MINING COAL SEAM GAS:
AN EXHIBITION IN THE DIVINE ART GALLERY

How an Australian theology of land can inform the public debate surrounding the Coal Seam Gas industry

A Thesis Submitted to Charles Sturt University as the Requirements for Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August, 2015
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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Christopher John Dalton, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award or any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis.

Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged. I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

Signed

Date / /
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God be the glory!

I am deeply grateful to my principal supervisor, Rev Dr Dean Drayton, for his patience, gentle guidance, wise teaching, steady encouragement and thoughtful insights. His input has been inspirational as I have journeyed from an academic approach characterised by a rational, reasoned, intellectual and scientific view of the world, to one that now intentionally also embraces subjectivity, experience and a love of Australian landscape art and poetry.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Rev Dr Clive Pearson, for his encouragement, guidance and input to this thesis. He also taught my wife Judith and me, as we undertook postgraduate theological studies at United Theological College and developed our shared passion for ecotheology.

I am grateful to the Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre for their scholarship to fund my study, to Charles Sturt University for accepting my candidature and to United Theological College for the regular Research Colloquiums that enabled me to participate in its postgraduate community.

I am appreciative, too, of the extensive editorial assistance freely and kindly provided by Kerry Sillcock. Her patience, attention to detail and sound advice has greatly helped me through the challenging task of producing a final thesis.

A big thank you also to my children Sarah, Jonathan and David, and their families, for their loving support.

My final, most heartfelt thanks go to Judith. She has given me a priceless gift. She has lovingly supported me, made this study possible and contributed to it in so many ways, whilst undertaking her own challenging journey.

To God be the glory, indeed!

Chris Dalton, Brisbane, August 2015
ABSTRACT

The growth of the Coal Seam Gas (CSG) industry has led to passionate and polarising debate within Australia. On the one hand, the mining of CSG can generate economic development benefits, employment opportunities and export earnings, and provide new energy sources; on the other hand, it can lead to environmental pollution and health problems, adversely affect water quality, and negatively impact on the livelihood and lifestyle of landowners, farmers and local communities.

This thesis explores how theology can contribute to the development of CSG policy in a way that adds value to the professional and expert inputs of the business community, economists, environmentalists, landowners, lawyers, politicians and scientists.

The central theological narrative of the thesis is that Land is a fellow traveller with humanity in Creation. This leads to public theology praxis that is informed by the parable of the Good Samaritan. It finds a precedent in the debate about the abolition of the slave trade, which led to a fundamental shift in the ethical outlook of society at the time, which had held slavery to be acceptable.

The thesis adopts a transdisciplinary approach with two theological streams. The first focuses on a theological reading of Land in Australia. It identifies anthropocentric utilitarianism as a key shortcoming in CSG public policy development in Australia, with Australians treating Land as a commodity rather than as Beloved in God’s Creation. As a part of this, the thesis hears the Voice of Land in Australian landscape art, poetry, experience, community input to the policy debate, spirituality and a plethora of government inquiries and reports. It is a voice that pleads for the scope of the policy debate to be broadened.

The second stream develops a public theology strategy in response to this shortcoming. Its core element is the establishment of a dialogue across faith and secular boundaries to consider the interests and rights of Land and how they might be recognised and incorporated into public policy. It generates consideration of alternative worldviews and accepts that, in a post-secular
society like Australia, the Christian faith cannot expect privileged treatment. It therefore presents a range of different insights into matters relating to CSG – metaphorically, by hanging paintings in a Divine Art Gallery on the theme of CSG mining – to stimulate the establishment of common ground upon which to build a policy framework that serves the interests of Australians and Land.

Research undertaken for the thesis informs a discussion of insights provided by ecotheology and the relationship between justice and law, the identification of the key features of the CSG industry and a description of the evolving CSG regulatory framework. It analyses these developments against the backdrop of how Australian attitudes to Land have changed since European settlement. This leads to the development of a public theology strategy that draws on imagination and experience as well as scientific research and economic analysis. It concludes by advocating that a conversation be commenced about incorporation of the rights of Land into legislation.
Born into this landscape
Wendy Martin, 2013
Bush ‘N Beyond Art Gallery, Broken Hill
(Inspiration for the thesis)
SECTION 1

IN GOD’S CREATION . . .
Chapter 1  
Introduction

1.1  What’s theology got to do with Coal Seam Gas?

The Coal Seam Gas (CSG) industry in Australia is in its infancy. The first stand-alone commercial production of CSG began in 1996 in Queensland,\(^1\) and by 2012 annual production of CSG represented just 0.1% of Australia’s potential in-ground CSG resources.\(^2\)

It is an industry, however, that has given rise to passionate and polarising debate within Australia. On the one hand, the mining of CSG can generate economic development benefits, employment opportunities and export earnings, and provide new energy sources; on the other hand, it can lead to environmental pollution and health problems, adversely affect water quality, and negatively impact on the livelihood and lifestyle of landowners, farmers and communities. What industry regulation is needed, then, to ensure that these diverse interests are addressed in a satisfactory way in a liberal democratic society like Australia? Further, what distinctive input can theology contribute to the consideration of these issues?

It is the standard practice of theology to be concerned with what might be considered to be internal matters of faith. Anselm’s description of theology as *faith seeking understanding* has been used by many theologians.\(^3\) It is a quest to understand how God is at work in Jesus Christ and what that might mean for us. Ever since the time of Immanuel Kant, however, there has been a distinction made between private and public reason. This separation casts the life of faith as more of a personal decision, lying within the realm of the heart.

This way of thinking has become well-established in secular societies. It has been common practice for political leaders, for example, to say that religious critics should keep to their own business. The thesis assumes a different

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perspective. It commits to a public theology approach that faith and theology are not limited to human salvation, matters of personal morality and the inner life of the church.

The genesis of the thesis can be found in the seminal question “What’s theology got to do with Coal Seam Gas?” In the context of the scientific, economic and political rationalism that permeates the public square, this is a valid question. What can a faith perspective add to the professional expertise and knowledge of the business community, doctors, ecologists, economists, engineers, geologists, landowners, lawyers, politicians, psychologists, public servants, scientists and sociologists?

The theological challenge in this question was illustrated in a 2011 church study group. Here the view was expressed that regulation of the CSG industry was a matter of common sense, of finding the right balance between the various (competing) interests of landowners, state governments, mining companies and environmental groups. It implicitly assumed that a reliance on education, the presentation of verifiable facts, dialogue and cool heads leading to informed decision-making was the primary (and sufficient) formula for determining regulatory policies that would maximise the Common Good. It paid little attention to theological perspectives.

This is not surprising in a secular liberal democratic society like Australia where faith is commonly held to be an individual, private matter that should not intrude into politics. Using a rational empirical approach based on objective, neutral disciplines such as science and economics appeals to a sense of fairness and impartiality, and a desire for representative decision-making. Indeed, some might hold the very notion of considering a faith outlook with a particular embedded morality to be anathema. In such a view, faith inputs have little place at the policy table.

There are assumptions in this view, however, that warrant further scrutiny. How is the right balance to be determined? Is reliance on common sense and an appeal to reason and rationality sufficient for delivering the best outcomes? What is meant by the Common Good? Values influence how such questions
are answered and, more fundamentally, values themselves are shaped by worldviews that are often implicitly accepted without question.

Further, what account needs to be taken of the evolving nature of society in Australia, which is becoming increasingly multicultural and multifaith, and which now might be described as post-secular. What does policy neutrality mean in practice? The thesis explores these questions by identifying and reflecting on the worldviews that mould the ethical judgements being made in the development of CSG public policy.

1.2 Worldviews shape public policy

The thesis locates itself at the intersection of worldviews and public policy. The research lens it has adopted to examine the relationship between the two is that of an evolving Australian theology of land, with its application to the CSG public policy debate providing a contemporary case study. The thesis is thus not a study of values per se, but an exploration of how a theology of land can assist society to reflect on its assumptions about the reality within which it exists, the values arising from this theological exploration, and how these values then shape regulatory policy.

Relevant here is Miguel de la Torre’s discussion of a society’s habitus which he defines as a product of the social location of its members that provides them with an ethical framework for understanding the world around them. He observes that

one’s habitus so imprisons the mind that it becomes difficult to move beyond a particular social location without making a major shift in how reality is conceived and understood. Consequently few members of the dominant culture question the construction of their conscience.4

A prime example of a ‘major shift’ is the change in societal attitudes towards slavery resulting from William Wilberforce’s efforts to abolish the slave trade. His successful campaign provides a precedent for the thesis, which asserts that anthropocentric utilitarianism is the prevailing policy outlook of the dominant

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4 M. A. de la Torre, Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 34, 35.
culture within Australia regarding CSG mining. The thesis draws attention to
the similarities between utilitarian attitudes towards the land and towards
slaves, and then advocates a major shift in this anthropocentric, utilitarian view
of the land to a worldview that recognises the land’s intrinsic value.

The thesis uses the lens of an evolving Australian theology of land to reflect on
this outlook by reviewing how reality is conceived and understood. It also
suggests ways to construct a public conscience that has due regard for the
land, based on a major shift that has occurred in the way Australians relate to
the land. In doing so it draws inspiration from Vaclav Havel, a former President
of Czechoslovakia:

What could change the direction of today’s civilization? It is my deep
conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the
sphere of human conscience. It is not enough to develop new machines, new
regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true
purpose of our existence on Earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift
will we be able to create new models of behaviour and a new set of values for
the planet.5

In the same vein, Naomi Klein argues that if a human-friendly earth is to
survive, we must re-imagine our relationship with the planet.6 It is a theme that
is also central to “Laudato Si’, On care for our common home”, the Papal
encyclical on the environment, in which Pope Francis appeals for ‘a new
dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a
conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we
are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.’7 He says ‘the
ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion.’8

Aligning with this outlook, the thesis asserts that the rapid growth of the CSG
industry, and the polarising debate that accompanies it, are significant enough
to warrant reflection on Australians’ relationship with the land. It locates this
within a theological reading of land in Australia and crafts public theology praxis

6 N. Klein, This Changes Everything (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 155.
7 Francis, Laudato Si’ (Rome 2015), para 14.
8 Ibid., 217.
that advocates a conversation be started about giving consideration to embedding the rights of the land in CSG policy.

1.3 Pioneering theology

A literature search undertaken at the start of the research project found only limited theological reflection on CSG mining and the regulation of an industry that is growing exponentially. A 2011 report of a Uniting Church Mining Taskgroup, for example, admitted to little theological commentary. It located mining within the context of the question ‘If we are to continue the way we are living what are the principles which embody stewardship of the environment and justice for the people affected?’. It implicitly assumed that stewardship was an adequate theological concept, and that justice should be understood in terms of human justice.

In a similar vein, a year later Anglicare Southern Queensland expressed a desire to explore the complex theological issues associated with CSG when it released its Coal Seam Gas Discussion Paper. The paper was discussed at a CSG public forum held in Toowoomba, but little attention was given to theological issues. It did not explore the theological foundations for action, or how theology might change CSG policy. Rather, the forum focused on practical and pastoral matters on which the church might act in response to the grievances and problems arising out of CSG mining, including:

- supporting and providing pastoral care to the weak, marginalised and powerless (e.g. affected farmers and the land);
- advocating a specific outcome (e.g. environmental protection, economic growth, or balanced development);
- pressing for justice (e.g. fair treatment of all interested parties, domestic and international);
- educating the decision-makers (e.g. an informed, professional and independent presentation of relevant facts, ethical considerations and resulting choices); and

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• being peace-makers in an increasingly polarised debate.\textsuperscript{11}

Theological reflection, however, has the potential to influence the very mindsets that shape CSG public policy. Theology can challenge one’s \textit{habitus} (de la Torre), prompt a change in the sphere of human conscience (Havel) and assist in re-imagining a relationship with the planet (Klein). It is, by its very nature, pioneering as it explores new ways of understanding the created order and thus offers itself as a participant in the dialogue proposed by Pope Francis.

Metaphorically, the thesis has much in common with Australia’s early explorers who ventured into unknown territory, their outlook shaped by a western heritage but needing to adapt to a new land. Just as non-indigenous attitudes towards land in Australia have changed over 225 years, so too the thesis explores changes in theological attitudes towards the land derived from a western Christian heritage. It then maps emerging insights.

In adopting an exploratory approach, the thesis develops a public theology praxis that is theologically defensible, inspirational rather than dogmatic, attractive rather than coercive, and communicated in terms that will be understood in the public square. It does not claim to be the only theological response; nor does it suggest adoption of its initiatives necessitates acceptance of its theological foundations. Rather, in its embrace of ‘imaginative apologetics’ it assumes no privileging or moral ascendancy of its outlook in responding to a post-secular society that welcomes faith-based inputs. At the same time, however, it seeks to witness to the glory of God in Creation.

This response looks beyond the development of ‘new machines, new regulations, new institutions’ (Havel). It concludes that finding solutions to the complex issues raised by CSG mining is more than a matter of collecting additional data to facilitate improved scientific monitoring, strengthening environmental protection legislation and brokering commercial deals between interested parties.

\textsuperscript{11} C. Dalton, “Fracking Theology,” in \textit{Queensland Churches Environmental Network Seminar} (Toowoomba 2013).
In doing so, the thesis finds a theological ally in St Francis. His response to the world around was, in the words of Pope Francis, ‘so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection.' At the heart of St Francis’ response is a worldview that regards the land in terms of relationships rather than as an object or commodity.

One example in the thesis of this emphasis on relationships can be seen in the way a reference to ‘the land’ becomes a reference to ‘Land’. This was a consequence of the author experiencing Land on a ‘Spirit Journey’ in Central Australia. Intellect, experience, science and imagination all inform one another in constructive ways and deliver new insights that can transform policy.

1.4 Indigenous perspectives

An Australian theology of land is incomplete if it fails to incorporate indigenous perspectives and/or colonises indigenous theological insights. Lessons, for instance, can be learnt from the parallels between Aboriginal resistance to European occupation and landowners’ resistance to CSG mining. In this regard, Rainbow Spirit Theology opens with the symbolism of the strangler fig whose seed finds a home in a kauri pine. It then notes that over the years ‘the generous host is slowly crushed’, and identifies European missionaries with the strangler fig and the Christian message as being imposed from above.

Indigenous spirituality is a major area of theological interest in its own right; it merits extensive study by researchers with appropriate skills, cultural heritage and knowledge. Indigenous art, for example, provides a rich source of spiritual insights, but its analysis requires a commitment of resources that go well beyond the capacity of the thesis, and so has not been pursued.

Instead, the thesis is informed by indigenous theological insights such as Rainbow Spirit Theology and the spiritual importance of ‘country’ to Aboriginal

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12 Francis, *On Care for Our Common Home*, para 11.
people. Recognising the value of these inputs, the thesis developed a strategy aimed at promoting and furthering a mutually beneficial faith dialogue. Mapping an Australian theology of Land is in an embryonic stage and it is appropriate to foster an approach that stimulates theological imagination and creativity and welcomes indigenous perspectives. Hence the thesis speaks in terms of an evolving Australian theology of land.

With regard to the potential for theological colonisation, the thesis draws on indigenous insights into issues surrounding European settlement. In particular, these insights provide a way to reflect on how western Christian theology has shaped attitudes and behaviour towards Aboriginal people, and what lessons can be learnt from this with regard to the treatment of Land (Chapter 9).

1.5 Thesis structure

The structure of the thesis reflects the adoption of an iterative research process. It progressively

- charts the methodology followed and the issues shaping it (Chapter 2);
- provides an overview of the theological treatment of land (Chapter 3);
- develops a conceptual approach towards a theology of land (Chapter 4);
- describes the CSG industry (Chapter 5);
- discusses CSG public policy developments and gaps (Chapter 6);
- explores how Australian landscape art and poetry point to a growing consciousness of the land within the Australian psyche (Chapter 7);
- reflects on a personal experience of Land (Chapter 8)
- reviews what form a public theology response to the CSG debate might take (Chapter 9);
- applies earlier theology of land insights to the Australian context and hears the Voice of Land in the CSG public policy debate (Chapter 10); and
- proposes specific public theology initiatives that include a preferential option for Land (Chapter 11).

Chapter 2 describes the process followed in undertaking the research and developing the thesis. It defines the research boundaries. For example, the research was not directed towards answering scientific issues (is there a causal
link between CSG mining and human ill-health?), making policy judgements (does the regulatory regime address water pollution adequately?), or undertaking economic assessments (do benefits exceed costs?). Rather, its focus was on understanding the industry sufficiently well in order to be able to make informed assessments about the regulatory policy framework and the factors that have shaped it.

The chapter also discusses two significant issues encountered during the course of the research, namely policy neutrality and the transdisciplinary nature of the research topic.

CSG is an emotionally charged subject for many of the policy stakeholders. Policy decision-makers, however, are attracted to a fact-based policy neutrality that assists in setting a ‘level playing field’ that establishes a verifiable, accountable regulatory framework. In response, the thesis advocates the position that in a post-secular liberal democratic society both religious and secular worldviews (and values implicit in them) cannot be ignored, but need to be identified and taken into account in policy decisions.

The chapter also outlines how the challenge of a transdisciplinary research topic has led to a more discursive, open-ended approach, rather than the adoption of proof arguments in support of a particular hypothesis. It argues that common perceptions of land emerging from different sources (such as Australian landscape art, poetry and personal experience) provide insights that complement those obtained through rational analysis and investigation.

Chapter 3 describes the emergence and evolution of a theological treatment of the land. The word ‘land’ is used in the thesis to cover all the non-human (both animate and inanimate) elements of Creation. The chapter commences with an overview of Walter Brueggemann’s proposal that land provides a central way of organising biblical theology.\textsuperscript{14} It then maps the evolving scope of ecotheology

\textsuperscript{14}W. Brueggemann, \textit{The Land: Place as Promise, Gift, and Challenge in Biblical Faith}, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
and finishes with a discussion of insights developed by Douglas Meeks, Sallie McFague and Kathryn Tanner that centre on the concept of a cosmic economy of salvation.

This review then questions whether there is a theological blind spot: are these insights too otherworldly to address sufficiently well the pragmatic realities and constraints of living in a finite and transient world? Are the concepts of the abundance of God’s righteousness (Meeks), the flourishing of all Creation (McFague) and an economy of grace where what benefits one benefits all (Tanner) too utopian to have practical application in the public square?

Pope Francis, for instance, notes that ‘theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract.’ Other views can be more judgemental. Steven Bouma-Prediger, for example, records the observation that ‘many people view Christianity, especially Christian theology, as ecologically bankrupt and morally blameworthy – as an irredeemable part of the disease and no possible part of the cure.’

**Chapter 4** takes a different approach by exploring more recent reflections that extend a theological understanding of land. First it looks at contributions by Alistair McFadyen and Ernst Conradie to draw some fresh insights into the relationship between humanity and the land that take into account issues of finitude, human nature, mortality and the relationship between God and Creation.

These insights lead to consideration of applying the principles of well-being, justice and rights to the land as well as humanity. Supporting this concept is

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18 Francis, *On Care for Our Common Home*, para 17.
Rachel Muers’ discussion of a theology of creatures, her concept of co-creatureliness, the biblical theme of earth’s praise and lament and her view that ‘there is an issue here of justice in the doing of theology … (i)f nonhuman voices are not heard and recognised within theological texts … theology perpetuates a wrong.’

How, then, might public theology pursue issues of ecojustice? In response to this question, the chapter explores a commentary by Ted Jennings on Derrida and Paul and the tension between justice and law, the aporetic nature of gift (Earth is often described as a gift of God: ‘we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others’) and the place of rights in law.

The chapter then makes the case that, to establish greater equity between humanity and land in law, the insights of Derrida and Paul can guide policy development, particularly where complex judgements need to be made between the interests of the land and the interests of humanity. This sets a theological framework for consideration of the rights of the land.

Whilst Chapter 4 has no special focus on an Australian context, it discusses the diverse ways in which land is understood theologically, noting the presence of complexity, ambiguity and mystery in this mix. It concludes by constructing a conceptual theological framework against which to explore Australians’ relationship with the land.

Chapter 5 describes the CSG mining industry in Australia. It outlines, in particular, the geological structures within which CSG is found, how CSG is mined, the benefits of mining CSG, the regulation of CSG and landowner, health and environmental issues.

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24 Francis, On Care for Our Common Home, para 159.
The chapter does not, however, seek to reach definitive conclusions about the costs and benefits, safety, and environmental impacts of CSG mining. Such analyses rightfully belong within the responsibilities of the relevant expert professionals. Rather, the purpose of the chapter is to highlight the contentious issues so that they are properly understood, and can then be explored in an informed way through taking a theological reading of land in Australia.

Chapter 6 initiates this analytical process by describing the public policy debate that has shaped the regulation of the CSG industry. It does this by providing an overview of the CSG-related political developments in Australia over the last 20 years. This overview is followed by a reflection on the adequacy or otherwise of Australian CSG policy. The chapter discusses what policy gaps public theology praxis might seek to address. It identifies a convergence within public policy towards economic determinism, scientific rationalism and anthropocentric utilitarianism.

The chapter concludes that goals such as human prosperity, survival and national development dominate the shape of the Australian regulatory framework. It then questions if the anthropocentric objectification of land that this outlook reflects aligns with how Australians see the land today.

Chapter 7 marks a significant shift in the research away from public policy processes and theological considerations towards Australian cultural insights – poetry and landscape art in particular – to gain new perspectives on how land is understood and valued in Australia.

First it explores the poetry of Judith Wright, a well-known and respected Australian poet. Her poetry reflects a progressive discovery of a spiritual connection with land, stimulated, in part, by her reflection on white settlers (including her own family) who dispossessed Aboriginals of their land. It provides a sobering backdrop against which to evaluate the challenges landowners face when confronted by the advent of CSG mining and the rhetoric of economic prosperity and development.
The chapter then describes the insights Australian landscape art provides into how non-indigenous attitudes to the land have evolved since European settlement. These attitudes range from an early view of Terra Nullius, ‘a region utterly unknown to man and as utterly forsaken by God,’\textsuperscript{25} to a visit to Uluru being compared with a visit to Chartres cathedral ‘coming up against the immensity and miraculousness of nature’\textsuperscript{26} and Lake Eyre, the lowest point below sea level and in Australia’s “Dead Centre”, being painted as ‘a womb shape, surrounded by squiggles and blobs of squirming life.’\textsuperscript{27} In 2015, spirituality sits alongside godforsakenness in the way Australians regard the land.

The chapter concludes there is a need to have a ‘multiterranean’ approach to Land. This outlook reflects the complexities inherent in any relationship, rather than one that is informed by treating Land primarily as an object of human utility, a commodity in a market economy.

**Chapter 8** personalises these insights. It describes how it was at this point in the research process that the author began to conceptualise land in terms of relationships, and so to capitalise references to Land. This change was influenced by his participation in a ‘Spirit Journey’ in Central Australia\textsuperscript{28} and, a few months later, by a close encounter with metastatic cancer.

The chapter includes commentary on inspiration gained through the Spirit Journey, personal poetry and artwork. It bears testimony to a shift in what de la Torre would call the author’s *habitus*, that was formed by an education centred on mathematics and the physical sciences, and subsequently shaped by 20 years working in a public service environment that championed the provision of informed, objective, rational and independent policy advice.

This shift can be seen in the thesis’ use of ambiguity and mystery, recognition of the Voice of Land, championing of relationships and embrace of culture. All are

\textsuperscript{25} C. Brown, *Pilgrim through This Barren Land* (Sunderland, NSW: Albatross Books, 1991), 55.
\textsuperscript{26} NSW Art Gallery notes on Lloyd Rees, *The Great Rock at Dusk*, 1977.
\textsuperscript{28} Experienced in July 2013. See [http://www.desertjourneys.com](http://www.desertjourneys.com), retrieved 26 June 2015
presented as complementing the insights of economics, science, reason and pragmatism. The challenge that this presented was how to incorporate them into a public theology praxis.

