses, I demonstrate the importance of professional and disciplinary backgrounds. However, I also show that what actors consider to be evidence is grounded in policy context. I argue that the implications of these findings are significant for the breadth of knowledge in the inquiry process overall and present challenges for advisory bodies in reaching agreement (examined in Chapter 6).

Before I go any further, I should make the point that the separation between understandings of evidence and uses of evidence might seem somewhat artificial. Indeed, many actors in my case-studies did label knowledge as evidence through discussing its application. However, I think the analytical separation of what actors consider as evidence (this chapter, Chapter 4) and how they use evidence (Chapter 5) has been helpful in providing novel insights into the relationship between evidence, knowledge, and policy.

Extensive knowledge-gathering activities

In some way or other, evidence draws from knowledge. Therefore, before turning to the main body of this chapter (how actors understand evidence), the knowledge-gathering activities undertaken during each case-study inquiry need highlighting. This helps illustrate the breadth of knowledge that inquiry actors had available to them as potential 'evidence'. In both case-studies, I find actors engaged in an extensive range of activities to bring knowledge to the inquiry. This initial finding is important in grasping the complex evidentiary context of inquiry work.

With this in mind, I highlight the range and diversity of knowledge-gathering activities in each case-study. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, actors referred to various consultation exercises to garner public input and to research-related activities. This included focus groups with income support recipients; a call for public submissions; a questionnaire; a customised website; stakeholder meetings; and the publication of an interim report to generate further public input. There was little new research undertaken during the inquiry, but actors did refer to analysing administrative data of trends in welfare receipt, assessing labour market trends, literature reviews of international research and practice, and some high-level modelling of tax/transfer interactions. With regard to the Child Support Inquiry, actors described multiple research activities and made reference to public input received from various sources. This included: analysis of administrative data to evaluate the current child support formula; three studies into the 'costs of children'; a new survey of community attitudes; a literature review covering international research and practice; and the development of a micro-simulation model. Public submissions from the immediately preceding parliamentary inquiry were available, overseas experts were consulted, and the chair of

the Taskforce undertook a visit to the USA to garner knowledge about alternative child support systems. As discussed in the previous chapter, the child support system had been reviewed on many previous occasions (Edwards 2019) and this material was also available to the new inquiry.

My main purpose in summarising this here is to highlight that actors in both inquiries had access to an extensive range of information and knowledge. The Welfare Reform Inquiry prioritised public input and community consultation, but also sought out other types of knowledge. The focus of the Child Support Inquiry was research-related activities but other knowledge was available, such as public input from the earlier parliamentary inquiry. Given this back-drop, what then did inquiry actors label as ‘evidence’?

Multiple discourses of evidence

To make sense of how actors viewed evidence, I identify and characterise a series of discourses of evidence. A discourse here is understood as a shared way of making sense of the world through concepts, assumptions, and ideas which are embedded in language (Hajer 2002, Hajer and Versteeg 2005, Dryzek 2013, Hendriks 2009).

In my research interviews, actors did not explicitly advocate a particular discourse of evidence. As highlighted by Dryzek (2013, p52), “discourses do not need conscious articulation. They can be so ingrained and taken-for-granted that it would never occur to anyone to mention them.” Given their implicit nature, discourses are identified and characterised through the interpretations of the researcher (Hajer 2005). In my research this process was highly inductive, with the discourses associated with evidence being constructed iteratively as I analysed the various interpretations of actors from interview data and inquiry documentation. More specifically, I read each ‘interview record’ thoroughly to identify patterns and themes, which I then adapted to code my data. This initial coding was also informed by my analysis of inquiry documentation (in particular the interim and final reports of each inquiry) and by reflecting on the existing literature. Then followed various iterations involving re-coding of my data, and which led to the construction and refinement of key discourses of evidence. In developing the discourses, I followed Dryzek’s (2013) approach which is to consider discourses as having a set of main attributes or elements. In my case, these

elements were developed inductively from my coding, so the discourses are configured through drawing on themes that emerged during interviews.

My data analysis provided two important insights with regard to the underpinning elements of these different discourses. The first insight was that the discourses varied by the types of knowledge that actors considered as evidence, and this related primarily to the source of the evidence, that is, how the knowledge was generated. The second insight is more nuanced and relates to how actors varied in how many different types of knowledge they viewed as evidence – what I have termed ‘knowledge breadth’ in my analysis. Therefore, to distinguish each discourse, I have considered three underpinning elements:

- Knowledge type – what types of knowledge did actors validate as evidence?
- Knowledge breadth – what was the range of different knowledge types?
- Actors – who adhered to the discourse?

As will become clear in the subsequent analysis, these elements have implications for the diversity and contestation of knowledge within inquiries.

This analysis led to the identification of five over-lapping discourses:

- Evidence as ‘multiple knowledges’
- Evidence as ‘research and data’
- Evidence as ‘public input’
- Evidence as ‘user knowledge’
- Evidence as ‘the facts’.

It should be noted that, even though I have constructed the discourses by drawing on what interviewees recounted, for some actors it was still ambiguous which discourse was relevant. I have constructed the discourses to be essentially mutually exclusive. For example, an actor who labelled research as evidence was either considered to adhere to the evidence as ‘research and data’ discourse or, if they also considered other types of knowledge as evidence, then the evidence as ‘multiple knowledges’ discourse was more relevant. Nevertheless, a few actors did shift between discourses or seemed to adhere to multiple discourses. Other actors seemed nervous and were cautious in talking about ‘evidence’, perhaps recognising its contentious nature or just doubting their memories. My point here is that a discourse, while an articulation of shared meaning, is still

imbued with the ambiguities of humans' trying to make sense of the world. However, this does not negate their analytical power or their real world impact (Dryzek 2013).

I have ordered the discourses by their prevalence in my research overall. However, as I discuss below, the two case-study inquiries had different dominant discourses. The 'multiple knowledges' discourse was the most common way of labelling evidence in the Welfare Reform Inquiry; whereas the 'research and data' discourse dominated in the Child Support Inquiry.

Discourse 1: evidence as 'multiple knowledges'

The most prevalent discourse overall was the idea that evidence involved many different types of knowledge. The key distinction here is that actors viewed evidence in more expansive and pluralistic terms than in all the other discourses. So, actors referred to research as evidence but also knowledge emanating from a range of other sources such as from public and stakeholder input.

This discourse of evidence as 'multiple knowledges' was adhered to by many actors in both inquiries. These actors tended to be policy practitioners or had previous experience of policy work. This was the dominant discourse among actors involved in the Welfare Reform Inquiry, with the inquiry documentation largely reflecting this discourse (McClure 2000a, 2000b). Similarly, this discourse was fairly common among actors involved in the Child Support Inquiry, and the final report of the Child Support Inquiry lists inquiry activities that drew on a range of data and information sources (Parkinson 2005, p 4.) However, I argue that the evidence as 'research and data' discourse, considered next, seemed to be the more dominant discourse in the Child Support Inquiry.

This view of evidence in public inquiries as being broad and expansive is often assumed in the inquiry literature. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, how evidence is understood and used in public inquiries has rarely been the subject of research. A notable empirical exception is research by Humphreys et al (2014) into what counts as evidence in Australian child care inquiries. This found a broad and 'multi-dimensional' (p 499) view of evidence, which includes research but also a range of other types of knowledge and evidence as understood by community stakeholders. That evidence

encompasses a range of types of knowledge resonates with some contemporary evidence literature. So, for example, Head (2008) discusses scientific, practice and political types (or perspectives) of evidence and Pawson et al (2003) theorise about five foundations of evidence: organisational knowledge; practitioner knowledge; user knowledge; research knowledge; and policy community knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 3, Boaz et al (2019) adopt an ‘inclusive’ definition of evidence which can include multiple types of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Table 1: Evidence as ‘multiple knowledges’

Discursive elements	Examples from cases
Valid knowledge types	In Welfare Reform Inquiry: research, data analysis, and public input from the consultation program In Child Support Inquiry: research, data analysis, modelling, and public correspondence
Knowledge breadth	Broad, with actors drawing on many different types of knowledge
Actors subscribing to this discourse	Many actors, the majority of whom were policy practitioners

Discourse 2: Evidence as ‘research and data’

The second-most prevalent discourse across the case-studies involved actors relating evidence to ‘research and data’ gathered for the inquiry. Actors used everyday synonyms such as ‘the research’ or ‘data’ when talking about evidence. This evidence did not need to be generated by academics, but actors did refer to knowledge generated through some loosely defined notion of standard forms of research and analysis.

During interviews, actors who adhered to this discourse in the Welfare Reform Inquiry referred to analysis of administrative data (for example, showing the extent of welfare reliance), OECD data on labour market trends, and literature reviews of existing research. In the Child Support Inquiry, actors referred to research studies into the costs of raising children, surveys of community attitudes, literature reviews of international research, administrative data evaluating the current child support formula, and

development of the microsimulation model used to evaluate alternative policy options. As one member of the Child Support Taskforce commented:

In relation to child support policy, the evidence is critical because it is such an emotive issue. We needed lots of hard data, for example, the research that analysed the costs of raising children.

Actors who adhered to this discourse tended to *exclude* public input and experiential knowledge from their view of evidence. In that sense, it was a relatively narrow view of what knowledge should constitute evidence. For example, in the Child Support Inquiry, some actors explicitly did not consider the public input to be evidence, despite it being extensively available. As another Taskforce member remarked:

There was lots of public input: a continuous stream of public input from the public and stakeholder groups; one of the highest (if not the highest) volumes of Ministerial correspondence; a very vocal lobby. But, you know, this public input was not considered evidence.

Actors who viewed evidence as ‘research and data’ tended, perhaps predictably, to be researchers, academics, or data analysts, although some policy practitioners referred to evidence in these terms as well. Much of the inquiry documentation was also written from this discursive perspective. This was particularly the case for the Child Support Inquiry, with the final report frequently citing the many sources of research and data analysis that were undertaken and which supported the inquiry findings and recommendations (Parkinson 2005). The final report of the Welfare Reform Inquiry also sets out research data on the extent of ‘welfare dependence’ to make the case for welfare reform (McClure 2000b) reflecting this discourse of evidence as ‘research and data’. However, as already mentioned, in the Welfare Reform Inquiry the dominant discourse was of evidence as ‘multiple knowledges’.

This discourse resonates with policy studies literature that assumes evidence to be *research* evidence and which seeks to promote the use of research in policymaking. As discussed in Chapter 2, this includes research utilisation literature (Weiss 1977a, 1979, Caplan 1979) and much ‘evidence-based policy’ scholarship which implicitly or explicitly assumes evidence to be research (see discussion in Oliver et al 2014b). In the

public inquiry literature, some authors (for example, Sheriff 1983 and Bulmer 1982) have highlighted the role of research and the involvement of social scientists in public inquiries. Given the involvement of researchers and academics in public inquiries, and what I reveal below about the relevance of professional backgrounds, it is perhaps unsurprising that this discourse was prevalent in both case-studies.

Table 2: Evidence as ‘research and data’

Discursive elements	Examples from cases
Valid knowledge types	In Welfare Reform Inquiry: administrative data on welfare reliance; labour market trends; overseas research, policy and practice In Child Support Inquiry: ‘costs of children’ research; attitudinal research; microsimulation modelling of child support variants; overseas research, policy and practice
Knowledge breadth	Relatively narrow, although various types of research and analysis are included
Actors subscribing to this discourse	Tended to be professional researchers and academics, plus some policy analysts within government

Discourse 3: Evidence as ‘public input’

The label of evidence was also used by actors to refer to knowledge that was generated by a wide variety of ‘publics’, including stakeholders and interest groups as well as affected publics (those individuals directly affected by policy) and the wider ‘interested’ public. The actors subscribing to this discourse of evidence as ‘public input’ showed little interest in the research, data analysis, or modelling work generated for the inquiries. Actors who adhered to this discourse were a mixed group, but tended to be actors who had worked in an advocacy or service delivery role.

The knowledge that underpinned this discourse of evidence as ‘public input’ was brought into the inquiries through various means: formally through official public

engagement activities, and informally through ad hoc meetings. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, actors discussed information received from public submissions (received before and after the Interim Report) and through the use of a questionnaire and a customised website; there were also focus groups comprised of income support recipients and meetings with stakeholder groups, academics, business representatives, and others. In the Child Support Inquiry, some actors discussed correspondence (from the public and members of parliament), unsolicited inquiry submissions, and public submissions from the preceding parliamentary inquiry.

Across the case-studies, there was a marked difference in the extent to which actors adhered to this discourse and whether public input was considered evidence. As referred to above, in the Child Support Inquiry, a few members of the Taskforce explicitly excluded public input as evidence, with most members adhering to the discourse that evidence comprised 'research and data'. Having said that, some actors involved in the Child Support Inquiry did validate public input as evidence, and the final report refers to types of information beyond research and data analysis, for example written submissions from interest groups and correspondence from the public (Parkinson 2005, p 4).

In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, the idea of evidence as 'public input' was much more prevalent, with several members of the Reference Group adhering to this view. The final report of the Welfare Reform Inquiry contains many references to the consultation activities and includes details of several public submissions (McClure 2000b). This is perhaps unsurprising. At a minimum, one might expect that if consultation has been undertaken, then views and comments would be included in the final report. My interviews suggest that this was not tokenistic, with several actors stressing the importance of the public input to their work and referring to it as 'evidence'. For example, one official working in the Secretariat for the Welfare Reform Inquiry commented:

We took the written submissions seriously. They were seen as the evidence base. You know they tempered things. For example, the ACOSS¹⁷ submission acted as a bit of a brake on things. It had impact – we drew on that.

That public input manifested as evidence is perhaps unsurprising in a study of ‘public’ inquiries. As discussed in Chapter 2, public inquiries typically undertake extensive public engagement activities, from public hearings and formal consultation exercises through to more informal workshops, gatherings, and meetings (Inwood and Johns 2016, Salter 2007). Indeed, the public is invited to ‘give evidence’ during inquiries. This discourse also resonates with the wider literature that suggests ‘evidence’ can include stakeholder consultations and user knowledge (for example, Pawson et al 2003 and UK Cabinet Office 1999).

Table 3: Evidence as ‘public input’

Discursive elements	Examples from cases
Valid knowledge types	In Welfare Reform Inquiry: public submissions and responses to interim report; documentation of focus groups and workshops In Child Support Inquiry: submissions from previous parliamentary inquiry; public correspondence
Knowledge breadth	Moderately broad, involving knowledge drawn from various publics
Actors subscribing to this discourse	A few actors in the Child Support Inquiry; several in Welfare Reform Inquiry and tended to be policy practitioners who had been in service delivery or advocacy roles.

¹⁷ The Australian Council of Social Service.

Discourse 4: Evidence as ‘user knowledge’

The next discourse relates to how some actors labelled direct experiential knowledge from affected publics as evidence. I have named this discourse evidence as ‘user knowledge’, as the affected publics can be considered ‘users’ of the child support and welfare systems. This discourse can be considered a sub-set of the ‘public input’ discourse. However, it differs in that actors who adhered to this discourse were highlighting experiential accounts from individuals directly affected by child support and welfare policy.

Again, the two case-studies differed in the extent to which this discourse was present. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, several actors highlighted the focus groups of income support recipients and how this had brought direct knowledge of the welfare system into the inquiry. As one member of the Welfare Reform secretariat commented:

The focus groups with recipients were helpful. People talked about how they were being ‘parked’ by the system and left alone to cope. These personal testimonials were very important to Patrick [McClure].

The value of hearing directly from people affected by welfare policy was raised by several members of the Reference Group. One member made the point that this provided an alternative view to the official data that was being presented to the group:

It was good to hear the counter-voices directly. We were being told by the department that you just need to get people onto the first rung of the ladder and that would solve everything. We were hearing that people stay on the first rung of the ladder for a very long time. Hearing these voices made things a bit better informed.

This discourse was rare in the Child Support Inquiry. However, the members of the associated Child Support Reference Group that I interviewed (of which there were only three) did adhere to this discourse. The Reference Group included interest groups representing both mothers and fathers, alongside professionals with experience in relationship mediation and counselling and in issues concerning parenting after separation (Parkinson 2005, Smyth 2005). Those members of the Reference Group that

I interviewed, when asked about evidence, detailed several accounts of individuals having been adversely affected by child support policy.

It seems important to reiterate here the point made by several members of the Child Support Taskforce – that the inquiry had followed a previous parliamentary inquiry which had elicited extensive experiential knowledge from affected publics. Multiple site visits had been undertaken in all states and territories “to hear firsthand the views and experiences of the community” (House of Representatives 2003, p 15) and ‘community statement’ sessions had been held at the end of each formal public hearing. These had generated extensive input from individuals directly affected by child support policy. This knowledge had all been available to the Taskforce. However, as a member of the Child Support Taskforce commented,

This time around, we felt we needed a different sort of evidence.

Table 4: Evidence as ‘user knowledge’

Discursive elements	Examples from cases
Valid knowledge types	In Welfare Reform Inquiry: personal accounts from stakeholder discussions In Child Support Inquiry: personal accounts from meetings between the Taskforce and Reference Group and from bi-lateral meetings
Knowledge breadth	Narrow, only knowledge drawn from affected publics
Actors subscribing to this discourse	Several in Welfare Reform Inquiry; a couple of actors in the Child Support Inquiry (tended to be actors directly engaged with policy users)

As discussed above, that ‘evidence’ can include knowledge from affected publics or ‘users’ is recognised in the evidence and public inquiry literatures (for example, Boaz et al 2015, Salter 2007). However, the extent to which this type of knowledge is valued in public policy is the subject of extensive debate (Nabatchi and Jo 2018). As shown in

Chapter 2, the public inquiry literature contains many descriptive accounts of public engagement activities (as part of ‘evidence-gathering’), but few empirical studies examining how this public input is valued and used in the practice of inquiry work. Salter (2007) makes the point that the ‘public’ in public inquiries is rarely scrutinised in the literature or in practice.

Discourse 5: Evidence as ‘the facts’

The final discourse of evidence present in the cases equated evidence with ‘the facts’ or knowledge that actors deemed indisputable or incontestable. Actors subscribing to this particular discourse referred to the ‘factual evidence’ or simply ‘the facts’ in discussing evidence. For example, one official working on the Child Support Inquiry differentiated the ‘facts’ from the public input that had been sought in the preceding parliamentary inquiry.

There were lots of submissions to the parliamentary inquiry. We needed something different – a factual base.

The actors who adhered to ‘the facts’ in the Child Support Inquiry drew attention to how child support is a highly emotionally charged area of policy. They described how the submissions received in the preceding parliamentary inquiry had mainly been based on individual experiences and driven by a sense of injustice over how they had been treated by the system. As highlighted in the above quote, it was felt by some actors that something different was needed – ‘the facts’.

This discourse could be considered a subset of the second (evidence as ‘research and data’), given actors typically were privileging knowledge drawn from a particular form of research and data analysis (that is, quantitative and statistical data) when they referred to ‘the facts’. The difference was that actors who adhered to ‘the facts’ discourse took a narrow view of what types of research knowledge counted as evidence in the inquiry *and* suggested that this knowledge was incontrovertible. Inquiry actors who privileged ‘research and data’ as evidence tended not to make this claim about research as evidence.

I should point out that this discourse was adhered to by a small minority in both case-studies. Of the 39 actors I interviewed, only two or maybe three fully adhered to this discourse. As I discuss further below, the professional and disciplinary backgrounds of actors (and their related epistemological and ontological outlooks) seemed relevant to the embracing of a particular discourse. The actors who adhered to this discourse were quantitative social scientists.

