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About Me

I am an independent researcher and writer on progress, sustainability, culture, health and wellbeing. I am a founding director of [Australia21 Ltd](#), an independent, non-profit, public-interest, research company. I was, from 1998 to 2010, a fellow and visiting fellow at the [National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health](#) at the Australian National University.

My research approach - [transdisciplinary synthesis](#) - is unusual. I range across many fields of knowledge to develop new, common frameworks of understanding. Synthesis strives for coherence in the overall conceptual picture rather than precision in the empirical detail.

My main contributions have been in advocating:

- better measures of national progress and human development. (Is the West really the best?)
- the importance of mainstream culture in shaping population health. (Are poverty and inequality the main drivers of population health?)
- health as a social dynamic and benchmark for sustainable development. (How do we balance and integrate social, environmental and economic priorities?)
- a new story of young people's health and wellbeing. (Is their health getting better, or worse?)

My work has been brought together in a book, *Well & Good: Morality, Meaning and Happiness* (Text, 2004, 2005), available on the first 'Books' page. I have also edited or co-edited and contributed to three other books: *The Social Origins of Health and Wellbeing* (CUP, 2001), *Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?* (CSIRO, 1998) and *Challenge to Change: Australia in 2020* (CSIRO, 1995).

I have published over 150 journal papers, book chapters, monographs and specialist magazine articles, and written many articles for leading Australian newspapers and for broadcast on national radio. I speak to a wide range of audiences, and have served on many boards, committees and advisory groups. Recent and current positions (in addition to those above) include: the board of *Familles Australia*, the ACT Community Inclusion Board, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' expert reference group on measures of Australia's progress, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's national youth information advisory group, and a government expert working group on science engagement (chair).

I am a co-author of a national index of [subjective wellbeing](#), introduced in 2001 and the first of its kind in the world, and of the [Australian Wellbeing Manifesto](#), published in 2005. My work has influenced a range of national initiatives, including: a national youth suicide prevention strategy; Government 'green jobs' and 'regreening' programs; and the Australian Bureau of Statistics report series, *Measures of Australia's Progress* (and, through the ABS, the OECD's global project, *Measuring the Progress of Societies*).

I studied zoology and later completed a masters degree in the history, philosophy and sociology of science and technology. My former positions include: science reporter for *The Sydney Morning Herald*; head of the media liaison office of CSIRO Australia, the national scientific research organisation, senior analyst with the Australian Commission for the Future, ministerial consultant to an Australian Government minister; and senior specialist, strategic analysis, at CSIRO.

Before settling into a career (and family life) in my 30s, I worked as a labourer and professional fisherman, and travelled abroad for two years. My travels had a profound influence on my life and work, allowing me to see more clearly Western culture's assumptions and values, strengths and flaws.

From *Well & Good*, p. 43:

'In the 1970s, I spent two years travelling overseas, through Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and Asia. Like many long-term travellers, I found that the most difficult cultural adjustment I had to make was on my return home. My first reaction on flying into Sydney from Bangkok was one of wonder at the orderliness and cleanliness, the abundantly stocked shops, the clear-eyed children, so healthy and carefree. However, my initial celebration of the material richness and comfort of the Western way of life soon gave way to a growing apprehension about its emotional harshness, social 'distances' and spiritual desiccation.

In a way I hadn't anticipated, the experience allowed me to view my native culture from the outside; and in ways I hadn't appreciated before, I realised ours was a tough culture. I became acutely aware that the Western worldview is just one of many, defined and supported by myths like any other. We tend to see material poverty as synonymous with misery and squalor, yet only with the most abject poverty is this so. We see others as crippled by ignorance and cowed by superstition; we don't see the extent to which we are, in our own ways, burdened by our rational knowledge and cowed by our lack of superstition - of spiritual beliefs.'

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Note

My work is an evolving analysis of progress and wellbeing. I publish in many fields (often by invitation), and I write for both scientific and popular publications. For these reasons, papers and articles may be variations on a common theme or summaries of longer works, with overlapping content.
My book, *Well & Good* (available on the 'Books' page), draws together much of my work up to 2004.
The major papers are marked *. Most of the attached papers are author-created, 'post-print' versions of the final paper. The published papers are available from the journal websites (although usually for a fee or through subscription).

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Popular articles are on the next page (above)