Chapter 9 draws on insights provided by Elaine Graham (public theology in a post-secular society)\(^{29}\) and Timothy Gorringe (all great art can function as secular parables)\(^{30}\) to develop an appropriate strategy for contributing to the CSG public policy debate. It uses the metaphor of public theology as a Divine Art Gallery\(^{31}\) to describe this approach, whereby theological ‘fragments’\(^{32}\) are presented in a way that helpfully informs a post-secular society through

- **communication** – the use of cultural inputs such as poetry and landscape art provides an effective and appropriate way to communicate ideas and concepts in the public square, independent of individual belief systems;

- **powerlessness** – in a society wary of religious imperialism, use of art is non-coercive: artists have little control over how others interpret their creations, yet works of art can transform the outlook of individuals;

- **transcendence** – art can express ideas and concepts beyond the reach of language, and so has the potential to be a catalyst in generating ‘a change in the sphere of human conscience’ (Havel); and

- **dialogue** – the very ambiguity and interrogative nature of art can foster dialogue between diverse interests and deliver policy solutions that complement economic quantification and scientific rationalism.

The chapter concludes with a summary of how the Divine Art Gallery has filled up during the course of the research with a wall hanging on Land, landscape art, poetry, policy submissions, media articles and public presentations.

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\(^{31}\) The use of this metaphor was inspired by the writings of Father George Tyrrell who, in 1903, urged a transformation of the church from an authoritarian institution to an “art-school of Divine Majesty” P. Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 122.

Chapter 10 revisits the theological foundations of the research in chapters 3 and 4, and reflects on how they might be extended in the light of chapters 5 to 8. Particular theological concepts that are explored include:

- **Theology from below** – The chapter draws on Bonhoeffer’s concept of taking account of the view from below by listening to indigenous voices. It explores how this concept assists in hearing the Voice of Land, rejecting the notion of a theological Terra Nullius, gaining insights through the gift of indigenous spirituality and recognising Land’s incarnational nature.

- **Diaspora** – Indigenous people see themselves as displaced by European settlement, as might landowners today affected by the advent of CSG exploration and mining. Migrants are also in diaspora, having left or fled their home countries to resettle in Australia. Similarly Land in Australia is experiencing dislocation from its previous timeless, unchanging existence, as a result of extensive natural resource development.

- **Neighbour** – These considerations reaffirm the mutual nature of the relationship between Australians and Land, best summarised as them being beloved fellow travellers in the ‘restless journey of the cosmos.’ This leads to contemplation of the question “Who is my neighbour?” within a theology of land context.

The chapter concludes by asserting that the Voice of Land can be heard through Australian landscape art, poetry, experience, community input to the policy debate, spirituality and a plethora of government inquiries and reports. It is summarised by quoting from Rainbow Spirit Theology: ‘The land cries: “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” The cry of the land is the cry of Christ, echoing through the ages, as Christ continues to suffer with us and for us.’

Chapter 11 brings together the two theological streams in the thesis, namely that of the theological treatment of Land and the development of a public theology strategy tailored to CSG developments in Australia. It draws on Wansbrough’s discussion of middle axioms, which she describes as

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34 Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, 143.
provisional … the best wisdom of the moment … evolving … [they] … translate theological concepts into forms which are usable in the public policy process, and which can link to the policy concerns of people outside the church who, nevertheless share similar views and aspirations for society.\textsuperscript{36}

Two main activities are suggested: (i) a focus on education, awareness-raising and reflection on the mantra of ‘ecologically sustainable development’ to assist the Voice of Land being heard and (ii) starting a conversation about incorporation of the rights of Land into legislation.

The core theological arguments in support of this action are:

- Land is a beloved part of God’s Creation, a ‘co-creature’ with humanity;\textsuperscript{37}
- Australians have denied Land’s co-creatureliness by commodifying Land in their regulation of CSG mining;
- Land is crying out and Australians need to hear and respond to its cry: ‘the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22);’ \textsuperscript{38} and, consequently,
- the validity of a preferential option for Land.

1.6 Concluding comments

I have observed the misery of my people … I have heard their cry … I know their suffering, and I have come to deliver them (Exod 3:7, 8).

Guiding ecojustice principles for the Earth Bible Team include The Principle of Voice whereby ‘Earth … is capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.’\textsuperscript{39} One outcome from looking at the CSG industry in Australia through the lens of an evolving Australian theology of land is that of hearing and recognising the Voice of Land resonating loudly in both praise and lament.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Muers, “Creatures.”
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Francis, \textit{On Care for Our Common Home}, para 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} N. C. Habel, \textit{Readings from the Perspective of Earth} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 46.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Muers, “Creatures,” 92.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
To respond to this Voice, however, requires a shift away from the prevailing mind-set that dominates CSG policy development. This mind-set is one of anthropocentric utilitarianism that implicitly defines the Common Good in terms of benefits to humanity. Public theology praxis, informed by an evolving Australian theology of land, provides a way forward, by drawing attention to the need for a conversation to be engaged about the rights of Land. This will involve a dialogue across secular and faith boundaries.

A provocative precedent can be found in Moses seeking to engage in a dialogue with Pharaoh about the plight of the Israelites in Egypt. Whatever scientific, economic and political rationalism was used at that time to justify the treatment of the Israelites, there was a greater imperative of justice that needed to be addressed. The thesis applies the same principle to the treatment of Land in the regulation of the CSG industry in Australia today.
Chapter 2 Methodology

The thesis topic presented three avenues for research, namely (i) a theology of land, (ii) the CSG industry, and (iii) public theology. A research methodology was adopted whereby each area was to be investigated, prior to the theology being contextualised by application to CSG developments in Australia.

This approach commenced with researching the evolution of ecotheology, and exploring an Australian theology of land in particular. It assumed that a theological reading of land in Australia could provide insights into a land-orientated policy issue that evokes passionate and polarising debate across Australian society. The emerging importance of land in the Australian psyche that was identified during the research served to confirm the value of a theological focus on land.

Implicit in this approach was an assumption of a linear process: (i) articulate relevant theological principles; (ii) understand the CSG industry in Australia; and (iii) formulate an appropriate public theology praxis that applies the developed theological framework to the CSG industry. The reality proved to be somewhat different, as a result of the embryonic nature of both an Australian theology of land and CSG public policy.

2.1 An evolving theology of land

As described in Chapter 3, the first step was the conduct of a literature search on the topic ‘theology of land’. This search did not lead to the development of a definitive, systematic theological framework, however, but to the identification of a growing complexity in theological thinking about the land that has evolved over the last 30 years (Chapter 4). For instance, Muers notes that:

It is now relatively well established in scholarship that the picture that dominated late twentieth-century theology, of a Bible created by nomads for whom land, place and the cycle of the seasons were of relatively minor importance, is a distorted or exaggerated one, and there is a growing body of research on the theological significance of land.¹

¹ Ibid., 98.
This is illustrated by theological insights such as:

- Brueggemann’s proposal that the land provides a central way of organising biblical theology, and his description of the land as a place of ‘gift’, ‘promise’ and ‘challenge’;

- Paul Santmire’s exploration of the eschatological fate of the non-human creation, his use of the metaphors of ‘ascent’, ‘fecundity’ and ‘migration’ to describe humanity’s relationship with the land, and his reference to ‘the ambiguous ecological promise of Christian theology’;

- Norman Habel’s recognition of the voice of Earth, identification of six discrete land ideologies in the Old Testament and articulation of six ecojustice principles that include the universe, earth and all its components having intrinsic worth;

- Geoffrey Lilburne’s introduction of a Christological perspective in noting that Aboriginal spirituality offered ‘a profound example of an incarnational ethic of land’, which Rainbow Spirit Theology characterises as ‘Christ is in our camp, in our land and is a part of our culture’;

- Michael Northcott’s reference to a cosmic economy of salvation: ‘The resurrection of mankind apart from creation would be a gospel of a sort, but a purely gnostic and world-denying sort that is far from the gospel that the apostles actually preached’;

- Hilary Marlow’s suggestion of an ‘ecological triangle’ where land has its own intrinsic worth and relationship with the divine, independent of humanity;

- Denis Edwards’ view that ‘the event of Jesus Christ can be understood as the self-transcendence of the created universe into God’;

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6 Readings from the Perspective of Earth, 24.
8 Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology, 60.
• Muers’ discussion of a theology of creatures that incorporates the earth and the plants, arguing that ‘undermining anthropocentrism is a move towards the formation of a theocentric account of humanity and of the world.’

These insights bring under the theological spotlight humanity’s relationship with the land, the land’s relationship with the divine, objectification of the land, ecojustice, Christology, God’s economy of salvation, eschatology and the nature of creation. The complexities emerging from this theological reading of land were further increased by consideration of questions such as:

• The land is often described as God’s gift to humanity, but might humanity also be described as God’s gift to the land?

• Does the land express the nature of God and is it, like humanity, made in the image of God?

• Is the land sinful, good or without morality?

• What is the good news for creation, as in ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’ (Mark 16: 15)?

• Is the eschatological New Earth a purely spiritual existence?

This foray into a theology of land gleaned a rich harvest of theological insights and questions. It also provided a starting point for developing a theological input to the CSG policy debate. The complexities it unearthed, however, militated against expositing a definitive systematic theology of land at this stage.

Instead, as a way of summarising the range of attitudes towards land, Chapter 4 concludes with the creation of a broad conceptual framework centred on alternative ways to regard the land. Whilst there is a theological foundation, secular concepts are used. The framework provides a way to communicate in the public square different ways of understanding attitudes to the land. It is thus more a public theology tool than a framework for a systematic theology of land.

The framework also provided a starting point for analysing the CSG public policy debate and understanding the contextual niche against which to explore

\[12\] Muers, "Creatures," 91.
a theological reading of land in Australia. The linear research process evolved into a more iterative research cycle in the formulation of public theology praxis.

2.2 An evolving CSG public policy debate

Chapter 5 describes the CSG industry and Chapter 6 the evolution of CSG policy in Australia, which has involved scientific investigations, parliamentary inquiries, regulatory reviews, economic analyses and public debate. These studies addressed concerns and uncertainties surrounding the impact of CSG mining on agriculture, water quality, water availability, ecosystems, health and the environment. They highlighted the breadth and dynamic nature of the CSG industry, and the complexity of the regulatory arrangements that surround it.

Further, the research into the public debate provided evidence that CSG mining is a complex and dynamic policy issue that generates strong emotions. Many issues were raised, giving rise to the methodological challenge of where to place research boundaries in order to focus on those areas in which a theological input can most helpfully make a contribution.

For this reason, the research did not duplicate the various investigations, inquiries, reviews and analyses. Nor did it question their findings or suggest alternative policy options. Neither did the research examine, or reach conclusions about, issues such as

- whether the benefits of CSG mining outweigh the environmental and social costs;
- whether landowners are treated justly and fairly under the relevant laws;
- the extent to which CSG might contribute to global warming;
- whether the regulatory regime addresses water pollution and supply issues adequately; and
- the evidence for a link between CSG mining and human ill-health.

These are important and complex issues, but analysis of them was not the main research target. That analysis lies, more appropriately, within the competence of the relevant expert professionals.
Rather, the primary issue selected for theological analysis was that of worldviews that shape CSG policy decisions. The policy rhetoric implicitly endorses the mantra of ecologically sustainable development and the benefits it can deliver in terms of improved standards of living, employment and export earnings. The research found, however, that differences between supporters and opponents of CSG mining were not resolved by this dominant policy advocacy of the merits of economic growth.

2.3 Theology and the public policy development process

The research found that both a theology of land and the CSG public policy framework in Australia are complex and evolving. This complexity, in turn, raised the question of whether an embryonic theology of land can realistically be expected to add value to a policy debate surrounding an industry that, itself, is in the vanguard of significant social, industrial and national changes.

The thesis takes the view that it is precisely here that theology can contribute. By taking a non-prescriptive approach that wrestles with uncertainty and complexity, theology can assist interested parties to explore issues emerging in an industry where outlooks are contested and policy is still evolving. This open-ended approach contrasts with the uncritical and almost ideological advocacy of anthropocentric utilitarianism and economic growth that the research found permeated government and industry rhetoric surrounding CSG public policy.

2.3.1 The interrogative nature of theology

Relevant here are the thesis’ use of a theological reading of land as a catalyst (rather than advocacy of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’) and Gorringe’s view that theology is ‘essentially interrogative’.\(^\text{13}\) In this way, the thesis seeks to stimulate discussion of worldviews that are implicit in CSG policy (Chapter 9). In other words, the open-ended nature of theological analysis can constructively assist the policy development process by highlighting and critiquing the dominance or bias of the prevailing worldviews that underpin CSG public policy. Two particular contributions theology can make are:

\(^{13}\) Gorringe, *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art*, 17.
• theological analysis that draws attention to pretensions to neutrality in public policy by highlighting the values shaping public policy; and
• theological input that provides a benchmark against which dominant values can be identified and critiqued.

2.3.2 Lessons from liberation theology

This interrogation of the status quo is a feature of liberation theology, which questions dominant outlooks in society. Relevant here to the development of a public theology strategy is Juan Luis Segundo’s hermeneutic circle. Its key features are:

Preconditions
• profound and enriching questions and suspicions about our current reality.
• a new interpretation of the Bible that is equally profound and enriching.

Factors of the circle
• our way of experiencing reality that leads us to ideological suspicion.
• application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular.
• a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account.
• that we end up with a new way of interpreting the Bible with new elements at our disposal.  

The applicability of a liberation theology approach to the development of a CSG-related public theology strategy is not surprising given the thesis' focus on issues of justice and the rights of Land. Muers addresses this theme in her discussion of a theology of creatures where she notes there are ‘important though not exact parallels to the concerns of liberation theologies.'  

Ann Wansbrough, too, in discussing a methodology for the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) to contribute to public policy debate in Australia,

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15 Muers, "Creatures," 91.
draws on Segundo’s hermeneutic circle and how it leads to praxis.\textsuperscript{16} Praxis is taken to mean ‘a coalescence of action, spirituality and theological reflection.’\textsuperscript{17}

2.3.3 Critiquing worldviews

But is this almost subversive methodology that questions established practices and worldviews needed for theological reflection on CSG public policy in Australia? If the thesis just proposed a strengthening of environmental protection legislation, then the need to critique the worldviews underpinning the legislation would be of less importance.

This is not the case. The research identified both an implicit bias towards anthropocentric utilitarianism (Chapter 6), and evolving attitudes in Australia towards Land that did not accord with this utilitarianism (Chapter 7). Further, these matters are not being addressed in the formulation of CSG public policy. At the very heart of these issues are different worldviews influencing attitudes towards Land, as portrayed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 4.

The methodology the thesis adopts in critiquing worldviews with regard to Land has its parallels in the actions of Wilberforce, a man driven by his Christian principles to abolish the slave trade. Eric Metaxas, for example, asserts that the impact of what Wilberforce did served to change the ethical outlook of society:

\begin{quote}
He vanquished the very mind-set that made slavery acceptable ... He destroyed an entire way of seeing the world ... we would never again question whether it was our responsibility as society to help those less fortunate ... Today we call this having a “social conscience”, and we can’t imagine any modern, civilized society without one.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

By engaging in an interrogative methodology, the thesis brings a policy focus to bear on the theological and other worldviews that have shaped Australians’ attitude to Land, and so to CSG mining.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{18} E. Metaxas, \textit{Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery} (Oxford: Monarch Press, 2007), xv, xvi.
2.4 Theological influences in public policy

A starting point for this theological excursion is set by the outlook expressed by the explorer Stuart who, in planting a Union Jack in what he thought was the centre of Australia, said ‘We then gave three hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civil and religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilisation and Christianity is about to break upon them.’

Within that context, Meredith Lake’s conclusion about early settlement in Australia, that natural resource development was motivated and shaped by a religious worldview, is not surprising:

Protestantism helped lay the foundations for colonial society by encouraging the transformation of the environment according to colonists’ values and needs, and by providing the ideological support for the British use and occupation of the territory. Prominent Protestants applied their religious beliefs to Australia in ways that tended to assist, legitimate or even necessitate the colonization of the land.

Her view is supported by David Reichardt’s study of the influence of theology on human impacts on the waterways of the Murray-Darling Basin. His particular perspective was Lynn White’s proposition that Christianity, as it had developed in the West, had formed the worldview responsible for today’s ecologic crisis, a worldview that emphasised humanity’s dominion over nature. Reichardt concluded that, with regard to environmental degradation in the Murray-Darling Basin, White’s “ecological complaint” against Western Christianity was supported. Theology has downstream effects!

These studies point to the past influence of religious beliefs on natural resource development in Australia. As discussed in Chapter 6, however, more recently the goals of economic development and growth have come to dominate the

20 M. Lake, "Protestantism, the Land and the Colonisation of Australia, 1788 - 1850" (Sydney University, 2008), 1.
22 D. C. Reichardt, Release the River!: An Ecotheological Reading of How the Murray-Darling’s Human Habitants Have Affected Its Waterways (Delhi: ISPCK, 2015), xiii.
public policy agenda. Ian Barns, in commenting on the decline of religious influence in Australia, puts it this way:

The displacement of ‘religion’ is reinforced by the ideological dominance, particularly among cultural elites, of a secularist public philosophy which consistently down plays the historical significance of ‘religion’ in Australian history ... The dominant languages of public life – of economics, of public policy, of scientific and technical expertise are still overwhelmingly secular in nature.  

This influence of worldviews, be they secular or religious, can be characterised by a rewording of Lake’s conclusion: ‘Prominent politicians, industry magnates and community leaders apply their worldviews to Australia in ways that tend to assist, legitimate or even necessitate the economic resource development of the land’.

2.5 Theology’s potential to stimulate policy changes

Drawing on these insights, a core methodological issue the thesis addresses is that of crafting a public theology that can contribute to CSG policy development in Australia in a constructive way. Regulation of this industry presents a particular challenge, given its complexity, embryonic nature, and the need for a transdisciplinary approach. As Wansbrough states:

In the world of policy-making, the simple questions of Christian ethics about what is right or wrong are inadequate ... The abstract vision of justice, peace and the integrity of creation becomes, in the policy arena, a much more complicated network of questions about particular areas that in turn involve questions of history, law, economics, science, society, ethics and politics, not only as academic disciplines, but as questions about human life, reality and social, cultural, commercial, and political relationships. They lead to questions about perspective, worldviews, ideologies, priorities and motives (my emphasis). They lead also to questions about compromise, the art of the possible, and the exercise of policy judgement.

The thesis therefore analyses the adequacy and sufficiency of the public policy embrace of economic growth by identifying what other outlooks shaping

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attitudes relating to CSG mining are evident in Australia. To undertake this analysis, theological insights drawn from sources in addition to scientific investigations, parliamentary inquiries, regulatory reviews and economic analyses were also explored.

The primary new sources were Australian poetry and landscape art. Whilst they do not focus on CSG mining specifically, their insights into attitudes towards the land are instructive (Chapter 7). They also prepared the author for the impact of his experience of Land (Chapter 8).

These insights presented a further methodological challenge, namely that of integrating them into a contemporary public theology strategy that can inform a fast-moving CSG public policy debate centred on scientific rationalism, economic quantification and legal determinism.

2.6 Crafting a public theology strategy

Several parameters have been set in the development of this theological input to the public debate surrounding the CSG industry:

- The thesis uses the CSG industry as a relevant case study for exploring wider issues relating to the ecological crisis humanity is facing. Its outlook is not one of responding to an occasional issue, but one of discerning the broader issues that are at stake.
- When defining a broader theological framework, the thesis needs to secure a space in the marketplace of ideas. In this regard it is mindful of Linell Cady’s observation about the need to respect ‘the Enlightenment distinction between open inquiry and dogmatic citation, and work to combat the authoritarian traces that linger on in contemporary theology.’
- The input needs to be both theological and bilingual. The thesis therefore identifies core theological issues that are at stake (for people with a faith perspective), but presents them in the public square in a way that does not assume a faith perspective. A challenge is to present the input in such a way as to be motivational for both faith and secular communities.

Sebastian Kim provides an overview of public theology that assists in this regard. Quoting Martin Marty, he describes public theology as ‘an effort to interpret the life of a people in the light of a transcendent reference’ such that doing public theology is to exhibit a ‘commitment to relate private faith to public order.’ He then makes a number of general observations about public theology:

- theology is inherently public;
- theology is not neutral;
- ‘public’ refers to an openness to engage in debate;
- theologians must educate both the Christian community and the general public about the public relevance of theology; and
- public theology is contextual.

2.6.1 Religion and the public sphere

A starting point for Kim’s discussion of the nature of public theology is Jürgen Habermas’ concept of the public sphere, which was created by the recognition of three sets of rights:

First, the right of radical-critical debate and political representation – freedom of speech and opinion, the free press, freedom of assembly, and so on; second the right to personal freedom and the inviolability of the home; and third, the right of private ownership, which required equity before the law.

Habermas also identified four spheres of the democratic public (formal institutions and processes of governance; the market and labour; voluntary and community organisations; and public opinion). Kim comments that this initial theoretical framework was ‘based on emerging male bourgeois societies, and therefore heavily criticized by feminist theorists, and many of his ideas need to be revised to meet the demand of the contemporary complex situations of plural societies.’ In response, Kim identifies six main bodies engaged in the public

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26 Ibid., 5.
27 Ibid., 9, 10.
28 Ibid., 10, 11.
29 As described in Graham, Between a Rock and a Hard Place, 85.
30 Kim, Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate, 11.
sphere: State, Media, Religious Communities, Academies, Civil Society and Market.  

Kim locates theology primarily in the academic and religious spheres, but notes that public theology deliberately expands its sources, audiences and applications in the public sphere in association with the other four players. That is the intention of the thesis in its advocacy of the need for dialogue. It is also found in Pope Francis’ call for a conversation about the environment that includes everyone.

Whilst there is no agreed academic characterisation of the public sphere in today’s post-secular society (this is discussed further in Chapter 9), a factor that cannot be ignored is the diminishing but enduring existence of a religious sector. As noted by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams:

> The sphere of public and political negotiation flourishes only in the context of larger commitments and visions, and that if this is forgotten or repressed by a supposedly neutral ideology of the public sphere, immense damage is done to the moral energy of a liberal society.

Thus, not only is the religious sector seeking to engage in dialogue across the public sphere, but also the public sphere benefits from engaging with the religious sector.

### 2.6.2 Public theological praxis

How, then, might the religious sector participate in the public sphere in a healthy and effective way? Kim ‘warmly commends’ John de Gruchy’s seven theses, whereby good public theological praxis:

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31 Ibid., 13. Figure 1
32 Ibid., 14.
34 de Vries, quoted in Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, xviii.
35 Rowan Williams, quoted in Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate*, 181.
36 Ibid., 15.
1. does not seek to give preference to Christianity but to witness to values that Christians believe are important for the common good;
2. requires the development of a language that is accessible to people outside the Christian tradition, and is convincing in its own right; but it also needs to address Christian congregations in a language whereby public debates are related to the traditions of faith;
3. requires an informed knowledge of public policy and issues, grasping the implications of what is at stake, and subjecting this to sharp analytical evaluation and theological critique;
4. requires doing theology in a way that is interdisciplinary in character and uses a methodology in which content and process are intertwined;
5. gives priority to the perspective of victims and survivors, and to the restoration of justice; it sides with the powerless against the powerful, and seeks to speak truth to power drawing its inspiration from the prophetic trajectory in the Bible;
6. requires congregations that are consciously nurtured and informed by biblical and theological reflection and a rich life of worship in relation to the context within which they are situated, both locally and more widely;
7. requires a spirituality that enables a lived experience of God, with people and with creation, fed by a longing for justice and wholeness and a resistance to all that thwarts well-being.37

In developing a public theological strategy, the thesis has adopted de Gruchy’s approach. It has therefore incorporated most of his themes, such as no preferential treatment of Christianity; accessible language; knowledge of relevant policy; an interdisciplinary (‘transdisciplinary’ in the thesis) approach; giving priority to the powerless (eg. Land); justice; and biblical foundations.