This discourse of evidence as ‘the facts’ aligns with a highly positivist worldview that knowledge can be value-free and known objectively (Douglas 2009). This view speaks to literature on the advance of ‘quantification’ as a way of understanding the world and its prominence in evidence-based policy debates (Espeland and Stevens 2008). In Smith and Joyce’s (2012) research into public health policymaking, they find actors have a preference for ‘concrete’ data and desire knowledge that simplifies rather than captures messy realities.

Table 5: Evidence as ‘the facts’

Discursive elements	Examples from cases
Valid knowledge types	In Welfare Reform Inquiry: statistics on welfare dependence In Child Support Inquiry: quantitative analysis of ‘costs of children’
Knowledge breadth	Very narrow, and typically privileging quantitative analysis
Actors subscribing to this discourse	A small number of actors, who tended to be quantitative researchers

Analysing the discursive landscapes

I turn now to comparing the discursive landscapes across both cases. Overall, I find that in both inquiries multiple discourses of evidence were adhered to and the landscape was uneven, diverse, and contested. However, I find significant differences across the case-studies – in terms of both the dominance and variety of different discourses. I then study these discursive landscapes further by analysing which actors adhered to

particular discourses. I consider the assigned roles of each actor in the inquiry and their professional and disciplinary backgrounds. I finally reflect on the role of 'context' before considering the implications of these findings.

Complex and contested evidentiary landscapes

Overall, both inquiries had complex discursive landscapes, with each inquiry having a different dominant discourse. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, most actors tended to subscribe to the evidence as 'multiple knowledges' discourse and took a broad view of what knowledge constituted evidence. This pluralistic view of evidence comes through in the following quote from one member of the Welfare Reform Reference Group:

We had the Reference Group bringing their own backgrounds and experiences. Then of course we had the submissions. There was then big brush strokes of evidence about the system not serving as well as it could in the longer term interests of people. That was the evidence. And of course the OECD data about the international context et cetera – that was the evidence base as well.

The dominant discourse in the Child Support Inquiry was evidence as 'research and data.' Many actors described the research and modelling that was undertaken during the inquiry in some detail, and the inquiry documentation largely reflected this discourse, including being explicit in the Terms of Reference (see Appendix A to this thesis). As one member of the Taskforce summarised:

At the first Taskforce meeting, the chair made it very clear that the work needed to be evidence-based and research driven, and should draw on existing and new research. We all bought into this approach.

However, as discussed above, other discourses were evident in both inquiries. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, several actors highlighted the experiential knowledge of those directly affected by policy while some others prioritised 'research and data' as evidence.

The diversity of what was viewed as evidence by different actors is well illustrated in this quote by a member of the Welfare Reform secretariat:

So there were different bits of evidence that worked for different members of the committee. The focus group feedback and some of the submissions about the complexity of the system, and how difficult it was to navigate the system, was important for many of them. Whereas others thought more about the income support structure, how it affected incentives to work, and how it needed to change.

In the Child Support Inquiry, a few actors took a broad view of evidence and adhered to the 'multiple knowledges' discourse and a couple privileged 'the facts'. However, compared to the Welfare Reform Inquiry, I argue there was less diversity in the discursive landscape of the Child Support Inquiry, with only a small number of actors deviating from the 'research and data' discourse. Many actors, particularly the members of the Taskforce, seemed to share a view about the importance of research to the work of the inquiry and held a common ambition to fill the gaps in research knowledge as far as possible in the time available. This contrasted with the Welfare Reform Inquiry where 'research and data' was a minority discourse and addressing research gaps did not seem to be a priority.

Revealing this discursive complexity within public inquiries is a novel and important contribution to the literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, we know little about how evidence is understood by actors involved in public inquiries. The literature does show that public inquiries *gather* multiple types of knowledge, and this was confirmed in my research. However, my research has revealed something further. It has exposed how actors have diverse views on what knowledge counts as evidence. A key implication of this finding is that public inquiries face the challenge of accommodating diverse discourses of evidence in developing collective policy advice. This is considered further below.

So far, the diversity of the discursive landscape of each inquiry has been highlighted. But how does this relate to the actors involved, their roles in the inquiry, and their

backgrounds? I now consider this further, and in so doing identify further important implications about who participates, and how, in public inquiries.

Discourses, actors, and inquiry roles

Understanding the roles of actors in relation to the evidence discourses is important, since particular groups of actors (for example, the advisory board and the official secretariat) need to work together to progress an inquiry, yet not all actors have equal status and power within an inquiry. First, I analyse actors by the role they play in the inquiry. Then, I identify the chairs and government member of each inquiry as having particularly important roles, which are worthy of further analysis. To undertake this analysis of roles and backgrounds, I start with the different ‘types’ of inquiry actor as set out in Chapter 3 and which relate to the roles that they played in the inquiry. These are: a) members of the inquiry advisory body; b) members of the official inquiry secretariat; c) other government officials working on the inquiry; and d) external policy actors engaged in inquiry work. I analyse the discourses of evidence by these actor types to see if any patterns exist.

My main finding here is that different types of actor (or groupings of actors) within the inquiries varied in the discourses to which they adhered. In the Child Support Inquiry, members of the inquiry advisory board (type a) were mostly adherents of the ‘research and data’ discourse and indeed were a fairly homogenous group in this regard. The secretariat (type b) and other government officials (type c) were more evenly split between viewing evidence as ‘research and data’ and as ‘multiple knowledges’. Perhaps of more significance, the external policy actors involved (type d) – in particular the members of the Reference Group that I was able to interview – tended to label ‘user knowledge’ as evidence. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, many members of the advisory board adhered to the ‘multiple knowledges’ view, although a broad range of discourses was evident. Again, government officials (types b and c) also tended to take this pluralistic view of evidence and adhere to the ‘multiple knowledges’ discourse, although a couple of officials clearly prioritised ‘research and data’. The discourse of evidence as ‘user knowledge’ was common among the external policy actors (type d).

This analysis further illuminates the degree of complexity within each inquiry. The particular evidence discourses adhered to by members of the advisory boards (the

decision-making bodies in an inquiry), and the differences between how the advisory boards and other inquiry actors viewed evidence, are important when I come to consider how the inquiry process culminates in producing policy advice. For example, it is potentially problematic if the advisory board views evidence in different terms to the secretariat. As shown in Chapter 2, the public inquiry literature has little to say about how evidence is understood and used within and during inquiries. In a notable exception, Bulmer (1982) explores the enablers and inhibitors of social science research used by commissions of inquiry, and highlights the significance of who makes up the advisory body and the dynamics between the advisory body and supporting staff. This analysis resonates with my own. However, the diversity of how actors viewed 'evidence' within public inquiries makes for a novel contribution. These differences create challenges for inquiry work which involves seeking a consensus view¹⁸ on recommendations and policy advice. This challenge is highlighted below and considered in more depth in Chapter 6.

Next, the specific roles of a few particularly influential actors are considered. This is significant as there are certain inquiry roles that carry significant power and authority, most notably the chairs of the advisory boards. Below, I consider the chairs of each inquiry – Patrick McClure and Patrick Parkinson. Then I turn to the government member of both inquiries – Wayne Jackson – given his unique role in each inquiry as both a government official and a member of the advisory board. Wayne Jackson is also unique in relation to my research as he was the only interviewee who was directly involved in both case-studies.

The chair of a public inquiry body is usually highly influential during an inquiry, as they drive the inquiry process and are accountable for the final recommendations (Prasser 2006). In recognition of the significance of the role, the final report of an inquiry is often

¹⁸ While uncommon, there are examples where an inquiry has failed to reach a consensus view. In Australia, a notable example is the Hancock review of retirement incomes in the 1970s (Hancock 1976). In the UK, perhaps most famously, the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress (1905–09) involved two minority reports (Webb and Webb 1909, Wakefield et al 1909).

named after the chair. In my research, both chairs expressed strong views on the role of evidence and what counted as evidence in the inquiries. In interviews, the chair of the Welfare Reform Inquiry, Patrick McClure, emphasised the broad evidence base of the inquiry – thus adhering to the ‘multiple knowledges’ discourse. McClure stressed that the recommendations of the Welfare Reform Inquiry were ‘evidence-based’ and recounted the different types of evidence that he considered had informed the work of the inquiry. McClure, who was chief executive of the welfare charity Mission Australia at the time, drew on his direct experiences of working with welfare clients and of working in the community sector. He also described how the Reference Group had been keen to learn from what was happening overseas and, early on in the inquiry, he commissioned two researchers within Mission Australia to undertake literature reviews and scans of international practice. This was additional to the work being undertaken by the inquiry secretariat within the department. During his interview, McClure discussed the wide and diverse nature of evidence used during the inquiry and returned many times to the importance of community views, specifically the perspectives of welfare recipients and community sector stakeholders.

Turning now to the Child Support Inquiry, in my analysis the chair, Professor Patrick Parkinson, adhered to the evidence discourse of ‘research and data’. Patrick was a scholar of family law and had been an active figure in family law debate and reform for many years prior to the Child Support Inquiry. He had been involved in the preceding parliamentary inquiry and given evidence at a public hearing. During his interview, Parkinson reflected on the extensive evidence gathered through public submissions and hearings during the parliamentary inquiry and commented that a different type of evidence and expertise was needed to conduct the new inquiry. In particular, Parkinson recounted the importance of the research into the ‘costs of children’ and the modelling work. In regard to the Child Support Inquiry, the deputy chair, David Stanton, also warrants attention. Several interviewees remarked on how Parkinson and Stanton had been an effective ‘double act’ with Stanton being ‘the ideal complement’ to Parkinson, particularly in bringing experience and knowledge of the policy world. Like Parkinson, Stanton tended to label ‘research and data’ as evidence.

However, it seems important to foreshadow here a further finding (set out in Chapter 6) that, in developing inquiry recommendations and policy advice, actors drew upon knowledge beyond that which they labelled as ‘evidence’. For example, during interviews, Parkinson and Stanton both described drawing on knowledge beyond what they had labelled evidence (research and data), such as knowledge about what might be politically and publicly acceptable. Boaz et al (2019, p 4) argue that the less deterministic role for evidence, as captured in the idea of ‘evidence-informed policy’, means considering how evidence plays an influencing role in the policy process alongside other forms of knowledge. Nonetheless, I argue below that it matters what sort of knowledge gets labelled as evidence, as this can give preferential status to that knowledge in the policy process. On the policy playing field, what gets labelled as evidence is not equal to other forms of knowledge.

The government member of an advisory body is another significant actor that deserves consideration given the bridging role he plays between an advisory body and a government department. Wayne Jackson was the government member of both my cases-study advisory boards and a deputy secretary in the Department of Families and Community Services (FACS) at the time. The government member of a public inquiry advisory body faces particular challenges – they are simultaneously a permanent public servant and a member of an ‘independent’ advisory group. They can also be responsible for taking forward the recommendations from an inquiry, as was the case here¹⁹. This makes Jackson, arguably, a very powerful person in the inquiry process. As mentioned, Jackson was also the only actor participating in my research who played a major role in both inquiries. Given this, his perspectives of evidence across the two cases is particularly useful.

¹⁹ Hennessy points to the value of taskforces which tend to include public servants, noting ‘Hybrid committees of insiders and outsiders can be very productive here. They have the great advantage of having at least some of the people who may be charged with implementing the proposals around the table from the outset.’ (Hennessy, 1989, p 729).

Interestingly, Jackson's views on what knowledge counted as evidence differed between the two inquiries. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, Jackson commented during interviews on the "broad brush-strokes of evidence" that were important in the inquiry, on the value of community consultations, and on the data analysis demonstrating the extent of 'welfare reliance'. Here, he subscribes to evidence as 'multiple knowledges' discourse. However, in the Child Support Inquiry, Jackson (in a similar vein to Parkinson and several other members of the Taskforce) viewed evidence as the research and modelling work that informed the work of the Taskforce, thus adhering to the evidence as 'research and data' discourse. Jackson's differing views on evidence across the two inquiries is a theme I return to further below.

Actors and their backgrounds

At this point, I consider the professional backgrounds of inquiry actors. My core finding here is that particular professional backgrounds appear to predispose individuals to a particular discourse of evidence. Broadly speaking, those inquiry actors who were or had been academics or researchers, perhaps unsurprisingly, emphasised 'research and data' as evidence. Those who came to the inquiries from wider professional backgrounds, for example the community or business sectors, took a broader view of evidence and adhered to the evidence as 'multiple knowledges' discourse. The policy practitioners and actors who had previously been policy practitioners (for example, some researchers who had previously worked in policy roles in government) similarly tended to view evidence as 'multiple knowledges'. The actors that adhered to 'the facts' discourse were quantitative researchers. The actors who attached to the 'user knowledge' discourse tended to have a practice or service delivery background (for example, had worked in the community welfare sector) and/or had direct advocacy experience.

Here I should highlight a 'non-finding' from my research. Recall my temporal approach and how, during interviews, I used a simple temporal framework to encourage discussion of evidence through the various inquiry stages. I did not find that actors adhered to different discourses as they talked through the inquiry process. In this regard, the discourses of evidence display a certain 'stickiness'. This makes sense given that the background of an actor seemed important in which type of knowledge they

considered evidence. However, that is not to suggest that context does not matter. Below, I discover a complex interplay between individual and contextual factors.

That professional or disciplinary backgrounds matter to interpretations of evidence is resonant with research in other areas of public policy (Lomas et al 2005, Lennon 2014, Smith and Joyce 2012). For example, research by Lennon (2014) which explored the meaning of evidence in Irish green infrastructure policy revealed that an individual's preferred form of evidence was linked to 'professional rationalities' (p 168), and how professional disciplines prescribe what can be counted as 'truth' (p 172). My research similarly shows that particular professional and disciplinary backgrounds predispose actors to validate particular types of knowledge as evidence. This knowledge proclivity of actors makes it important 'who' gets to be involved in public inquiries, and in what role – a theme I touch on below and explore in more detail in Chapter 7.

However, returning to Jackson (the government member of the two inquiries) brings us back to context. His professional background – as a long-standing policy practitioner – suggests a predilection for a broad view of evidence (evidence as 'multiple knowledges'). This was Jackson's view in the Welfare Reform Inquiry. However, in the Child Support Inquiry, he supported the 'research and data' discourse. This reveals an interplay between individual knowledge preferences and *context*.

Evidence and context

That context matters to how 'evidence' is understood is really the starting point for my research and for approaches to studying evidence 'in situ', such as case-study research design. As discussed in Chapter 2, that context matters to what counts as evidence (and how it is used) is a prevailing theme in the academic literature (Davies et al 2019, Wesselink et al 2014). Scholars highlight the significance of the political and discursive contexts in which actors operate and have provided empirical evidence of how these contexts constrain what counts as evidence in policy (for example, Cook and Natalier 2014). My empirical research sheds some light on *how* context mattered to the types of knowledge that were privileged as evidence in my case-study inquiries.

Putting analytical attention on ‘context’ helps make sense of the dominant discourses in each inquiry. Here, to illustrate the point I return to the context of how each inquiry was established.

The Child Support Inquiry emerged from the preceding parliamentary inquiry into child custody arrangements (House of Representatives 2003), which had involved wide-ranging community consultation. Indeed, it recorded one of the highest volumes of public input to a parliamentary inquiry ever received at the time. As the chair, Parkinson, and others argued, a different sort of knowledge was needed given that the parliamentary inquiry had drawn heavily on public input. Furthermore, several actors pointed to the wider context – of emotional contestation between interest groups, ongoing public concern, intense media attention, and the vocal lobbying by fathers’ groups – as grounds for taking what was described as an ‘evidence-based policy’ approach which valued social scientific data. This context helps make sense of the recourse to ‘research and data’ as evidence – the dominant discourse in the Child Support Inquiry.

The discourses of evidence in the Welfare Reform Inquiry were highly diverse, with the dominant discourse being ‘multiple knowledges’. The Welfare Reform Inquiry was established at a time of uncertainty about the direction of welfare reform. Some actors referred to political shenanigans in parliament leading up to the announcement of the review (see Hazlehurst 2001) and how media coverage claimed a lack of direction in welfare reform. Other actors discussed ongoing heated debates about the potential extension of ‘mutual obligation’ (see discussion in Chapter 3). This illustrates the competing pressures and expectations on the Welfare Reform Inquiry. In this context, what emerged was a Reference Group drawn from multiple sectors and a great diversity in the types of knowledge that actors labelled as evidence.

Discussion

In summary, my overarching finding in this chapter is that the discursive landscape in each inquiry was diverse, with actors understanding evidence in multiple and overlapping ways. Through exploring the inquiry roles and professional/disciplinary backgrounds of actors, I bring to light a complex interplay between individual preferences for particular types of knowledge and context.

I turn now to discussing these findings and considering their implications. What are the implications of knowledge being labelled as evidence? And how do advisory bodies reach agreement on policy advice given the tensions that different evidentiary discourses surely present?

Knowledge diversity in public inquiries

This chapter has demonstrated that public inquiries can involve a broad and diverse range of knowledge-gathering, covering a wide range of research-related and public-engagement activities. But empirical analysis has also revealed that these different types of knowledge receive differing preferential treatment by actors during an inquiry. When knowledge receives the label of evidence, I argue it bestows epistemic power on that knowledge and its status within policy work is elevated. Actors who adhered to the evidence as ‘research and data’ discourse were in this sense elevating the status of research knowledge over other types of knowledge. Similarly, actors who adhered to the evidence as ‘public input’ discourse were putting greater value on the knowledge of various publics.

Thus, my findings have implications for the diversity of knowledge present in a public inquiry and *whose* knowledge gets to be privileged as evidence. There are substantive policy implications of incorporating a wide range of knowledge in the policy process. For example, involving affected publics can enhance our understanding of problems and create more informed policy processes and outcomes. Then there are the democratic merits of including the knowledge of various publics in the policy process, which can help build trust and legitimacy in governance (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015, Parkhurst 2017). The dominant evidence discourse in an inquiry matters in elevating the status of knowledge from particular groups of actors over others. In Chapter 6, I explore how actors develop policy advice and reflect back on the implications of the dominant discourse of evidence in each inquiry.

That actors are predisposed to label particular types of knowledge as evidence is significant. In a sense, there is a certain ‘stickiness’ in how actors interpret evidence – that is, they carry evidence preferences with them into different settings and contexts. It makes ‘who’ is involved in public inquiries, and their roles, very important to what knowledge qualifies to receive the status of ‘evidence’. So how advisory board members,

and other actors involved in an inquiry, are recruited matters, and this is examined in Chapter 7.

A further nuance around the nature of knowledge that underpins evidence is warranted at this point. As well as showing that evidence is drawn from different types of knowledge, my research findings also demonstrate that evidence in public inquiries is more than ‘what works’.²⁰ This was revealed when I analysed the data through a temporal lens. The discourses of evidence typically did not change over the course of the inquiry, perhaps reflecting the strength of individual knowledge preferences. However, the knowledge ‘subject’ of what actors considered as evidence (that is, what it was about) did change somewhat. In interviews, actors discussed how, as each inquiry progressed, the focus of evidence discourse shifted from knowledge that sought to understand the nature of the problem through to knowledge that informed the development of possible solutions. I am not suggesting that these are not interrelated or that there was a neat linear progression – indeed, the following chapters reveal the iterative nature of inquiry work. The important point here is that knowledge that actors labelled as evidence was about problems, causes, trends, policy ideas, and community attitudes and values – the focus of what was considered evidence extended well beyond ‘what works’.

