



Royal Commission Final Report

Silence not so golden

***PM shuts down discussion
journalists not given time to
read report***



see page 2

***gloomy predictions
re likely government response***



George Megalogenis



Ross Gittins

see page 3

**Aged care's tenacious
advocate in the media**

see page 4



Anne Connolly
**2019 Winner of the Graham
Perkin Australian Journalist
of the Year**

The May Budget

On 18 April, the Sunday Age ran a front page story headed ‘\$10b pledge on aged care to underpin reforms’. In their self-serving leak, the anonymous government sources revealed that the aged care package would exceed \$10b and be the “budget’s centrepiece”. An aggregate figure is important but the fine print is no less so. On Budget day, 11 May, observe the comparative media coverage of aged care and women’s issues and also media coverage of the specific aged care recommendations adopted especially on staffing, training and funding and on whistleblowers.

Guess what the Royal Commission cost

see page 4

Royal Commission Final Report Silence not so golden

PM shuts down discussion journalists not given time to read report

At a media conference on Monday 1 March 2021, the Prime Minister released the Final Report of the Aged Care Royal Commission. The eight volume report, weighing 11 kg, was released without letting journalists access it first! Usually the press would receive copies of a public inquiry report in advance of the media conference but not this time.

Wait until May

The PM said the Government response would be made in May at Budget time.

Competing for media attention

This means that aged care will have to compete for media coverage with a myriad of other issues at the time of the Budget debate.

Losing out to treatment of women

An irony here is that if the government's widely perceived failure to deal with the vital issue of the treatment of women in politics, and in society generally, remains a source of controversy it could well be that this issue will help to swamp the issue of aged care reform during 2021.



“I’m the Prime Minister. This is my minister. Our cabinet will decide our response to this royal commission, OK?”

Scott Morrison responding to question from ABC journalist Anne Connolly, 1 March 2021.

Short of a dramatic turnaround in the public's response, aged care will likely fail to generate the grass roots support and protest action sufficient to demand the attention of politicians.

Labor, Greens and the cross bench

Much will depend on the Opposition's position plus that of the Greens and minor parties and independents, especially in the Senate.

There is one certain hope for aged care amongst the media and that is the formidable force of the ABC and its intrepid journalist Anne Connolly (*see page 4*).

Silence not so golden *gloomy predictions re likely Government response*

Writing in *The Age*, two respected, experienced commentators recently made similar observations about the Prime Minister's response to the Commission's Final Report. Both had a gloomy outlook regarding the likely Government action on reform. Both lamented the media silence on aged care since the media conference at the beginning of March when the Report was released.

A "shambles" and disrespectful

George Megalogenis said the 1st March media conference was "a shambles". He regarded the PM's response to a question from the ABC's Anne Connolly as disrespectful (*see quote below*) especially as it was her *Four Corners* expose of the scandal of aged care in 2018 which triggered the decision to call a Royal Commission.

He described what he saw as the PM's aversion to scrutiny: "...he goes into shutdown mode when the questions start".

A familiar pattern

Ross Gittins drew comparisons between Scott Morrison's response to the recommendations of the

"There will be plenty of opportunities to ask many questions This isn't the only day I'll be standing before you on this. Today I'm here telling Australians we have released the royal commission report. We commissioned it".

S. Morrison, Media Conference.
1 March 2021.

banking royal commission and the likely response in the case of aged care namely, "you give the appearance of responding to the outcry without actually doing much".

The PM announced \$452 million of spending on "this and that".

Increase in Medicare levy?

Ross Gittins notes the PM floated the idea of an increase in the Medicare

tax levy* to fund the reforms but this was promptly ruled out by the Treasurer. He said aged care has "hardly been mentioned from that day to this".

* Recommendations 138 (Commissioner Pagone) and 142 (Commissioner Briggs).

"Why do I have a terrible feeling that, should aged care not come back on the media agenda between now and budget night, what's announced will be only a token response to the continuing and worsening problem"

R. Gittins, 'Borrowers a-loan in the dark', The Age, 31 March 2021

G. Megalogenis, 'Morrison fouls up his bid to show the female side of his brain', The Age, 27 March, 2021.

R. Gittins, 'Borrowers: a-loan in the dark', The Age, 31 March 2021.

Aged care's tenacious advocate in the media

Aged care disadvantage

Aged care may not be as politically sexy (*sic*) as women's issues but it does have at least one tenacious advocate in the media: Anne Connolly.

Impressive track record

Winner of the 2019

Graham Perkins

Australian Journalist of the Year award, Anne's reporting on the Four Corners program in 2018 was a trigger for the Aged Care Royal Commission.

Journalist's assessment

On the ABC website, Anne graciously acknowledges the pioneering journalism on aged care of Margot O'Neil. She sees many positives in the 148 recommendations and singles out a few reforms that would bring generational change:

**mandated staffing hours* (R86);

**registration of personal carers with English language and qualification requirements* (R77);

**a new Aged Care Act with the focus on the rights of the older person and the primary provider obligation to care for them properly* (R1&2);



Anne Connolly at the PM's media conference on the day the Royal Commission Report was released.

**proper funding including phasing out RADs (bonds) and substituting a Medicare style levy of around 1 per cent* (Commissioner Briggs)

(R142) *or an amount determined by the Productivity Commission* (Commissioner Pagone) (R138) *and *a star rating system for nursing homes* (R24). A. Connolly, 'I've got four reasons to be optimistic about the aged care royal commission', abc.net.au/news 2021-03-03.

Star rating system

This recommendation requires the Government, by July next year, to publish useful performance information on each home so they can be compared, for example: staffing levels,

falls and fractures, medication management, compliance, sanctions and complaints.

One thing we can be sure of, the ABC and Anne Connolly in particular, will be tenacious in following up on the politicians' response.

Tell them

Think about a one page letter to your federal MP naming two or three recommendations you want them to adopt. He or she doesn't know what you're thinking unless you tell them.

It cost \$92 million

Independence

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