2.6.3 Pretensions to neutrality

In adopting de Gruchy’s approach, the thesis also takes the position that the development of public policy is rarely neutral, objective and value-free, and that public theology provides a constructive way to identify and evaluate relevant worldviews in the policy development process. Cady, for example, makes the point that theologians must ‘unmask the impossible pretensions to neutrality and universality that underlie the Enlightenment understanding of public, and the public exercise of reason.’38

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38 Quoted in Kim, Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate, 8.
Graham also addresses the issue of neutrality and presents a similar view to Williams regarding the contribution faith inputs can make to public policy formulation:

It is not clear ... non-theological reasoning is any the less subjective or partial than any other form of public discourse. Similarly, the expectation that only people of faith might ‘bracket out’ their deepest moral convictions is no longer viewed as the ideal condition for participation in political life – on the contrary, it is increasingly regarded as a restriction on the exercise of free citizenship.\(^{39}\)

These observations are particularly pertinent to the CSG debate in Australia. For example an ABC report in 2014, under the banner *Move to limit ideological objections to Qld mining projects*, stated that the Queensland Government ‘was looking to restrict who can object to mining applications, in a bid to crack down on what it calls philosophical opposition to projects.’\(^{40}\)

At best this statement might be understood as a pretension of neutrality. It implies government policy does not have a bias, presumably because it relies on a rational approach that uses tools such as economic analysis and scientific research. As discussed in Chapter 6, however, this approach still delivers a policy outcome shaped by an uncritical acceptance of a dominant philosophy that champions economic development and growth.

A task for a public theology methodology is thus how to promote recognition and discussion of worldviews in the public square. In addition, public theology must also add value to the insights already provided through the complex mix of economic, environmental, geological, legal, medical, psychological and sociological input.

2.6.4 Transdisciplinary Imagination

This complexity has led to a focus in the public square on technical, economic and policy issues such as water pollution, ecologically sustainable development and efficient regulation. In such cases, clear terms of reference and


performance measures can be established. Overlaying these subject-specific policy goals, however, is the need to make complex judgements about the competing interests of stakeholders, and to take proper account of the worldviews that shape these judgements.

Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber use the term ‘Wicked Problems’ to describe complex public policy issues that defy conventional, rational approaches to problem solving. They assert that:

The difficulties attached to rationality are tenacious, and we have so far been unable to get untangled from their web. This is partly because the classical paradigm of science and engineering – the paradigm that has underlain modern professionalism – is not applicable to the problems of open societal systems.41

In using the term ‘wicked’ they do not invoke a normative value. Rather, they use this term to describe a complex issue that defies complete definition. They contrast wicked problems with ‘tame’ problems that can be solved with existing modes of inquiry and decision-making that rely on objective performance measures.42

Rittel and Webber do, however, introduce normative elements. They recognise, for instance, that it may become ‘morally objectionable to treat a wicked problem as though it were a tame one, or to tame a wicked problem prematurely, or to refuse to recognise the inherent wickedness of social problems.’43 Further, they speak in terms of ‘identifying the actions that might effectively narrow the gap between what-is and what-ought-to-be.’44 Even performance measurement does not escape this normative approach:

The tests for efficiency, that were once so useful as measures of accomplishment, are being challenged by a renewed pre-occupation with consequences for equity. The seeming consensus … is being eroded by the growing awareness of the nation’s pluralism and of the differentiation of values that accompanies differentiation of publics.45

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 161.
44 Ibid., 159.
45 Ibid., 156.
Valerie Brown and her co-authors have applied Rittel and Webber’s concept of a wicked problem to the planetary dilemmas facing humanity. In doing so they describe a wicked problem as one ‘for which there can be no final solution, since any resolution generates further issues, and where the solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time.’ Their response to these policy challenges is to invoke a ‘transdisciplinary imagination’, where transdisciplinary is taken to be the collective understanding of an issue:

It is created by including the personal, the local and the strategic, as well as specialized contributions to knowledge. This use needs to be distinguished from a multidisciplinary inquiry, which is taken to be a combination of specializations for a particular purpose … and from interdisciplinary, the common ground between two specializations. Open transdisciplinarity includes the disciplines, but goes further than multi-disciplinarity to include all validated constructions of knowledge and their worldviews and methods of inquiry.

With regard to imagination, Rittel and Webber note that ‘we are accustomed to thinking of imagination as the enemy of scientific research, undermining the long-held primary goal of objectivity.’ They describe this view as false, and state that ‘imagination is also required to overcome the current cultural limitations in the way we think.’

The value of this approach is summarised by John Reid, a visual artist at the Australian National University. In his Foreword to Tackling Wicked Problems: Through the Transdisciplinary Imagination, he states:

The framework urges acceptance of different views of the world, multiple ways of knowing the world, and using the imagination in trying to understand and act in that world … In adopting these principles we arrive at a different form of decision-making as collective inquiry … I want to buy this book for my colleagues who interrogate the world in all sorts of ways – whether scientific, historical, sociological, spiritual, experiential, whatever.

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 5.
50 Quoted in ibid., xix, xx.
That CSG policy is a ‘wicked problem’ can be seen in the embryonic nature of the CSG industry, its scientific complexity, evolving Australian attitudes towards Land, the multiplicity of stakeholders and, as advocated in the thesis, the need to take the rights of Land into account. Indeed, Ross Garnaut, chair of the federal government’s climate change review, has described climate change (to which CSG mining is a contributor) as a wicked problem, noting that at its heart it is an ethical issue.\textsuperscript{51}

Accordingly, the thesis adopts a transdisciplinary imaginative approach to explore issues surrounding the CSG industry, stimulate reflection on humanity’s relationship with Land and encourage consideration of new policy initiatives. To do this it makes particular use of two metaphors – ‘neighbour’ and ‘Divine Art Gallery’.

**Neighbour** Land is central to the narrative of the thesis. Just as the Earth Bible Project delivers new insights into theology through examining the biblical text from the perspective of the earth, so too exploring CSG policy from the perspective of Land delivers new insights.

Use of the metaphor neighbour – which includes humanity as Land’s neighbour and Land as humanity’s neighbour – elevates the status of Land and applies to Land concepts such as justice, value in the eyes of God, love, suffering, finitude, joy and forgiveness that already apply to humanity. It redefines Land in terms of relationships rather than commodity, and so takes the interests of Land beyond that of mere scientific study and economic analysis.

**Divine Art Gallery** This is a more inclusive concept that relies on an acceptance that art knows no boundaries, has a legitimate role in the public square and is not limited by considerations of science, law, economics and reason. ‘Holding an exhibition in the Divine Art Gallery’ then becomes an invitation to dialogue that is open-ended, encourages the use of imagination, does not rely on proof arguments in support of a particular proposition and helps in the communication of new ideas and insights across disciplines.

In addition, by assembling a diverse range of artwork drawn from Australian landscape art and poetry, experience and imaginative theological reflection, a common picture emerges of Land crying out to be heard. It complements insights provided through more specialised research, but which are brought into focus by an approach that transcends disciplines.

2.7 Summary

As the research advanced, it became clear that what needed to be addressed could not be satisfied through a theological literature search to define a relevant theological framework, a review of existing reports and investigations into CSG mining to identify policy gaps, and a consequential fine tuning of the CSG policy framework using these inputs.

The revised research methodology that was adopted made use of the approach suggested by Segundo’s hermeneutic circle by examining worldviews that shaped natural resource development in Australia. In doing so, the research engaged in two discrete lines of theological enquiry: (i) the pursuit of a contemporary theological reading of land in Australia; and (ii) the crafting of an appropriate public theology praxis in response.

A particular methodological challenge faced was how to include in this praxis due regard for experience, imagination and culture. This was addressed through the development of the concepts of neighbour and a Divine Art Gallery.
Chapter 3  Exploring a theology of land

3.1  Introduction

The subject ‘land’ does not feature in renderings of the core systematic theology agenda. That agenda addresses doctrines which surround understandings of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, creation, the church, the Christian life and eschatology. The closest the theological perspective on land comes to inclusion is through the doctrine of creation, and more recently, Muers’ inclusion of a separate doctrinal focus on creatures.¹

There is, nonetheless, a range of biblical discussion on the land as well as some monographs specifically devoted to a theology of place, such as: The land: place as gift, promise, and challenge in biblical faith;² A sense of place: a Christian theology of the land;³ The land is mine: six biblical land ideologies;⁴ A Christian theology of place, Explorations in practical, pastoral, and empirical theology;⁵ Wilderness in the Bible: toward a theology of wilderness;⁶ and Towards a Theology of Place in the South African Context: Some Reflections from the Perspective of Ecotheology.⁷

This literature uses words such as wilderness and place, and opens up the definition of land to other land-related concepts such as space. Conradie, for example, emphasises a theology of place, which he describes as ‘the theological significance of specific geographic locations’, but notes that it can become ‘rather slippery and extremely diffuse’ and that ‘the very notions of “space” and “place” are extraordinarily complex.’⁸

¹ Muers, “Creatures.”
² Brueggemann, The Land: Place as Promise, Gift, and Challenge in Biblical Faith.
³ Lilburne, A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of Land.
⁸ Ibid., 3 - 5.
Recognising this complexity, this chapter ‘travels towards’ a theology of land, rather than engages in the formulation of a systematic theology of land. It aligns with the sentiment expressed by Sittler that ‘my way of reflection is too impressionistic to deserve the adjective “systematic”.’

The word ‘land’ is used in the thesis to cover all the non-human (both animate and inanimate) elements of Creation. Whilst the thesis focuses mostly on the Earth – and Australia in particular – a cosmic dimension is not incompatible with this usage. This approach is similar to that taken by Santmire, who uses the term ‘environment’, and draws on Psalm 24:1 ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’.

We will take “nature” as a synonym for a more concrete theological term, rooted in biblical parlance, “the earth” … all other related concepts – such as “ecology,” “environment,” and “cosmos” – will be understood in terms of this fundamental theological construct.

In a footnote Santmire adds ‘the word “environment” will be used in the popular sense of the “nonhuman world of nature” … The word “cosmos” will also be used, although sparingly.’

The existence of a theological boundary separating humanity from the rest of Creation lends itself to the adoption of an anthropocentric perspective. Santmire argues this emphasis has been the dominant trajectory of the Christian tradition. His purpose is designed to reveal a minority tradition that is more ecologically sensitive. It includes reference to the life and witness of the likes of St Francis of Assisi, whom White proposed as a patron saint of ecologists.

The more positive inclusion of nature is also recognised and developed further by Habel and the team that has initiated the Earth Bible Project. Here the focus is on ‘the Earth itself as the object of investigation of the text, rather than Earth

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11 Ibid., 223.
12 White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1207.
as God’s creation or property.\textsuperscript{13} It highlights the ‘Principle of Voice’ whereby ‘Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.’\textsuperscript{14}

It is evident that theological insights into land have developed significantly since White’s seminal article \textit{The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis}. In this article he asserted Christianity taught that ‘no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.’\textsuperscript{15} As a result, he claimed, the ecological crisis could be attributed to a Christian dogma of ‘man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature.’\textsuperscript{16} There is an implicit interpretation here of Genesis 1:28: ‘subdue it … have dominion over every living thing.’

White claimed that this tradition was the dominant one of two possible readings of the Christian faith and ecology. His thesis subsequently received qualified support amongst theologians. Osborn, for example, noted the view that:

\begin{quote}
It is not that western Christianity is the exclusive historical cause of our environmental crisis. Rather, its beliefs were particularly well adapted to encouraging the exploitation which has led to the present situation. Western Christianity stands accused of being an accessory to our exploitation of the environment.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

As a theological starting point for the thesis, this chapter traverses the biblical foundations for a theology of land, reflects on the nature of Creation and explores relevant theological perspectives. It concludes by identifying a need to explore further more recent theological insights, en route to developing a public theology approach that inform the CSG policy debate.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{15} White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1205.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 1206.
\textsuperscript{17} L. Osborn, \textit{Guardians of Creation} (Leicester: Apollos, 1993), 31.
3.2 Biblical foundations

3.2.1 Old Testament

White’s article brought into sharp focus the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. Brueggemann explored aspects of this relationship ten years later when he proposed using land as a way of organising biblical theology. He states that it ‘provides a critique of the “mighty deeds of God in history” approach … (which) … focussed singularly on the great events of God’s intrusive action.’\(^{18}\) He then asserts that this view has tended to fall into the space/time, nature/history antithesis in a one-sided way, leading to an inordinate stress on covenant to the neglect of land, and an emphasis on history to the denial of land.\(^{19}\)

Brueggemann treats land primarily as a consistent motif used by biblical authors to explore the relationship between Israel and God, but without ascribing an intrinsic value to land. The concept of exile features in his thesis, with him finding in the biblical record a narrative of the possession of land leading to the loss of land (Solomon to Babylon)\(^{20}\) and asserting that faith was precisely for exiles who remember the land but see no way back to it.\(^{21}\)

One feature of Brueggemann’s analysis is the identification of repeated ambiguities in the biblical record. It is a land of promise becoming a land of problem;\(^{22}\) the sojourner becomes possessor;\(^{23}\) the wilderness is contrasted with a land of plenty\(^{24}\) and the land is both gift\(^{25}\) and temptation.\(^{26}\) He considers a climax was reached with Jeremiah, whom he sees as telling the whole story of Israel as the story of the land, with homelessness as the final outcome. In his view land loss became, almost paradoxically, the entry to the new land,

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 201.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., xvii.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 29.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 45.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 50.
foreshadowing the ultimate homelessness of the crucified Jesus as the final act in God’s plan of salvation.27

Brueggemann defines land primarily in terms of human utility. In his preface to the second edition of his book, however, he acknowledges giving insufficient attention to the recovery of creation and to the claim of a promised land being a vigorous ideological assertion that served the purposes of its authors.28 Whilst Brueggemann makes no direct reference to White’s thesis, he implicitly supports it by treating land as subordinate to humanity. For example, Brueggemann uses land to explore Israel’s relationship with God, but land’s fate in the eschaton does not merit attention.

Following the publication of Brueggemann’s book in 1977, there was continuing interest in the theological significance of land, the ambiguity that comes with it, and the use of land-related metaphors.

Santmire, for example, proposed land-related metaphors to gain deeper theological insights. He uses the metaphor of ‘ascent’ to describe humanity’s search for the divine that culminates in a spiritual transcendence and transformation that leaves the physical world behind. He sees God’s economy of salvation also giving birth to a new spiritual creation, a ‘land-transcending metaphor.’29 Santmire describes this spiritual motif as humanity rising above nature in order to enter into communion with God, and sees it reflected in ‘the kind of dialectic that the anthropocentric view attributes to biblical theology.’30

Santmire contrasts this outlook through use of the metaphors of ‘fecundity’ and ‘migration’, which are ‘land-affirming’. Fecundity is deeply ‘grounded’ in the physical world, in the earth’s vastness and mystery and beauty, leading to the beholder being in awe and wonder of God’s physical creation. On the other hand, migration involves possible alienation from a former land, and looking

27 Ibid., 202.
28 Ibid., xi - xxiii.
30 Ibid., 188.
forward to a new good land experience. Here identity is centred on relationship with the land: one can never lose one’s rootedness in the world of nature.\textsuperscript{31}

Santmire suggests fecundity could mitigate ascent leading to Gnosticism and migration leading to secularism. Taken together, fecundity and migration could form an ecological motif and so go beyond the ambit of the spiritual motif.\textsuperscript{32} In this analysis he identifies the eschatological fate of non-human creation as a key issue. Different conclusions about the status of the non-human creation in the eschaton are reached, depending on which motif is applied. These can be characterised as the land just being the stage upon which the drama of God’s salvation is played out and will pass away – or the land having an intrinsic worth and being an important part of the new heaven and the new earth.

Santmire further notes that church history bears witness to an ongoing debate on this issue down the centuries. For example he locates Irenaeus, Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Luther and Calvin primarily within the ecological motif and Origen, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Dante, Barth and Teilhard de Chardin within the spiritual motif.\textsuperscript{33}

Santmire’s analysis highlights some of the complexities that accompany research into a theological understanding of land. A theology of land involves more than the use of land as a helpful metaphor to understand faith, or a way of organising biblical theology, or the treatment of land as an object. It leads also to a fundamental reappraisal of relationships – between God and humanity, humanity and the non-human creation, and the non-human creation and God.

This approach has been explored by Marlow, who analysed three eighth century BCE prophets (Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah). She proposes an ‘ecological triangle’ that includes consideration of the relationship between God and non-human creation.\textsuperscript{34} Her approach is similar to that of Leal’s ‘theological triangle’ that represents the three basic elements that theology addresses,

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 183 - 84.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 216 - 17.
\textsuperscript{34} Marlow, Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah.
namely God, humanity and the rest of creation.\textsuperscript{35} It takes the debate firmly beyond the realm of metaphor and anthropocentrism, points to land having its own intrinsic worth, and reinforces a theological emphasis on relationships.

Further insights into a theological understanding of land were developed by Habel, who identified six discrete land ideologies in the Old Testament. In doing so he conceptualised land in terms of Source of Wealth (royal), (Conditional Grant (theocratic), Family Lots (ancestral home), YHWH’s personal nahalal (prophetic), Sabbath Bound (agrarian) and Host Country (immigrant).\textsuperscript{36}

Through his Earth Bible and Season of Creation projects,\textsuperscript{37} Habel has emphasised the importance of the earth and creaturely existence having intrinsic worth. By this claim he means that the earth possesses the dignity of its being and has value as a part of creation outside of the way it is put to use by humans. A collection of essays edited by Habel provides an elaboration on his hermeneutical approach and six ecojustice principles that include the universe, earth and all its components having intrinsic worth.\textsuperscript{38}

### 3.2.2 New Testament

The New Testament does not, in general, give explicit recognition to a theology of land. This should come as no surprise. It covers a much shorter span of time than does the Hebrew Bible, and is more obviously directed to a single event and the subsequent response to that event. It is also about the life, death and resurrection of Christ and how life in the church – the body of Christ – should be lived out. The context of the New Testament is that of the expected imminent return of Christ and the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

This context brings with it an increased focus on eschatological considerations, centred on the ambiguity and mystery of the renewal of the whole creation. A

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{R. B. Leal, \textit{Through Ecological Eyes: Reflections on Christianity’s Environmental Credentials} (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2006).}
\footnote{Habel, \textit{The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies}.}
\footnote{See, for instance, \url{http://seasonofcreation.com/about/the-season-of-creation-story/}, retrieved 29 July 2015}
\footnote{Habel, \textit{Readings from the Perspective of Earth}, 24.}
\end{footnotes}
conceptual emphasis on the cosmic Christ, though, can lead to a tendency to spiritualise any consideration of land. Key passages include Rom 8:18-25; 1 Cor 2:7-10 and 8:6; Eph 1:10, 20-23 and 3:9-10; Col 1:15-20.

Lilburne notes that there are scant direct references to land in the New Testament. He links this lack of emphasis on land to populations moving from rural areas to cities in the post-exilic period, with land becoming more symbolic and theology focussing more on a people in transition. He speaks of how in post-exile Israel the focus shifted from ‘space’ to ‘place’ (as in the temple) yet at the same time the ‘promised land’ became less tied to one place. He also describes how the fall of Jerusalem reinforced the fact that faith could not be tied down to one location, yet locating Jesus in history created a need to place him geographically.\(^{39}\) He sees the need to rediscover the wisdom of indigenous people and the vitality of their sense of place.\(^ {40} \)

In summary, he suggests land is a submerged theme in the New Testament and questions whether the New Testament treats land in a negative way by spiritualising it.\(^ {41} \) He sees any such spiritualisation as a deficiency, and speculates that

> any attempt to develop a theology of nature will have to go down to the deepest roots of Western religious sensibility and vocabulary if it is to plumb the depths of the ambiguity we find there in respect to nature and come up to speak with a clear voice.\(^ {42} \)

Importantly, his analysis includes a Christological emphasis, which draws on the centrality of the Kingdom of God to Jesus’ teachings.\(^ {43} \) He also state that Aboriginal spirituality offers ‘a profound example of an incarnational ethic of land care.’\(^ {44} \) This Christological perspective has been explored by authors such as Edwards. Edwards emphasises how the Jesus narrative is told in terms of his surrounds, his parables relating to the natural world, the focus on wilderness, the garden of Gethsemane and his view that ‘the event of Jesus

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\(^ {40} \) Ibid., 11.
\(^ {41} \) Ibid., 56 - 67.
\(^ {42} \) Ibid., 89.
\(^ {43} \) Ibid., 89 - 98.
\(^ {44} \) Ibid., 120. the focus on wilderness
Christ can be understood as the self-transcendence of the created universe into God.\textsuperscript{45}

Another author with a New Testament and soteriological orientation, and focus on the nature of God’s creation, is Tom Wright. In providing some new insights into the Easter story, Wright asks what happens when we think of space, time and matter being renewed, redeemed and not abandoned. He says that renewal of space involves a fresh grasp of the Celtic tradition of “thin places”, ‘one aspect of a much wider “theology of place”’.\textsuperscript{46} He then asserts that the Christian hope is for God’s renewal of all things, for his overcoming decay, corruption and death, and his filling of the whole cosmos with his love, his power and his glory.\textsuperscript{47} This outcome is neither abandonment nor destruction of the earth, but a radical healing. It is a view shared by Northcott, who argues that ‘the resurrection of mankind apart from creation would be a gospel of a sort, but a purely Gnostic and world-denying sort that is far from the gospel that the apostles actually preached.’\textsuperscript{48}

Edwards is similarly cosmic in his approach when he states that ‘redemption involves not only human beings but the whole creation’\textsuperscript{49} and ‘resurrection is revealed as the meaning of the whole of creation.’\textsuperscript{50} Further he quotes the work of Brendan Byrne, an Australian Pauline scholar, who sees in Romans the inclusion of the whole of nonhuman creation within the sweep of salvation alongside human beings ... Paul presupposes a Jewish tradition that sees the nonhuman creation as intimately bound up with the fate of human beings ... sharing a “common fate”\textsuperscript{51}

Edwards goes on to refer to Karl Rahner’s divinisation of the whole reality, and to observe that ‘we cannot think of our fulfilment without thinking of the fulfilment of the material universe.’\textsuperscript{52} He concludes that the message of the New

\textsuperscript{45} Edwards, \emph{Ecology at the Heart of Faith}, 50 - 63.
\textsuperscript{46} N. Wright, \emph{Surprised by Hope} (London: SPCK, 2007), 271.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 153 - 55.
Testament is that we are called to participate in the new creation proclaimed and inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus.\textsuperscript{53}

In a similar vein, Wright sees redemption to be the remaking of Creation, a ‘marriage of heaven and earth’ and a reason for humanity to care for the non-human creation.\textsuperscript{54} It is a view shared by Brian McLaren who talks of God’s sacred ecosystem and seeking God’s dream of creation to come true,\textsuperscript{55} and by Northcott who states that ‘we are enjoined to love creation, to love nature, because we share with nature in the restoration which is promised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’\textsuperscript{56}

Wright also dismisses the dualistic folly of talking of withdrawal from the world, such as might be the consequence of being guided solely by Santmire’s spiritual motif. He concludes that we should ‘reflect long and hard on a proper theology of place and space, thought through in terms of God’s promise to renew the whole creation, before we abandon geography and territory.’\textsuperscript{57} This conclusion gives a pre-eminence to a theology of land that was absent from the dominant theological outlook that White asserted was part of the historical roots of our ecologic crisis.