Finally, the potential trade-off between breadth and depth of knowledge in public inquiries merits highlighting. The Child Support Inquiry had a narrower knowledge base as evidence, given the dominance of the ‘research and data’ discourse. As discussed, this made sense to inquiry actors, given the context of child support policy and previous reviews, and many actors emphasised the depth and rigour of the research evidence created during the inquiry. By virtually all accounts of interview participants, research, analysis, and modelling work had brought a more rigorous evidence base to child support policy than had ever been available previously. It could be argued that this inquiry privileged depth over breadth. This is not without its implications, as previously

²⁰ Understood here as detailed knowledge of policy and program interventions (Roberts 2005).

discussed. However, public inquiries have limited time and resources to complete their work, so trade-offs between breadth and depth may be inevitable.

Contestation and reconciliation

The diversity of how inquiry actors viewed evidence has implications for the level of contestation and argument that might occur during an inquiry, and this presents challenges for how an inquiry reaches agreement on recommendations and policy advice. Public inquiries are a collective endeavour. The advisory body, with the support of a secretariat, are required to produce an agreed report of their findings. As referred to earlier, some public inquiries do not succeed in reaching consensus recommendations and a separate dissenting report is then published alongside the majority report (see discussion in Prasser 2006, p 142). One could argue that the inability to reach consensus might be related to divergent views on evidence, although this has not been the subject of empirical investigation as far as I know. And of course the challenges for a group in reaching agreement may relate to many other things beyond different perspectives on evidence, such as fundamental disagreements over ideology. In my research, the advisory board members of both case-study inquiries were able to reach a consensus. In order to do this, actors somehow needed to make sense of the various evidence discourses and navigate the breadth and diversity of knowledge that actors collectively considered evidence. How they did this is explored in Chapter 6.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I suggested that public inquiries might be interesting sites for exploring how diversity of evidence might be reconciled. The empirical findings in this chapter support this contention. Davies et al (2019, p 377) have argued that greater inclusivity of what counts as evidence in policy makes effective “knowledge integration processes” important, pointing out “that the greater challenge lies in creating integrated and situated *knowing*, rather than emphasising the production of knowledge products”. Importantly, the findings in this chapter highlight that this task of integration is made more difficult because actors have different meanings of ‘evidence’ and this needs to be accommodated. I have shown how the backgrounds of policy actors, and their ontological and epistemological preferences, shape the types of knowledge that get labelled as evidence. Further, it has long been contended that actors

bring their own values and interests to policy work (Rein 1976), and these to some degree will influence views on what should count as evidence. That ‘evidence’ itself is anchored in differing value perspectives adds further complexity to how the evidence is weighed and negotiated in the process of developing policy advice. In subsequent chapters, I explore how actors used evidence in the case-study inquiries and how ‘situated knowing’²¹ was created in developing policy advice. This reveals a process which requires actors to navigate often implicit differences in their understanding of what the label ‘evidence’ means. The ambiguity created through differential labelling of evidence might however be helpful. As Fischer (2003, p 63) has argued, ambiguous meanings can have important political functions, particularly in facilitating cooperation and compromise between different interest groups, a theme I return to in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

We cannot take for granted that there is a shared understanding of what ‘evidence’ means in a public inquiry. In this chapter, through identifying and exploring different discourses of evidence, I have demonstrated that inquiry actors carry diverse meanings of evidence. I have explored the relevance of the professional and disciplinary backgrounds of actors and of context. I have suggested that these findings have implications for the diversity of knowledge within public inquiries and whose knowledge gets to be privileged as evidence. Further, the diversity of evidence discourses has implications for how an inquiry body might deliberate and develop policy advice. These are themes explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.

The findings in this chapter challenge my initial assessments of the two case-study inquiries. As previously discussed, from preliminary investigations, the Child Support

²¹ By ‘knowing’, I am using the term as articulated by Cook and Wagenaar (2012). In this sense, ‘knowing’ is realised in interaction with others in the ‘eternally unfolding present’ (Cook and Wagenaar 2012, p 21) or as Cook and Brown (1999, p 387) describe, knowing is an aspect of practice itself (‘the epistemic dimension of practice’) and can be distinguished from ‘knowledge’ which is something that can be ‘possessed’. This ‘knowing’ is ‘situated’ in that it is realised and embedded in context.

Inquiry seemed to have been driven by empirical research evidence and had been proposed as an example of 'evidence-based policy' (Stanton 2005). In contrast, the Welfare Reform Inquiry seemed to be primarily a community engagement exercise, with the final report including many references to the public and stakeholder input (McClure 2000b). These first impressions have some 'truth' in them, but do not portray the full picture. A more nuanced understanding of the case-study inquiries and their evidentiary characteristics emerges in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Evidence uses

Introduction

How evidence gets used, or does not get used, in public policy can greatly affect policy processes and outcomes (Parkhurst 2017). As previously discussed, there is very little empirical understanding of how evidence is used within public inquiries. Inquiry scholarship includes many descriptive accounts of the knowledge-gathering activities of inquiries, but rarely has an evidence lens been taken. In the inquiry literature overall, much is assumed about how evidence is used, and these, often implicit, assumptions underpin the conventional characterisations of public inquiries. So portrayals of public inquiries as ‘impartial advisers’ (Prasser 2006, Owens 2012) suggest evidence is being used instrumentally to develop findings and recommendations. On the other hand, depictions of public inquiries as ‘political puppets’ (Bulmer 1982, Stark 2019) suggest that the use of evidence is largely symbolic and is being employed selectively to support a pre-determined policy position. In this chapter, my empirical findings question these two outlooks.

The novel empirical contribution of this chapter lies in uncovering the dynamic nature of inquiry work, specifically in relation to how the use of evidence by actors varies over time. In this chapter, I do not take a bird’s eye view but instead draw on how actors described using evidence in the inquiry process. As Boswell (2008) has commented, different evidence uses do not necessarily reflect articulated strategies. I have identified different evidence uses from how actors recounted using evidence, and by drawing on inquiry documentation. In interviews, I asked participants: How did you use evidence during the inquiry? What did you do with the evidence?

Actors in both cases recounted using evidence in multiple ways during their respective inquiries. Principally, they described how evidence informed policy design and inquiry recommendations. However, actors also reported using evidence in other ways as the inquiry progressed: to frame the problem; to promote public debate and build legitimacy; to bridge stakeholder interests; to publicly substantiate findings; and to support the policy reform process. A further significant finding revealed in this chapter is how actors related the use of evidence to the wider roles that the inquiry was playing

in the policy process, and that these policy roles were many and varied. This relates back to my overall argument that public inquiries need to be seen as dynamic processes that interact with the wider political and policy process.

An important reminder is warranted here about the diversity of what actors considered as 'evidence'. As analysed in the previous chapter, there were multiple discourses of evidence adhered to by inquiry actors which related to the types and breadth of knowledge that were considered valid. In this chapter, I have tended to refer to 'evidence' in a singular way, thereby simplifying the communication of the various evidence uses. However, the full evidentiary complexity should be noted here. Actors were recounting different uses of evidence and had different interpretations of 'evidence' and of what was being used.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I analyse the different ways evidence was used, according to the actors. Then, I unpack my overarching finding that these evidence uses changed over time. Next, I consider the implications of these findings for how we might conceptualise how evidence is used in inquiry work and for understanding the evidentiary supply and demand characteristics of public inquiries.

Many uses of evidence

Actors in both case-studies pointed to a range of ways in which they used evidence. Most commonly, actors referred to using evidence to inform the development of policy design and advice. Importantly, actors discussed using evidence in this way as ongoing throughout each inquiry, and I start my analysis with this evidence use. The range of other uses are ordered temporally, foreshadowing an important finding – that how actors used evidence changed over the duration of the inquiry, with different uses appearing more prominent at different times. Using this temporal logic, I turn next to exploring how evidence was used to frame the policy problem (which typically occurs during the establishment phase of an inquiry) and I conclude by discussing how the evidence supported the subsequent policy reform and implementation process (following the reporting phase of an inquiry).

Using evidence to inform policy design and advice

Most actors interviewed in this research reported how evidence was used to inform policy options and ultimately the inquiry's recommendations and policy advice to government. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, interviewees described a process of gathering evidence which they then used to inform their analysis and recommendations. For example, one adviser to the inquiry described drawing on international policy practice and adapting it to develop policy advice for the Australian context.

We drew on what the Social Exclusion Unit in the early Blair era was doing in the UK. Essentially, we put a white picket-fence around the approach to make it work for a Conservative, Australian government.

Actors discussed using various pieces of evidence to inform their policy advice. Some referred to evidence which revealed the extent of welfare dependency and how this had turned their attention to designing a system which encouraged active participation – which was then reflected in the core recommendations of the Welfare Reform Inquiry for a 'Participation Support System' (McClure 2000b). Other actors discussed evidence of how the tax and transfer systems interacted and how this had shaped recommendations for a simplified payment system.

In the Child Support Inquiry, many actors described how evidence was used in designing the new child support formula and in associated recommendations. The intention to base advice on evidence was explicit in the terms of reference and that this approach had been followed was highlighted throughout the final report (Parkinson 2005). How the evidence informed the Taskforce's advice and subsequent decision-making has been the subject of written commentary by members of the taskforce (Smyth 2005, Harding and Percival 2007, Stanton 2005). For example, Ann Harding (a member of the Child Support Taskforce) reflects in Harding & Percival (2007, pp 434) that:

The taskforce was fortunate to have a much more comprehensive evidence base than was available to those determining the shape of the original Child Support Scheme in the late 1980s – and this evidence base fed directly into such decisions

as the higher costs recommended for older children and the movement away from expressing child costs as a flat percentage of income.

During interviews, several members of the Taskforce discussed how evidence had been instrumental in developing the recommendations and how it had been an ‘evidence-based’ process. Indeed, in both inquiries, actors referred to the recommendations and final reports as being ‘evidence-based’. The way in which actors used the term ‘evidence-based’ was in the context of discussing how evidence informed the process of developing policy advice.

That evidence can be used to inform policy directly is commonly identified in research on evidence use, with the ‘instrumental use’ of evidence being one of the main conceptualisations found in the literature (for example, Head 2008, 2013, Cherney 2009). One of Weiss’s evidence use models (1979, p 427) is the ‘problem-solving model’ which involves the direct application of evidence to a policy decision, and much ‘evidence-based policy’ literature assumes or aspires to a direct application of evidence to policy (Sanderson 2009).

While this evidence use has been well recognised in the policy studies literature, there is little empirical research that reveals its presence. As discussed in Chapter 2, empirical studies of how evidence is used in practice remain rare and research that surveys policy practitioners on their evidence use typically finds that the direct use of evidence is uncommon (Oliver et al 2014b, Stoker and Evans 2016). Indeed, when Weiss (1977b, 1979) reflected on her research into the various ways in which research can be used in policy, she concluded that her ‘enlightenment model’ (whereby concepts and theories permeate policy over time) was the most likely route.

My research, therefore, is an empirical example of ‘instrumental use’ with many actors reporting that they used evidence to inform policy. This raises interesting questions about the characteristics of public inquiries that made this possible, and this is discussed further below. However, it would be jumping the gun to characterise the case-studies as ‘evidence-based policy’, understood as evidence being used instrumentally within a linear and ‘rational’ policy approach. I turn next to examine how actors also recounted using evidence in several other ways during the inquiries. That actors used

evidence in multiple ways suggests other, and more complex, forces were at play, beyond a technical and problem-solving exercise. Furthermore in Chapter 6, I unpack how actors made decisions and formed specific policy recommendations and advice. This reveals a highly complex, iterative, and interactive process in which actors draw on 'evidence' alongside multiple normative, practical, and political concerns.

Using evidence to define and frame the problem

Actors in both case-studies recalled using evidence to define and frame the nature of the problem. This evidence use could be seen as part of the above process of using evidence in developing policy advice, as understanding the policy problem is part of developing policy advice. However, an important distinction is that this evidence use illuminates how actors contest different understandings of the problem, and use evidence in support of their own problem definition.

In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, several actors pointed to evidence that illustrated the extent of 'welfare dependency' and how they had used this in the inquiry. Some government officials discussed how, in the lead-up to the inquiry, there was greater awareness within the department of how long some people were staying on welfare payments, which was revealed through new analytical capability that could track individuals through the income support system. This evidence was used in the speech by the Minister that announced the inquiry and which framed the problem as one of 'welfare dependency'. It should be noted that this framing of the problem as being largely one of 'welfare dependency' (Newman 1999) or 'welfare reliance' (McClure 2000a, p 62) was contentious among members of the Reference Group, and between the Reference Group and members of the departmental secretariat. The following quote by a member of the secretariat illustrates this evidence use, and its challenges:

A pivotal piece of evidence we used was that one in four households of working age were receiving income support. We were top of the league for jobless households, and the level of passivity amongst recipients was very high. However, not everyone wanted to see it this way. We had lots of framing tussles with the Reference Group and they did not want to be seen to be blaming jobless people.

Other actors in the Welfare Reform Inquiry were keen to reframe the problem as being one of poverty and social exclusion and used evidence to support this view. The chair of the inquiry reported bringing two researchers from Mission Australia into the inquiry to ensure this perspective on the problem was included. Evidence which demonstrated wider structural problems was included in the interim and final reports (McClure 2000a, 2000b).

Similarly, in the Child Support Inquiry, several actors reported examples of evidence being used to describe and frame the policy problem. Some actors talked about the problem being technical in nature and emphasised the research data on the 'costs of children'. However, other actors described how the problem was one of 'fairness' and about balancing the interests of mothers and fathers, and they invoked the views of the public and interest groups in discussing this.

There was much debate and contestation within each inquiry about the nature of the problems being addressed, but the important point here is that actors reported using evidence to define the problem. There seemed to be various frames at play and differing interpretations of the nature of the problem, but evidence was a tool used in support of each specific frame.

This research provides empirical support for the claim that evidence is used to frame and reframe problems (Nedlund and Garpenby 2014, Cairney 2019, Wesselink et al 2014). The process of problem definition and framing is inherently political, given it involves actors contesting different meanings (Rein and Schön 1994). In the discussion below, I return to this and reflect on how using evidence to frame the problem does not fit with the 'political use' of evidence as defined in much of the literature (that is, in narrow symbolic terms as using evidence to support a pre-determined position, Boswell 2008). This discussion involves considering what a broader approach to the political meaning of evidence use might look like.

Using evidence to promote public debate and build legitimacy

Actors also described how they used evidence to promote public debate and build legitimacy. This evidence use was raised by several actors in both inquiries. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, for example, many actors referred to the role of evidence in the

Interim Report and how it served as an important vehicle to generate further public debate and community engagement in the inquiry process. Actors referred to evidence being used throughout the public consultations to build conversations about welfare reform. Some actors went further and described how putting the evidence out into the public domain was intended to generate debate *and* build public support for the process of welfare reform. This nuance is captured in the following quote from a member of the Welfare Reform secretariat:

I think one of the things that was really important was to use the evidence and data to support community debate about the issues. An externally-led process tends to have more success in doing that, probably because they have wider membership and people with some standing in the community. You can get the crucial bits of evidence out there in the press, in the community. And get it talked about in a way that is arms-length from government. Then you can help build a constituency for change, and I think real reform needs that. So it was about... letting those conversations happen.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the Child Support Inquiry was not as public as the Welfare Reform Inquiry. There was no formal public consultation, no interim report, and evidence was not put out into the public domain during the inquiry. Nevertheless, many actors referred to the importance of the final report, and its supporting evidence documentation, being published and open to scrutiny following the inquiry. Actors in the Child Support Inquiry tended to emphasise that evidence was used to inform the detailed design of policy and that this was its primary role, particularly given the extensive public engagement that had been undertaken in the previous parliamentary inquiry.

Using evidence to bridge stakeholder interests

Another common way in which actors in both inquiries talked about using evidence was in bridging different stakeholder interests. This supports what some scholars identify as an important role of public inquiries – that is, that public inquiries can offer sites to debate, contest, and reconcile diverse interests (for example, Smith and Weller 1978 and Degeling et al 1993, cited in Chapter 2).

Turning first this time to the Child Support Inquiry, actors referred to the interplay between the Taskforce (policy and technical experts) and the Reference Group (interest groups and practitioners). Actors recounted how members of the Taskforce met regularly with the Reference Group, and members of the Reference Group recalled being presented with extensive research, data, and modelling during the inquiry. During interviews, several actors made reference to the extent of division and acrimony between the two main interest groups (representing mothers and fathers respectively) on the Reference Group. The development of the evidence base, and the engagement of the Reference Group in its consideration, was seen by some actors as a way of bridging the different perspectives through getting all involved, or as one Taskforce member described it, 'aligned with a factual base'. In this sense, evidence was distanced from particular interests and used as a tool to bridge different points of view. One member of the Child Support Reference Group recalled how evidence was used in this way:

So it provided us all with a very clear and detailed set of information about the issues and the recommendations and so we were all on the same page. It wasn't the case as in some policy issues where the stakeholders don't get to see the detailed advice to government. And so actually I think it levelled things out. It levelled out the playing field for all the stakeholders. Then it was simply a case of each of us using our own lens – the lens through which we viewed the Parkinson evidence.

It should be noted that the way in which evidence was used to engage stakeholders was not universally considered in a positive light. One member of the Child Support Reference Group recounted the evidence being used to baffle and pacify interest groups, commenting:

I remember lots and lots of graphs. The complexity was designed to confuse I think. They got us thinking it was all fair and fine.

In Chapter 7, I reflect on the implications of the separation of the Taskforce and Reference Group in the Child Support Inquiry for how evidence was understood and used in the inquiry, and I consider whether this separation 'worked' and in what way.

Turning to the Welfare Reform Inquiry, actors similarly reported using evidence to bridge stakeholder views. In this case-study, actors tended to describe the main opposing interest groups as being the community welfare sector and the government itself. The government officials I interviewed pointed to the evidence of ‘welfare dependency’ being important in discussions with the community members of the Reference Group and the wider community sector. Conversely, actors from the community sector pointed to how they brought in other evidence to illustrate the broader nature of the problem and to persuade government officials of the need to look at a wider scope of solutions (for example, beyond ‘mutual obligation’; see discussion in Chapter 3). As discussed earlier, the chair of the Reference Group, Patrick McClure, got two members of staff from Mission Australia to produce material (relating to wider issues of poverty and social exclusion) that was then used in discussions with government officials during the inquiry. In the following chapter, I analyse how actors navigated these tensions to produce policy advice.

Using evidence to publicly justify findings

Actors also discussed how evidence was used to publicly justify the findings of the inquiry within the final report and after the report had been released publicly. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, actors pointed to how evidence garnered from the public consultations was used throughout the final report in support of the recommendations, and in particular in support of the ‘balanced approach’ to welfare reform that was proposed. Other actors made reference to the evidence of reforms occurring in other countries, and how this was used to provide backing for the Participation Support System that was advocated by the Reference Group.

In the Child Support Inquiry, a number of actors – and the chair in particular – described using the evidence to substantiate the Taskforce’s findings and recommendations. As the chair, Patrick Parkinson, stated during an interview:

The evidence was crucial *to be able to say*, in this very difficult area, that the recommendations were based on the best available evidence. (Emphasis added)

Actors reported that the evidence was used in this way during the press conference and other media activities to launch the final report and to brief backbenchers and

opposition members of parliament. Reflecting on the inquiry after it had reported, Parkinson also wrote about how the evidence was used to support and defend the proposals:

What the Taskforce sought to do was devise a new child support formula that could be defended as being based on the best available estimates of the costs of children and consistent with community values on child support. There can be no other adequate foundation for child support policy. (Parkinson 2007, p 206)

This 'evidence use' could be considered to be 'political' in that evidence was used in support of a policy position. However, actors did not recount using evidence in the narrow political way as often defined in the literature as being to legitimise pre-determined decisions (Boswell 2008). As I discuss below, in both case-studies actors reported that they did not believe government had fixed, pre-determined positions on key policy questions that they were being expected to validate.