Scientific

Progress, development and sustainability

- Eckersley, R. 2009. Is the West really the best? Measuring the progress of societies. *Issue 1, Mar/2*, pp. 9-11. OECD, Paris. *Article*
- *Eckersley, R. 2008. Population measures of subjective wellbeing: How useful are they? *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 84, no. 1, pp. 1-12. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2008. Unthought or contented? The politics of past life. *Journal of Futures Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 87-92. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2007. What's wrong with the official future? In Hassan G (Ed). *After Blair: Politics After the New Labour Decade*. Lawrence and Wishart in conjunction with Compass, London, pp. 172-84. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2006. Progress, sustainability and human wellbeing: is a new worldview emerging? *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 205-217. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2005. The quality of life in Saunders P. Waller J (Eds). *Ideas and Influence: Social Science and Public Policy in Australia*. UNSW Press, Sydney, pp. 158-218. *Full paper*
- *Cummins RA, Eckersley R, Paterson J, Van Vugt J, Mason R. 2003. Developing a national index of subjective wellbeing: The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index. *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 64, pp. 159-190.
- Eckersley, R. 2002. Bjorn Lomborg's *The Skeptical Environmentalist*: a sociocultural perspective commentary. *Social Change and Human Health*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 55-57. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2001. Postmodern science: The decline or liberation of science? In Stockmayer S, Goss M, Bryant C (Eds). *Science Communication in Theory and Practice*. Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 83-94. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2001. Economic progress, social discontent: the modern paradox. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 69-97. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2000. The mixed blessings of material progress: Demystifying values in the pursuit of happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 297-305. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2000. The state and fate of nations: Implications of subjective measures of personal and social quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 52, pp. 3-27. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 1999. Reply to: Saunders P in defence of progress: A response to Richard Eckersley. *Family Matters* no. 63, Autumn, pp. 43-48. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 1998. Redefining progress: Shaping the future to human needs. *Family Matters*, no. 51, Spring/Summer, pp. 6-12. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 1998. Perspectives on progress: Economic growth, quality of life and ecological sustainability. In Eckersley R (Ed). *Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?* CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, pp. 3-34. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 1989. Reopening Australia - the environmental, economic and social benefits of infestation. Occasional paper no. 3. CSIRO, Canberra. *Full report*
- *Eckersley, R. 1987. Australian attitudes to science and technology and the future. Australian Commission for the Future, Melbourne. *Full report*

Health and wellbeing

- *Eckersley, R. 2011. The science and politics of population health: giving health a greater role in public policy. *Medical Centre Publications HEAL Th 2011, 2(3):WMC001987*. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2010. *Wellbeing: The Five Dimensions of a Good Life*. In Cork S (Ed). *Resilience and Transformation: Preparing Australia for the Future*. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, pp. 115-120. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. Reader L. 2008. Violence in public places: Explorations and solutions. *Australia 21 Ltd*. Canberra. *Full report*
- *Eckersley, R. 2007. Culture. In Galea D (Ed). *Macro-social Determinants of Population Health*. Springer, New York, pp. 193-209. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2007. Culture, spirituality, religion and health: Looking at the big picture. *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 186, no. 10, pp. 554-555. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2006. Author's response: Culture can be studied at both large and small scales. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 35, pp. 253-255. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2004. Is modern Western culture a health hazard? *International Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 33, pp. 250-258. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2005. 'Cultural fraud': The role of culture in drug abuse. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, vol. 24, pp. 157-63. *Full paper*
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- *Eckersley, R. 2001. Culture, health and well-being. In Eckersley R, Olson J, Douglas B (Eds). *The Social Origins of Health and Well-being*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 51-70. *Full paper*

Young people's health and wellbeing

- *Eckersley, R. 2011. A new narrative of young people's health and wellbeing. *Journal of Youth Studies*. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2011. Troubled youth: an island of misery in an ocean of happiness, or the tip of an iceberg of suffering? *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 5 (suppl 1), 9-11. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2010. Commentary on Tienari and Sorri (2010): A transdisciplinary perspective on young people's wellbeing. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 78-80. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R. 2008. The health and well-being of young Australians: Patterns, trends, explanations and responses. In Gil, Bennett, D, Trean, E, Eds. *Adolescent Health: Challenges in Adolescent Health*. An Australian Perspective. Nova Science, New York, pp. 3-19. *Full paper*
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- Eckersley, R. 2008. Teaching happiness: hope or hype? Unpublished article based on keynote address to the First Australian Positive Psychology in Education Symposium, May 2008. Sydney University. *Article*
- *Eckersley, R. 2008. Values and visions - youth and the future of modern western culture. *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 10-19 (reprint of 1995 article). *Full paper*. See also: *Points of view*, *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 14, no. 2, Winter 1995, pp. 45-52. *Full paper*. (Archived with permission of journal, which retains copyright.)
- *Eckersley, R. 2008. Never better - or getting worse? The health and wellbeing of young Australians. *Australia 21 Ltd*. Canberra. *Full report*
- *Eckersley, R, Campbell, Wieringa A, Wijn J. 2007. Generations in dialogue about the future: the hopes and fears of young Australians. *Australia 21 Ltd*. Canberra. Australian Youth Research Centre, Melbourne. *Full report*
- Eckersley, R. 2007. The health and wellbeing of young Australians: present patterns and future challenges. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 217-227. *Full paper*
- Eckersley, R. 2007. Young people's wellbeing and the contemporary search for meaning. *Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 41-44. *Full paper*
- *Eckersley, R, Wieringa A, Wijn J. 2005. Platforms and signposts: Pathways to success and wellbeing for Australia's young people. *Australia 21 Ltd*. Canberra. Australian Youth Research Centre and YouthHealth, Melbourne. *Full report*
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- *Eckersley, R. 2004. Separate selves, tribal ties and other stories: making sense of different accounts of youth. *Family Matters*, no. 68, winter, pp. 36-42. *Full paper*
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- Eckersley, R. 1998. Rising psychosocial problems among young people: Historical myth or contemporary reality? *Family Matters*, no. 59, winter, pp. 50-52. *Full paper*
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- *Eckersley, R. 1992. Youth and the challenge to change. *Apocalypse? Not! Essay series no. 1*. Australian Commission for the Future, Melbourne. *Full report*
- *Eckersley, R. 1988. *Cavalier of change - the predicament of youth in Australia*. Australian Commission for the Future, Melbourne. *Full report*

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