This overview illustrates a progression in land-related biblical insights in the last 50 years. With just a utilitarian and subordinate status, land is little more than a mortal, physical creation through which humanity could perceive, respond to and accept the gracious love of God and eternal spiritual life. Recent theological inquiry into land, however, has ventured beyond these boundaries. A theological reading of land now has within its ambit consideration of matters such as justice, relationships, spirituality, Christology, redemption, eschatology, the nature of the created order, and the new heaven and the new earth.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{54} Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, 115 - 17.
\textsuperscript{55} B. D. McLaren, \textit{Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crisis, and a Revolution of Hope} (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 43.
\textsuperscript{56} Northcott, “Ecology and Christian Ethics,” 225.
\textsuperscript{57} Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, Chapter 14.
The arc of a theology of land thus has the potential to stretch well beyond land being the stage upon which the drama of God’s salvation is played out, to inspiring fresh insights into the nature of Creation and, as a consequence, humanity’s relationship with, and vocation within, that Creation.

3.3 An expedition into a theology of land

The poetry of Thomas Hardy provides a succinct starting point for painting new visions for a theology of land:

Let me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting Might
That fashioned forth its loveliness
Had other aims than my delight.\(^{58}\)

This poem sets a framework for viewing land in terms of it being an important part of God’s Creation and having an intrinsic value that extends beyond that of human utility. Five perspectives assist in unpacking this outlook further:

- defining the land within a spiritual context such as, for example, Gaia the Earth Mother (subsection 3.4);
- placing the land within the soteriological context of God’s cosmic economy of salvation (subsection 3.5);
- exploring the implications of the realities and constraints of living in a finite world (subsections 4.1, 4.2);
- examining the evolution of ecotheology (subsection 4.4); and
- positioning this approach within the public square (subsection 4.5).

Lynch provides a backdrop for this analysis in his commentary on spirituality in the twenty-first century. According to Lynch, there is an ‘increasingly widespread perception that western society is undergoing one of its most significant religious transitions for many centuries’\(^{59}\) and ‘a sense of unease about the state of western society … the notion that we are living through a time of moral and spiritual crisis.’\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) Quoted in Anne Primavesi, *Making God Laugh: Human Arrogance and Ecological Humility* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2004), 120.


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 130, 31.
His response, however, is not to transition towards a secular meta-narrative for understanding the world today as might Richard Dawkins who, Lynch says, advocates a form of scientism informed by an anti-religious polemic. Rather, Lynch focuses on the emergence of a progressive spirituality as summarised by his own rather polemic observation that:

it is only through cultivating such a non-patriarchal, earth-centred spirituality focussed on the immanent divine that we can hope to find the resources to move beyond this neurotic, controlling and alienating phase of global capitalism.

His wariness of secularism, and advocacy of progressive spirituality, is further instanced by statements such as:

Progressive spirituality sees in secularization a dangerous process of the disenchantment of the world, which leaves it more vulnerable to economic and environmental exploitation,

and

Unlike a secularist world view that depicts human life as devoid of meaning and value other than that created by humans themselves, the universe story places humanity as one small element in a grander narrative of cosmic unfolding.

He might well have had in mind the theme of Primavesi’s book *Making God laugh: human arrogance and ecological humility.*

Relevant to a theology of land is Lynch’s identification of ‘imperatives’ that he believes should shape the way ahead. These imperatives include Earth-centredness, spirituality and immanence, which he describes as follows:

**Earth-centredness:** ‘Progressive spirituality has arisen out of moves to develop a spirituality which reflects a healthy understanding of the relationship of humanity to the wider natural order.’ This outlook is reinforced by McFague’s observation that ‘to feel in the depths of our being that we are part and parcel of

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61 Ibid., 20.
62 Ibid., 157.
63 Ibid., 126.
64 Ibid., 159.
the evolutionary ecosystem of our cosmos is a prerequisite for contemporary Christian thinking.\textsuperscript{67}

**Spirituality** ‘Progressive spirituality has arisen out of the desire to find new ways of religious thinking and new resources for spiritual growth and well being that truly connect with people’s beliefs, values and experience in modern, liberal societies.’\textsuperscript{68}

**Immanence** ‘Progressive spirituality has arisen out of attempts to reconcile religion with contemporary scientific knowledge, and in particular in attempts to ground spirituality in contemporary scientific cosmology.’\textsuperscript{69}

Lynch suggests there is a mutuality in the relationship between science and religion and asks whether we can have a truly humane science if it does not allow for humanity’s enduring religious concerns. He speaks of the need for the ‘re-enchantment of science’,\textsuperscript{70} adding to Ruether’s observation that the mutual insulation of religion and science was breaking down.\textsuperscript{71}

Implicit in Lynch’s outlook are assumptions that the divine is immanent (not ‘out there’), that there are signs of the divine within creation and that science is one of the tools through which the presence of the divine can be discerned. In embracing science in this way, he aligns with those authors who attach credence to the views of Fritjof Capra about links between physics and mysticism.\textsuperscript{72} In Celia Deane-Drummond’s words, ‘a slow thaw in relations of science with theology has begun to take place in the new physics, with an openness to new forms of religion and mysticism.’\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 29 - 34.
\textsuperscript{73} Deane-Drummond, *Biology and Theology Today*, 208.
One example of this thaw is the Gaia hypothesis that has captured the attention of both scientists and theologians. It provides some common ground upon which to explore a contextual theology of land in a contemporary way.

3.4 Gaia

The Gaia hypothesis, named after the primal Greek goddess of Earth, was conceived by Lovelock in 1965. Through it, Lovelock popularised the idea of an alternative, more radical approach to science that relied on ‘holistic’ scientific method and extended ecological principles to consider the whole earth as one giant self-regulating ecosystem. He described his scientific journey as a quest in search of evidence for the idea that the earth is alive.

His hypothesis attracted some support from the scientific community and generated several scientific models for Gaia. These are variously described as ‘interconnected’, ‘homeostatic process’, ‘ideological/teleological’ and ‘co-operative evolutionary’. Whilst he gave such models some scientific legitimacy, many scientists remain uneasy with them.

Lovelock now describes Gaia as:

A view of earth ... as a self-regulating system made up from the totality of organisms, the surface rocks, the ocean and the atmosphere tightly coupled as an evolving system ... this system [has] a goal – the regulation of surface conditions so as always to be as favourable as possible for contemporary life.

The Gaia hypothesis also generated interest amongst theologians, seemed to cohere with New Age Spirituality and attracted the attention of neo-pagans, feminist ecotheologians, post-Christians, ethicists and philosophers. As Deane-Drummond notes, the range of scientific interpretations of Gaia means that there is an equally wide range of ethical and theological outcomes.

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75 Deane-Drummond, Biology and Theology Today, Chapter 7.
76 J. Lovelock, Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007), 162.
77 Deane-Drummond, Biology and Theology Today, Chapter 8.
What theological value might the Gaia hypothesis have? The views of two feminist ecotheologians, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Anne Primavesi, provide some insights.

Ruether speaks of two religious traditions, covenantal and sacramental, and humanity’s need for two holy voices of divinity from nature. She describes the former as a masculine voice, controlling and speaking prophetically on behalf of the powerless; and the other as feminine, intimate, long silenced by the male, beckoning into communion. Both are the voice of Gaia. \(^{78}\) Here, Gaia is more than an immanent deity, an all-nurturing earth mother goddess, but one who continually brings forth both new life and new visions of how life should be more just and more caring. \(^{79}\)

Primavesi, on the other hand, talks of humanity’s need to be sufficiently knowledgeable about its place within the earth community in order to practice ecological humility through learning from what she calls the wisdom of Gaia. She describes this approach as

> a project of contemporary wisdom that aims to understand life as a whole … refuses to isolate one kind of knowledge, science, by cutting it off from the rest of life … [is] a wisdom of the body politic and planetary, sacred and secular, human and more-than-human. \(^{80}\)

Further, Primavesi places humanity within the whole process of self-regulation that constitutes Gaia’s wisdom. This is a homeostatic wisdom that knows how to regulate conditions favourable for life to emerge and be built up, broken down and rebuilt in diverse forms over different time scales. She describes humanity as one such life form, dependent on Gaia for sustainable living, but with a broader role in Gaia’s self regulation, which is a sacred work and product of divine wisdom. \(^{81}\)

This deep ecology encompasses a self-regulation that goes beyond the self-preservation instincts of humanity. It finds an ally in Deane-Drummond’s


\(^{79}\) Ibid., 4, 5.


\(^{81}\) Ibid., 145 - 50.
suggestion of understanding Gaia with reference to Sophia, Lady Wisdom, the feminine face of God, who is identified in John’s Gospel with Logos and thus with Christ. Primavesi also speaks of embodying wisdom and the wisdom of Gaia.

Between them, Ruether and Primavesi bring into consideration concepts of divinity, wisdom, interconnectedness, justice, intrinsic value, spirituality and nurture. They invoke a sense of mystery about Gaia that extends Lovelock’s rather mechanical hypothesis, although they are unlikely to impress those for whom a faith perspective has little value. As Deane Drummond notes, “those who are still influenced by reductionist methodology in science and logical positivism would be inclined to dismiss Gaia altogether as myth, tainted further by a creeping form of teleology.”

Contrasting with this scientific reductionism is the use by Flannery, a respected scientist, of images from Greek mythology (Medea and Gaia) in discerning a message of hope for the Earth. His use of myth communicates ideas that may not be adequately conveyed through scientific texts. Similarly, Lovelock refers to the “revenge of Gaia.”

Are these merely shorthand ways to convey complex scientific conclusions in a compelling way, or just a part of what Dawkins describes as ‘the pop-ecology literature’? This critique might also apply to Ruether’s rather dramatic contemplation of “Mother Earth” rising up like a chthonic Jehovah to topple human empires and return earth to pre-civilised simplicity … a justified revenge of “nature” against “civilisation”.

Does such labelling matter, however, if the similar metaphorical language and images that may be more emotive than scientific lead to common conclusions

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82 Deane-Drummond, Biology and Theology Today, 219.
83 Ibid., 91.
85 Deane-Drummond, Biology and Theology Today, 163.
87 Lovelock, Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity.
88 Quoted in Flannery, Here on Earth: An Argument for Hope?, 34.
89 Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing, 84.
about the need to respond to the crises facing the Earth? Is consideration of the common ground that they occupy of more value than rigid adherence to a reductionist approach that might constrain the imagination? Reflection on Gaian perspectives can facilitate the establishment of a dialogue across faith and scientific perspectives, through its embrace of concepts such as divinity, interconnectedness, homeostasis and self-regulation, and its use of language that appeals to a sense of morality.

There are, of course, contentious issues concerning the use of a theology of land approach that is informed by insights gained through consideration of such Gaian perspectives. These include the possibility of a pantheistic syncretism that unduly embraces human culture and current philosophical musings, and insufficient attention being given to the uniqueness and value of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

On the first, pantheism, the approach in this chapter aligns not with it but with the concept of panentheism. McFague describes panentheism as an attempt to speak of God as both radically transcendent to, and radically immanent in, the world. This contrasts with pantheism that lacks a transcendent component. It is an outlook that regards humanity and the rest of Creation as ‘other’ to God, whilst at the same time recognising the Kingdom of God is at hand. It does not seek to diminish either the immanence or transcendence of God.

On the matter of syncretism, Ruether has argued that rather than denying Christianity’s syncretistic reality, its role as a ‘synthesizer of major Hebraic, Oriental, and Greco-Roman thought should be recognized as a strength … today’s eco-spirituality crisis demands a synthesizing creativity of even greater expansiveness.’

In addition, Luzbetak suggests that ‘syncretism may be a bridge and an accelerator in the acculturation process from unchristian to Christian ways of

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belief.'\textsuperscript{92} Similarly, Schreiter comments on the uniformly negative view of syncretism within the Christian faith, but argues for a more open-minded approach: 'all change is syncretic.'\textsuperscript{93}

Rather than rejecting syncretism, therefore, there is value in listening to what others are saying about religious identity and in recognising Christianity's own history of evolving within a diverse range of cultures. This openness to other outlooks is particularly relevant to today's multicultural Australian society.

A more significant issue presented by consideration of Gaia, however, is soteriological. How can Gaia be understood within the context of the divine economy of salvation?

Both Ruether and Primavesi fall short in their treatment of Gaia in this regard. Whilst they acknowledge a teleological aspect to Gaia, namely the survival of the living cosmic organism, they do not provide a compelling interpretation of the Easter story. Rather, their emphasis seems to be on humanity's role in Gaia's survival. Ruether, for example, speaks of 'an ethic for ecological living'\textsuperscript{94} and Primavesi of 'the practice of an ecological humility.'\textsuperscript{95}

In summary, the Gaia hypothesis establishes some common ground, albeit incomplete, upon which science and religion can together explore insights into the nature of reality. Avoiding ideological fundamentalism, it appeals to the exercise of imagination, such as through the use of the mythos concept: 'the story within which the members of a culture locate themselves – a story bound up with particular cultural symbols and rituals.'\textsuperscript{96}

Theologically this approach sits comfortably within Bevans' Synthetic model of contextual theology where he speaks of a creative dialectic that involves

\textsuperscript{93} R. J. Schreiter, \textit{The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local} (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 83.
\textsuperscript{94} Ruether, \textit{Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing}, 225.
\textsuperscript{95} Primavesi, \textit{Making God Laugh: Human Arrogance and Ecological Humility}, 149.
\textsuperscript{96} Lynch, \textit{The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century}, 159.
'constant dialogue and employment of ... the analogical imagination ... the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.'

A deficiency in the use of the Gaia hypothesis, however, is that it does not speak in the language of economics, yet confronts the ideology of economic development that is so prevalent in society today (as described in Chapter 6). These are matters that are relevant for a theology of land to address, as the land is a primary target for economic development. A starting point for such an analysis is the assertion by Meeks that ‘the doctrine of the church is the doctrine of the economy of God’s household.’

3.5 A cosmic economy of salvation

This subsection draws on theological perspectives on economics developed by Meeks, McFague and Tanner. Its analysis locates the discipline of economics, and the way it is applied in public policy decision-making, within the context of the economy of God’s household and thus a cosmic economy of salvation. It concludes by drawing parallels between attitudes towards slavery 200 years ago and attitudes towards the land today.

The use of the word household finds its parallels in Greek philosophy such as Aristotle’s notion of oikonomike. Oikonomike is described as the use of things necessary to the Good Life – that is, the life of virtues – with the term covering the civil community as well as the house. Meeks claims that the principle of oikos is also central to the relationship between God and Israel. He notes that ‘the redemptive work of God has traditionally been referred to as God’s

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97 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 90.
98 Meeks, God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy, 23.
99 Ibid.
100 McFague, Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril.
101 Tanner, Economy of Grace.
102 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 317.
economy’ and draws attention to the use of words such as savings, redemption, purchase, price and trust in both economics and theology.\textsuperscript{104}

Aristotle’s ‘Science of Economics’ that links \textit{oikonomike} with the life of virtues, and the use of \textit{oikos} in the evolution of Jewish and Christian theology, thus have similar origins. It locates a theological application of the term economics in the context of ‘God’s life, work and suffering for the life of the creation … the ground of the human economy for life.’\textsuperscript{105}

With the Enlightenment, however, a significant divergence between economic and theological conceptualisations of the civil community appeared.\textsuperscript{106} It was a watershed in the development of economics as a value-free, positivist discipline. A science of economics emerged, built upon concepts such as scarcity, rationality, competition, self-interest, exchange and growth. It was independent of theology although, as pointed out by Brennan and Waterman, its thematic parallels with elements of theology are striking:

- humanity motivated by self interest (original sin);
- a right to abundant wealth as a result of personal actions (salvation and repentance);
- a positivist value-free system (faith is a private matter);
- God is exogenous to the economic system (the dualism of spiritual and worldly matters);
- a laissez-faire and unregulated market place (religious freedom and individual responsibility);
- scarcity (not all will enter the Kingdom of God);
- exchange (forgiveness in return for repentance); and
- economic rewards (the prosperity gospel).\textsuperscript{107}

McFague draws out a number of these parallels by contrasting the values of neo-classical and ecological economics. It is Meeks, however, who laid the

\textsuperscript{104} Meeks, \textit{God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy}, 29 - 34.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 85.
foundation for a re-examination of the relationship between economics and theology.

3.5.1 God the Economist

Writing in 1989, Meeks was a pioneer in discussing God using the language of economics. He considers that the development of a market economy has led to the emergence of a market society. This development, he says, brought with it its own form of domination and an economic law that ‘could seemingly fulfil all public functions that “God” had previously performed.‘\(^{108}\) His concern, however, goes beyond the consequences of domination and idolatry with his suggestion that some fundamental assumptions of economics conflict with God’s economy.

First Meeks questions an economic system founded on a view that human nature (possessive individualism, which he likens to sin) is immutable. He rejects the principle of basing an economic system on such an assumption. He also rejects the notion of scarcity, which he describes as a universal prerequisite of the principle of exchange in an economic system. He asserts there is always enough to go round if the righteousness of God is present.\(^{109}\)

Further, Meeks highlights the implications of exchange as a market mechanism, whereby the market (the exchange relationship) commoditises social goods such as healing, education and human relationships.\(^{110}\) An example he gives in this regard is that provided by Hay and Kreider, who assert that contract differences rather than morality then separate prostitution from marriage.\(^{111}\)

More ominously, Meeks maintains that economic oppression cannot exist without its religious justifications.\(^{112}\) A new Christendom that aligns God’s economy with a market economy (in place of the state), however, is to be treated with suspicion, rather than embraced. There are traps for the unwary

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\(^{109}\) Ibid., 10 - 12.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 39.


here, given the use of common terminology and the thematic parallels between the science of economics and theology.\textsuperscript{113}

Meeks suggests, instead, that God’s own economic work starts with those who have been excluded from the household.\textsuperscript{115} He argues that Christianity should be subversive in calling into question the deepest assumption of modern economics, namely scarcity, as in almost all situations of human life scarcity has been created by human injustice.\textsuperscript{116} Within an all-encompassing horizon of creation as household, he sees the economy of God as the distribution of God’s righteousness,\textsuperscript{117} which is unlimited.

In conclusion Meeks advocates a subversive approach that challenges the ideology of the market society:

‘Does not a thoroughgoing critique of the positivist ideologies of the market society and a mode of doing theology in the suffering and liberating praxis of the oppressed require a deeper critique of some premises of the market system itself?’\textsuperscript{118}

He then uses the parable of the Prodigal Son to talk of ‘God the Economist’. He pens a picture of the Host ‘who yearns for a new household that can be hospitable to the poor, the forsaken, the lost, the dying, for economy is the question of giving access to life to the Host’s own child.’\textsuperscript{119}

A weakness in Meeks’ critique, however, is that whilst he suggests flaws in the conceptualisation of the economic system, he does not formulate a practical alternative approach. McFague seeks to address this shortcoming in her advocacy of ecological economics.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 29 - 34.
\textsuperscript{114} Brennan and Waterman, "Christian Theology and Economics: Convergence and Clashes,"
\textsuperscript{77}.
\textsuperscript{115} Meeks, \textit{God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy}, 43.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 171 - 74.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 182.
3.5.2 Ecological economics

McFague compares two paradigms (neo-classical and ecological economics) to present an alternate worldview, a role she considers to be an essential task of Christianity. She contrasts key differences between the models, such as growth versus sustainability; an external God versus an immanent God; a focus on production (outputs) versus a focus on resources (inputs); the role of corporations versus the role of organisms; and personal sin versus systemic evil.

McFague argues that the ecological approach delivers outcomes much more in line with the biblical narrative and the glory of God, which she defines to be ‘every creature fully alive’. This concept is a variation on Irenaeus’ ‘the glory of God is man fully alive’. Further, she describes God as being ‘a down-to-earth householder, as God cares about just and sustainable planetary management so that all creatures may flourish.’

Her justification for presenting an alternative to neo-classical economics is drawn from what she sees to be its main faults – isolation of the economy from the planet’s well-being, individualistic anthropology, and its failure to take human suffering seriously enough.

What, then, does she propose in her promotion of ecological economics? Like Meeks she conceptualises God’s household to be all of creation. A consistent theme in her book is that the planet’s resources should not be treated as an exogenous factor by the economic system, that the environment can no longer be regarded as an externality. Second, she pleads for the voice of the earth to be heard. She asks, ‘is the good life for all people and for all the planet?’

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121 Ibid., 79.
122 Ibid., 131, 41.
123 Ibid., 95.
124 Ibid., 72.
125 Ibid., 132.
126 Ibid., 138.
127 Ibid., 146.
128 Ibid., 94, 153.
Reflection on this question leads to her support for an Earth Charter that has regard for the well-being of the whole planet.129

3.5.3 Economy of Grace

Tanner takes a different approach to McFague in her questioning of some of the assumptions behind the discipline of economics. She does not focus on the inclusion of ecological factors into an economic model. Rather, she advocates the replacement of a scarcity-based exchange system with an “economy of grace”. In this system, ‘giving that is not conditioned by considerations of exchange … form(s) the bedrock of the economy of grace.’131 It is a vision of economic life that, she asserts, gives ‘a radical alternative to the present system.’132

She also notes a mix of attitudes in the church regarding money – criticism of usury, the ideal of commonly held property, the Franciscan movement’s refusal to engage in monetary transactions or to own property, the Jubilee tradition in the Hebrew Bible and Christian concerns about the corrupting influence of wealth.133 Tanner then explores the relationship between money and grace, and concludes that grace has everything to do with money because ‘in grace money has its greatest challenger and most obstreperous critic.’134

From this starting point, Tanner develops a model of a theological economy as an alternative to the current economic system, focussing in particular on property and possessions. Drawing on principles such as unconditional giving and non-competitive possession,135 Tanner defines her model of a theological economy as ‘a universally inclusive system for the increase and distribution of goods, one dedicated to the well-being of its members and organised to ensure that what benefits one benefits all.’136

129 Ibid., 85.
130 Ibid., 96.
131 Tanner, Economy of Grace, 62.
132 Ibid., ix - 3.
133 Ibid., 2.
134 Ibid., 29.
135 Ibid., 62 - 82.
136 Ibid., 92.
This may be utopian, but if the term “all its members” is understood within a cosmic view of the Grace economy of God’s household, then McFague’s treatment of the land as an endogenous factor is not sustainable. Land is not just a utility. The land, as well as humanity, is to benefit from economic development. This broader vision values land in terms of divine grace rather than exchange and ownership. Land is not to be objectified as a human possession or slave, but to be regarded as having an intrinsic value in God’s sight that goes beyond human utility.

3.6 Slavery and the national economy

There are parallels here with the issues surrounding the treatment of slaves that provide another context for evaluating humanity’s relationship with the land. Two hundred years ago Britain’s economic system dehumanised slaves, treating them as little more than production units in its economy. Further, to speak of reform (eg, the human rights of slaves) at a time when it might harm Britain’s economic interests (in 1793 France declared war on Britain) was likely to be seen as tantamount to treason. The society of the day closely linked the continuation of slavery with the national interest.

More than this, however, that society accepted slavery as a part of life, just like births, marriages and death. For 5,000 years the idea of human civilisation without slavery had been unimaginable and the suffering of the poor was regarded as “the will of God”. At that time there were ‘effectively only two responses to the condition of the poor … moralistically judging them as inferior and unworthy of help … [or] to see their plight as inevitable, part of the unavoidable price of “modern civilisation”.