Using evidence to support policy development and implementation

My final 'evidence use' concerns how actors described using evidence generated during the inquiry in the reform process following publication of the final report. Several actors in both inquiries referred to this more enduring use of evidence. Those actors I interviewed who were involved in the implementation of the inquiry recommendations tended to highlight the importance of this way of using evidence.

So, in relation to the Welfare Reform Inquiry, some actors suggested that the McClure Report became a source of evidence used in brokering agreement across government over what reforms should be implemented. As one government official described it:

We drew upon the report in the later reform process. It became evidence – a key document – that was used in internal conversations across government.

Actors from the Child Support Inquiry also described how evidence created during the inquiry was used to further develop the reform proposals. A specific example is how the modelling developed by the Taskforce was first used to inform the advice in the inquiry report but then used within government to develop the recommendations further. Actors recounted how the micro-simulation model developed by members of the

Taskforce was adapted and subsequently used within government. Furthermore, some actors reported how the final report and supporting evidence was instrumental in the implementation process itself. One government official described the evidence generated during the inquiry and the final report as ‘evidence touchstones’ in taking the policy reforms forward. This ‘evidence use’ is well illustrated in the following quote from a government official who was involved in the implementation of the child support reforms that took place following the inquiry:

The work of the Taskforce was tremendously helpful throughout implementation. The final report was a constant guide. We used it to help make decisions and we used it with stakeholders to guide our conversations during implementation.

To summarise so far, I have explored how actors described using evidence in multiple ways during the inquiries. This finding is consistent with empirical studies that focus on how evidence is used in other policy settings (for example, Weiss 1979, Rickinson et al 2019), but my original contribution here is uncovering this multiplicity of use within the context of public inquiries. More significantly, I uncover how evidence use varied over the duration of the inquiry – a theme to which I now turn.

The dynamic uses of evidence

A significant empirical finding in this chapter is the dynamic nature of evidence use in public inquiries. This is a frequently implied but rarely studied aspect of evidence use in the literature, with some notable exceptions (Boswell 2008, Nutley et al 2007, Davies 2012, Rickinson et al 2019).

In previous chapters, I have described my temporal approach and how, in interviews, I guided participants through the inquiry process by asking for reflections on the establishment, operational, and post-report phases of the inquiry. I asked participants to share their experiences and insights on evidence and how it was used *throughout* the inquiry. When discussing the establishment phase of the inquiry, actors in both case-studies tended to discuss using evidence to define and frame the problem. During the operational phase of both inquiries, actors started by describing how evidence was used to promote public debate. Then, actors reported that as the operational phase

progressed, evidence was used within stakeholder conversations and to bring together the interests of different groups. As highlighted above, throughout the inquiry, actors referred to using evidence to inform policy proposals and advice. After the final report had been published, actors discussed how evidence was then invoked to substantiate the recommendations contained in the report. Finally, the evidence had a legacy use with actors recounting how they had used evidence from the inquiry in progressing and implementing its recommendations. So in the case-studies, evidence was used and invoked in different ways at different times, and this seems related to the priorities of the inquiry as it progressed.

Furthermore, how actors talked about using evidence in the inquiry process was in the context of the wider policy process. Some examples are warranted here. As discussed, one way in which actors discussed using evidence was to promote public debate. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, this seemed motivated in part by a desire to generate public input, but some actors also pointed to how these conversations needed to happen in order to help create a climate for reform. Hence, the ways actors used evidence depended on the wider policy context and reform process. Another way in which actors used evidence was to substantiate the inquiry findings and recommendations. This endorsement mattered in terms of the chances of the inquiry recommendations being subsequently adopted. In this sense, actors were using evidence to promote the role of the inquiry and its findings in the wider policy process. The idea that public inquiries can be understood as a 'process within a process' is considered in Chapter 7.

A further finding is that the different uses seemed to be complementary, rather than working against each other. This contention is supported by other empirical research (for example, Amara et al 2004), although some studies highlight the tension between evidence collected and used for different purposes (for example, Cameron et al 2011). Relatedly, in his discussion of policy analysis as a process of argumentation, Majone (1989) distinguishes between the process of discovery (through which conclusions are reached) and the process of 'justification' (through which conclusions are justified), and argues that it makes sense and indeed is entirely 'rational' to use different forms of knowledge and argument for these different purposes. My research provides some empirical support for how this works in practice. In the Welfare Reform inquiry, actors

did refer to different types of knowledge (labelled varyingly as ‘evidence’) being used to guide policy development (for example, overseas practice) and to justify policy recommendations (for example, data on welfare reliance). However, it was also the case that the same type of knowledge could be used for different uses. For example, in the Child Support Inquiry, research knowledge (for example, the ‘costs of children’ research) was used to both inform the conclusions and justify them.

Discussion

In summary, I have found that actors described using evidence for various purposes and that these uses changed over the course of the inquiry. I turn now to discussing my findings and their implications. Specifically, I ask: what are the implications of my findings for how we might conceptualise evidence use in public inquiries and for the role that public inquiries play in generating supply and demand for evidence?

Evidence use in public inquiries

The evidence uses identified in this research do not fit well with existing conceptualisations of ‘evidence use’ found in the literature, particularly the notion of a distinct ‘political use’. As discussed in Chapter 2, three broad conceptualisations of ‘evidence use’ are often cited: a) instrumental – where evidence directly informs policy; b) political – where evidence is used selectively to substantiate or legitimise a policy position; and c) conceptual – where evidence affects policy slowly and indirectly (for example, Head 2013, Cherney 2009, Amara et al 2004). The key distinction between these three different uses of evidence can be understood as lying in their ‘intent’ (Newman 2017). So evidence can be used intentionally to address a policy problem (instrumental use) or used for a political purpose (political use) or there is no immediate intended use (conceptual use). These distinctions have been helpful in exploring my findings, but ultimately my analysis reveals the limitations of these categories.

Many (if not all) of my identified uses can be considered ‘instrumental’ in the broad sense that inquiry actors were pursuing the aim of producing policy advice and influencing government decisions. None of my identified uses were ‘political’ in the narrow way defined in much of the literature – as using evidence to legitimise *pre-*

determined decisions and which is sometimes conflated with or substituted for 'symbolic use' (Whiteman 1985, Lavis et al 2003). It is worth highlighting here that in both my case-studies actors reported that there was no pre-determined position on key policy questions. Writing after the inquiry had reported, the chair of the Child Support Taskforce commented,

The Taskforce did not begin with any assumption that reform was needed, and certainly not major reform. Nor did the Government have any particular agenda for change. What it did want was to have a comprehensive review of the formula in light of the best available research... (Parkinson 2007, p 180)

In a similar vein, a member of the Welfare Reform Reference Group remarked during an interview,

I think we knew it (the welfare system) needed significant reform, but we didn't know where it should be going.

This is not to suggest that the symbolic use of evidence in public inquiries does not exist nor indeed that it might be very common, but actors in my case-studies did not report this to be the case. However, all my identified evidence uses can be considered 'political' in the sense that actors were navigating a political process.

In the context of public inquiries, my empirical findings suggest that 'evidence use' should be grounded in an understanding that the inquiry process is inherently political. Further, attention also needs to be paid to: the diversity of what might constitute evidence; the multiplicity of uses; and the dynamics of the process. In Chapter 7, I put forward an 'evidence-policy framework' that incorporates these three considerations and which I suggest might be helpful for policy scholars and practitioners in thinking through how evidence relates to policy more generally (that is, beyond public inquiries). Other authors have called for the broadening of the political meaning of evidence use (Boswell 2008, Daviter 2015) or questioned the terms 'evidence use' and 'evidence utilisation' on the basis of their 'rationalistic' underpinnings (Standring 2017). My research supports these calls for improved ways of thinking about 'evidence use' (Oliver et al 2014b, Rickinson et al 2019).

How public inquiries create both supply and demand for evidence

There is a broader finding from this empirical research that deserves consideration here: that actors report that evidence *is* actually used in public inquiries. This finding begs the questions what evidentiary practices make this possible. The nature of my research does not allow any generalisations to be made about whether and how often evidence is used in public inquiries and subsequently in decision-making and policy reform processes. It is also important to remember that my case-studies were ‘policy-advisory’ in nature and so had a particular remit to ‘nut out’ a complex policy issue. However, I do conjecture here that some of the standard practices of public inquiries make it harder for actors involved in public inquiries to ignore evidence. Furthermore, I argue that the commissioning government must consequently use and respond to evidence in some way. In this sense, my case-studies suggest that public inquiries play a role in creating both supply and demand for policy evidence (broadly understood).

Several inquiry practices stand out from my research as having an influence on supply and demand for evidence. On the supply side, public inquiries involve knowledge-gathering activities and inquiry actors deploy various types of knowledge as evidence in the inquiry process. That public inquiries generate knowledge and ‘evidence’ is well-recognised in the literature (Prasser 2006). Weiss (1990) has observed that public inquiries and their reports provide a route for research evidence to reach decision-makers. More recently, as highlighted in Chapter 2, Head and Di Francesco (2019) suggest that inquiries can be an important way for research and stakeholder knowledge to enter the policy process.

In one sense, this supply of evidence creates its own demand within an inquiry. Actors involved in inquiries must ‘do something’ with evidence, and the synthesis, analysis, and consideration of evidence are core features of public inquiries. Indeed, at a more fundamental level, the commissioning government has created a demand for evidence in establishing an inquiry. In setting up an inquiry, government is ‘asking for evidence’ to tackle a challenging policy problem and must respond in some way to this request. Furthermore, the ‘publicness’ of public inquiries can amplify this demand from the commissioning government. It might create a public expectation that evidence from

public inquiries and the ‘evidence-informed’ advice contained in an inquiry’s final report will be considered by government.

That public inquiries operate on the supply *and* demand sides makes them interesting institutions for considering evidence use. There has been increased appreciation of the limitations of initiatives that focus on the supply side (Stoker and Evans 2016, Oliver et al 2014b). The various supply-side enterprises to create policy-relevant knowledge and to present and communicate evidence in such a way that it will be used are important, but can only achieve so much.

How public inquiries integrate evidence producers and users

This supply and demand analysis risks obscuring a further characteristic of public inquiries – that the conventional categories of ‘producers’ and ‘users’ of evidence are becoming more blurred. As previously discussed, public inquiries involve many different types of actor. Advisory boards are typically diverse and include individuals from outside and inside government and from a range of sectors within society. Commonly, they include researchers, academics, public servants, and representatives from business and civil society organisations. Furthermore, it is not only the advisory boards who are engaged in inquiry work. The members of the official secretariats, other government officials, and actors from outside of government can be directly involved in inquiries, as was the case in my two case-studies.

In this sense, evidence is being collaboratively produced and used in public inquiries by a group of actors. For example, the Child Support Taskforce included researchers working alongside government officials in the production of policy-relevant research that was then used in developing policy advice. Relatedly, the Welfare Reform Reference Group included stakeholders from the community sector, with their experiential knowledge, sitting alongside government officials in producing ‘evidence’.

This closer integration of the production and use of evidence is a theme of contemporary interest, particularly given the enduring obstacles to ‘evidence use’ found in the literature and which some scholars attribute to a separation of the supply and demand side (Stoker and Evans 2016). As Nutley et al (2019, p 314) suggest, collaborative processes for developing evidence are “an exciting field of study, albeit

one requiring a great deal of further definition, investigation and testing.” One approach which claims promise but is ill-defined in the literature is the ‘co-production’ of evidence. How evidence might be considered to be ‘co-produced’ within public inquiries has not been the subject of scholarly attention. However, research into ‘hybrid advisory committees’ (Krick 2014) or ‘hybrid fora’ (Décieux 2019), which are advisory bodies that include academics, government members, and civil society representatives (and so have some similar traits to public inquiries) have been investigated as examples of the co-production of knowledge for policy. My research suggests that the historic institution of public inquiries might provide insights alongside these other co-production initiatives.

Conclusion

The empirical research presented in this chapter challenges the typical archetypes of public inquiries (Stark 2019, Bulmer 1982, Stone 1994). They are neither mere ‘political puppets’ which governments establish to manage or manipulate an agenda; nor are they ‘impartial advisers’ established to provide an objective analysis unsullied by politics. Instead my analysis suggest that public inquiries are more constructively viewed as ‘processes’ which relate to the wider policy process, and which involve evidence being used in multiple ways.

The findings here point to some of the complexities involved in inquiry work. I have illuminated the multiple ways in which actors understand evidence and the dynamic purposes to which actors describe evidence as being employed. How then do inquiry advisory bodies reach agreement on recommendations and advice, given the complexity and diversity of this evidence terrain? In the following chapter, I focus on this question and reveal a rich account of the nature of inquiry work.

Chapter 6: Evidence and policy judgement in inquiry work

Introduction

To produce policy advice, the diversity and complexity of evidence within public inquiries needs to be reconciled. Yet how evidence is deployed in the actual work that takes place within public inquiries has rarely been explored. As discussed in Chapter 2, little is known about how evidence is analysed or debated or how it informs policy advice (Salter 2007, Johns and Inwood 2018). The significant contribution of this chapter lies in an improved understanding of how actors use evidence in the process of crafting advice. Through examining this ‘pointy end’ of the inquiry process, the way actors contest, debate, and reconcile evidence is brought into sharp relief.

This chapter builds on the previous empirical chapters by focusing on how actors navigate the diverse evidentiary characteristics of public inquiries revealed so far. In the preceding chapters, I uncovered what the label ‘evidence’ means for different actors (Chapter 4) and how they used evidence for a variety of purposes (Chapter 5). In Chapter 4, I identified several discourses of evidence and revealed that there were multiple, overlapping understandings of evidence in the case-studies. I argued that the nature and diversity of the discourses has implications for what gets considered to be valid knowledge and presents challenges for how inquiry bodies might reach agreement. In Chapter 5, I examined how actors used evidence. I revealed that actors described using evidence to inform policy advice, alongside several other ‘uses’ which changed over the course of the inquiry. In this chapter, I build on these findings and examine how actors accommodated these diverse and dynamic evidentiary characteristics. In particular, I analyse how actors navigated evidence in the process of developing and agreeing on recommendations and policy advice. In this sense, I am focusing on the main ‘evidence use’ (using evidence to inform policy) that was identified in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, I point to the practice of ‘policy judgement’ and its role in the development of policy advice. Through unpacking policy judgement, I find it involves actors drawing on a wide and diverse knowledge base as they navigate ‘evidence’ with multiple normative, practical, and political concerns. Policy judgement is shown to be a

collective activity whereby actors are involved in ongoing debate and argument – it is deliberative²² as well as analytical. Further, policy judgement involves an iterative process with multiple judgements being made throughout public inquiries.

Moreover, I argue that it is the practice of policy judgement that enables evidence to inform the process of inquiry, and I suggest that both case-study inquiries can be understood as examples of ‘evidence-informed policy’. This involves actors drawing upon explicit knowledge codified as ‘evidence’ alongside implicit and tacit knowledge embedded in their expertise, as part of creating situated ‘knowing’. I argue that the practice of policy judgement has been relatively neglected in contemporary policy studies literature and, in particular, should be brought into debates about ‘evidence-informed policy’.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Drawing on my empirical research, I introduce the idea of ‘policy judgement’. Then, I unpack what policy judgement involves in the inquiry process. I conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for how we understand inquiry work and its requisite skills and experience, and for the realisation of ‘evidence-informed policy’.

The practice of policy judgement

In the public inquiry literature, it is often assumed that the way in which evidence is used in the inquiry process is analytical, rational, and systematic, and consistent with a conventional ‘evidence-based policy’ approach (Prasser 2006). As will be shown, my empirical findings suggest that while the inquiry process has elements of this, there is nuance and complexity involved.

²² Deliberative is used here, and throughout this thesis, in broad terms as defined by Gastil (2008, p xi), that is “people deliberate when they carefully examine a problem and a range of solutions through an open, inclusive exchange that incorporates and respects diverse points of view.”

The novel finding that emerged in my research was how actors recounted exercising judgements throughout the inquiry process²³. During interviews, I pressed participants on how they went about reconciling diverse evidence with other influences and how they developed recommendations and policy advice for government. In other words, I was interested in unpacking how they progressed to making a decision about what to recommend. The practice of policy judgement emerged as a key enabler. That judgements played a role in how the inquiry actors went about developing policy advice was widely articulated by actors. As one member of the Welfare Reform Reference Group replied when I asked how they developed recommendations:

Now that's hard because you can do as much discussion and thinking and reading and debate, and ultimately there's a value set there and, you know, any policy recommendation involves making judgements.

The role of judgement in policy has been acknowledged in the policy studies literature (for example, Vickers 1965, Fischer 2003, Majone 1989, Rittel and Webber 1973) and specifically in the evidence literature (Sanderson 2009, Head 2008, 2013). However, rarely has judgement been the focus of analytical attention and the actual practices of policy judgement are not well understood. Colebatch (2006a, p 316) refers to how policy workers are often told that "the policy process depends, in the end on 'judgement', which becomes something of a 'catch-all' category". My novel contribution here is unpacking this 'catch-all' term – by examining how actors discussed policy judgements made during the inquiry process. This gives insights into the practice of policy judgement and illuminates the kinds of skills and expertise it demands.

Judgement, inevitably, has multiple meanings and applications (see discussion in Stewart 1998) and I now go on to explore judgement in the context of the case-study inquiries. Drawing on my empirical data, I have conceptualised 'judgement' as a process enacted by individuals, rather than as an individual trait (for example, understood as

²³ This was an inductive finding. I did not ask about judgement; rather it was offered up during interviews. The Interview Protocol is in Appendix B.

possessing 'good judgement'). Further, I have employed the term '*policy* judgement' to draw a distinction with '*political* judgement', the latter tending to be associated with political leaders and with political levels of decision-making (Steinberger 2018).

However, as will be illustrated, policy judgements remain inherently political in nature.

Drawing from my empirical data, I suggest the practice of policy judgement involves: a) a wide and diverse knowledge base; b) interaction, dialogue, and deliberation; and c) ongoing iteration. Overall, I show that the practice of policy judgement involves actors collectively reconciling diverse evidence with normative, political, and practical concerns. Importantly, policy judgement as revealed in my research was not about 'stepping in' where information was lacking (as judgement is sometimes portrayed in the literature; see discussion in Yankelovich 1999, p 191), but rather concerned with navigating the multiplicity of evidence and policy-relevant knowledge.

A wide and diverse knowledge base

First, I highlight the breadth of knowledge that actors drew upon in exercising policy judgements during each inquiry. This includes wider contextual knowledge, values, principles, and detailed practical and political considerations. In interviews, actors recounted a process which involved drawing on knowledge beyond that which they labelled as 'evidence'. Here, I am trying to tease out what knowledge informed the decisions of the inquiry, not the labelling of particular types of knowledge (the focus of Chapter 4.)

Wider contextual knowledge

In many interviews, when I asked about how policy advice was developed, several actors widened the scope of the conversation and wanted to talk about context and history. Several actors positioned the inquiry in which they were involved with reference to the wider political arena and referred back to this throughout the interviews. For example, one member of the Child Support Taskforce, commented:

You want to talk about evidence but we should really start with the politics. The Taskforce did its work within a highly charged political environment.