The vision of Wilberforce and his reforming zeal, however, changed that. In the words of Metaxas:

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137 Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, 118.
138 Ibid., 158.
139 Ibid., xiv.
140 Ibid., xvii.
141 Ibid., 85.
Wilberforce saw the idea that all men and women are created equal by God, in his image, and are therefore sacred ... that one must love one's neighbour as oneself and that we must do unto others as we would have them do to us.\textsuperscript{142}

Wilberforce presented, and gained societal acceptance of, a new way of seeing reality that challenged the then perception that slaves were mere cogs in an economic machine. In terms of public theology, he believed a utilitarian perspective would not be changed unless the whole paradigm was changed. This is illustrated in his statement that ‘God almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners’, where “reformation of manners” meant a change in habits or attitudes.\textsuperscript{143} It fell to him to demonstrate that abolition was the right thing to do not only morally but also economically, that the costs involved would be justifiable in the longer term.\textsuperscript{144}

The thesis advocates the need for a similar conceptual shift in the CSG public policy debate, from a focus on anthropocentric utilitarianism to recognition of the intrinsic value of the land.

In other words, a view of the land having a sacred place in God’s grace economy shapes humanity’s relationship with the land and humanity’s treatment of the land within a market economy. This highlights the need for the development of a public theology strategy that leads to the status and intrinsic interests of the land being given greater attention in the public square.

3.7 A theological blind spot?

The foundations for a public theology strategy are set by Meeks who establishes a platform for a dialogue between theology and economics, by McFague who presents an ecological approach that includes the environment as an endogenous variable within neo-classical economics and by Tanner who suggests the adoption of an economy of grace that challenges some assumptions in economic theory.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., xvi. \\
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 85. \\
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 118.}
Their contemporary (as in their use of the language of economics) theological treatment of land complements the emphasis on land’s spirituality found in the insights of Ruether and Primavesi. It also extends their advocacy of land having an intrinsic value by locating land’s spirituality within the soteriological context of the economy of God’s household.

Is there, however, a significant theological blind spot? Economic principles suggest this might be the case. Scarcity implies some people go without, or do not receive as much as they want. In addition, achievement of the Common Good carries with it an expectation not all desires will be met, and individual priorities may be sacrificed for the broader benefit of others.

These outcomes, however, conflict with the abundance of God’s righteousness (Meeks), the flourishing of all Creation (McFague) and an economy of grace where what benefits one benefits all (Tanner). Are these theological insights, then, perceived to be too “otherworldly” and thus inadequate in addressing the pragmatic realities and constraints of living in a transient, finite world?

To analyse these questions, Chapter 4 engages in further theological analysis. It explores McFadyen’s concept of ‘bound willing’, Conradie’s exploration of the nature of Creation, Muers’ theology of creatures and Jennings’ commentary on the relationship between justice and law.

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145 McFadyen, Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin.
146 Conradie, An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?
147 Muers, “Creatures.”
Chapter 4  Mapping a theology of land

The Australian continent was unknown territory to early European settlers. Similarly, a theology of land encompasses much to be explored. The theme of discovery applies both to the ‘opening up’ of Australia and to theological inquiry. Discovery leads to the mapping of territory, the naming of places and the identification of connections between places.

This chapter develops a conceptual map that names different aspects of a theology of land. It provides a framework for theological reflection on the CSG industry, the public policy debate surrounding that industry and Australian attitudes to land. Building on the introduction in the previous chapter to the scope for a theology of land, the chapter penetrates deeper into this theological territory by, first, examining McFadyen’s exploration of the nature of abhorrent human behaviour.

4.1 Bound willing, joy and priests of creation

McFadyen’s hypothesis is that, even though a free will is a rational will, ‘our very use of and capacity for “free choice” is distorted’,¹ and that the will is bound to the pathologies in which it is situated.² He locates this conclusion within a cosmic perspective of sin which, he says counters the dynamic of God in creation and salvation, and has an invasive ubiquity in the entire created order.³ He contrasts sin with excessive, overflowing, life-giving and abundant joy being the dynamic of a right relationship with God. He claims ‘we were born into and for joy in a God who loves, blesses and has joy in us … original sin may now be read as a de-facto, universal, original and radical lack of joy.’⁴

His focus on joy is similar to an outlook expressed by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh of the Eastern Orthodox Church:

> There is not an atom in this world, from the meanest speck of dust to the greatest star, which does not hold at its core ... the thrill ... of its coming into

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¹ McFadyen, Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin, 196.
² Ibid., Chapter 9.
³ Ibid., 210.
⁴ Ibid., 246 - 48.
being, of its possessing infinite possibilities and of entering into the divine realm, so that it knows God, rejoices in him.\textsuperscript{5}

This joy, however, is relational rather than private. McFadyen states that ‘freedom in joy is not founded on the separation of the isolated self but is profoundly relational, orientated towards the genuine joy of God and others, and hence also oneself.’\textsuperscript{6} He places relationships within a context of the entire created order having ‘its own proper integrity and [being] directed and called towards its own fulfilment and perfection.’\textsuperscript{7}

The significance of this view for a theology of land is its cosmic context, and McFadyen’s view that humanity’s capacity for free choice is distorted. His analysis of abhorrent pathological human behaviour (child abuse and the Holocaust) can also apply to humanity’s (mis)treatment of the land. It extends a theology of land beyond consideration of its intrinsic value and spirituality to include consideration of how humanity’s exercise of land-related decision-making might also be pathologically distorted.

In this regard McFadyen says that these pathological distortions highlight shortcomings in \textit{pragmatic atheism}, which he asserts is the dominant approach to public affairs, with God-talk relegated to those gaps where ‘the explanatory power of secular discourses gives out.’\textsuperscript{8} An implication of these shortcomings for public theology is the need to acknowledge the reality of the scope for distortion in natural resource development decision-making.

One way to reduce this scope would be to promote the well-being of the land. It is inadequate, for example, to rely only on protection measures that are orientated towards reducing environmental harm. This approach is akin to requiring slave owners just to ‘look after’ their slaves, an outlook that was deficient in Wilberforce’s view. Metaxas notes that he was incensed by the comments made by some that slaves were ‘decently’ cared for, having food,

\textsuperscript{5} Quoted in E. Theokritoff, \textit{Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology} (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 236.
\textsuperscript{6} McFadyen, \textit{Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust, and the Christian Doctrine of Sin}, 216.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 69.
clothing and shelter.\textsuperscript{9} It raises the question of whether humanity’s moral code is just one of reducing harm caused to others, or whether humanity should travel that extra mile and love its fellow cosmic travellers as much as it loves itself.

The land’s participation in Creation’s ongoing narrative, then, might be understood as more than just a costly, sacrificial giving by land that benefits humanity. It might also be seen in terms of a mutual sacrificial relationship between humanity and the land, that includes recognition of humanity’s responsibilities towards the land which do not just focus on human utility considerations. It is an approach that recognises suffering and aligns more with a theology of the cross than a theology of glory.

Relevant here is Elizabeth Theokritoff’s view of the nature of creation and humanity being ‘priests’ of creation.\textsuperscript{10} She quotes the view of Joseph the Hesychast that ‘the rocks and the whole of nature are “voiceless theologians speaking theology”,’\textsuperscript{11} and concludes that ‘our task is not to reorganise or redirect creation, but to articulate its “wordless word”.’\textsuperscript{12} She says:

\begin{quote}
The ultimate contrast is not between shaping our environment or preserving it in a pristine state. The choice before us is whether or not we will embrace its potential, as the saints have done, so that natural and manmade features alike become a sacrament of divine presence.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

It is a theme that Williams also promotes:

\begin{quote}
Humanity has a priestly role in nature, a calling to make explicit and visible the meanings that are there in creation, to hold them up for understanding and contemplation, and to make sense of the world – God’s sense, that is, not their own.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

In summary, McFadyen’s analysis reinforces the need to treat land as a sacred part of Creation, and highlights the inevitability of distorted human decision-making. Taken together, these conclusions point to the need for a theology of

\textsuperscript{9} Metaxas, \textit{Amazing Grace}; \textit{William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery}, 163.
\textsuperscript{10} Theokritoff, \textit{Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology}, 189.
\textsuperscript{11} Quoted in ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 219.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{14} Quoted in C. Foster and E. Newell, \textit{The Worlds We Live In} (London: Longman and Todd, 2005), 90.
land to go beyond an emphasis on anthropocentric utilitarianism of the land and the intrinsic value of land, to include consideration of humanity’s responsibilities towards, and (distorted) impact on, the land as it participates in what Conradie describes as ‘the restless journey of the cosmos.’

4.2 Finitude, mortality and eschatological longing

Conradie takes a different approach to McFadyen, but comes to some similar conclusions. He explores issues of finitude, mortality, the transcendence of God, freedom, suffering, sin and the distinctiveness of humanity from the rest of creation. For him, God is no divine watchmaker or an absentee landlord but a relational, creating God who is ‘distinct from creation, but is nevertheless present with creation and in creation’, an outlook he quotes Page as labelling ‘pansyntheism’ – God is present ‘with’ everything.

Further, drawing on Gunton, Conradie sees creation’s ‘otherness’ from God as being vital to creation’s integrity, so that God’s immanence can be understood in a way that does not deprive creation of its freedom. He places this otherness within an eschatological setting whereby ‘a sense of belonging can only be understood in terms of an eschatological longing’ that yearns for ‘an eschatological transformation of the conditions of finitude.’

In addressing the separateness of God from God’s creation, and the intimacy of that relationship, Conradie discusses the rabbinic doctrine of zimsum, divine self-withdrawal. Moltmann describes zimsum as where God ‘as it were retreats, creates space within himself so there is ontological space for there to be something else other than him.’

Conradie explores this concept through the image of a mother and a foetus in her womb and the later relationship between the mother and the child that is born. His analogy is an adaptation of an ecofeminist version of zimsum:

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15 Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, 139.
16 Ibid., 55.
17 Ibid., 13.
18 Ibid., 159.
19 As quoted in Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 113.
A baby coming forth from the mother’s womb has to grow up and become a mature human person in her own right. The daughter cannot remain an extension of her mother forever. The mother has to allow the daughter to become distinct from her. The relative independence of the daughter from the mother is a condition of the relationship of mutual love and respect which will emerge between mother and daughter. This does not diminish the nourishing, nurturing, protecting love of the mother for the child in any way. Moreover, the mother will always remain ‘present’ in the daughter – genetically, through the mother’s upbringing and through their lifelong companionship. Likewise, God’s loving care for creation does not imply that creation has to remain merely an extension of Godself.  

In other words, however panentheism and pansyntheism are understood, the whole of creation is ‘other’ to God, although in an intimate relationship with God. Conradie discusses otherness in terms of humanity’s sense of homelessness and of participating in the restless journey of the cosmos; in doing so he draws on Augustine’s description of human restlessness. It is a journey that includes the discovery of humanity’s finitude, retrieval of a sense of place, recognition that humanity can be ‘at home in the earth’ and the need for an earthly Christian spirituality.  

Conradie cautions, however, that a sense of belonging to the earth community will remain facile and superficial if the predicaments of (human) suffering … finitude …and the legacy of human sin are not adequately addressed. If the message from the sciences and indigenous wisdom suggest that we as human beings are kin to nature, the reality is that our sense of belonging is undermined by a widespread alienation from nature … (for which) … an authentic Christian response is best based on the radical distinction between the triune Creator and the created order.

Having identified this radical distinction, Conradie then asserts that there is no theological urgency to defend a privileged position for humans in God’s household on the basis of human uniqueness. Nor does he endorse humanity’s alienation from nature. Rather, he speaks of human dignity serving as a paradigm for the dignity (or integrity) of the whole earth community. He argues that the distinctiveness of humans from nature can be affirmed and treasured as long as it enriches the earth community. He has an outlook that has similarities with the view of humanity having a priestly role in nature:

If human distinctiveness is characterised as a journey of discovery of our finitude and therefore of that which transcends it, then our vocation and

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20 Conradie, An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?, 55.
21 Ibid., 135 - 50.
22 Ibid., 41.
responsibility may be to enrich the earth community now already through our ability to discern the destiny of our lives, the earth and the cosmos itself.\textsuperscript{23}

Hall also explores the concept of finitude, and in the context of death finds links with love and joy. These are made all the more powerful when his reference to ‘beloved’ is taken to include the nonhuman creation:

Where would love be without death? It belongs to the heart of love to know that the beloved like oneself is mortal, that we love only under the conditions of ‘chronos’ and mortality. Genuine love … contains a large measure of compassion borne of the recognition of our common finitude …

The great objection of the Bible is in fact not to death itself and as such; it is to the power of death over life – a power not given to it by God but by \textbf{us}, by human beings, who in their state of “finitude in anxious self-awareness” (Tillich) are fixated on death. This anxious preoccupation with mortality detracts from our capacity fully and joyfully to enter life.\textsuperscript{24}

Thus, whilst human awareness of finitude and mortality has its shadow side, it also shapes an eschatological longing. This can lead to positive experiences of love, joy and life, and to an understanding that humanity and the nonhuman creation are companions in being other to the One who transcends finitude.

A companionship in otherness also suggests principles such as justice and rights should apply to land as well as humanity in recognition of living within the freedom and constraints of the divinely created order. For in Christ all are one, there is no longer slave or free (Gal 3:28).

Equality of treatment is also strengthened by Conradie placing eschatological longing within a land-related theological context. Here, almost paradoxically, the earth is God’s home, ‘the Creator is creating a home for all creatures’\textsuperscript{25} and ‘Creation is God’s unfinished product’.\textsuperscript{26} For him, the earth is not so much humanity’s house as God’s house, and his Christological outlook is that Jesus Christ is the One who came to dwell in God’s household to make it habitable

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 80, 81.
\textsuperscript{24} D. J. Hall, \textit{The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World} (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 147.
\textsuperscript{25} Conradie, \textit{An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?}, 51.
\textsuperscript{26} Moltmann, quoted in ibid., 173. This point is also made in N. H. Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” \textit{Dialog} 40, no. 3 (2001): 201.
and hospitable. Transcendence and immanence merge when the Kingdom of God is at hand, and otherness disappears.

In summary Conradie’s outlook reinforces the concept that land is a sacred part of Creation, a fellow-traveller with humanity in Creation’s unfolding story. Further, Conradie is a realist in asserting that ‘the suffering and death that form a necessary part of creation have been radicalised by the inexplicable and devastating consequences of the emergence of sin.’

His conclusion that environmental degradation is primarily a product of human sin has much in common with McFadyen’s observations on the inevitability of distorted human decision-making.

4.3 A bridge too far?

Conradie and McFadyen both address the shadow side of Creation where, as noted by Conradie, struggle, pain, cruelty, brutality, and death lie beneath the relatively stable and serene surface of nature’s order. There is no blind spot here as they seek to understand abhorrent human behaviour and link it theologically with the texture of the created order. The relevance to CSG policy of this understanding of human behaviour becomes apparent in the context of degradation of the land occurring as a result of natural resource development, and the treatment of land as a human utility.

The impact of human behaviour, however, is commonly addressed in public policy in terms of the economic principles of competition, scarcity and exchange. So do the theological insights of McFadyen and Conradie add value to the policy debate, or do these economic principles provide a sufficient and acceptable analytical framework for making public policy decisions, without the need for any reference to theology? Is it good public policy, for instance, to treat land as little more than an endogenous input to an econometric model?

28 Ibid., 199, 200.
29 Ibid., 48.
30 The term ‘texture’ was used by Deane-Drummond at a “Rediscovering the Spiritual in God’s Creation” conference, McLaren Vale, South Australia, March 2015
used to determine how the Common Good is best served? If not, can theology provide a different and helpful perspective?

A common feature of McFadyen and Conradie’s respective theological analyses is the absence of a compelling imperative for giving humanity a privileged position in God’s economy, ahead of the rest of creation. For example, McFadyen locates relationships within the context of the entire created order, and Conradie emphasises the interconnectedness of all of creation. A policy orientation towards anthropocentric utilitarianism, therefore, is difficult to justify theologically.

More than this, however, such an orientation in CSG policy has the potential to generate significant harmful consequences for the land, given humanity’s capacity for distorted policy decision-making. The seductive appeal of human self-interest competes against rational policy decisions that benefit the land but come at a cost to humanity.

On what theological grounds might the policy dominance of anthropocentric utilitarianism be challenged? Muers’ concept of ‘co-creatureliness’ has the potential to be a circuit breaker here. She argues that ‘a theology of creation, that starts from, and is limited to, fear for the human future will distort the meaning and value of creation.’ Further, she says ‘pausing at “creatures” has the positive function of enabling us to attend to them – simply as they are, in their scale, power, beauty, diversity, unpredictability and order.’

From a public theology perspective, what Muers does through her theology of creatures is to advocate consideration of a different worldview in the public square. She suggests a new mind-set for seeing, and treating, the non-human creation. There are parallels here with attitudes to slavery in the time of Wilberforce. He, Metaxas says, ‘saw the idea that all men and women are created equal by God, in his image, and are therefore sacred’

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32 Ibid., 92.
33 Ibid., 91.
34 Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, xvi.
‘vanquished the very mind-set that made slavery acceptable and allowed it to survive and thrive for millennia.’

More than just elevating the theological status of creatures, however, Muers sees undermining anthropocentrisim as an important move towards the formation of a theocentric account of humanity and the world. In this way, she provides insights into a theologically-based alternative to anthropocentric utilitarianism in CSG policy as well as contributing more broadly to a systematic theology of land.

In making her case, Muers also refers to the ‘Principle of Voice’ identified by the Earth Bible commentators. In the CSG debate, this Voice is that of a significant stakeholder. The consequences, however, of treating the land as a stakeholder are significant. They ultimately lead to consideration of the need for public policy to apply the principles of wellbeing, justice and rights to the land as well as to humanity. Three arguments (at least) support this:

- There is no compelling theological case for privileging the policy status of humanity ahead of land; indeed, theological developments over the last 30 years have led to increasing importance being attached to giving the land an intrinsic value that goes beyond that of human utility.
- If public policy accepts there is a need to identify explicitly the principles of wellbeing, justice and rights with regard to humanity, then it should also recognise the need to identify explicitly similar principles with regard to the land.
- If there is embedded within humanity the potential for distorted human behaviour that is not constrained by a human/land boundary, then land needs to be afforded similar protection to humanity against abhorrent human behaviour.

An initial response might suggest that consideration of the rights of the land and ecojustice in the development of public theology praxis relating to the CSG industry is too radical. This conclusion echoes the reaction to Wilberforce’s

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35 Ibid., xv.
36 Muers, "Creatures," 91.
37 Ibid., 98, 99.
early advocacy of the abolition of slavery that, Metaxas says, was seen as ‘a bridge too far. Even to discuss ending the trade was, at that point, seen as economic insanity.’

Similar statements are made about Laudato Si’:

Page after page reveals Francis and his advisers as environmental populists and economic ideologues of a quasi-Marxist bent. The language is vivid, almost hysterical. Profound intellectual ignorance is dressed up as honouring God … [the Pope] enunciates a flawed view of economic progress.

It is therefore important to establish a secure and sustainable theological basis upon which to develop a public theology strategy. To this end, subsection 4.4 examines Bouma-Prediger’s discussion of foundational concepts for a Christian ecological theology. Subsection 4.5 then discusses Jennings’ analysis of contemporary dilemmas surrounding society’s pursuit of justice.

4.4 Trends in the evolution of ecotheology.

Bouma-Prediger develops a series of ecotheological propositions in response to a view that Christian theology is ‘ecologically bankrupt and morally blameworthy.’ Through examining the insights of Ruether, Sittler and Moltmann, and using a metaphysical triangle (God, earth, humanity), he suggests ecotheology is relevant if it serves to reshape some theological concepts and adopts a theocentric rather than anthropocentric or cosmocentric perspective.

Then, in discussing the emergence of concepts such as eco-justice and the increasing recognition of the interconnectivity of all creation that dissolves theological boundaries between humanity and the rest of creation, Bouma-Prediger answers his own question by building on the pioneering work of these theologians. His final chapter speaks in terms of developing a Christian ecological theology, but does not formulate a systematic ecotheology as such.

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38 Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, 118.
39 Paul Kelly, Editor-at-large, The Australian, June 24 2015
41 Jennings, Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul : On Justice.
43 Ibid., 5 - 19.
He recognises there are problems with the theologies of Ruether, Sittler and Moltmann, but acknowledges the need for disciplined reflection in light of the Christian faith on the pressing social and ecological issues we face today … and that more work is required to construct a perspective which is faithful to both Christian science and tradition, informed by the insights of contemporary science, and understandable and compelling to both Christians and non-Christians alike.  

4.4.1 Commentary on Ruether

In discussing Ruether’s contribution he notes Murphy’s observation that Earth had come to be viewed as humanity’s hotel rather than home. He then records Ruether’s views on the need to get beyond concepts of the Earth being either Mother Earth or mega machine, the dangers of romanticism, problems of the stewardship model, linkages between ecological and social domination, and the need for a ‘conversion’ that rediscovers the finitude of the Earth and the idea of Jubilee.

Further, he discusses Ruether’s rejection of dualism (particularly the dualism between humanity and nature), her preference for an understanding of human uniqueness based on ‘the human capacity for technological rationality (that) is itself the highest gift of nature’, and her advocacy of a concern for justice and peace in our present temporal existence being the proper subject of Christian eschatology, rather than a ‘flight into the unrealisable future.’

[44] Ibid., 301.
[47] Ibid., 136 - 43.
4.4.2 Commentary on Sittler

In the writings of Sittler, Bouma-Prediger finds an emphasis on God’s grace in creation, ‘an interconnected web of grace,’ and a cosmic Christology that is at the core of Paul’s concept of Lord. Bouma-Prediger thus sees Sittler casting grace and redemption in terms of the whole cosmos, not just the grace of God being a holy hypodermic whereby sins are forgiven:

Only the doctrine of grace will be adequate to change the spirit of our minds whereby we deal with timber and oil, fish and animals, and the structure of cities, urban design, homes for people, places to work – all of these mundane, concrete things that yet constitute the anchorage of our hearts, the home of our daily lives.

Bouma-Prediger explores how Sittler characterises creation as the ‘theatre of grace,’ describing God as other than, but also present in and with, creation. Sittler asserts that the one comprehensive reality of God is grace, and affirms earth is ‘man’s sister, sharer of his sorrow and scene and partial substance of his joys.’ Bouma-Prediger concludes that it is ‘fitting to speak of nonhuman creatures as siblings’ and, quoting Sittler again, that earth ‘unquenchably sings out of her violated wholeness, and in groaning and travail awaits with man the restoration of all things.’

Further, Bouma-Prediger notes Sittler’s description of nonhuman creatures as ‘companions of our creaturehood,’ a term similar to Edwards’ reference to humanity being ‘the companion of finitude.’ He advocates the need to see the intrinsic value of the natural world in moral terms and humans having moral duties and obligations toward things nonhuman. He sees a false separation of sacred and secular, and emphasises a coherent unity in creation. Bouma-Prediger also agrees with Sittler’s implicit affirmation that ‘only a concept like

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51 Gibbs, quoted in ibid., 64.
52 Sittler, quoted in ibid., 67.
53 Sittler, quoted in ibid., 84.
54 Ibid., 83.
ecojustice, which links ecological harmony and social justice, is adequate to describe the
comprehensive vision of creaturely flourishing to which humans everywhere should aspire.\(^5^8\)

Finally, Bouma-Prediger quotes Sittler’s observations about the cruciform character of human existence: ‘At the heart of the Christian message is the affirmation that God himself enters our dying – that God, the Creator of all things, of all life, has himself undergone that which is most common to us humans.\(^5^9\)

It is but one step from here to apply the cruciform label to the land, as Habel has done. Habel, for instance, explores the concept of the Crucified Land (in contrast to the Promised Land) and the need for reconciliation between the Earth and humanity, a concept informed by Rainbow Spirit Theology locating the suffering Christ in the land.\(^6^0\)

4.4.3 Commentary on Moltmann

Bouma-Prediger suggests the emphasis within Moltmann’s writings is on pneumatology and panentheism, which leads to conclusions that align with those of Ruether and Sittler. His discussion of Moltmann’s theology is guided by two quotes:\(^6^1\)

- ‘The sciences have shown us how to understand creation as nature. Now theology must show how nature is to be understood as God’s creation.’\(^6^2\)
- ‘Through his Spirit God himself is present in his creation. The whole creation is fabric woven and shot through by the efficacies of the Spirit.’\(^6^3\)

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 214.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 212.
He relates this theology to Moltmann’s experience as a German prisoner of war during World War II where Moltmann talks of ‘God’s presence in the dark night of the soul’ and that he writes ‘not only out of a deep recognition of the suffering Other – whether exploited peasants or the groaning earth but also out of remembrance and acknowledgement of his own suffering.’