Many other actors prefaced their discussion of evidence with reference to the prevailing political debate. In the Child Support Inquiry, actors referred to contestation between

opposing interest groups (fathers' groups and mothers' groups) and some reported the Prime Minister becoming personally involved, having been lobbied by his backbenchers and directly by fathers' groups who felt they were being unfairly treated in the current system. In relation to the Welfare Reform Inquiry, some actors referred to the negative media coverage that the Coalition government was receiving (claiming a lack of direction in welfare reform) and to how Minister Newman's speech to the National Press Club had been postponed following a speculated intervention by the Prime Minister which left a detailed discussion paper that had already been prepared unpublished²⁴. As one external adviser to the Welfare Reform Inquiry remarked:

You can't extract the politics from it. There is no clean sheet of paper, even with a review like this. The political pressures were all still there and all around us.

In addition to highlighting the prevailing political situation, some actors referred to the wider policy context and how the inquiry fitted within substantive policy debates occurring within and outside of government. In the Child Support Inquiry, references were made to wider family law debates (the family law system was undergoing a reform process at the time) or to how family norms were changing and should be reflected in child support reform. In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, actors highlighted how their remit related to other policy debates and reform processes occurring across government (for example in the employment and education portfolios).

Other actors described the history of the policy issue as the starting point for the conversation. For example, in relation to the Child Support Inquiry, several actors discussed how the child support system had originally been introduced in Australia and recounted many other previous reviews and inquiries that had taken place into child support (see discussion in Chapter 3). In the Welfare Reform Inquiry, some actors

²⁴ Senator Andrew Bartlett tabled a Motion of Censure in parliament because the government's welfare reform discussion paper had not been published, which led to a debate in the Senate (Hazlehurst 2001).

discussed how the welfare system had changed markedly since its inception and related historical developments to current problems being experienced.

Values and principles

Another key influence on the process of developing advice raised by actors during interviews was values, and what they termed 'principles'. As two members of the Child Support Taskforce commented:

We had the foundation of evidence, but did not only rely on evidence. We spent a lot of time thinking about what fairness meant and how this should shape our advice.

To tackle wicked problems, like child support policy, there is the need to balance evidence with a deep appreciation of values and of different perspectives.

Other actors emphasised the role of values in developing advice, specifically in interpreting evidence or indeed highlighting that values were embedded in the evidence that each inquiry was creating. Actors did not invoke the language of evidence hierarchies (Petticrew and Roberts 2003), but rather stressed the importance of judgement in weighing up the evidence. As the chair of the Child Support Taskforce described it:

Research on the costs of children can only provide a broad estimate... Ultimately, the Taskforce made a considered judgment about the costs of children in four age groups... (Parkinson 2007, p 185)

It is widely acknowledged that research itself is inherently contestable because of embedded values, diversity of analytical approaches, and differences in ontological and epistemological viewpoints (House and Howe 1999, Stoker and Evans 2016). Actors had to navigate this, but also, more broadly, they had to accommodate how the label 'evidence' carried multiple meanings for actors. As was set out in Chapter 4, within each inquiry actors adhered to multiple discourses of evidence. Reconciling this diversity of meanings required collective judgements to be made about which 'evidence' and kinds of knowledge to prioritise against competing values and interests. Here, it should be noted that the ambiguity created through actors adhering to multiple discourses of

evidence might have been helpful as it gives ‘wriggle room’ (Boswell 2016) in the process of negotiating across different value positions. As Fischer (2003) has argued, ambiguous meanings can have important political functions, for example in facilitating cooperation and compromise.

The role of values in public policy and the interplay of evidence and values in policy processes is well recognised in the literature (for example, Stewart 2009, Biesta 2010, Head 2008). Jenny Stewart (2009) argues that much policy analysis tends to skirt around the problem of values. Interestingly, in both case-study inquiries many actors raised the role of values in guiding the development of policy advice and discussed how values were incorporated in stated ‘principles’. This explicit articulation of value-based principles (set out in Appendix A to this thesis) and how these guided the work of the inquiries was a strong theme in my empirical analysis of how inquiry actors made sense of the work they did. How values are articulated and made explicit in public inquiries is an interesting avenue for future research.

For some actors, the values and principles that influenced the work of the inquiry were paramount and more significant than ‘evidence’. As one member of the Welfare Reform Reference Group put it:

When I read what your focus is (evidence), I think – of course there needs to be evidence. But is evidence foremost as compared to a more general appreciation of a set of principles and issues that make better policy?

Here I would like to draw attention to the normative underpinnings of policy judgement that came through in my research: that it involves values and choices about what ought to be done. That judgement involves normative considerations is well illustrated in Geoffrey Vickers’ work. In the *Art of Judgment*, Vickers (1965) develops an ‘appreciative judgment framework’ which involves three elements: reality judgements (those judgements concerning what is or is not the case); value judgements (those concerning what ought or ought not to be the case); and instrumental judgements (those concerning the best means available to reduce the mismatch between is and ought). In my case-study inquiries, it is possible to see all these different elements in how inquiry actors discussed judgements. However, in both inquiries these elements appear to be

interwoven. As Vickers is keen to stress, his elements of judgement are part of one activity, for example, that reality and value judgements are inseparable parts of appreciation – “that judgements of value give meaning to judgements of reality” (1965, p 55).

Political and practical concerns

Finally, actors also drew various political and practical concerns into the development of their policy advice. Often questions of what would be politically acceptable came into play, as one member of the Welfare Reform Reference Group explains:

Then it was a matter of trying to balance the political and the palatable with sufficient rigour in relation to the evidence.

Similarly in the Child Support Inquiry, one member of the Taskforce commented:

We used the evidence within the boundaries of the moral imperatives and other constraints such as what we knew would be politically acceptable and acceptable to stakeholders.

During interviews, actors did not tend to portray inquiry advice as being *driven* by these political priorities, but rather described how they were part of a complex array of factors being considered by the advisory boards. These findings provide further empirical support to Salter’s research which shows that the development of policy advice in public inquiries factors in political concerns. As Salter (1989, p 195) highlights:

The science of the inquiry process is often less scientific than the inquiries themselves would wish and the fact-finding component is short-changed by the pressure to produce acceptable recommendations.

Then, several actors discussed practical considerations related to the policy issue, such as budget constraints or implementation challenges. Other practical constraints were to do with the realities of the nature of an inquiry – that there was only limited time and capacity to undertake analysis and develop advice. Many of these are summed up in the following quote by the chair of the Child Support Taskforce, Patrick Parkinson:

In weighing up the evidence, we were obviously constrained by time, and we had to work out what was defensible and ‘good enough’. We tried to go for practical and realistic recommendations, sensible in budgetary terms, which were well justified and well thought through.

That public inquiries consider the practical implications of their policy advice tends to be disputed in the inquiry literature. Public inquiries have no power in relation to the subsequent implementation or administration of recommendations (Banks 2013), and other research has suggested that in developing advice public inquiries do not consider the practical challenges of implementing reform (Weller 1994a, Krasovitsky 2018). Similarly, Eburn and Dovers (2015, p 499) have argued that public inquiries “do not and cannot consider the budget implications of their recommendations.” My research suggests this is not always the case. Several actors in both of my case-studies pointed to how they had considered the practical implementation of recommendations. This was also evident in the inquiry documentation, for example with both final inquiry reports detailing implementation considerations.

My analysis so far has shown that the practice of policy judgement involves drawing on a wide knowledge base. There is a lot more than ‘evidence’ at play in the process of developing inquiry advice, with actors drawing on normative, practical, and political considerations. In this sense, the label of ‘evidence’ does not do justice to what is going on, knowledge-wise, in developing policy advice.

Implicit and tacit knowledge

Finally, I consider a further important aspect of the knowledge actors drew upon in making policy judgements – that it involved knowledge that was not explicit. Many actors struggled to articulate how they made judgements, with some characterising judgements as involving a ‘leap’ in the process. As one member of the Child Support Taskforce described:

Now there is always a leap – here [in this inquiry] there was a leap from the evidence through to the formula, involving a lot of judgements and trade-offs.

Actors struggled to articulate how they exercised judgements. I argue this reflects that judgements involve actors employing ‘implicit’ and ‘tacit’ knowledge, as suggested by

Vickers (1965). Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge was grounded in his observation that "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi 1967, p 4) and he distinguishes between 'explicit' knowledge that can be articulated in writing or verbally and 'tacit' knowledge that cannot be articulated. As an example of tacit knowledge, Polanyi (1967) describes being able to recognise someone's face without being able to explain how it is done. The further category of 'implicit' knowledge is helpful in drawing attention to knowledge that has the potential to be articulated (made explicit) but which has so far not been (Nickols 2000, Vickers 1965). As discussed in Chapter 4, my research contends that, while diverse discourses of 'evidence' were adhered to, actors were referring to 'explicit' knowledge. The evidence might involve different sources of knowledge (for example from research, public input, or practitioner knowledge), but it was all articulated during the process of inquiry and, therefore, can be understood as an 'explicit' form of knowledge.

What is being revealed here is actors drawing upon explicit knowledge (much codified as 'evidence') alongside implicit and tacit knowledge embedded in their expertise.²⁵ Why this matters relates to the source of 'implicit' or 'tacit' knowledge. This knowledge has not been or cannot be articulated. It resides in the expert and is embedded in their expertise. One government official who worked on the Welfare Reform Inquiry made an insightful comment in this regard:

Evidence doesn't solve the problem for you. So you need to bring in something else – expertise.

Other researchers have sought to expand the concept of evidence to include expertise. For example, Head (2008) and Pawson (2006) have suggested that policy should be informed by a broad conception of evidence that includes professional expertise. However, the relevant point here (developed in Chapter 4) is that it would appear that actors' interpretations of 'evidence' captures explicit knowledge only. The implicit and

²⁵ I did not explore the meaning of 'expertise' with actors, but it was understood in broad terms as being related to knowledge carried by individuals.

tacit knowledge embedded in experts is what makes policy judgement possible, and these forms of knowledge risk being devalued if attention is focused primarily on 'evidence' at the expense of 'expertise'. This is discussed further below.

Dialogue and deliberation

Having established that policy judgements involve actors drawing on a wide knowledge base, I turn now to a further characteristic which relates to how actors interact with each other in designing policy advice. My key point here is that the practice of policy judgements is not only a mental or analytical activity of individuals, it is also a communicative and interpersonal process. It involves interaction within a group of actors who discuss and deliberate in order to develop policy advice.

A collective endeavour

First, it is important to point out that actors tended to refer to judgement as a collective endeavour. In interviews, actors tended to refer to how 'the Taskforce' or the 'Reference Group' (collective nouns) made judgements, or simply used the collective pronoun 'we'. That judgements were collective reflected how actors talked about the wider role and purpose of the inquiry. Actors recognised that they had been tasked with producing a collective outcome and that the advice should be agreed to by all members of the advisory body. As I discuss below, the advisory bodies, together with members of the secretariat, met regularly on a face-to-face basis throughout the inquiries. The collective quality of inquiry work seemed to come about through actors being given a shared goal and through their coming together during the inquiry to debate issues and work through challenges.

Little attention has been paid to how public inquiry bodies *collectively* develop and agree to policy recommendations (Salter 1989), and specifically the potential role of judgement in reaching these decisions has not been explored. In the context of 'inquisitorial' public inquiries, judgement might be seen to be exercised by the chair (who is often a judge) who makes a determination based on the evidence collected during the inquiry. My research reveals something different, which emphasises the collective nature of judgement in the 'policy-advisory' inquiries studied here, and that this involves mutual accommodation of diverse views (of evidence, ideology, and values) and compromise. This reflects that, as is typical in a policy-advisory inquiry, it is

a group of actors who have been charged with developing a consensus position – on the evidence and on a proposed course of policy action.

Interaction, debate, and deliberation

This then leads us to consider *how* actors went about accommodating views in the process of making collective policy judgements.

It is important to note that multiples sites have been highlighted throughout this thesis where groups of actors came together during a public inquiry to discuss policy. Many of these were related to public or stakeholder engagement activities, such as the many focus groups and consultation workshops conducted as part of the Welfare Reform Inquiry or the ongoing consultation meetings of the associated Reference Group in the Child Support Inquiry. My focus here is specifically on the deliberations of the advisory body in each inquiry (that is, the Child Support Taskforce and the Welfare Reform Reference Group) and how each body developed recommendations and advice. This is the largely private part of an inquiry that has received particularly scant attention in the inquiry literature (Salter 2007, Johns and Inwood 2018). Having said that my focus here is on the private deliberations of the advisory board, it should be remembered that the final report and recommendations of an inquiry are published (and therefore public) and public inquiries are required to justify their advice publicly. So in deliberating in private, actors did so in the knowledge that the outcomes of their deliberations would be public and would need to be justified publicly.

Private deliberation of this kind can have benefits in terms of the quality of deliberation (Chambers 2004), but it does pose questions of transparency and legitimacy. Degeling et al (1993), in their analysis of the Drug Evaluation Review in Australia, describe ‘frontstage’, ‘backstage’, and ‘understage’ activities, which varied in their ‘publicness’ and in the nature of information-sharing and negotiation that took place. The contribution of ‘secrecy’ and ‘publicity’ in the different activities of public inquiries is an interesting avenue for further research and would reveal further insights into the nuances and challenges of inquiry work; it also has implications for evidence. For example, it relates to recent calls for the ‘good governance’ of evidence (Hawkins and Parkhurst 2016, Parkhurst 2017) which seeks to promote processes that are transparent, open, and accountable.

Actors described the nature of debates and contestation differently in the two inquiries, and the extent of contestation seemed related to the diversity of the advisory bodies. In describing how they went about debating and agreeing on recommendations, actors again referred to the many meetings held to progress the work of the inquiry. I should make clear here that I am relying on actors' accounts of these meeting and the deliberations that took place, since I was not privy to the actual meetings. However, I should also make the point that actors went about recalling events with clarity and detail. This perhaps reflects, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the profound impact that involvement in an inquiry can have on individuals and this may have contributed to the strong recall of events.

Turning first to the Child Support Inquiry, it is important to recap that this inquiry involved a Ministerial Taskforce made up largely of research and policy experts and an associated Reference Group that included the main interest groups. As has already been described, the Taskforce itself was a relatively homogenous group and several actors referred to the group as co-operative and even 'harmonious'. However, that is not to say that Taskforce meetings did not involve vigorous debate; some actors commented that the level of debate among the group was high, with members willing to engage in argument over what the evidence was revealing and how it should inform their policy recommendations. However, most Taskforce members did share the view that advice should be strongly informed by the research and modelling work that had been undertaken during the inquiry. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the dominant evidence discourse in the Child Support Inquiry was 'research and data', with many members of the Taskforce sharing common professional backgrounds.

In contrast, in the Welfare Reform Inquiry, several actors reported ongoing 'conflict' and 'tension' throughout the inquiry work. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the Reference Group had a more diverse membership than the Child Support Taskforce. In Chapter 3, I highlighted the diversity of the discursive landscape and how actors within the Reference Group adhered to multiple discourses of evidence. Some actors placed high value on the public input garnered from engagement activities (the evidence as 'public input' discourse) and which tended to underline the importance of a secure and adequate income support scheme to social and economic participation. Others privileged data analysis which showed that income support recipients were staying on

payments for long periods of time; these individuals were keen for the inquiry to focus on tackling 'welfare dependency' (adhering to the evidence as 'research and data' discourse). As also discussed in Chapter 4, several actors in the Welfare Reform Inquiry had a broad view of what constituted evidence (evidence as 'multiple knowledges') in contrast to other actors who saw evidence as related to a specific type of knowledge. This highly diverse discursive landscape, and lack of shared meaning of 'evidence', makes contestation amongst members of the advisory board likely, as did happen in the Welfare Reform Inquiry. In addition to contestation within the advisory group, there was also ongoing disagreements between the advisory group (and its community representatives in particular) and officials within the department.

It should be noted that disagreement during debates may have had positive effects. Indeed, a couple of the actors argued that conflict during the Welfare Reform Inquiry, and in particular between the Reference Group and departmental officials, was a driver of rigour and creativity and may have led to a more robust report and set of recommendations. This resonates with arguments from deliberative democracy scholars that highlight the epistemic value of deliberation and which reveals disagreements can improve argumentation (Bohman 2007). Indeed, empirical research has shown that greater diversity among deliberators can improve the quality of deliberation and its outcomes (Sunstein 2002). However, several actors did report that they considered the ongoing tensions detrimental and made progressing the work difficult. Some actors reported that being involved in the inquiry was extremely stressful, with one departmental official commenting, 'Never, never again', and the chair of the inquiry, Patrick McClure, reflected after the event that the process was 'challenging' and 'very stressful' (McClure 2011, p 76). Interestingly, in both inquiries, many actors seemed profoundly affected (in good and bad ways) by their involvement, with several opining that the inquiries had been seminal experiences in their professional lives. In Chapter 7, I revisit this aspect when considering the implications of my research findings for inquiry practitioners and the nature of inquiry work.

This process of advice-forming could be understood as 'deliberative', as defined in broad terms by Gastil (2008), given that members of the advisory boards spent time considering, discussing, and reasoning over complex issues. In this sense, the advisory board members deliberated – they went about debating and reflecting on issues in the

process of developing and agreeing on policy advice. However, the deliberative quality of public inquiries should not be generally assumed. Whereas deliberation might occur within the confines of an advisory board meeting, other activities undertaken as part of an inquiry – such as public engagement forums (for example, stakeholder meetings or client focus groups) – might not be deliberative in nature. The level of interaction and reflection that occurs in these forums during inquiries has rarely been studied.

Moreover, most definitions of ‘deliberation’ in the context of public policy carry some standard of ‘inclusion’, particularly as advocated by deliberative democrats (Dryzek and Hendriks 2012). The inclusive nature of public inquiries and their ‘publicness’ has been researched and questioned in previous research. Salter (2007) analysed the public credentials of several public inquiries and argued that although they can be exemplars of deliberative democracy, they often are not.

Nevertheless, as Rowe and McAllister (2006, p 100) suggest, a defining feature of public inquiries is that they “seek to engage a wide range of participants in the process of deliberating on policy in a more public arena that might otherwise be the case.” This should make them of interest to those scholars and practitioners concerned with democratising policy processes. Furthermore, the ‘systemic turn’ which has occurred recently in deliberative democratic theory would suggest that public inquiries (and their constituent forums) should not be assessed in isolation. The ‘systemic turn’ argues that concern should shift to the deliberative capacity of whole systems, rather than particular sites within the system (Dryzek and Hendriks 2012). The deliberative capacity of public inquiries, and the forums that take place during inquiries, would then need to be understood in the context of a wider deliberative system.

However, the main insight here is that actors in both inquiries described how they engaged in a process of reasoning, debate, and argument in order to navigate diverse policy knowledge and make recommendations. This analysis of the inquiry process reflects the conception of policymaking provided by Majone (1989) who describes a ‘communicative’ policy process grounded more in argumentation and dialogue rather than primarily a ‘technical’ process based on scientific advice. Many other post-positivist scholars, such as Fischer (1990) and Dryzek (1990), adopt a similar view in arguing that policymaking is not a purely technical process.

Let me summarise the argument so far. I have uncovered how the practice of policy judgement involves actors negotiating evidence, values, and principles alongside practical and political concerns. Developing inquiry advice involves actors engaging in a collective process of debate, argument, and deliberation.