Bouma-Prediger describes Moltmann’s concepts of creatio originalis (creation in the beginning), creation continua (creation in history) and creatio nova (the eschatological or perfected creation) that will become the Home of God. He also discusses Moltmann’s use of the concept of zimsum, how creation continua is ‘other’ to God, and how perichoresis (the mutual inter-penetration and indwelling within the Trinity – ‘the dance of the Trinity’) provides a pattern for the relationship between God and the world.

Bouma-Prediger characterises this relationship in terms of mutuality and reciprocity: in God there is no one-sided relationship of superiority and subordination, command and obedience, and master and servant. He notes, too, that Moltmann’s emphasis on humans as the priests of creation provides a helpful way of speaking about human responsibility to represent God in creation.

Further, Bouma-Prediger is persuaded by Moltmann’s argument that theology must be theocentric rather than cosmocentric or anthropocentric. In this regard he notes Moltmann’s view that while ‘the human being is certainly the living thing with the highest development known to us,’ nonetheless the crown of creation is not humanity but the Sabbath and that the ‘enduring meaning of human existence lies in its participation (Teilnahme) in this joyful paean of God’s creation.’

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65 Ibid., 109 - 25.
66 Ibid., 268.
67 Ibid., 229.
4.4.4 Implications for public theology praxis

In summary, in his overview of developments in ecotheology based on an analysis of the insights of Ruether, Sittler and Moltmann, Bouma-Prediger proposes a number of foundational concepts for a Christian ecological theology, including:

- a rejection of dualism (body and soul, humanity and nature);
- support for relationality (based on a social concept of Trinity);
- links between ecological degradation and social justice;
- God as a suffering God;
- a theocentric perspective;
- recognition of a creation full of grace;
- a Christology as expansive as the cosmos;
- an accommodation of the immanence and transcendence of God; and
- the paradox of the world being totally and essentially dependent on God, and yet not identical with God.  

These foundational concepts complement the discussion in this chapter of factors shaping the evolution of a theology of land and how it might inform the CSG public policy debate, such as:

- the otherness (to God) of all creation;
- the ubiquitous presence of joy in creation;
- the cosmic nature of God’s economy of salvation;
- the finitude and transience of creation;
- the kinship of humanity with the rest of creation;
- the moral character of all creation;
- the suffering experienced by all creation; and
- the intimate, interconnected and mutual nature of the relationship between God and creation.

This chapter’s leaning towards adoption of the principles of wellbeing, justice and rights for the land as well as for humanity is informed by these factors. It

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thus sits comfortably within Bouma-Prediger’s exploration of the evolution of ecotheology and is hardly radical.

Nor should it be considered to be radical to promote these principles in the public square. King, in advocating the centrality of creation theology in policy-making, argues for a reworking of a theology of creation.\textsuperscript{70} If the theology is sound, then the advocacy of principles arising out of this theological reflection becomes a matter of appropriate public theology praxis.

This issue is insightfully informed by Jennings’ “thought experiment” that examines and compares the respective approaches of the Apostle Paul (mostly in his letter to the Romans), and a contemporary philosopher, Jacques Derrida, to the claims of justice and the demands of the law.\textsuperscript{71}

4.5 Justice and law

Through an analysis of Derrida and Paul’s writings, Jennings provides a commentary on insights into a range of related matters such as grace, gift, the law, justice, hospitality, forgiveness, violence, duty and debt. He shows how they use different words and concepts (Paul, for example, refers to the cross, grace, flesh and works, whereas Derrida speaks of ‘deconstruction’ as justice and justice requiring ‘an experience of aporia’\textsuperscript{72}), but both explore the tension between justice and law,\textsuperscript{73} and observe that justice is outside and beyond law. Jennings also highlights how both Derrida and Paul speak ‘into the public square’, going beyond issues of personal morality and faith.

4.5.1 Paul and grace

With regard to Paul, Jennings asserts that Paul’s reflections on the law are often interpreted in the context of Jewish law. Jennings takes it as axiomatic, however, that Paul is concerned with the broader concepts of law, justice, grace

\textsuperscript{70} C. M. King, \textit{Habitat of Grace: Biology, Christianity, and the Global Environmental Crisis} (Hindmarsh: Australian Theological Forum, 2001), 140.
\textsuperscript{71} Jennings, \textit{Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul : On Justice}, xi.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 78.
and gift. He notes, for example, Michel’s observation that Paul’s reflections refer not only to a knowledge of the Mosaic law but also to the juridical thinking of antiquity. On this basis Jennings opens up the application of Paul’s insights into the broader context of justice and law (public policy) in today’s world.

Paul, he says, is concerned to develop the thesis that ‘justice is not and cannot be established through the law, but rather is in some way the consequence of grace or gift.’ 74 Jennings also argues that for Paul justice is more than compliance with the law, that there is a disconnect between law and justice and that this tension ultimately comes to a head through the violence of the law.75

An example Jennings quotes is the condemnation and subsequent execution of Jesus. He argues that, in Paul’s view, the condemnation was not wrong in terms of the law, nor was the execution wrong in terms of legality, but that there was a problem with law as law. Jennings sums it up this way: ‘Paul’s perception that the law is incapable of producing justice depends on the recognition that the messiah of God has been legally condemned and executed by the law.’ 76

Further, Jennings asserts, Paul highlights the conflict experienced by those who wish to pursue justice: ‘The difficulty is that in precisely willing and doing justice we discover that we are already embedded in a world of injustice in which to respond to the claim of the one I betray the claim of the other.’ 77

It is within this context that Jennings quotes Paul’s words ‘Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death? … So that with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh am a slave to the law of sin.’ 78 In other words, for Paul there is an inevitability about injustices being perpetrated in the name of the law, regardless of how moral the decision-maker may be, and that he himself is enslaved by this. Jennings concludes that in this passage Paul is not agonising about sinful weaknesses, but recognising there is

74 Ibid., 7.
75 Ibid., 86.
76 Ibid., 64.
77 Ibid., 151.
78 Ibid.
no escape from complicity in perpetrating injustices, however well-intentioned he might be.

It is also more than McFadyen’s ‘Bound willing’ which focuses on abhorrent human behaviour. Indeed, Jennings states that what is at stake here is neither the captivity of the will nor its impotence. Rather it is a reflection of the texture of the created order impacting on ethical decision-making and the impossible tensions this creates. It therefore extends the scope for distortions in public policy beyond those arising out of pathologically abhorrent human behaviour. It is a sobering challenge for those engaged in public theology praxis – the ethical dilemma of being caught “between a rock and a hard place”. Paul definitely does not have a theological blind spot when developing his vision of what Jennings calls a ‘messianic quest for justice’.

Having described law’s failure to secure divine justice, Jennings then asserts that Paul affirms grace as serving the basis for justice: ‘you are not under law but grace.’ This is more than a statement about personal forgiveness and salvation. Jennings interprets it as a suspension of condemnation of those caught up in the messianic quest for justice, who become agents of injustice precisely because they are bound by the messianic. He describes this suspension of condemnation as ‘the forgiveness/gift that sustains the possibility of seeking to be just.

Here, Paul is not forcing a choice between grace and law, between the eschatological New Heaven and New Earth, and the texture of the created order. Rather, in wrestling with the tension highlighted by the relationship between grace and law, Paul points to a blueprint for living where the two intersect, in the messiness of the world but liberated by divine grace. In public theology terms it translates into a continuing search to find a way to close the gap between what pragmatic atheism delivers and the Shalom of God’s Kingdom, whilst recognising the inevitability of an ethical public policy decision-making process delivering embedded injustices.

79 Ibid., 149.
80 Ibid., 153.
81 Ibid., 86, 87.
82 Ibid., 153, 54.
4.5.2 Derrida and gift

Derrida reaches a similar conclusion about the importance of gift/grace and the failure of the law to secure justice in its fullness, but through a different set of arguments that draw on the concepts of *aporia* (Jennings describes this as ‘the impossibility of what is necessarily possible’\(^83\)), ‘the impossibility of the gift’\(^84\) and a ‘duty beyond debt’\(^85\) to help understand the relationship between justice and law.

Derrida asserts that ‘law is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law; but justice is incalculable.’\(^86\) This outlook leads him to discuss the concept of gift as a central feature for securing justice ‘beyond the law’, as ‘pure morality must exceed all calculation, conscious or unconscious, of restitution or reappropriation.’\(^87\) But he also sees a gift as freely given, with no consideration of reciprocity, which is annulled when, inevitably, it becomes an item in an economy of exchange. He says, ‘for there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt.’\(^88\) Hence he refers to “the impossibility of the gift”.

Can law (ie. public policy), then, secure just outcomes on its own, or is there also a place for accommodating something that is “impossible”? In the public square, for example, where the common approach privileges consideration of the application of economic principles such as demand, supply and exchange to deliver just outcomes (see the discussion of CSG policy in Australia in Chapter 6), should policy decision-making extend beyond such considerations if injustices are to be avoided? Or is this just impractical, fanciful thinking?

In exploring this issue, Jennings discusses Derrida’s concept of hospitality, which he sets alongside Paul’s treatment of the theme of ethics under the heading of “welcome”:

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\(^{83}\) Ibid., 25.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 81.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 96.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 27.
\(^{87}\) Quoted in ibid., 97.
\(^{88}\) Quoted in ibid., 82.
Although there are many ways in which the question of a duty beyond debt, a gift beyond economy, and a justice beyond law might be made more concrete ... the one that Derrida has seemed to find most fruitful for broaching the question of politics has been that of hospitality.\(^8\)

In providing a practical example of justice beyond law, he describes Derrida’s “incandescent” criticism of a revision of legislation in France that sought to make things more difficult for illegal immigrants, a view that has parallels with Paul’s reaction to the legal execution of the messiah.

What becomes of a country, one must wonder, what becomes of a culture, what becomes of a language when it admits of ‘a crime of hospitality,’ when hospitality can become, in the eyes of the law and its representatives, a criminal offence?\(^9\)

Jennings locates this explicit legal sanctioning of injustice within the context of Derrida’s wrestling with the aporetic policy issue of the legal adoption of a right to hospitality that compromises the principle of unconditional hospitality:

It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law ... between the Law of an unconditional hospitality ... and the constitutional laws of a right to hospitality, without which the unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire.\(^9\)

For Derrida, the experience of aporia is a key to the achievement of justice:

justice would be the experience of what we are unable to experience ... I believe that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible.\(^9\)

This assertion has a familiar ring to it. Paul, too, is inspired by an impossible vision (of divine justice), an experience of what some might hold to be impossible (divine grace), which motivates him also to look beyond the law to the Law of unconditional hospitality.

Jennings concludes that the reflections of Derrida and Paul come together in a formulation of justice beyond the law, gift outside economy and duty without debt.\(^9\) Their language might differ but their concepts are similar, as both

\(^8\) Ibid., 109.
\(^9\) Ibid., 125, 26.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Quoted in ibid., 25.
• have a vision of justice beyond law, but neither wants to abandon the law;
• highlight the linkages between violence and the law’s pursuit of justice;
• speak in terms of hospitality and welcome;
• advocate duty beyond debt and the obedience of faith;
• see the need to go beyond the perspective that the law provides the benchmark against which the achievement of justice is measured;
• recognise the “impossibilities” of gift and grace inherent in their respective visions; yet
• continue to advocate their centrality in securing justice.

Paul’s vision of the grace being the ultimate source of justice is thus no more “a bridge too far” for informing a public theology praxis than Derrida’s vision of the concept of gift informing contemporary policy issues. It might be seen as a quixotic tilting at windmills, but what they have in common provides a foundation for a constructive public policy dialogue that crosses philosophical boundaries, through different ways of understanding the relationship between public policy (law) and justice. Jennings puts it this way:

Both Paul and Derrida are wrestling with … above all, the question of justice. And it is because they are wrestling with precisely these questions that they may be seen to engage one another’s projects in interesting and illuminating ways.94

4.5.3 If Creation is a gift

How might this view of the relationship between justice and law then apply to the development of a theology of land, and thus to the public policy debate surrounding the CSG industry? Some additional insights can be found in Mark Manolopoulos’ exploration of the view of Creation as gift, which extends Derrida’s concepts of gift and aporia to the whole of Creation.95

First, he refers to Derrida’s bias against exchange, that the gift becomes infected (and fallen) because ‘the moment the gift, however generous it might be, is infected with the slightest hint of calculation … it falls within the ambit of

93 Ibid., 111.
94 Ibid., 176.
an economy.\textsuperscript{96} He then quotes Grau’s conclusion that ‘Derrida’s attempts to isolate the gift from all polluting economy appear restrictive, if not almost oppressive, in what seems a drive for purity and transcendence.'\textsuperscript{97} Finally he equates “creation as gift” with transcendental escapism and “exchange” with interrelatedness and interindebtedness by noting that a ‘world of absolute transcendence would be non-reciprocal, orderly, sheer grace and gratuity – unlike this messy matrix of interrelating, interindebting, intertwining bodies.’\textsuperscript{98}

Manolopoulos then concludes that

Not only is any escape from the interface between the immanent and transcendent theoretically dubious but also eco-politically disastrous. The drive for purity is a somewhat fanciful flight from dirty materiality to stainless ethereality. (The qualifier “somewhat” signifies that we shouldn’t be absolutely against absolute transcendence but that we should acknowledge existence as the interplay between transcendence and immanence, presence and absence, etc).\textsuperscript{99}

What needs to be separated out here is the characterisation of Creation from the response to that characterisation. Interpreting and encountering Creation as “gift-aporia”\textsuperscript{100} has parallels in the theological conceptualisation of Creation (for example: is the good Earth, a gift of God to humanity, “fallen”, “broken”, or “incomplete”? Is human sin responsible for this state?) and generates debate about the relationship between transcendence and immanence, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The characterisation of Creation as gift-aporia thus contributes to theological debate.

On the other hand, to describe Derrida’s ‘isolation of the gift’ as ‘restrictive, if not almost oppressive’ does him a disservice. Although Derrida defines a necessary distinction between justice and the law, he still acknowledges that justice requires the law.\textsuperscript{101} And it is in the exploration of this relationship, as reflected in his observations about the role and value of rights, that Derrida involves himself in the messiness of political realities.

\textsuperscript{96}Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{97}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98}Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{99}Ibid., 62, 3.
\textsuperscript{100}Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{101}Jennings, \textit{Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul : On Justice}, 45.
Indeed, Manolopoulos’ focus on Derrida’s emphasis on purity – ‘perhaps the latter-day Derrida became too much of a purist and this thereby endangered the undisclosed ecological possibilities in rethinking gift- porous’\(^\text{102}\) – misses an opportunity to extend Derrida’s treatment of rights into an ecological context.

For example, in his discussion of unconditional hospitality, Derrida states that ‘justice is not the same as rights; it exceeds and founds the rights of man.’\(^\text{103}\) Further, Derrida claims that ‘the law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights’,\(^\text{104}\) but then qualifies this view (as cited earlier):

> It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law … between the Law of an unconditional hospitality … and the constitutional laws of a right to hospitality, without which the unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire.\(^\text{105}\)

If there is a place for embedding human rights in the law, then the same arguments could be employed in advocating the rights of the land. Whilst Manolopoulos does not address this explicitly, consideration of his concept of oscillation as a response to encountering Earth as gift- aporia, and what he calls its contradictory duality, provides scope for this.

Manolopoulos describes oscillation as embracing the adoption of responses that include letting-be (radical, ecological non-interventionism), playing-with (joyous interactivity responding to the gratuity of the gift), utilisation (benefitting from the gift’s instrumentality), and reciprocity (thanksgiving, indebtedness and paying-back). For him, Earth’s contradictory duality requires responses that can be contradictory.\(^\text{106}\) He then concludes that

> if creation is a gift – a gift in all its splendid aporeticity – then it would inspire and inform an oscillatory interactivity with it, which may save it. And, if another name for interactivity marked by letting-be, utility, enjoyment, and reciprocity is “love”, then Earth should be loved.\(^\text{107}\)

\(^{103}\) Quoted in Jennings, Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul : On Justice, 80.
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 124.
\(^{105}\) Quoted in ibid., 25.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., 67.
Manolopoulos’ reasoning is technical and conceptual, with terms like oscillatory interaction, interindebting bodies and splendid aporeticity providing a good test for the theological imagination. His consequential advocacy of loving the earth, however, finds a theological home in the commandment to “love your neighbour”. The way he describes oscillatory interaction between humanity and the rest of creation, for example, could also easily apply to relationships between humans, where similar notions of letting-be, joyous interactivity, utilisation and respect are equally relevant.

But more than this, just as Derrida wrestles with the relationship between justice and law, and acknowledges the place of “rights” in the regulation of interactions between humans, so also the same debate surrounds the place of the rights of the land in the regulation of the interaction between humanity and the land. So if public policy does not incorporate the rights of the land, will loving the land remain no more than a ‘pious and irresponsible desire’?

4.6 Weaving a theology of land

This exploration of a theology of land has involved an examination of the topic from a number of different, but overlapping, angles:

- the insights of Ruether and Primavesi provide a focus on spirituality;
- those of Meeks, McFague and Tanner locate the topic within a cosmic economy of salvation;
- McFadyen and Conradie reflect on the impact of the texture of creation on humanity’s responsibilities towards the rest of creation;
- Muers offers an alternative to anthropocentrism by exploring a theology of creatures;
- Bouma-Prediger proposes a number of foundational concepts for a Christian ecological theology in his commentary on the evolving character of the broader topic of ecotheology; and
- Jennings and Manolopoulos provide a theological basis for dialogue across faith and secular boundaries on the treatment of land in the public square.

Through this theological journeying, land emerges as having an intrinsic worth in the eyes of God, having a voice that is not heard clearly by humanity, giving
joy, suffering, having an eschatological hope, participating in the dance of the Trinity, being a travelling companion to humanity in the restless journey of the cosmos, and sharing with humanity an ‘otherness’ to the divine.

Along the way, a lookout point was passed that provided a vision of seeing the need for public policy to recognise the rights of the land.

Some may hold that the concept of the rights of nature is theologically unsustainable, too radical, and/or will have little traction in a public square that McFadyen says is dominated by pragmatic atheism.¹⁰⁸ This chapter, however, puts the case that it is precisely in this liminal space where the messiness of the world and divine grace intersect, beyond pragmatic atheism but not as far as the eschatological new creation, that public theology has a contribution to make, informed by an ever-evolving theology of land. In Manolopoulos’ terms, this is where purity and exchange meet.

It is premature to speak of a systematic theology of land, particularly in view of the open-ended nature of some issues raised in this chapter. Nevertheless, the conceptual threads in this chapter lend themselves to being woven together to create a ‘wall hanging’, themed on a theology of land, to provide a context for assessing CSG developments in Australia. The wall hanging has many threads running through it, suggesting deeper truths not yet captured in one theological structure, and having the potential to inspire theological and public policy imaginations.

What is to be found in this wall hanging? Drawing on discussions in this chapter, three metaphors for creation – Stage, Incomplete and Beloved – are put forward as a backdrop against which to reflect on how a theology of land might inform attitudes towards the land and, as a consequence, policy decisions that impact on the land. Each delivers different emphases and insights, ranging from anthropocentric utilitarianism, through stewardship, to treating land as neighbour.

4.6.1 Creation as ‘stage’

The first metaphor reflects the theological view that humans are at the centre of creation; it leads to an attitude to the land focussed on human use, with an underlying narrative being that of land as a gift of God to humanity. Irenaeus, for example, states that ‘man was not made for its sake [the creation’s], but creation was made for the sake of human beings.’ Further, Migliore says that ‘God was not compelled to create the world. It is an act of free grace. Creation is a gift, a benefit’, and Kim refers to a Vatican view that the environment is God’s gift to humanity. And it is certainly treated as a gift, as no explicit payment is made to the land for the uses humanity makes of it.

This outlook lends itself to the assignment of human-based economic values to aspects of the environment, be they of an aesthetic or resource nature, and also to the adoption of economic methodology as a decision-making tool. It privileges the principles of the Common Good, economic growth and sustainable development. Further, it supports policies that protect food security and water quality, provide later generations with a viable future, and preserve the environment’s natural beauty, as all address human needs. Accountability and responsibility are measured in terms of human utility.

It also legitimises an anthropocentric focus for churches, such as when they champion the interests of the powerless and marginalised in the CSG debate, exercise pastoral care for people affected by the CSG industry, and pursue issues of international justice (such as inequity in resource usage and carbon emissions between first and third world nations).

The way in which land is regarded within this metaphor, however, differs little from the pragmatic atheism approach referred to by McFadyen. It has little sense of Derrida’s ‘infection’ of a gift, or Paul’s groaning of Creation. And as an

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input to a polarised and contentious policy area like that surrounding CSG, it generates few policy challenges besides that of caring for the marginalised.

So what additional insights might emerge if the theological net is cast more explicitly into ecological waters? In his discussion of the foundations for a Christian ecological theology, Bouma-Prediger draws on VanHoeven’s suggestion that ‘a Spirit-recast theology of creation opens up the possibilities for “untraditional thinking” about nature, eg. viewing the natural world as more than simply the stage for the divine-human drama.’\(^\text{112}\)

This approach gives the scope for land to have its own identity, for the introduction of the concept of relationships between the land, humanity and God, and for the consideration of the impact that the texture of the created order has on human decision-making with regard to the land.

4.6.2 Creation as ‘incomplete’

The second metaphor is based on the concept of Creation being ‘good but incomplete.’\(^\text{113}\) As discussed earlier, the texture of the created order can be described as sinful, broken, constrained, imperfect, transient, transforming, good and joyful. The term incomplete is favoured as a generic, open-ended and neutral term that invokes a sense of divine mission, Moltmann’s stages of creation and Conradie’s concept of the restless journey of the cosmos. It also applies to humanity as much as it does to the land.

Recognition that the created order is incomplete invites reflection on the idea that land has an eschatological, intrinsic value in the eyes of God that is independent of human utility. Wright, for instance, in exploring the nature of the created order, sees transience as ‘a god-given signpost, pointing not from the material world to a non-material world, but from the world as it is to the world as it is one day meant to be.’\(^\text{114}\)

\(^{112}\) Quoted in Bouma-Prediger, The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jurgen Moltmann, 296.

\(^{113}\) Wright, Surprised by Hope, 114.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., 106.
This view attaches importance to physicality as well as to spirituality, brings the nonhuman creation into God’s cosmic economy of salvation, and makes humanity more accountable (to God) for its treatment of the land, which is integral to the divine creation. It leads to an emphasis on stewardship and humanity’s responsibilities to manage natural resources efficiently, to protect the environment from human degradation and to repair ecological damage caused by humans.

It also encourages churches to have an environmental focus, something that is gradually becoming an integral part of mission. For example, Lande records that one of the Anglican “five marks of mission” is ‘to strive for the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth’ and Ayre notes that ecological and environmental issues have started to show on the radar of the Christian community generally, although there is still a long way to go. That certainly appears to be the case in Australia, where such awareness seems to reflect a minority position.

In this regard, a National Church Life Survey (NCLS) report found that whilst a large majority of church attendees believed there was a moral obligation to be active about environmental issues (81% in 2011, up from 72% in 2006), less than half were personally active (33% in 2011, up from 17% in 2006).

Further, NCLS reported that whilst a large majority of Australian church attendees thought that climate change was occurring (82%), they were split about whether this was natural (37%) or largely human-induced (44%); this mirrored the Australian population in general. NCLS also noted the need for considerable engagement with congregational members about climate change, its causes and imperatives for mitigation.

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The rather lukewarm uptake of attitudinal change is not surprising given the analysis in Chapter 6 that records a continuing dominance of anthropocentric attitudes in the regulation of the CSG industry in Australia, where the land’s interests remain firmly subordinate to human needs. Further, some forms of stewardship can assume an anthropocentric hierarchy\(^\text{119}\) that draws the focus away from the needs of the environment towards the needs of humanity.

As observed by Conradie, for example, the exercise of stewardship can (arrogantly) assume that ‘we are skilful enough to manage everything, including ecological systems’, and that humans are ‘in control of nature’ and ‘view themselves as distinct from and superior to the nonhuman creation.’\(^\text{120}\) This, however, is an outlook that Marlow says should be challenged.\(^\text{121}\)

“Incomplete” thus goes beyond an anthropocentric, utilitarian view that can limit human responsibilities towards the environment to a focus on humanity’s ecological footprint; it gives greater prominence to issues of justice, equity and intrinsic value, and a stewardship praxis based on theological concepts such as healing, transformation, renewal and redemption.

Is this view sufficient, however, to generate a shift in attitudes to the land as significant as that which occurred 200 years ago with regard to slavery, to overcome the public inertia within Australia towards attitudinal change? Lessons learned from that event suggest that what is required is a new way of seeing reality.

One option is to explore further Manolopoulos’ conclusion that Earth should be loved, by locating it within the divine command to love one’s neighbour as oneself. The policy outcomes this might generate, however, need more analysis – whilst the terms neighbour and love have meaning, applying them to the land requires engagement with new ways of looking at the mysteries of the


\(^{120}\) Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?,* 212.

\(^{121}\) Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah,* 252.
created order. It leads to the third metaphor for describing Creation, namely that of ‘Beloved’.

4.6.3 Creation as ‘Beloved’

Describing Creation as ‘Beloved’ resulted from embarking on a theological journey of discovery. Departure on this journey meant leaving behind religious and scientific fundamentalism, and looking beyond biblical text-based proofs and scientific reductionism. It included wrestling with emotions, experience, ambiguity, paradox, Derrida’s ‘impossibility of the gift’ and Paul’s struggles with the relationship between grace and the law.

Concepts encountered in this journey included finitude, transience, suffering, zimsum, the intrinsic goodness of creation, death, theodicy, the eschaton, and aporia, as discussed in this chapter. A sense of mystery also accompanied each one, giving rise to an awareness of the potential for getting lost in a theological maze, after leaving the security of a safe religious tradition.

Hope was provided, however, by Haught’s discussion of religious homelessness, a particularly pertinent concept within a theology of land framework. Conradie presents Haught’s insights as follows:

A sense of religious homelessness may actually foster a sense of being at home in the natural world if the history of the cosmos itself can be interpreted in terms of cosmic homelessness, but then understood as an ongoing adventure into mystery, a cosmic pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{122}

A similar insight is provided by Darragh who sees that homelessness brings with it a sense of being one with Earth’s journeying,\textsuperscript{123} and also by Deane-Drummond who, in her analysis of Moltmann’s ecological doctrine of creation, speaks of ‘the ideal of home, which we experience both now and in the future Sabbath, and the ideal of pilgrimage which is content to pass through suffering so it can enter a full glory.’\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} Conradie, An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?, 139.
\textsuperscript{123} Darragh, At Home in the Earth: Seeking an Earth-Centred Spirituality, 36.
Religious homelessness involves the pilgrim occupying a liminal theological space, having moved from a former religious ‘home’ (which, perhaps, was safe and comfortable), but not yet having arrived at a new religious destination (only seen through a mirror, dimly). Wrestling with mystery is central to this journey that, as developed by Conradie, incorporates both a physical (immanent) and eschatological (transcendent) sense of belonging.

Not only, then, are humanity and the Earth fellow companions on the restless journey of the cosmos, but also their companionship can be understood in terms of a relationship, of mutual belonging. It is but a short step from here to regard all Creation, not just humanity, as Beloved.

This conceptualisation, however, challenges the acceptability of environmental protection regulatory policy that is orientated towards managing the harm done to the environment. Is it acceptable to have polices that countenance harming something that is Beloved? Well might a policy decision-maker echo Paul’s lament in Romans 7:24 ‘Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?’ Whatever policy decisions are made, injustices will emerge and suffering will result. Consideration of the rights of the land provides one possible response.

At a public policy level, Creation as Beloved empowers the consideration of the rights of the land through its entertainment of the commonalities between humanity and the rest of creation. Relevant here is Derrida’s argument that, although recourse to human rights compromises the achievement of (pure) justice, there is a case for the inclusion of human rights in the law. The same reasoning can also apply to the inclusion of the rights of nature in law if there is no sustainable theological argument to support the privileged treatment of humanity compared to the nonhuman creation. This assumes that the pursuit of justice should embrace all of creation, not just humanity. Finding the right policy balance will then take into account the rights of the land as well as humanity.

4.7 A theology of land wall hanging
The following chart provides a broad summary of these contrasting, but not mutually exclusive, views of Creation. It sets an initial theological context for examining developments surrounding the CSG industry and for reflecting on evolving Australian attitudes to the land. Australian contextual considerations are discussed in Chapter 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creation metaphor</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Incomplete</th>
<th>Beloved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to Land</td>
<td>Utility</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Co-creature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for action</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecomission goals</td>
<td>N/A[^125]</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Land is valued</td>
<td>Anthropocentric</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Land is regarded</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Creature</td>
<td>Kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty towards Land</td>
<td>Dominion</td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Land</td>
<td>Gift</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Neighbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral standing of Land</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal treatment of Land</td>
<td>Terra Nullius</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terms populating the chart have not been rigorously defined, nor have they been selected with a view to establishing a foundation for a systematic Australian theology of land. Rather, they are mostly non-theological terms intentionally chosen to communicate theological insights in the public square.

Three scenarios are presented to help identify what views of reality currently inform CSG public policy, to promote dialogue on the acceptability of current CSG-related practices and legislation, and to stimulate the imagination about different ways to respond to the challenges the CSG industry presents.

The chart is described as a ‘wall hanging’ rather than a summary of policy options, in view of its descriptive rather than prescriptive nature. This aligns with the conclusions reached in Chapter 8 about the form of public theology in today’s post-secular society.

[^125]: If Land has no purpose other than being a stage for the drama of God’s economy of salvation and providing resources for humanity, then in no way is it a focus for mission.
SECTION 2

. . . THE VOICE OF LAND . . .
Chapter 5  The Australian Coal Seam Gas industry

5.1  The Australian landmass

Australia covers five per cent of the world’s land mass and is the world’s sixth largest country. It is the lowest, flattest and (apart from Antarctica) driest continent. The uniqueness of Australia’s flora and fauna reflects its geological isolation. It is one of the most biologically diverse countries on the planet and has some of the oldest land surface but land clearing, water extraction and poor soil conservation have caused the quality of Australian soils to decline.¹

5.2  What is Coal Seam Gas?

The Australian energy sector, within which the CSG industry is located, is an important contributor to the Australian economy. It has been described as follows:

In economic terms, the energy sector makes a substantial contribution to the nation’s gross domestic product, export earnings, and employment. A secure supply of affordable, reliable, environmentally sustainable energy is essential to Australia’s future growth and prosperity.²

Further, with Australia’s abundant and diverse energy resources (of which CSG constitutes a substantial part), the Minister for Industry has highlighted the significance and importance of this industry sector in the future:

Australia is well positioned to maintain its role as an important supplier of the world’s energy needs while our energy resources continue to provide Australian households and businesses with a secure and reliable domestic energy supply.³

Natural gas is the fastest growing energy source within this vibrant sector of Australia’s economy, with production increasing by 8% in 2011-12 and CSG playing a large part in this growth. Between 2005 and 2012 there was a tripling of proven and probable (“2P”) gas reserves due to the discovery of more CSG

¹  This summary draws on the australia.gov.au website, retrieved 23/11/2014
³  Ibid., Foreword.
reserves on the east coast of Australia; in addition, Australian CSG production increased from 2% to 11% of total gas production in five years to 2010-11.\(^4\)

Further, in 2012, the Economic Demonstrated Resources (EDR) of CSG accounted for about 24% of the total gas EDR in Australia; and after Sub-Economic Demonstrated Resources (SDR) \(^5\) and inferred resources are included, CSG accounted for more than 50% of all identified gas resources in Australia.\(^6\) This is discussed in more detail in subsection 5.3.

It is therefore not surprising that, as reported in the 2014 Australian Energy Resource Assessment (AERA) report, natural gas is Australia’s third largest energy resource after uranium and coal, and is expected to increase its share of Australia’s energy production and exports over the next few decades.\(^7\) In 2011-12, for example, gas accounted for 23% of Australia’s primary gas consumption, and 19% of electricity generation,\(^8\) and these percentages are set to increase, partly as a result of an expansion in CSG production. In addition, Australia’s CSG production accounted for 8.9% of CSG production worldwide.\(^9\) The economic outlook for the CSG industry can thus be described as robust.

What, then, is so controversial about this growth industry that has generated so much criticism and brought it into the policy spotlight? To explore this, it is necessary first to identify the special characteristics of CSG that determine the way in which it is mined. This then provides a foundation upon which to scope and analyse the issues arising.


\(^5\) EDR are defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as a ‘measure of the resources that are established, analytically demonstrated or assumed with reasonable certainty to be profitable for extraction or production under defined investment assumptions. Classifying a mineral resource as EDR reflects a high degree of certainty as to the size and quality of the resource and its economic viability, and SDR are defined to be similar to EDR in terms of certainty of occurrence but are considered to be potentially economic only in the foreseeable future.’ See http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/89EAED62B799ED20CA25773700169CC1?opendocument retrieved 18 November 2014.


\(^7\) Ibid., 81.

\(^8\) Ibid., 83.

\(^9\) Ibid., 91.
The report prepared for the Australian Council of Environmental Deans and Directors (ACEDD) in 2012 provides a broad schematic of different natural gas resources that include CSG (Figure 5.1).\textsuperscript{11} Also known as coal seam methane and coal bed methane, CSG is a naturally occurring fossil-fuel gas. It is classed as an \textit{unconventional} gas, but chemically it is virtually identical to \textit{conventional} natural gas. The use of terms such as CSG and, generically, unconventional gas refer to the source, geological location and characteristics of the reservoir within which gases are found and the processes used to extract them, rather than chemical composition.\textsuperscript{12}

Conventional natural gas can be obtained from reservoirs that largely consist of porous sandstone formations, capped by impermeable rock, with the gas trapped by buoyancy. Extraction is through conventional drilling into the rock

\textsuperscript{10} NSW Chief Scientist \& Engineer, "Coal Seam Gas Review - Initial Report," 37.


\textsuperscript{12} The information in this subsection on natural gas is drawn from CSIRO, "What Is Unconventional Gas?," (Australian Government, 2015).
strata trapping the pocket of gas, and often the gas can migrate to the surface through gas wells without the need for pumping.

Unconventional gases are usually produced from complex geological systems that prevent (or at least significantly limit) the migration of gases, and so require innovative and unconventional technological solutions for their extraction. It is these extraction technologies in particular that give rise to a number of the critical policy issues, such as the use of hydraulic fracturing and the management of the ‘produced’ water that is pumped up with the CSG from the coal seam. The mining of unconventional gases in Australia currently centres on CSG, in view of its easier and lower cost extraction.

Other examples of unconventional gases besides CSG are shale gas and tight gas. Shale gas is held in organic-rich source rocks such as shales and fine-grained carbonates. It is generally extracted from clay-rich sedimentary rock, which has naturally low permeability. The gas the rock contains is either adsorbed or is in a free state in the pores of the rock (called the matrix). Tight gas is found in rocks of low permeability, trapped in reservoirs characterised by very low porosity and permeability and a geological structure that makes gas migration very difficult.

CSG is extracted from coal seams at depths of between 200 and 1,000 metres. It is a mixture of gases, but generally contains between 95% and 97% pure methane. It has very little of the heavier hydrocarbons such as propane and butane and no natural gas condensate.

Figure 5.2 Schematic of the formation of coal seam natural gas.\textsuperscript{13}

As illustrated in Figure 5.2, the gas is typically attached by adsorption on the fracture surfaces, in the open fractures in the coal (called the cleats) or within the coal matrix. It is held in the coal by the pressure of formation water in the coal cleats and fractures. Production of the gas relies largely on the release of water pressure within the coal seams, supplemented where needed by hydraulic fracturing (also known as “fracming” or “fracking”). It cannot be extracted by conventional methods of drilling into a pocket of natural gas.

The extraction technology used in a particular location, however, depends on the geological characteristics of the strata within which a coal seam is found.

5.3 Where is CSG found in Australia?

As reported in the 2014 AERA report, the major basins with large CSG reserves are mostly in eastern Australia (Figure 5.3).

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Of these, the Surat and Bowen basins in Queensland account for 92% of CSG EDR reserves (Figure 5.4).

![Figure 5.4. CSG EDR reserves by basin.](image)

CSG exploration and production, however, is in its infancy. Production of CSG in Australia in 2012 was 258.1 petajoules, just 0.1% of Australia’s potential in-ground CSG resources, but up 10.8% in just 12 months.\(^\text{16}\)

Further, this production has primarily been from Permian and Jurassic coals where the costs of extraction are lower. More recently, CSG exploration has ventured into other areas of widely differing geological age, where extraction costs are higher. Triassic and Cretaceous strata, the Galilee and Clarence-Moreton basins, and brown and black coal basins are now all active targets. The geographic footprint of CSG production thus has the potential to expand very significantly in the future, although the 2014 AERA report notes the full extent of this is unclear as the totality of CSG reserves is unknown.\(^\text{17}\)

The geologically specific nature of local CSG production also brings with it policy complexities relating to the different environmental impacts arising out of its use of extraction technologies. The geological strata within which CSG is found determines which extraction techniques are used and therefore the impact that CSG production will have in a region:

Permian basins are more likely to require hydraulic fracturing than Jurassic Basins due to the differences in permeability (Jurassic being more permeable). This means that basins such as the Sydney (NSW), Gunnedah (NSW), Bowen


(NSW/Qld) and Gloucester (NSW) are more likely to require hydraulic fracturing in comparison to the Surat (NSW/Qld) and Clarence-Moreton (NSW/Qld).\(^{18}\)

This policy complexity is further compounded when CSG is found in other geological strata (for example, black and brown coal basins), where extraction requires the development of different and more expensive technologies. This is also true of the mining of other unconventional gases such as shale gas and tight gas. The insights gained through analysis of the CSG industry thus have the potential to apply to the Australian natural gas industry as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Category</th>
<th>Conventional Gas</th>
<th>Coal Seam Gas</th>
<th>Tight gas</th>
<th>Shale gas</th>
<th>Total gas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically demonstrated resources</td>
<td>109,433</td>
<td>35,905</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>145,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-economic demonstrated resources</td>
<td>62,664</td>
<td>65,529</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>130,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferred</td>
<td>~11,000</td>
<td>122,020</td>
<td>22,052</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>155,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All identified resources</td>
<td>183,097</td>
<td>223,454</td>
<td>22,052</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>430,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources identified, potential and undiscovered</td>
<td>249,700</td>
<td>258,888</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>480,700</td>
<td>989,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Tight gas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.5  Total Australian gas resources (measured in petajoules).\(^{19}\)

The importance of this industry to Australia is illustrated by Figure 5.5, which provides estimates of the growth potential of the Australian natural gas market. CSG currently constitutes more than half of Australia’s identified natural gas resources, although this might be overshadowed by shale gas if its extraction becomes economically viable.

Australian gas production is thus projected to increase substantially over the next few decades, with some of the currently SDR and largely inferred (mostly CSG) resource being converted to EDR and then entering production. Whilst the true size of Australia’s gas resources is unknown, and could be much larger than the identified resources, what is clear is that this sector of the Australian economy is expected to grow significantly over the next few decades.\(^{20}\)

In addition to CSG having a major economic impact on Australia in the future, it will also have a substantial geographic and environmental impact which, in


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 119.
policy terms, has implications for matters such as indigenous issues, pollution, landowners rights, and alternate land uses like agriculture, housing and recreation. Figure 5.6 illustrates the coverage of natural gas basins from which natural gas is, or may be, extracted. This underlies a significant percentage of the Australian continent.

![Australia Natural Gas Resource Potential](image)

**Figure 5.6** Australian natural gas resource potential.\(^{21}\)

The geographic location of Australia’s gas reserves, and CSG in particular, also needs to be put in the context of another of Australia’s major natural resources, the Great Artesian Basin (GAB). This is one of the largest artesian groundwater basins in the world, extending beneath parts of Queensland, New South Wales (NSW), South Australia and the Northern Territory, and running 2,400 kilometres from Cape York in far north Queensland to Dubbo in central NSW.\(^{22}\) It underlies approximately one fifth of the Australian continent (Figure 5.7) and overlaps many of the basins where CSG is found, such as the Surat, Bowen and Clarence-Moreton basins. Its extensive geographic reach has implications


for the management of hydraulic fracturing and general water issues arising out of the mining of CSG, as discussed in subsection 5.7.

5.4 How is CSG mined?

The main components of a CSG production process are the building of a well, hydraulic fracturing (usually), pumping the gas out of the coal seam, treating the ‘produced' water, and delivering the gas to a CSG production centre.

CSG is extracted through wells drilled into coal seams. The coal seam is normally saturated and under pressure and so when water is removed the gas can desorb from the coal and be pumped to compression plants for injection into gas transmission pipelines. Individual wells may take from three days to six weeks to set up, drill and complete. Once it is operational, a CSG well may produce gas for up to 30 years.

As illustrated in Figure 5.8 a well is drilled down to the coal seam and then the mixture of gas and associated water is pumped to the surface where the gas is

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separated from the water and passed through a gas drying facility to a gas compression unit for distribution. The produced water is commonly saline and can contain chemicals naturally present in the coal seam or introduced as a part of the hydraulic fracturing process. It can be ‘cleaned’ through desalination and then used for irrigation, discharged into rivers and streams, left in surface ponds to evaporate or just reinjected back into the subsurface. All these outcomes have the potential to pollute the environment and thus the management of produced water in an effective manner is an integral and important part of the CSG production process.

Ensuring well integrity is an important feature of CSG engineering for reducing the potential for CSG production to pollute the environment. CSG wells are lined with two layers of pressure-rated steel casing from the surface to just above or below the coal seam, with the casing set in a strong seal of cement to prevent the leakage of gas or fluids around the outside of the casing into nearby groundwater or the air. The cross section of a typical CSG well is illustrated in Figure 5.9.

Because of the geological nature of CSG deposits, and the limited volume of coal (and so gas) that can be accessed from a single vertical well, often many production wells are drilled between one or two kilometres apart, or less. In some locations, however, multi-lateral in-seam drilling can be used to target several coal seams from a single well-head on the surface (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.8
A schematic of a CSG well.26

Figure 5.9
The cross section of a typical CSG well.

Horizontal legs are drilled within each seam, allowing for greater production from fewer surface installations. This can reduce the need for hydraulic fracturing.

Figure 5.9
Cross section of a CSG well.\(^{27}\)

Figure 5.10
Multilateral, in-seam drilling.\(^{28}\)

5.5 Hydraulic fracturing\(^ {29}\)

The technique of hydraulic fracturing has been used by the oil and gas industry since the late 1940s to increase the rate and total amount of oil and gas extracted from reservoirs. It can also reduce the number of wells required, thereby limiting the impact of gas extraction on the land surface.\(^ {30}\) It is described by the Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association (APPEA) as ‘a process that uses pressure to create an artificial fracture network to allow gas to flow to a well to improve the gas production rate from the well.’\(^ {31}\) Figure 5.11 provides a schematic diagram of the hydraulic fracturing process.

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\(^{27}\) NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, "Coal Seam Gas Review - Initial Report," 52.


\(^{29}\) This section draws on the fact sheet published by the CSIRO, "What Is Hydraulic Fracturing?," (Australian Government, 2015), Other sources are cited as appropriate.


\(^{31}\) As reported by the NSW Parliament, "Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas," 65.
Hydraulic fracturing involves the high-pressure injection of a sand/water slurry and chemical additives into the coal seams to fracture the seams and thereby increase the permeability of the seam. The NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer notes that:

Much higher production rates can be achieved after hydraulic fracturing. Production rate increases of a factor of two to five for vertical wells and by a factor larger than five for multiple fracture stimulations along horizontal wells, are typical.

Wells that are drilled into low permeability reservoirs, which would otherwise be uneconomic, can be produced after fracturing, which allows resources that would otherwise be uneconomic to be recovered.\(^\text{33}\)

However, not all CSG extraction requires hydraulic fracturing. In 2011 this was estimated to be between 30% and 40% of wells.\(^\text{34}\)

The decision by a company to use hydraulic fracturing is highly dependent on the nature of the coals (thickness, permeability, ‘gasiness’), the general geological setting (prevailing stress field, depositional environment), the adjacent rock types, the proximity of major aquifers and the regulatory regime.

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Not all CSG wells require fracturing; if there is adequate natural permeability, or if it has been horizontally drilled, then it may not be necessary – fracking is expensive – and if it can be, it will be avoided.\textsuperscript{35}

In the case of CSG extraction, the sand in the slurry acts to keep the fracture open after the injection stops and forms a conductive channel in the coal seam through which the water and gas can travel back to the well. Some fractures may extend to a distance of 200 to 300 metres from the well. After fracturing is complete most of the slurry is brought back to the surface and treated before being used again or disposed of.

Added chemicals make up about 1\% of the hydraulic fracturing fluid. Some are in domestic use, such as guar gum (a food thickening agent), sodium hypochlorite (pool chlorine), ammonium persulfate (used in hair bleach), ethanol, ascetic acid (vinegar) and sodium carbonate (washing soda). Some hydraulic fracturing fluids may also contain chemicals not commonly associated with domestic use, such as ethylene diaminetetra acetic acid salt and cyclohexylamine.

The extent to which these chemicals pose harm varies with the exposure to humans and their concentration, and strategies are needed to ensure that groundwater is not contaminated by hydraulic fracturing activities. As noted by the CSIRO, however, whilst the technological aspects of hydraulic fracturing are known, its environmental impacts are less characterised and further study is needed.

Issues related to hydraulic fracturing include the potential for contamination, ‘connectivity’, induced seismicity, subsidence and health impacts.\textsuperscript{36} The 2012 ACEDD report reinforces the need for careful management of the hydraulic fracturing process:

\begin{quote}
The pressure required to fracture the coal seams without impacting on other aquifers requires careful management, including analysis of the strength of overlying and underlying strata, and progressive monitoring and reporting of the outcomes of the fracturing activity.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, "Coal Seam Gas Review - Initial Report," 54.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 55.
5.6 What policy issues surround CSG mining?