An iterative process

The final aspect of policy judgement I wish to highlight is its iterative nature.

Importantly, judgement is not a one-off action (that is, a judgement is made – and a gavel struck – at the conclusion of an inquiry) but rather a repeated activity throughout a process of developing and agreeing upon policy advice. For example, the actors interviewed here recounted: judgements in interpreting evidence; judgements over which ideas and interests were to be prioritised; and judgements about the detail of policy recommendations. Further, actors did not describe this process as linear or ‘stagist’, but rather dynamic and iterative.

The iterative nature of the inquiry process was raised by many inquiry actors. For example, one official working with the Child Support Taskforce described the work of the inquiry as:

... an iterative process, going from impressions to evidence-based outcomes; a process that involves evidence-gathering and sifting, recommendations based on those findings, testing them out, amending them in light of reactions.

To explain the iterative nature of the inquiry work, actors frequently made reference to the many meetings that took place during each inquiry. At these meetings, actors frequently recounted instances of returning to issues as the inquiry progressed and reconsidering initial findings in the light of further information, analysis, and discussion. One member of the Secretariat to the Welfare Reform Inquiry described this process as follows:

We met on a weekly basis and discussed tricky issues. We then revised draft chapters and got them back to the group [Reference Group] in time to discuss the issues at the next meeting. And so it went back and forth, on and on...

This quote resonates with the literature exploring ‘policy work’ (Colebatch et al 2010) and how ‘meetings and papers’ can dominate the lives of policy workers, with papers being prepared for meetings and meetings being held to discuss papers (Noordegraaf 2000).

However, the iterative character of inquiry work revealed in my analysis sits somewhat in contrast to recent research by Stark (2019) which explores the relationship between public inquiries and policy learning (with respect to post-crisis inquiries). Stark asks whether we should conceptualise the process of an inquiry “in a linear and sequential fashion or as a messier collage of recursive and iterative relationships” (p 12). Stark suggests that the learning process within inquiries is ‘stagist’ and linear but that the subsequent policy process, following an inquiry, is much messier since many more actors become involved. However, my case-studies suggest that inquiries themselves can be highly iterative, with many repeated analyses and debates over contested issues.

Suggesting that the process of inquiry in my case-studies was iterative and not ‘stagist’ should not be misconstrued as a description of a chaotic process or even one defined by ‘messiness’. I was struck during interviews by how many actors described what seemed to be a logical and known inquiry process: a divergent process of forming questions, gathering information, and generating options, followed by a convergent process of refining options, ongoing iteration, and agreeing to recommendations. These are characteristics common to many collaborative decision-making processes which involve dialogue within a group of policy actors (Forester 1999, Innes and Booher 2010).

I do not want to give the impression that this process of deliberation and iteration is a leisurely endeavour. Both inquiries operated under severe time pressures owing to the requirement to report by a pre-determined deadline²⁶. Moreover, several actors recounted how the process seemed to accelerate as the inquiry was reaching its conclusion. This involved more frequent meetings and quick turnaround of

²⁶ The Child Support Inquiry sought a short extension to the initial timeframe, but still completed its work in around 11 months.

documentation between meetings, whether this was draft chapters of the final report or, specifically in the case of the Child Support Inquiry, further iterations of the modelling of variants of the child support formula. Salter (1989) identifies time-pressure as one of the defining characteristics of this latter phase of an inquiry, a contention well supported by my case-studies.

Before moving on, it seems important to focus on the word 'inquiry' as a potentially defining characteristic of the process. In Chapter 3, I explained how public inquiries can be conceptualised as a 'process of inquiry'. My intention in doing so was to move away from a rather static view of inquiries found in much research (which sees either the advisory board or the product – the final report – as the primary focus of attention), and to shift attention to the 'process'. However, my empirical research suggests we should also pay attention to how actors engage in 'inquiry' – that is, the act of asking questions. This would seem to be an important and even foundational characteristic of inquiry work.

In the next section, I discuss the findings around the practice of policy judgement and consider their implications. In particular, I analyse what my research contributes to our understanding of the nature of inquiry work and the skills and expertise of inquiry workers. Before concluding the chapter, I then return to my central concern – evidence – and consider the implications of my findings for how we conceptualise how evidence is used within public inquiries.

Discussion

Inquiry work, skills, and expertise

My research suggests that inquiry work is arduous, complex, and time-pressured. As discussed, it requires actors to navigate and weigh complex evidentiary characteristics alongside normative, practical, and political concerns. Fundamentally, it requires policy judgements which involve actors drawing on implicit and tacit knowledge. This is not easy work. It involves working alongside others with divergent values, interests, and ways of seeing the world. It involves contestation and the hard work of collaboration and compromise. It might feel uncertain and ambiguous, not scientific or well-defined. Exploring how actors go about developing policy advice has provided these insights into

the nature of inquiry work. Further, it suggests certain skills and expertise are required, to which I now turn.

Firstly, inquiry work demands that actors have expertise in the substantive policy issues under consideration in an inquiry. My research shows that actors are not mere arbiters of knowledge (like a 'knowledge judge') but they actively inject knowledge into the inquiry process. In interviews, actors suggested that part of the motivation for establishing the inquiries was to bring expert knowledge to the policy problems, expertise that was not available within government. In both case-study inquiries, several inquiry actors were credited with having in-depth knowledge of specific policy topics. For example, in the Welfare Reform inquiry, there were experts in the income support system (and how it related to the tax system) and experts in the wider social support system. Similarly, in the Child Support Inquiry, actors had expertise in child support policy and practice, the broader social security system, and the family courts. This type of content knowledge is clearly important, but other types of expertise were valued too.

Second, inquiry work requires a working appreciation of the *process* of policymaking. During interviews, several actors were credited with having knowledge about how policy works. As discussed in Chapter 4, the government member of each inquiry (Wayne Jackson) and the deputy chair of the Child Support Taskforce (David Stanton) were heralded in this regard. This type of procedural policy expertise has been shown to be important in other research. In their empirical research with Dutch civil servants, Hoppe and Jeliaskova (2006) showed how policy analysts require practical, process-oriented knowledge as well as being subject-matter experts, and Maybin's (2015) ethnographic study of English civil servants analyses the importance of 'policy know-how' (rather than 'know-that') which is required to 'make policy happen'.

Third, inquiry work requires that actors are able to navigate values and normative concerns. Here it is helpful to turn to Flyvberg's adaption of Aristotle's intellectual virtues – episteme, techne, and phronesis (Flyvberg 2001). In this work, Flyvberg considers 'episteme' to be rational, analytical, and context-free knowledge; 'techne' to be essentially practical, context-dependent knowledge; and 'phronesis' to concern the understanding and analysis of values. My research highlights the importance of

phronetic knowledge and how actors navigated values with other types of knowledge. This was particularly so in my analysis of policy judgement, drawing on Vickers' insights on the normative underpinnings of judgement (Vickers 1965). This suggests that actors need to be 'value aware' in undertaking inquiry work. By this I mean that actors need to be alert to their own values, aware that others carry values, and that values are embedded in particular knowledge sources. The chair of an inquiry might play an important role in drawing out values during deliberations or, as was the case in the Child Support Inquiry, values might be explicitly articulated through the development of guiding principles. This work involves normative reasoning alongside the ability to appreciate technical and practical influences on policy (Tenbenseel 2008).

Fourth, inquiry actors need to be able to navigate different interpretations of 'evidence' and types of knowledge. Tenbenseel (2006) draws on Flyvberg (2001) and argues that policymaking and implementation should pay attention to all three types of Aristotelian-derived knowledge (episteme, techne, and phronesis). Furthermore, Tenbenseel (2006) asks whether policy workers should specialise in a particular type of knowledge or whether policy work requires 'knowledge versatility'. Tenbenseel details the arguments for and against knowledge versatility (in contrast to 'functional specialisation') and the challenges of being equally skilled in each type of knowledge. However, he suggests policy workers might be less effective if they are not at least 'proficient' in different types of knowledge and argument. My analysis shows that inquiry work involves actors engaging with and navigating various types of knowledge and understandings of evidence. This would suggest that there might need to be a healthy 'quorum' of actors with 'knowledge versatility'.

Finally, inquiry actors need skills in communication and collaboration. This picks up from the insight above about how inquiry work involves dialogue, debate, and argument, and how it requires actors to collaborate in developing and agreeing upon policy advice. This resonates with Forester's research on policy practice (Forester 1999) and Innes and Booher's insights on collaborative policy dialogue (and 'collaborative rationality') as the bedrock of governance practices in an 'age of complexity' (Innes and Booher 2010, p 1).

To summarise, what does this reveal about the requisite knowledge, skills, and expertise of inquiry workers? It might include actors exhibiting ‘knowledge versatility’ (Tenbenschel 2006), given they are weighing diverse evidence and knowledge, grappling with embedded values, and accommodating different ways of knowing²⁷. It might include skills that enable actors to understand and negotiate diverse interests, and effectively navigate political concerns – for example through gaining ‘political nous’ or ‘political astuteness’ (Hartley et al 2014). The arduous and time-pressured nature of inquiry work suggests resilience would also be a valuable trait. Finally, in light of the contested meanings of evidence revealed in this thesis, inquiry workers would benefit from what Colebatch (2010, p 41) has argued is the “the greatest policy asset” – that of having “a capacity for creating shared understanding and a tolerance for ambiguity.”

In exploring the expertise of inquiry workers, I now return to the distinction between explicit, implicit, and tacit knowledge and why this matters. My thesis has revealed that a public inquiry does a good job at making knowledge explicit through its evidence practices. Public inquiries capture and make knowledge explicit through processes of evidence gathering, production, and publication. However, what about knowledge that remains tacit or implicit? What are the implications of this knowledge being embedded in expertise? Perhaps it makes little difference, because inquiry workers draw on this knowledge and it is thereby ‘brought into’ the inquiry. What I have revealed is how actors draw upon explicit knowledge codified as ‘evidence’ alongside implicit and tacit knowledge embedded in their expertise, and this creates situated ‘knowing’ (Cook and Wagenaar 2012)²⁸.

Indeed, there would seem to be risks in trying to make implicit knowledge, explicit. As Fazey et al (2006, p 4) have argued: “when it is made explicit, the nature and value of

²⁷ A related idea is ‘epistemic fluency’ (Markauskaite and Goodyear 2017), which is drawn from the literature on professional education and describes how individuals can learn how to recognise different kinds of knowledge and to work flexibly with different ways of knowing.

²⁸ As highlighted in Chapter 4, I am using the term ‘knowing’ as understood by Cook and Wagenaar (2012), that is, ‘knowing’ is realised in practice and in interaction with others, or as Cook and Brown (1999, p387) describe, knowing is ‘the epistemic dimension of practice’.

the knowledge changes because it is no longer linked to the rest of a person's rich implicit and tacit knowledge". What this brief discussion does suggest is that it would seem important for the expert (with their implicit and tacit knowledge) to accompany the evidence in order for the breadth of knowledge types to inform policy. Perhaps, then, one of the strengths of public inquiries is that experts are embedded in the policy process through being on advisory boards. However, this does reinforce the point (made in Chapter 4) that who gets to be involved in public inquiries – particular actors or experts – matters to what types and forms of knowledge are included. Furthermore, the deliberations that take place during public inquiries will be vastly different depending on the diversity of participants, their values, and the kinds of explicit, implicit, and tacit knowledge they value and bring to the table. In my concluding chapter, I reflect on these insights and highlight the importance of paying careful attention to the appointment and recruitment of inquiry actors.

The craft skills of policy judgement

Much of what I have discovered in this chapter around the practice of policy judgement resonates with the understanding of policy work as a 'craft', and thereby speaks to the importance of what we might think of as 'craft skills'. In his article "Recovering the craft of public administration", Rhodes (2016) unpacks the notion of craft in the context of contemporary policy work. Rhodes suggests an activity is a craft rather than a science when experiential knowledge is just as important as formal knowledge. He also points out that in contrast to art, craft has utility – meaning it leads to the production of something 'useful'. In a similar vein, drawing on Aristotle, Majone (1989) draws an analogy between policy analysis and the notion of craft and shows how this includes a set of skills that provide useful objects. Majone (1989, p 45) also suggests that craft concerns careful attention to the quality of a product and a sense of responsibility to the goals of the client.

These attributes of craftwork in policy are consistent with what this thesis research has discovered about inquiry work and the centrality of policy judgement. Inquiry work involves actors 'weighing' and navigating evidence and exercising policy judgements – more a craft than a science. Inquiry work has practical purpose and utility – more a craft than an art. Finally I would argue that inquiry actors pay careful attention to the quality

of the product (the policy advice) and share the common goal of ensuring that the advice is of good quality, echoing both Rhodes' (2016) and Majone's (1989) understanding of craftwork.

Evidence-informed policy in public inquiries

At this point, I wish to consider how my research speaks to broader debates on evidence-informed policy. In the light of my empirical findings, I suggest that both case-studies can be considered as examples of 'evidence-informed policy'. However, this can only be achieved through the practice of policy judgement. This argument requires some unpacking.

At the start of my research, I had considered that the case-studies were polar opposites in relation to evidence. The Child Support Inquiry seemed to have been driven by empirical research evidence and had been proposed as an example of 'evidence-based policy' (Stanton 2005). The Welfare Reform Inquiry seemed to be primarily a community engagement exercise, with the final report including many references to public and stakeholder input (McClure 2000b). In Chapters 4 and 5, I described how the two inquiries had very different discursive landscapes in relation to evidence. However, both case-studies undertook extensive knowledge-gathering activities and they shared a common complexity and diversity in how actors understood and used evidence. The case-studies did have different evidentiary characteristics, but the differences were not as significant as I had first expected.

The findings in this chapter have further challenged my initial case-study characterisations. In particular, rather than considering the Child Support Inquiry to be an example of 'evidence-based policy' and the Welfare Reform Inquiry as something else altogether (my initial characterisations), I now argue that both inquiries can be seen as examples of 'evidence-informed policy'. As discussed in Chapter 2, the adoption of the phrase 'evidence-informed policy' in the literature reflects a more modest role for evidence than the original champions of 'evidence-based policy' had envisaged (Bowen and Zwi 2005, Head 2016). Embracing the term 'evidence-informed policy' acknowledges the political context and political nature of policy processes (Head 2016). It understands 'evidence use' as part of a complex, social and interactive process (Nutley et al 2007, Boaz et al 2019) and with the understanding that policy emerges from a

process of evidence relating to values, argument, norms, and power (Majone 1989, Stone 2001). This is a far cry from what some early advocates of ‘evidence-based policy’ saw: evidence of ‘what works’ leading in a ‘rational’ and linear fashion to policy decisions.

What I have found out about the way actors navigate evidence within an inquiry is resonant with the more nuanced view of how evidence informs policy, captured in the term ‘evidence-informed policy’. Actors recounted evidence being used to inform policy advice, alongside other influences and types and forms of policy knowledge, and as part of a process that was complex and interactive. Returning to Weiss’s models of research utilisation (set out in Chapter 2), one model she identifies is the ‘interactive model’ whereby the “use of research is only one part of a complicated process that uses experience, political insight, pressure, social technologies, and judgement.” (Weiss 1979, p 429). Of all the models articulated by Weiss, this one seems to most reflect my findings overall. However, as discussed earlier, it places a lot of explanatory weight on the ‘catch-all’ term, ‘judgement’. My research, in unpacking policy judgement, has generated insights into what this might entail in practice. Through the practice of policy judgement, actors reconcile and enable diverse evidence to inform the development of policy advice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how inquiry advisory bodies, within the complex evidentiary terrain illuminated in previous chapters, produce policy advice. Overall, I do not find a mechanistic process with actors drawing on evidence hierarchies to evaluate evidence. Rather, I have highlighted the practice of policy judgement, a process which involves actors drawing on a wide knowledge base, both interactively and iteratively, and which has normative and political underpinnings. I have argued that policy judgement is critical in accommodating different accounts of ‘evidence’ and in enabling evidence to be balanced with political and practical policy concerns.

There has been a long-standing interest in judgement in political science which has flourished in political theory scholarship in recent times (see discussion in Weidenfeld 2011). However, I argue judgement has received scant attention in the contemporary

policy studies literature. Given how important policy judgement is in inquiry work, and potentially in policy work more generally, this would seem to be remiss.

There have been numerous comparative insights put forward in this chapter. I have highlighted many common traits of inquiry work across the two case-studies. Actors in both inquiries described a similar iterative process involving debate and argument, although the degree of contestation varied and was related to the extent of diversity in advisory group membership. Overall, the expected differences between the two case-studies in terms of the role of evidence did not materialise and I have suggested that both inquiries can be described as examples of 'evidence-informed policy'.

Two further comparative aspects of my research relate to 'actors' and to 'time'. As to the first, the main insight in this chapter is that different actors bring different types of knowledge and ways of knowing, and that the diversity of actors involved in public inquiries has implications for the nature of inquiry work. On the latter, a strong temporal theme again emerged in the inquiry work. We see a process of divergence (as evidence is gathered and ideas and options generated) and of convergence as actors agree upon recommendations under acute time pressures at this 'pointy end' of the inquiry process. But we also see that an inquiry 'can buy time' (as described by one government official) to gather and consider evidence in developing policy advice.

The findings in this chapter support the general argument of this thesis that public inquiries involve complex evidentiary and political considerations. Neither case-study inquiry is well characterised as either a 'political puppet' or an 'impartial adviser' (the two characterisations put forward in Chapter 2 which are typically found in the literature). Rather than offer another caricature of public inquiries, I have tried to capture and portray the complexity of public inquiry work. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I further explore the implications of my findings for how we understand public inquiries and their practices, and for the relationship between evidence and policy.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Introduction

The significance of public inquiries as sites equipped to deal with diverse evidence has been overlooked. The growing complexity and plurality of public policy has widened ideas about evidence and, in turn, policy arrangements able to navigate diverse evidence are increasingly important. But what does this process of navigating diverse evidence look like in practice? To gain insights, I have explored the public inquiry process from the perspective of actors directly engaged in inquiry work. In so doing, I have gained insight into how actors understand evidence and how the multiplicity of evidence meanings can be reconciled in inquiry work. I have found that inquiry work involves the practice of ‘policy judgement’ and I argue that this requires specific skills and expertise that should be prioritised in inquiry recruitment practices and, more broadly, in the development of policy workers.

In my research, I have asked: how do actors involved in public inquiries understand, use, and navigate evidence? In Chapter 2, I brought together the evidence and public inquiry literatures and showed how interpretive and practice-oriented studies could make valuable contributions to understanding evidence and its use in inquiries. In Chapter 3, I described how the research was operationalised and how I undertook a comparative analysis of two Australian social policy inquiries. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 39 policy actors (advisory board members and other ‘inquiry workers’) and extensive inquiry documentation, my interpretive approach has shed light on the evidentiary perspectives and experiences of inquiry actors. Viewing each case-study as a ‘process of inquiry’ has also allowed the research to identify a dynamic aspect that is rarely seen in public inquiry scholarship.

My research findings have revealed the complex and dynamic evidentiary characteristics of inquiry work. This has involved interpreting how actors described navigating ‘evidence’ with other influences and forms of knowledge to produce policy advice. This empirical picture was developed in Chapter 4, where several discourses of evidence prevalent in each inquiry were identified and which set out the explicit knowledge that actors labelled as ‘evidence’; in Chapter 5, where I brought to light the

diverse and dynamic ways in which inquiry actors recounted using evidence; and in Chapter 6, where I tracked how actors navigated the complexity of evidence in the process of producing policy advice and where the practice and craft of ‘policy judgement’ were unpacked.

In this final chapter I reflect on my research findings and consider the implications for understanding public inquiries and their practices, and for the role of evidence in public policy more broadly. The novelty of my interpretive approach has been to provide a detailed and contextualized analysis of how actors engage with ‘evidence’ based on two real-world public inquiry case-studies. I have used insights from exploring these situated practices not to develop generalisable claims but rather to inform relevant theory and to open up new lines of exploration (Flyvbjerg 2001) as well as setting out plausible conjectures for debate (Rhodes 2014).

Two main messages emerge from this discussion. First, careful attention needs to be paid to the recruitment practices of inquiry actors if public inquiries are to be equipped for welcoming, navigating, and accommodating diverse evidence. Second, the design of these sites of inquiry matters and, in particular, sufficient time needs to be ‘earmarked’ for the complex and arduous nature of inquiry work. ‘Time’ allows for diverse evidence to be thoughtfully considered, debated, and accommodated, so that practical policy actions can be agreed upon. This ‘earmarking’ of time for reconciling diverse evidence is particularly important in an era of fast policy (Stoker 2016).

Throughout this thesis and in this concluding chapter, I have signalled specific suggestions for future research. This includes further comparative study of the differing institutional designs of inquiries and of the public and private aspects of public inquiry work, and the implications for evidence deliberation. More generally, further studies of evidence in policy practice should be undertaken so that we can learn more about how diverse evidence can be brought in and accommodated. This should include studies into processes within government, as well as policy arrangements that extend beyond government, such as other types of inquiry and the myriad of ongoing advisory bodies that provide advice to governments.

An improved understanding of public inquiries

My empirical research challenges existing archetypes of public inquiries as ‘political puppets’ or ‘impartial advisers’ (Stark 2019, Bulmer 1982, Stone 1994) on two fronts. The first relates to my research approach and my locus of attention – the ‘process of inquiry’. In Chapter 3, I outlined how my approach departed from much previous inquiry research through its focus on process, rather than the advisory body per se or the impact of inquiry recommendations. In this sense, my research has challenged approaches that conceptualise and understand public inquiries as ‘entities’ as opposed to ‘processes’. The second front relates directly to my empirical findings. Here, my research throws into question whether, how, or to what degree, public inquiries are ‘political’ or ‘impartial’. In Chapter 6, I revealed how actors in my case-studies navigated a process involving evidence, values, interests, and practical constraints in developing policy advice. In this sense, it is a political process, as many authors have observed of the policy process more broadly (for example, Fischer and Gottweis 2012, Majone 1989, Stone 2001, Maddison and Dennis 2009).

However, while illustrating the political character of inquiry work, my empirical findings do not fit with the characterisation of a public inquiry as a ‘political puppet’. This would imply that the inquiry was essentially symbolic. In both inquiries, actors claimed there was no pre-staged outcome set by government and that their task was a genuine exercise of inquiry and advice-forming. Of course, ‘political puppet’ might be an apt description of some or indeed many public inquiries (Prasser 2006), but this does not fit my case-studies. My findings suggest an alternative conceptualisation might be helpful, which is outlined further below.

The political nature of inquiry work also challenges the view of public inquiries as ‘impartial advisers’. Some inquiry actors might well shudder at my dismissal of the ‘impartiality’ of public inquiries. This simply reflects my insights into inquiry work and the long held contention that all policy actors come to their work with certain values and interests, and that these, to some degree, influence collective policy actions and decisions (Rein 1976). However, questioning the ‘impartiality’ of public inquiries is not the same as suggesting public inquiries cannot be to some degree ‘independent’. My research suggests that public inquiries can have a degree of independence (from

government and other policy actors and institutions) but crucially also remain connected to the wider ongoing policy process. In any case, 'independence' matters to inquiry work. For example, it allows evidence to be considered and debated at a distance and separate from the ongoing business (and busyness) of government. In this sense, a degree of independence can help in the process of accommodating diverse evidence, values, and interests.

Overall, I argue that public inquiries might be usefully viewed as a 'process within a process'. Here I am drawing explicit attention to the dynamic nature of public inquiries and how they both influence and are influenced by their wider context. Actors in my research described a complex inquiry process that was intertwined with, and inseparable from, wider policy and political concerns. If we view policy as a 'continuing process' (Colebatch 2006a), then a public inquiry is a process operating within that wider ongoing process.

This conceptualisation of an inquiry as 'a process within a process' can usefully inform research that seeks to examine the impact of public inquiries and their contribution to policy change (Inwood and Johns 2016). Understanding inquiries as 'a process within a process' is also valuable for scholars seeking to evaluate the effectiveness or tease out the 'success' of a public inquiry. It draws attention to the possible influences that inquiries can have throughout their operation, not just through the publication of a final report. It also brings into view a wider range of actors who engage in inquiry work, such as officials working in the inquiry secretariat or elsewhere in government. These inquiry actors have been largely ignored in the public inquiry literature (Stark 2019) and yet my research suggests their role and influence could be significant.

A further conceptual nuance is important in understanding inquiry work, and that relates to how inquiries are 'time-limited'. As set out in Chapter 6, inquiry actors were acutely aware that their work was time-limited and that they had been tasked with producing policy advice within a designated timeframe. This suggests that public inquiries might be better conceptualised as a 'time-limited process of inquiry within an ongoing policy process.' This temporal nuance makes a difference, as explored further below.

The importance of earmarking time

My research has revealed the complex and arduous nature of the work involved in collectively reconciling diverse evidence and crafting policy advice. This takes time. In this sense, public inquiries ‘design-in’ time to the ongoing policy process. The notion of ‘designed-in temporality’ has been considered in recent literature on ‘slow democracy’ which endeavours to protect democracy from the impact of ‘social acceleration’ (Saward 2015). In an era of fast politics (Stoker 2016), the ability to consider diverse evidence effectively and to have a reflective policy process is similarly challenged. As argued in the Introduction to this thesis, this is particularly worrying in a ‘post-truth’ era where speed often seems to take precedence over reflection, depth, and deliberation in policy analysis and debate. My research has demonstrated that public inquiries allow time for diverse forms of knowledge and evidence to be brought to the policy table and for differing interpretations of evidence to be debated and navigated. Furthermore, inquiries also put a time constraint on inquiry work through requiring conclusions and recommendations to be made in a pre-determined timeframe. I argue that the ‘earmarked time’ that public inquiries bring is an important policy process characteristic. When it works well, and an inquiry is given ‘enough time’, diverse evidence is accommodated and a shared view of what policy actions are required can emerge.

The time-limited nature of an inquiry has other implications for how we understand evidence in public policy. Bulmer (1983b) has argued that time constraints are the greatest impediment to the contribution that *research* can make to public inquiries. Collating and analysing existing research is not particularly time-consuming, but producing new research of course can be. As discussed previously, in the Child Support Inquiry, members of the Taskforce undertook a new attitudinal survey, research into the ‘costs of children’, and developed a model for comparing policy variants. During interviews, Taskforce members recounted the immense pressure this put them under. Similarly, Prasser (2006) and Salter (1989) have stressed that inquiry timeframes often put great pressure on public inquiries, and this can limit both the extent of information-gathering and the quality of the final report (McClelland 2001). My main point here is

that research and other knowledge-gathering activities takes time, but the process of carefully deliberating upon diverse and contested evidence also requires time.

A wider temporal significance of public inquiries also comes through my research – that public inquiries are ‘Janus-faced’ (Stanley and Manthorpe 2004) because they involve looking back and forward in time. Stanley and Manthorpe’s analysis, drawing on their research on health and social care inquiries in the UK, suggests a key strength of public inquiries is this ability to learn from the past, link to the present, and then look forward to how things could be better in the future. Goodin (2008) has written about how policy practitioners typically live in an unreflective world and this compresses time horizons. He argues this means that actors fail to recollect the past and foreshorten anticipation of the future. Much of the work described by inquiry actors in my case-studies was both historically-oriented and forward-looking. This has implications for what matters in ‘inquiry work’, for example the priority given to historical analyses and/or future projections.

My findings on the temporal aspects of public inquiries have implications beyond the kinds of ‘policy-advisory’ inquiries which featured in the case-studies. This includes the ‘inquisitorial’ inquiries which were the subject of Stanley and Manthorpe’s work, discussed above. The focus of inquisitorial inquiries is to investigate wrong-doings or the response to catastrophic events (such as fires or floods). As such, the inquiries analyse what has occurred in the past and recommend action that might prevent such events recurring in the future. The ‘Janus-faced’ attribute of public inquiries seem particularly relevant for ‘truth commissions’ (Freeman 2006) which seek to promote awareness of past historical injustices and their ongoing impact, as a way of then moving on to a better future in a more reconciled way. In these contexts, facilitating this temporal reflection would seem to be an important characteristic of inquiry work. There has been growing calls for the establishment of truth commissions in Australia to increase understanding of the impact of colonisation and the resulting trauma for First Nations People (Reconciliation Australia 2018), as has occurred elsewhere in the world (Freeman 2006). Further consideration of inquiry work in relation to this wider temporal significance of inquiries would be of great value.

Implications for the practice of public inquiries

My research has several important implications for the ongoing practice of public inquiries. These relate to the nature of inquiry work, recruitment practices, and the institutional design of public inquiries.

Inquiry work

My conceptualisation of public inquiries as a ‘process within a process’ has practical implications for how inquiry actors might undertake their work. Fundamentally, it shifts the focus of inquiry actors away from the production of a final report towards the activities that are undertaken during an inquiry, and thereby gives greater recognition to how these activities might be both shaped by, and influence, the wider policy process. For example, my research has illuminated how actors find value in using evidence for generating public debate and building legitimacy. Other inquiries might emulate this as part of a strategy to create a climate receptive to policy reform. Similarly, inquiry actors described using evidence to bridge stakeholder interests as the inquiry progressed. This seemed to be particularly effective in the Child Support Inquiry to garner wide-ranging support, and is a strategy that might be employed in future inquiries. These examples demonstrate the importance of the *process* of the inquiry. In her research into public inquiries, Sheriff (1983, p 673) reflects on their contribution to public policy and argues “...it is not so much *what* policy is formulated, but *how* it is formulated that takes precedence.”

Understanding public inquiries as a ‘process within a process’ has implications for a broader range of policy actors with an interest in public inquiries. Here, I am thinking in particular of the multitude of ‘publics’ who contribute to inquiries – whether this is designated ‘experts’, stakeholders, interest groups, or affected publics – that is, those individuals who are directly affected by the policy area being examined. This public involvement might be through making a written submission, ‘giving evidence’ at a hearing, or being involved in a consultation gathering of some form. Whatever the method of engagement, this wide group might adapt their engagement strategies in the light of viewing a given inquiry as ‘a process within a process’, for example by tailoring their input to a particular stage in the inquiry or with greater regard to the wider policy context. This group might also gain insights from my findings around how ‘evidence’

might be understood and used in public inquiries. For example, stakeholders might tailor evidentiary input to an inquiry on the basis of *who* is involved and assumptions about the types of knowledge they are likely to privilege.

A more fundamental insight should not get lost here – that ‘their evidence’ counts in inquiry work, and this has practical implications for the role that public inquiries can play in public policy. The extent to which input from various publics was labelled as evidence varied (across actors and case-studies), but overall my research illustrates that knowledge garnered from public input is valued in public inquiries. This includes a wide range of experts, whether lay, professional, or scientific. My point here is that the combination of research-focused work and public and stakeholder engagement would seem to make public inquiries genuinely ‘hybrid’. They are not led by science (as in ‘scientific advisory committees’) or by a desire to deepen the engagement of citizens (as in citizens’ juries). Rather, their strength lies in bringing in and combining different forms of expertise. In this sense, public inquiries share the ambition of ‘consensus conferences’ (Joss 1998) and ‘hybrid advisory committees’ (Krick 2014) which explicitly seek to enhance the role of both scientific expertise and public engagement in complex policy problems. Later, at the end of this thesis, I return to the importance of ‘hybrid’ sites of evidence and policy deliberation.

Consideration of public participation connects with a crucial message my research brings to actors involved in any new public inquiry: that the task should not be viewed simply as a technical problem-solving exercise aimed at producing a well-written report. Therein lies the path to the proverbial shelf. Rather, the focus should be on facilitating a process of inquiry that enables dialogue and argument over diverse evidence among inquiry workers (advisory board members and other actors engaged in inquiry work) *and* with the wider range of actors with an interest in the outcome of the inquiry. The purpose of an inquiry should not be to ‘speak truth to power’ (Wildavsky 1979) but rather to ‘make sense together’ (Hoppe 1999). This also means paying attention to history and the wider temporal significance of public inquiries, and this involves looking back to previous inquiries in order to think and act knowledgeably in relation to the future. These characteristics of ‘inquiry work’ have implications for the

skills and expertise needed of those involved. This makes the recruitment of these actors important, an issue to which I turn next.

Recruitment practices

My research findings suggest careful attention needs to be paid to inquiry recruitment practices. A major insight that surfaces through various parts of my research is that it matters *who* gets to be involved in inquiry work. In Chapter 4, the research revealed that actors have a tendency to label particular types of knowledge as ‘evidence’ (for example, research or public input) linked to their professional or disciplinary background. Therefore, what types of knowledge are viewed as ‘evidence’ in an inquiry relates to *who* was involved. In Chapter 6, the research suggested that the nature of debate and deliberation that takes place during an inquiry will differ depending upon the diversity of participants, their backgrounds, values, and the kinds of explicit, implicit, and tacit knowledge they bring to the inquiry. Recruitment practices determine who gets to be involved and the mix of who gets to be involved. Therefore, such practices are fundamental to the role of public inquiries as sites of inquiry where diverse evidence can be debated, navigated, and accommodated.

First, recruitment practices should consider the range of skills and knowledge needed in inquiry work. In addition to policy content expertise, my research has highlighted the value of procedural policy knowledge – the policy ‘know-how’ needed to make policy happen (Maybin 2015.) Unpacking the practice of ‘policy judgement’ also revealed further desirable capabilities such as the ability to collaborate and to navigate different types of knowledge. How one would recruit for this latter ability to use different types of knowledge (similar to what Tenbenschel (2006) terms ‘knowledge versatility’) needs further consideration, but prior experience of working in complex evidentiary (and value-laden) environments might be one marker, or having undertaken multidisciplinary policy-relevant research another.

Given inquiry work is ‘group work’, these diverse skills might not need to be present within all individuals. For example, as previously discussed, ‘knowledge versatility’ is not an easy trait to acquire. Further, requiring all actors to have this ability might dilute the diversity of inquiry actors, which is a valuable group characteristic (discussed further below.) However, as a minimum, an openness to diverse knowledge or

'epistemic humility' (Kidd 2016) might be deemed an essential recruitment criteria. This might be particularly important in policy arenas which involve 'ways of knowing' that are beyond conventional or 'Western' knowledge traditions, such as in Indigenous Affairs (Cochran et al 2008). Furthermore, we still need to acknowledge that actors will come with distinct knowledge preferences, as well as embedded values, and this should be considered in recruitment practice.

Second, recruitment strategies need to pay attention to the diversity of inquiry actors. This is important in light of what my research has revealed about what different individuals bring to an inquiry (in terms of knowledge preferences and implicit and tacit knowledge) and that certain characteristics of the 'group' have ramifications for the nature and quality of deliberation that takes place (Bohman 2007, Sunstein 2002). A concern with the diversity of actors needs to extend to the gender of participants, in light of how gender influences our knowledge preferences (Hekman 1987). It might also mean seeking out individuals who have lived experience of the policy issues in question, given that experiential knowledge is often difficult to capture explicitly (Nickols 2000) and the implicit and tacit knowledge of the affected publics would otherwise not be included. This discussion has focused on the value of diversity in relation to knowledge and deliberation. Of course there are wider democratic concerns of inclusion, representation, and legitimacy which might, depending upon the topic of the inquiry, support diversity across several dimensions (for example, gender, race, disability, and sexual orientation) as an important recruitment criterion (Cornwall and Coelho 2007).

Third, recruitment strategies might pay attention to the inquiry experience of actors – that is, whether an actor has been involved in previous inquiries. My analysis of 'inquiry work' in Chapter 6 matches much of what has been described in other studies of 'policy work' (Colebatch et al 2010), in particular the iterative and interactive qualities. So experience of 'policy work' is useful. However, I argue that there is likely to be distinctive knowledge and skill requirements of 'inquiry work', given the specific institutional characteristics of public inquiries (for example, they are time-limited and quasi-independent), features which might make experience of previous inquiries valuable. Further research into the distinctive nature of inquiry work would be helpful, not least because many participants in my research found that working in a public

inquiry was stressful, a response which might have been related to various factors such as the technical difficulties of the subject matter, time and political pressures, and the challenges of working in a group. As Bulmer (1983a, p 563) comments “...the experience of working for a commission in whatever capacity, is a common trauma. It marks people, if not for life, for a very long time.” Understanding better why this is the case and how we might better equip actors for the arduous nature of inquiry work would be a useful avenue for future research.

Involving some actors with prior experience of public inquiries is all the more important since the process of learning about public inquiries is inherently difficult given their ad hoc and temporary attributes (Prasser 2006, Stark 2019). The review of public inquiries undertaken by the Australian Law Reform Commission recommended that the Australian Government develop and publish an ‘Inquiries Handbook’ which would capture institutional knowledge of inquiry workers and commissioners (ALRC 2009). In the UK, researchers at the Institute for Government (Norris and Shephard 2018) have made a similar plea in discovering that inquiries often rely on informal networks for guidance on how they should be run. They echo calls from previous parliamentary inquiries in the UK to establish a permanent ‘inquiries unit’ within the Cabinet Office, which would produce guidance, act as a repository of ‘lessons-learned’ from previous inquiries, and work with secretariats on the establishment of a new public inquiry. In my research, the majority of actors were ‘inquiry novices’ with only a handful of my research participants having had involvement in other inquiries. In addition to these suggestions, a further idea might be to convene a pool of ‘inquiry alumni’, which might include previous advisory group members and government officials, who could offer advice throughout a public inquiry. However, I would nevertheless argue that inquiry experience might still be considered in recruitment, so that there is at least some experience of undertaking inquiry work among the collective of inquiry workers.

An important proviso needs to be made with regard to this discussion about recruitment practices, given the informality and ad hoc nature of ‘recruitment’ to inquiries. In relation specifically to members of inquiry advisory bodies, Scott Prasser explained in his evidence to the aforementioned ALRC inquiry (ALRC 2009, p 136):

Appointing members to a public inquiry, unlike other government or public service positions, is not undertaken via advertisement or formal selection processes; rather, it is achieved by private ‘soundings’ of potential candidates, usually between the relevant minister’s office and the department.

At the start of my interviews with inquiry actors, I asked them how they came to be involved in the inquiry. Their responses all suggested an ad hoc, informal, and private process. We should question whether recruitment to public inquiries need be like this. Even if the private nature of these processes does need to be retained, I would argue that greater attention should be paid to the capabilities identified in this research and to the need for diversity. Alternatively, these processes might be made more formal and transparent, as is frequently the case in recruitment to permanent advisory bodies (such as the recruitment practices of the Productivity Commission in Australia). The desirability and feasibility of this shift to greater formality needs further analysis, as it is not without drawbacks – for example, in acting as a barrier to a legitimate need for expediency or confidentiality.

Finally, it is important to remember that these concerns relate not only to recruiting members of the formal advisory boards within inquiries. One of the themes running throughout this thesis is that other actors, which includes members of the official secretariat and other government officials, are undertaking important inquiry work. Careful attention should be paid in the recruitment of this wider pool of inquiry workers to make sure they have the requisite knowledge and represent diversity.

Institutional design

Important questions about the institutional design of inquiries are also raised through my research, specifically how to incorporate various experts and interest groups and in what roles.

How an inquiry is constituted means that different inquiry roles have varying power and authority, as discussed in Chapter 4. Not all inquiry actors are equal. In the Child Support Inquiry, Patrick Parkinson knew this all too well. As he recounted during interview, when asked to be a *member* of the Taskforce, Parkinson declined the offer. When re-approached and asked to be *chair* of the inquiry, he was happy to accept and

then took a leading role in shaping the design of the inquiry. Parkinson became the main architect of the novel institutional structure of the Child Support Inquiry, which involved the separation of the Taskforce (policy and research experts who made up the formal advisory board with decision-making authority) and the Reference Group (advocates and professionals with practical experience who had only an advisory role). As previously discussed, this model is unusual, with most public inquiries involving a single advisory body with a diverse membership, such as the Welfare Reform Reference Group. Overall, the institutional structure of the Child Support Inquiry ‘worked’ in the sense that it allowed complex and technical work to proceed expediently. However, it did not ‘work’ in the sense that the representatives of those directly affected by the potential policy reforms were not included in the inquiry decision-making body.

However, the wider message from my research is that institutional design matters to what gets counted as ‘evidence’, and how other forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are brought into and valued in a public inquiry. It matters whether the advisory body is broadly composed or homogenous. It matters who gets to sit on the inquiry decision-making body and how external actors get to be involved. Would a different outcome have resulted if the Child Support Inquiry had included interest groups on the Taskforce, or if a woman had been chair? Would the Welfare Reform Inquiry have produced different recommendations if the Reference Group had included more researchers or if the chair had not been from the community sector? The answer to these questions is likely to be ‘yes’. So, this means careful attention should be paid to the structure and membership of inquiry advisory boards, including who acts as chair and deputy chair (given the power and authority imbued in these roles) and to how the official secretariat is structured and staffed. And it means being mindful of *how* various ‘experts’, stakeholders, representatives, and affected publics are able to engage with the inquiry.

Implications for evidence and policy

Having considered the implications of my findings for public inquiries, I turn now to explore how they inform debates on the role of evidence in policy.

The practice of policy judgement

My findings concerning ‘policy judgement’ have implications for progressing the practice of ‘evidence-informed policy’. At the heart of policy judgement is how actors reconcile different meanings of ‘evidence’ and types and forms of knowledge. Judgement need not be the mysterious ‘catch-all’ in the policy process, as described by Colebatch (2006a, p 316). My research (set out in Chapter 6) has revealed that ‘policy judgement’ involves an iterative, interactive, and deliberative process which requires certain skills and experience. This has relevance and implications well beyond public inquiries. In particular, it has wider implications for advancing ‘evidence-informed policy’ which seeks to promote the use of evidence but which recognises that ‘evidence’ is part of a complex and inherently political policy process (Head 2016, Boaz et al 2019). The significance of ‘policy judgement’ in the policy process is that it involves actors navigating and accommodating the diversity of ‘evidence’ within the complexity and ambiguity of a policy process, thereby *enabling* diverse evidence to inform policy. I argue that the practice of policy judgement has been neglected in contemporary policy studies literature, and it deserves greater attention in debates about ‘evidence-informed policy’.

As part of future research, there needs to be further exploration of the capabilities and expertise of actors needed in the practice of policy judgement. Returning again to Tenbensel’s (2006) application of Aristotle’s ‘epistemic, techne, and phronetic’ intellectual virtues, I have argued that these different types of knowledge are included, navigated, and accommodated through the process of exercising collective policy judgements. This returns us to the importance of actors being able to navigate diverse types of knowledge (of ‘knowledge versatility’) in the realisation of ‘evidence-informed policy’ and in policy work more generally.

Furthermore, the claim that ‘policy judgement’ involves the application of implicit and tacit knowledge (revealed in Chapter 6) has implications for how we think about the relationship between evidence and expertise. This requires some unpacking. As previously discussed, my thesis has revealed that a public inquiry does a good job at making knowledge explicit through its evidentiary practices. Knowledge that is tacit or implicit risks being devalued if attention is focused primarily on ‘evidence’. Experts do

not just bring evidence, they offer valuable tacit and implicit knowledge. And so I argue that it might be important for experts (and their tacit and implicit knowledge) to accompany evidence. Perhaps then, one of the strengths of public inquiries is that experts become part of the policy process through being on advisory boards, and this suggests we should be thinking more about integrating experts into critical policy processes or other sites of inquiry. This need for evidence and expertise to work together provides another argument for co-production or collaborative processes involving multiple types of knowledge expert.

The relationship between evidence and policy

My findings also have implications for how we think about the relationship between evidence and policy. This research adds to a deeper understanding of the political and dynamic nature of this relationship. Along with others (for example, Rickinson et al 2019), I argue that the singular and instrumental deployment of evidence implied by the term ‘evidence use’ limits its usefulness. Drawing on my empirical findings on how inquiry actors understood and used evidence, I suggest the focus on ‘evidence use’ should shift to an ‘evidence-policy framework’, which first and foremost recognises that evidence is used within a policy process that is intrinsically political. This ‘evidence-policy framework’ should incorporate at least three considerations: 1) the *diversity of evidence* – evidence can be based on multiple types of knowledge and needs to be understood in context; 2) the *multiplicity of uses* – actors use evidence in multiple ways with varying intent; and 3) the *dynamics of the process* – the way evidence is used is iterative and part of the ongoing policy process. This moves us firmly away from a singular view of ‘evidence’ and the implied linear relationship between evidence and policy (as encapsulated in ‘evidence use’) and towards recognising evidence as situated and understood within the policy process. This framework might be useful in helping practitioners and scholars disaggregate the pluralistic and diverse nature of evidence

and how it is used in policy. Monaghan's (2010) advocacy of a 'processual model'²⁹ of evidence utilisation resonates here in that he draws attention to the complexity and nuance of the policy process and how evidence can serve multiple purposes. However, I argue it is also important to draw attention explicitly to the diversity of 'evidence' itself within the politics of the policy process, and the nature of and contestation within that diversity. Crucially, in considering the diversity of evidence, this needs to recognise not only that it involves diverse *sources* of evidence but also diverse *meanings* of evidence – that is, actors have different views on what knowledge constitutes 'evidence' in context. Further development of conceptual models is needed to help build understanding of the evidence–policy relationship which recognises its multi-faceted complexity. This should include building understanding of the differences and tensions between types and meanings of evidence. As Tenbenschel (2004, p 205) has argued, "A fuller understanding of the tensions between types of evidence, taking into account the political and economic forces that underpin these tensions, is a prerequisite to the design of policy institutions that are capable of making sense of, and acting upon, evidence."

Informed by research and public input

Finally, I speak to two normative agendas that are concerned with the place of particular types of evidence in policy – research and public input.

Many scholars and practitioners believe policy should be better informed by research.³⁰ Although I have signalled that some scholars are adopting a more inclusive definition of evidence which goes beyond research (for example, Boaz et al 2019, Head 2010), it is still the case that these and other scholars frequently focus attention on research-based evidence and its role in the policy process. Some of the strategies used in my two case-studies to develop and use research in the inquiry process could be emulated in other

²⁹ The processual model of evidence utilisation "a) focuses on the mechanisms of selection of evidence, but b) does not restrict the role of evidence to outcomes and c) recognises that the policy process is dynamic." (Monaghan 2009, p 10)

³⁰ With research understood here in the broader sense as being the result of systematic investigation, rather than having to be generated in a university or other research setting (Boaz et al 2019).

settings. One strategy is to have researchers on advisory bodies. This was the case in both case-study inquiries and is an example of having a particular type of expert integrated into the policy process, as discussed above. Another strategy is to *require* the public inquiry to undertake research. This was done in the Child Support Inquiry through the government explicitly stating in the terms of reference that research must be sought to inform the recommendations. Public inquiries also employ a range of techniques to ‘air’ the evidence, including research evidence that has been specifically generated. This occurs most commonly through the use of interim reports, as was the case in the Welfare Reform Inquiry³¹. The point here is that these public processes air research evidence, raising its profile, and this, I would argue, makes it more difficult to ignore in subsequent decision-making. In a sense, this supports long-standing endeavours by researchers to publicise their findings and which has received extra impetus in the context of ‘research impact’ requirements introduced in academia in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and elsewhere (Penfield et al 2014).

A different normative agenda is pursued by those concerned with deepening informed and deliberative public engagement in policy processes. This includes a wide range of scholars, including those concerned more broadly with advancing ‘deliberative democracy’ (Bächtiger et al 2018). From a normative perspective, public inquiries can be important sites of public deliberation (Salter 2007). Yet their public engagement practices have rarely been empirically studied. This is a particularly glaring omission in the literature, given that inquiries have engaged ‘publics’ for centuries and there is a rich source of publicly-available data in inquiry documentation.

The findings in this thesis illuminate both the potential advantages and frailties of the ‘publicness’ of public inquiries. It reveals that public inquiries typically seek to engage various ‘publics’, and yet the reality is that public engagement is often limited in terms

³¹ In the United Kingdom, the Pensions Commission undertook a similar approach, publishing a ‘First Report’ (Turner 2004) which explicitly sought to present their research analysis of the pension problem and establish the ‘fact base’ (Institute of Government 2010). In Australia, the Cass Social Security Review (1986-88) published six major ‘Issues Papers’ and 31 other research and discussion papers which aimed to generate public discussion on the research, analysis and policy proposals (Cass 1988).

of who gets to be involved and who is 'heard', and the nature of deliberation can in some cases be shallow. For example, many actors adhered to an evidence discourse in which public input was discounted as evidence, and most publics were engaged in the process via one-way consultation rather than through more interactive and empowering forms of engagement. In Chapter 6, I set out the deliberative nature of the work that takes place in developing policy advice among the advisory boards and between other inquiry workers. While these deliberations included many individuals from outside government, it still represented a rather exclusive group, and I suggest it would fall short of the standard of 'inclusion' advocated by deliberative democrats (Dryzek and Hendriks 2012).

Nevertheless, I maintain that public inquiries are important sites for exploring the 'public' in public policy. Public engagement is the mainstay of most public inquiries, whether this is through formal public hearings, more informal consultations, public submission processes, or in more recent times, on-line discussion forums and social media. And as has been discussed, advisory boards bring external experts and stakeholders into the policy process. An institutional learning process, that I have argued above is much needed in relation to public inquiries, should extend to questions of the quality of public inclusion and deliberation.

Conclusion

The main contribution of this thesis has been to offer a fuller conceptual and empirical understanding of the public inquiry process and its evidentiary, knowledge, and discursive characteristics. This has deep implications for how we understand the role of public inquiries in the policy process, for their recruitment practices, and how they should be designed.

To conclude, I would like to return to where I began with a reflection on the increasing complexity and plurality of public policy and the associated diversity of evidence. In a sense, this thesis supports the call for further sites of inquiry that are equipped to deal with diverse evidence. Both my case-studies illuminate the diversity of what can count as evidence and the contested meanings placed on evidence. We need processes that enable this diversity of evidence to be debated and accommodated. These processes

need to involve diverse people for good deliberation to take place and they need 'earmarked time'.

My final message is that we need to make sure these policy settings are equipped to navigate *both* public engagement and the results of systematic research inquiry. Much popular and scholarly attention has been focused on arrangements that bring the public into policymaking, and this makes sense given the strength of epistemic and democratic arguments for greater involvement of citizens and 'publics' in public policy (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015). Meanwhile, 'evidence-based policy' and 'evidence-informed policy' initiatives seem to remain primarily concerned with advancing the role of research in public policy. My argument is that we need genuinely hybrid sites of inquiry that have the explicit dual function of bringing in affected publics *and* drawing on scientific knowledge and expertise. These two normative agendas, and the associated empirical and theoretical literature, need to be brought together so that we can deepen both research influence and public engagement in policy. The ability of public inquiries to accommodate both public input and scientifically-generated knowledge is perhaps one reason for their enduring appeal. But as the complexity and plurality of public policy increases, public inquiries and other sites of policy inquiry will need to improve the way they accommodate diverse 'evidence', knowledge, and ways of knowing.

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Appendix A: Case-study background

Case-study 1: Welfare Reform Inquiry

Membership of Reference Group on Welfare Reform³²

Mr Patrick McClure (chair), Chief Executive Officer, Mission Australia

Mr Wayne Jackson (deputy chair), Deputy Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services

Professor Peter Dawkins, Director, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne

Professor Mark Lyons, School of Management, University of Technology, Sydney

Ms Jane Schwager, Chief Executive Officer, Benevolent Society of New South Wales

Mr Jim Longley, Senior Finance Executive, Commonwealth Bank of Australia

Ms Elizabeth Morgan, Social Policy Specialist, Morgan, Disney and Associates

Terms of Reference

The Reference Group had the following terms of reference:

- a) Adopting the reform principles established by the Government to provide advice on:
 - i. Options for change to income support arrangements aimed at preventing and reducing welfare dependency by those of workforce age; and
 - ii. Other options relating to the provision of associated services, including employment, education and training that would assist in preventing and reducing welfare dependency.
- b) In providing this advice, the Reference Group will give particular consideration to:

³² All professional positions given are as at the time of the inquiry.

- i. The broader application of Mutual Obligation.
 - ii. Demographic changes.
 - iii. Sustainability of the current system.
 - iv. The particular incentive effects associated with the design of social security payments for people of workforce age.
 - v. International best practice.
- c) In framing its advice, the Reference Group will draw on community input and call for submissions from interest groups and the broader community.

An interim Report from the Reference Group will be provided to the Minister for Family and Community Services early in the year 2000, with the final draft to be provided to the Minister by 30 June 2000 (McClure 2000b, p 62).

Reform Principles

Six principles were identified to guide reform:

- Maintain equity, simplicity, transparency and sustainability;
- Establish better incentives for people receiving social security payments, so that work, education and training are rewarded;
- Create greater opportunities for people to increase self-reliance and capacity-building, rather than merely providing a passive safety net;
- Expect people on income support to help themselves and contribute to society through increased social and economic participation in a framework of Mutual Obligation;
- Provide choices and support for individuals and families with more tailored assistance that focuses on prevention and early intervention; and
- Maintain the Government's disciplined approach to fiscal policy.

(McClure 2000b, p 62).

Case-study 2: Child Support Inquiry

Membership of the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support³³

Professor Patrick Parkinson (chair), Professor of Law, University of Sydney, and
Chairperson of the Family Law Council

David Stanton (deputy chair), Consultant Social Security Planner and Policy Analyst and
Visiting Fellow, Asia Pacific School of Economics and Government at the Australian
National University

Dr Matthew Gray, Research Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research,
Australian National University

Professor Ann Harding, Director of the National Centre for Social and Economic
Modelling (NATSEM)

Dr Paul Henman, Lecturer in the School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences,
University of Queensland

Wayne Jackson, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Family and Community Services

Professor Deborah Mitchell, Director of the Australian Consortium for Social and
Political Research, Australian National University. (Professor Mitchell had to resign due
to family circumstances in January 2005.)

Bruce Smyth, Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies

Membership of Reference Group

Patrick Parkinson (chair)

David Stanton (deputy chair)

Bettina Arndt, social commentator and member of the Family Law Pathways Taskforce

Michael Green QC, Author of the book *Fathers After Divorce*

³³ All professional positions given are as at the time of the inquiry.

Dr Elspeth McInnes, Lecturer in the School of Education, University of South Australia, Deputy President of ACOSS and Co-executive Officer of the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children

Tony Miller, Founder and Director of Dads in Distress

Jocelyn Newman AC, Former Senator for Tasmania and former Minister for Family and Community Services

Clive Price, Executive Director of Unifam Counselling and Mediation, New South Wales

Judy Radich, National President of the Early Childhood Association

Kathleen Swinbourne, President of the Sole Parents Union of Australia

Barry Williams, Founder and National President of the Lone Fathers' Association of Australia

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference required the Taskforce, supported by the Reference Group, to:

- 1) Provide advice around the short-term recommendations of the Committee along the lines of those set out in the [Every Picture Tells a Story] Report (Recommendation 25) that relate to:
 - increasing the minimum child support liability;
 - lowering the 'cap' on the assessed income of parents;
 - changing the link between the child support payments and the time children spend with each parent; and
 - the treatment of any overtime income and income from a second job.
- 2) Evaluate the existing formula percentages and associated exempt and disregarded incomes, having regard to the findings of the Report and the available or commissioned research including:
 - data on the costs of children in separated households at different income levels, including the costs for both parents to maintain significant and meaningful contact with their children;
 - the costs for both parents of re-establishing homes for their children and themselves after separation; and

- advise on what research program is necessary to provide an on-going basis for monitoring the child support formula.
- 3) Consider how the Child Support Scheme can play a role in encouraging couples to reach agreement about parenting arrangements.
 - 4) Consider how Family Relationship Centres may contribute to the understanding of and compliance with the Child Support Scheme.

Parkinson (2005, p 2).

Guiding principles

The key principles that guided the Taskforce were:

- 1) Children who do not live with both parents should have an adequate living standard and, as far as possible, should receive support from a non-resident parent commensurate with the amount that the parent would be likely to spend out of his or her taxable income if the two parents were living together, taking account of that parent's direct expenditure on the children when they are in his or her care.
- 2) The formula should be so designed that it can be demonstrated that parents are sharing in the expenses of raising their children at a level appropriate to their combined incomes and in proportion to their capacity to pay.
- 3) In assessing the level of support the non-resident parent should provide, account needs to be taken of the contribution that the taxpayer provides in supporting all children, whether in intact or separated families, through government benefits.
- 4) The Government contribution to the expenses of raising children where parents are living apart should be no less than if the parents were living together. The Government is entitled to expect a contribution from the non-resident parent towards the taxpayers' costs of supporting the children beyond this level of contribution.
- 5) The Child Support Scheme should take proper account of the costs to each household where children are spending time in the homes of both parents.
- 6) The Child Support Scheme should endeavour to treat children in first and subsequent families equally.

(Parkinson 2005, p 116)

Appendix B: Interview protocol

Introduction

Introduce research, respond to any questions

Check consent and that recording (NB: CHECK CONSENT FORM)

Set out the three parts to the discussion: a) the establishment of the inquiry b) the operational phase of the inquiry and c) after the inquiry had reported

Estimate interview will last around one hour

Interviewee's role

Can you briefly outline your role in the inquiry?

What was your on-going position (main/permanent job) at the time of the inquiry?

Part a) Establishment of the inquiry

Can you describe how the inquiry came about? Why was the inquiry established?

How was the membership of the review bodies (e.g. taskforce and reference group) determined?

What role did evidence play in the establishment of the inquiry, if any?

Part b) Operational phase

What evidence was gathered during the inquiry process? How did you collect evidence? What did you count as evidence?

How did you use evidence during the inquiry? What did you do with the evidence?

Can you talk me through how you weighed up the evidence?

How did you go about developing recommendations and advice?

What role did you see the inquiry playing?

Part c) Post-report phase

Tell me about when the report was published?

Can you talk me through what happened next?

Did the collated evidence or the report get used subsequently? In what way?

Did the recommendations get implemented? What role did the inquiry play in this, if any?

Final questions

Who else would you recommend that I speak to?

Do you have any questions for me?