In 2011-2012, the extraction of mineral and energy resources accounted for 9 per cent of Australia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP)\(^{38}\) and, as discussed in subsection 5.2, the CSG industry plays a significant role within this sector of the economy. The economic benefits delivered by the mining of CSG include export earnings, a secure and reliable domestic energy supply, minimising the cost of gas to consumers, an increasing GDP, employment and economic investment in regional areas of Australia. The Queensland Government notes:

Economic studies indicate a medium-sized 28 million-tonnes-per-annum CSG to liquefied natural gas industry could:
- generate over 18,000 jobs in Queensland with 3,000 jobs in the Surat basin alone,
- increase gross state product by over $3 billion, or 1%,
- generate private sector investment of over $45 billion,
- provide royalty returns of over $850 million per annum, which could help fund schools, hospitals and other vital services.\(^{39}\)

These economic benefits provide an unavoidable backdrop against which the policy issues arising out of mining CSG are debated in the public square. The CSIRO, for example, lists the economic and other benefits\(^{40}\) of mining CSG, but at the same time it sets this within a complex policy cauldron by noting the lack of certainty surrounding the impact of the industry:

Predicting long-term impacts of CSG production can be difficult due to potential cumulative and region-specific impacts of multiple developments ... Estimating social and environmental impacts for a given time and place is challenging because of variation in the:
- nature of land use in surrounding areas
- amount, density and location of surface infrastructure required
- geology
- hydrodynamics
- economics and logistics of producing and transporting the gas
- the range of management and monitoring practices in place.\(^{41}\)


\(^{40}\) Such as natural gas burning more efficiently than coal or oil, maybe emitting less greenhouse gas, and having a role in supporting a strategic journeying towards lower or zero emission renewable energy sources

The 2012 ACEDD report provides a way to address this complexity through its categorisation of the policy issues. In doing so it highlights their contentious nature since they invoke

- land rights;
- health concerns;
- competing demands for land (for water, food, agriculture, forestry, housing, minerals and recreation);
- the impact on the long-term supply of renewable natural resources (water and land); and
- biodiversity and the sustainability of ecosystems.

The categorisations that the report uses are biodiversity and the landscape, productive landscape, air emissions, water resources, community responses and health.

5.6.1 Biodiversity and the landscape

The 2012 ACEDD report states that CSG mining represents

a serious threat to native vegetation, biodiversity and threatened species ...however it is salutary to recognise that such impacts on vegetation and habitat are usually smaller than the historical impacts of land clearing for agriculture or urban development.

It further notes that wells may be in a grid pattern 200 – 700 metres apart, connected by roads, pipelines and compressor stations that can block pre-existing access to private and public land, as well as intruding into formerly reserved areas of native vegetation.

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42 There is little disagreement within the public and private sectors about the policy issues that need to be addressed, so their categorisation in the 2012 ACEDD report has been used as an initial analytical framework in the thesis.


44 Ibid., 32.

45 Ibid.
5.6.2 Productive landscape

The 2012 ACEDD report states that CSG production ‘generally compromises the landscape for productive agricultural and pastoralist activities … as well as for its habitat values and scenic and aural qualities.’

It puts this in the context of the need to defend Earth’s productive capacity against water scarcity with worldwide food demand expected to double by the middle of the century.

Public debate on this issue has centred on a perceived need to find an appropriate balance between protecting the most valuable agricultural land and the development of the CSG industry, with the primary issue being the construction of regulatory arrangements to achieve that balance.

In this regard the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer states that ‘the current level of use of our sedimentary basins is unprecedented … leading to competition for access to basin reserves that is bringing challenging social, political and regulatory issues.’

This conclusion draws on a paper by Rawling and Sandiford who, in highlighting the importance of adopting the right regulatory and management framework, propose that:

with potential for conflict over competing access regimes to sedimentary basin resources, there is a case for new approaches to the management of our sedimentary basins to help reduce adverse environmental and social impacts, reduce the potential for unintended resource depletion and/or sterilisation, and reduce economic risk arising from multiple, interacting and competing resource usage scenarios.

5.6.3 Air emissions

The 2012 ACEDD report discusses several aspects of this:

\[\text{References}\]

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46 Ibid., 35.
47 Ibid.
48 See, for example, NSW Parliament, "Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas," 174.
50 Ibid.
whether methane is an environmentally cleaner fuel than coal (the report asserts this is the case);

- the fugitive leaks of methane over the lifetime of a gas field (the report suggests further scientific investigation is needed);

- the impact of CSG on climate change (the report suggests this depends on how linkages between water resource management and gas production are understood and managed); and

- the potential for air pollution from contaminants associated with gas production (the report references public concern about air pollution for activities associated with shale gas production processes in the United States).

The report of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into CSG notes the very different views that exist on the likely greenhouse gas emissions of CSG activities, and recommends that CSG companies should be required to minimise fugitive emissions. The NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer discusses in detail this issue of fugitive emissions in her report on CSG, noting community concerns surrounding health and safety, air quality and greenhouse gas impacts. She concludes there is a requirement for further research, baseline and ongoing monitoring to understand the level of fugitive emissions from the industry. The CSIRO has now commenced a project to measure fugitive emissions from a range of production wells in Queensland and NSW.

5.6.4 Water resources

This is a significant issue given the emotive and almost iconic regard for water in the world’s driest inhabited continent. The 2012 ACEDD report identifies five main issues:

- a reduction in available water for other users;

- rapid de-pressurisation of water supplies affecting other water users and the environment;

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• poor treatment of wastewater altering natural flow patterns and water quality and, therefore, river and wetland health;
• hydraulic fracturing leading to contamination of aquifers; and
• injection of extracted water or treated wastewater into aquifers that changes the beneficial characteristics of those aquifers, thereby impacting on industries such as agriculture that rely on these aquifers.\textsuperscript{55}

As discussed in Chapter 6, these issues have attracted the attention of many government agencies: Geoscience Australia, the National Water Commission (NWC), the Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Reference Committee, the Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC), the Department of Industry, the Standing Council on Energy and Resources (SCER), the Productivity Commission and the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer.

The impact of CSG mining on Australia’s water resources has thus been the focus of much investigation, public policy analysis and regulation over the last ten years. A consistent theme is the level of uncertainty and risk surrounding the potential long-term and cumulative impact of CSG activities on Australia’s water resources. Water-related issues debated in the public square fall into three broad categories – demand for water, water pollution and the treatment of wastewater.

The CSG industry competes with demand from the general population (for household use), industry sectors such as farming, and the environment as a whole in supporting a sustainable and healthy ecosystem. At issue is whether (and if so, how) this demand should be regulated.

With regard to pollution, aquifers and groundwater may be polluted as a consequence of hydraulic fracturing, seepage and spillage. This can negatively affect the quality of drinking water, the health and quality of crops that receive the polluted water and the local environmental ecosystem. At issue are the extent and impact of the pollution, acceptable pollution limits and the effectiveness of measures to contain pollution within these limits.

\textsuperscript{55} Williams, Stubbs, and Milligan, “An Analysis of Coal Seam Gas Production and Natural Resource Management in Australia,” 42.
The issues surrounding wastewater relate to its storage and subsequent release out of storage ponds once it has been treated. At issue is whether the treatment is adequate, what impact this will have on the environment, and what beneficial use might be made of this ‘produced’ water.

5.6.5 Community responses

The 2012 ACEDD report lists a number of issues of concern to local communities and landowners, such as the importance of revenue sharing to fund necessary and sustainable regional development, a lack of information about CSG projects, negative impacts on the quality of life and lifestyles,\(^56\) access to land access and compensation.\(^57\)

The NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into CSG is more forthright on these last two issues, referring explicitly to ‘a marked lack of equity between landholders and mining companies with regard to land access … the unequal bargaining positions of landholders and licence holders.’\(^58\) It also notes that there appeared to be ‘limited guidance for landholders when determining appropriate compensation for hosting coal seam gas activities on their properties.’\(^59\)

These matters were also raised by the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer who attributes the genesis of the conflict in part to the landholder’s ownership of the surface of their property and the Crown’s ownership of the minerals and petroleum under the land, which gives the Crown the power to authorise companies to explore on public and private properties and extract resources. She found widespread concern about the seemingly invasive and disruptive nature of CSG wells appearing in grid-like fashion across populated and often expensive land … (noting that) … the property owner ultimately has no legal right to refuse access to their property and must negotiate a land access agreement.\(^60\)

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 71.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 78.
\(^{58}\) NSW Parliament, "Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas," xiii.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., xv.
5.6.6 Health

The 2012 ACEDD report identified a number of potential threats to public health and safety, such as increased truck traffic, unsafe driving practices, gas leaks and explosions, and suggests these issues should be given greater attention.61

The NSW Parliamentary CSG Inquiry report also acknowledges community concerns about the impact of hydraulic fracturing on human health but questions whether these concerns are justified.62 In this regard, a 2013 study by the Queensland Department of Health, that drew on studies undertaken by a number of Government, academic and private sector organisations, concluded that

a clear link cannot be drawn between the health complaints by some residents in the Tara region and impacts of the local CSG industry on air, water or soil within the community. The available evidence does not support the concern among some residents that excessive exposure to emissions from the CSG activities is the cause of the symptoms they have reported.63

In a similar way, the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer notes that human and environmental health impacts are of major concern to the general public (for example, the contamination of drinking water from fracturing fluids, exposure to fugitive gas emissions, mental health, and concerns about noise and dust) but also points out that studies are inconclusive and do not provide evidence of correlations or causality between physical health issues and CSG activities.64

5.7 Discussion

The economic outlook for the CSG industry in Australia is very robust. It has the potential to be a major contributor to economic growth and development in the future, delivering substantial export earnings, an increasing GDP, regional

development, employment, and a secure and efficient domestic energy supply within an environmentally responsible energy strategy.

The CSG industry, however, intersects with major aspects of life in Australia, giving rise to a contentious public policy debate. Threats (real and perceived) regarding the availability and supply of clean water, the pollution of the air, the impact on climate change, land access, the loss of prime agricultural land, and the destruction of ecological habitats are all now a part of a policy mix that is attracting keen attention in the public square.

What is it, then, that heats this policy cauldron of issues surrounding the CSG industry? Why is the debate so emotive and, potentially, polarising? Are the economic arguments not convincing? Is the science too inconclusive? Is the complexity arising out of the interconnected nature of the issues just too great? Are the facts and figures presented in public debate too speculative? Or maybe there is a ‘gap’ in the public debate itself that is being missed in the plethora of government inquiries, economic reports, research studies, public policy initiatives, legislative reforms and private sector investments that have become a feature of the industry today (as detailed in Chapter 6).

To suggest a gap is not to imply a deficiency in the analytical tools (such as economic rationalism, scientific investigation, deductive reasoning and cost/benefit analysis) being applied to the CSG industry. Nor does it imply the existence of a better analytical template that will somehow cut through the Gordian knot of CSG public policy. Rather, it may be that the recognition and articulation of a gap can act as a catalyst in the application of these epistemological tools in a broader way than previously.

What form might this take? Some insights can be gained from sources used in this section to describe the mining of CSG.

The 2012 ACEDD report concludes that, in principle, CSG production is no different to any other productive land use within a landscape:
Managing the production of CSG, an unconventional gas, is essentially another part of managing the whole landscape. It is one more demand on the landscape, competing with production of energy, water, food, fibre, minerals, and with human settlement, and with the need to maintain biodiversity to underpin the ecological functioning of the landscape itself.

Fundamentally, CSG production is no different to any other development of our landscapes. Like them, it poses risks to the condition of the water, soil, vegetation and biodiversity, and has the potential to reduce the capacity of our natural resources to supply human, as well as, ecological needs.

It is important to see CSG operations in this context. The potential impacts of CSG could be significantly less than the impacts and degradation already experienced as a result of agriculture and urban development over the past two centuries in Australia.65

The report’s advocacy of a whole-of-landscape analysis and cumulative risk assessment strategy essentially relies upon acquiring and applying further scientific and operational knowledge about the production of CSG. It also highlights the importance of economic and social analysis, concluding that ‘the challenge is to bring social, economic and environmental concepts together to lead the way to sustained and enduring action on the ground.’66

The NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer makes a similar point, although the recommendations in her initial report on CSG are aimed not so much at further research but ‘improving information available to the community and assisting the Government to build confidence that it has the intention and capacity to oversee a safe CSG industry.’67

In doing so she notes that

CSG is a complex and multi-layered issue, which has proven divisive because of the emotive nature of the community concerns, the competing interests of the players, and a lack of publicly available information ...

From a technical and scientific standpoint, many challenges and risks associated with CSG are not dissimilar to those encountered in other energy and resource production, and water extraction and treatment.

She concludes that

66 Ibid., 7.
the issue of CSG in NSW is a tough one with many complicated parts. A commitment to sound policy implementation based on highly developed data and further research to fill the knowledge gaps will be essential.  

These two reports were produced by well-respected organisations with a strong scientific orientation. Their discussion of the issues surrounding CSG locates their scientific observations within a broader economic and social public policy context. A measure of the thoroughness and acceptability of their analyses and investigations can be found in the National Harmonised CSG Regulatory Framework for Natural Gas from Coal Seams issued by SCER in 2013.  

The Executive Summary of this Framework notes that

the successful development of the industry depends on Australian governments, industry and communities working together to achieve balance in environmental, social and economic outcomes. In particular, governments must provide the policy and regulatory settings and enforceable conditions that will be effective in managing development and will be efficient in maximising the benefits to the community while protecting the environment and human health.  

Further, it notes that the mining of unconventional gas brings a number of risks to the environment. It proposes a set of leading practices framed in a way that is compatible with a risk-based approach to regulation, informed by facts. Its four core practices relate to well integrity, water management and monitoring, hydraulic fracturing and chemical use. Its approach is very compatible with, and essentially endorses, the findings and conclusions reached in the ACEDD and NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer Reports.

So do all these reports provide a sufficiently definitive, comprehensive and authoritative analysis of the issues associated with the mining of CSG to instil confidence in the policy initiatives governments are taking to exercise appropriate regulation of the industry?

A key policy issue identified in all these reports is the management of complexity and uncertainty, and a knowledge gap that can be filled through

68 Ibid.
69 Resources, "The National Harmonised Regulatory Framework for Natural Gas from Coal Seams."
70 Ibid., 6.
71 Ibid., 7.
further research, information gathering and education. It invites an objective, empirically based and rational response and presents this as a reasonable, balanced approach. Further, and perhaps significantly, embedded within the reports and this outlook is an implicit view that the economic and other benefits of CSG establish a compelling and sufficient rationale for mining to proceed, provided strict threshold environmental and production management standards are set and enforced.

But is this view sufficient to allay community fears of, and resistance to, the mining of CSG? The next chapter explores the policy decisions and regulatory action taken by Commonwealth and State Governments to manage the CSG industry, and whether there is a policy gap that is driving the ongoing community concerns.

5.8 Summary

The CSG industry is set to experience rapid, extensive growth over the next few decades. The sheer volume of CSG to be extracted, the technological challenges associated with this, and the expected growth in the exploration and mining of natural gas as a whole paint a picture of a robust gas energy sector that will have significant geographic, economic and social impacts in Australia.

At the same time there are risk factors relating to health, environmental pollution and water quality. Further, competition for scarce natural resources such as water and land, point to increasing contestability for these resources and the potential for polarising conflict.

These factors, together with CSG reserves’ large geographic footprint make the CSG industry a very appropriate representative case study for exploring the interfaces between natural resource development, theology and public policy through the lens of an Australian theology of land.
Chapter 6  Australian Coal Seam Gas public policy

This chapter provides an overview of recent policy developments in the public square surrounding the emergence and rapid growth of the CSG industry in Australia. In analysing these developments it identifies a policy ‘gap’ where a theology of land can contribute to the regulation of the industry.

First, it traces the evolution of regulatory arrangements applying to the CSG industry. Its focus is on Commonwealth, Queensland and NSW jurisdictions, where most of the policy debate surrounding the CSG industry in Australia in the last 10 years has occurred. Then it identifies a consistent and persistent economic development rhetoric, almost ideology, underpinning CSG policy and regulation in Australia. In particular, environmental legislation implements ecologically sustainable development primarily in terms of policy goals relating to economic growth, export earnings, employment opportunities and meeting energy needs cost-effectively within regulated environmental thresholds.

The Chapter concludes by laying the groundwork for a theological input. It asserts that the narrative underlying the development of the industry reflects attitudes towards the land that are strongly utilitarian and anthropocentric, and questions whether such attitudes accurately represent contemporary views on the land and the changing nature of Australians’ relationship with the land.

6.1 The genesis of CSG regulation in Australia

As a result of a special Premiers’ Conference held in Brisbane in October 1990, a statement on national environmental policy was signed in May 1992 by the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, states and territories of Australia and by the Australian Local Government Association. Section 3 of this agreement specifies four principles of environmental policy that ‘should inform policy making and program implementation’.¹

These principles provide the foundational public policy context within which attitudes to the environment in Australia are examined in the thesis:

3.5.1 precautionary principle - Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. In application of the precautionary principle, public and private decisions should be guided by:

1. careful evaluation to avoid, wherever practicable, serious or irreversible damage to the environment; and
2. an assessment of the risk weighted consequences of various options.

3.5.2 intergenerational equity – the present generation should ensure the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

3.5.3 conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity – conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration.

3.5.4 improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms –

- environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services
- polluter pays i.e. those who generate pollution and waste should bear the cost of containment, avoidance, or abatement
- the users of goods and services should pay prices based on full life cycle costs of providing goods and services, including the use of natural resources and assets and the ultimate disposal of any wastes
- environmental goals, having been established, should be pursued in the most cost effective way, by establishing incentive structures, including market mechanisms, which enable those best placed to maximise benefits and/or minimise costs to develop their own solutions and responses to environmental problems.  

Following the signing of this agreement, in 1997 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) developed an agreement on the respective roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states and territories. This sets in place the broad framework within which the regulation of the CSG industry falls. It specifies that Commonwealth responsibilities should focus on matters of national environmental significance, such as world heritage properties, nationally endangered and vulnerable species and communities and the management and protection of the marine and coastal environment. In general, however, it provides for the primary responsibility for the assessment, approval and licensing of mining projects such as CSG to rest with state governments.  

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2 Ibid., Section 3.
The initial application of these principles and responsibilities to CSG mining occurred in Queensland, with exploration starting in 1976 and commercial extraction in 1996. The Queensland Government was early to acknowledge the importance of CSG mining as a major resources and energy industry. On 12 May 2004, for example, the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines & Energy informed the Queensland Parliament that CSG was a Queensland success story with a public policy regime that would ensure Queensland continues to lead the way on coal seam gas ... and ... provide the framework it (the Government) needs to continue to create jobs and prosperity for Queenslanders in the years ahead.

He described an approach to the CSG industry that valued it in a utilitarian way, namely that of providing substantial benefits to Australians. This is a value framework that has not changed significantly in the last 10 years, although it is now qualified by environmental and social considerations that are a source of escalating community concern and tension.

This tension in the CSG policy debate can be seen in comments made by the Chair of a Queensland Parliamentary Committee that in 2013 examined a Private Member’s Bill to protect prime agricultural and other land from CSG mining. In his foreword to the Committee’s report he stated that the Bill ignores the significant investment by this government in world class frameworks, based on science and logic, to properly manage the social, environmental and economic impacts of the coal seam gas industry, one of our most important industries, and to deliver the best economic outcomes for the whole of the State

and that what the Bill proposed was

sheer economic suicide. It would come at great cost to the 30,000 plus workers in the coal seam gas industry and their families, and the thousands of other businesses and their workers whose fortunes are tied one way or another to the industry.

\footnote{NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, "Coal Seam Gas Review - Initial Report," 1.}
Finding a balance between the social, economic and environmental impacts of CSG development is a key policy issue that regulation of the CSG industry seeks to address, as highlighted in 2012 in the report of a NSW Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas. In the report’s foreword, the Chair of the Committee states

there is a marked lack of equity between landholders and mining companies with regard to land access …

the practices of coal seam gas companies are variable at best, and on the whole have been less than acceptable. This was the case not only with regard to negotiating land access, but also with regard to community consultation …

Governments have not done enough to provide accessible and factual information about the development of the industry, which has contributed to a high level of alarm amongst communities affected by coal seam gas exploration …

the industry’s development has outpaced the ability of governments to regulate it, particularly in relation to technical practices such as the storage of ‘produced’ water and fracking fluids.

Further, as provided for in the Heads of Agreement on Commonwealth and State roles and responsibilities for the Environment, environmental regulation is not just a matter for the state governments as some CSG issues do cross state boundaries. For example, the Commonwealth has a particular interest in the management of water resources in view of their national environmental significance.

To this end, a Position Paper on Coal Seam Gas and Water was issued by the NWC. In it the NWC warns about the CSG industry having significant, long-term and adverse impacts on adjacent and groundwater systems. It argues that, where there is potential for significant water resource impacts, CSG activities should be incorporated into water planning and management regimes consistent with the National Water Initiative. It also proposes principles be

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7 NSW Parliament, "Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas."
8 Ibid., xiii.
9 COAG, "Heads of Agreement on Commonwealth and State Roles and Responsibilities for the Environment."
applied by state and territory governments to manage the cumulative impact of CSG waters. For this to occur, Commonwealth/state co-ordination is essential.

In summary, these broad brushstrokes, which describe developments in the public square stimulated by the exploration and extraction of CSG, provide an introduction to the complex policy challenge generated by the growth of that industry. It is one that straddles Commonwealth/state, geographic, scientific, social/economic, private/corporate and ideological boundaries. It also lies within the emotive context of CSG mining operations antagonising communities and polarising attitudes.

A starting point for exploring this complexity is to develop a more detailed understanding of CSG-related regulatory and policy developments at State and Commonwealth levels.

6.2 The research focus

With Queensland pioneering CSG production and the concentration of CSG reserves on Australia’s east coast, Queensland and NSW were selected as a research focus. Developments at a Commonwealth level were also included, given the Australian Government’s national environmental responsibilities.

CSG is a topical issue in other states too, but the industry in those states is not as advanced as in Queensland and NSW. For instance, in 2012 the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources announced a hold on approvals to undertake hydraulic fracturing, noting that ‘exploration for coal seam gas in Victoria is at a very early stage. There is currently no coal seam gas production in Victoria.’\(^\text{12}\)

The Victorian Premier followed this with an announcement in 2013 that the moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in Victoria was to be extended until at least

\(^{12}\) See
July 2015, in parallel with a 12 month public consultation process on a Gas Market Taskforce paper that looked at gas supply issues.\(^\text{13}\)

There are no known, potentially commercial, CSG resources in Western Australia because of that state’s geology and the character of its coals, but it does have significant shale gas reserves.\(^\text{14}\) In 2013 the Western Australia Legislative Council announced an inquiry into hydraulic fracturing, to be undertaken by its Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, but no report date has yet been set.\(^\text{15}\) One hundred and fourteen submissions have been made to this inquiry.\(^\text{16}\)

A similar Inquiry into hydraulic fracturing has also been established in the Northern Territory.\(^\text{17}\)

Contrasting with the more cautious approaches in Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the Minister for Resources and Energy in South Australia is reported to have

\[
\text{delivered an emphatic endorsement of hydraulic fracturing, opening his arms to resource companies while reassuring explorers that the Festival State will not follow neighbouring Victoria which has extended its ban on fraccing to July 15, 2015.}\(^\text{18}\)
\]


The developments in these three states and the Northern Territory, however, did not introduce new issues into the policy mix that encompasses the mining of unconventional gases, but it did reinforce an anthropocentric, utilitarian focus. For example, common themes are economic development and concerns about hydraulic fracturing, matters that have already received significant attention from the Australian, Queensland and NSW Governments. Further, the various reports commissioned by those governments have already attracted extensive submissions on issues to be covered in the new inquiries. Water management is an example of such interest, particularly given the geographic footprints of the Great Artesian Basin and the Murray Darling Basin.  

This affirms the research strategy adopted for the thesis that a representative cross-section of attitudes within Australia towards the CSG mining can be found by focusing on policy developments in Commonwealth, Queensland and NSW jurisdictions, a summary of which is at Appendix 2.

6.3 Australian Government initiatives

This subsection outlines core Commonwealth legislation that establishes a national framework for environmental protection and then, through analysing key reports that relate to the CSG industry, identifies policy priorities that are currently influencing the Australian Government’s regulation of the industry. It concludes that regulatory implementation of these principles is becoming dominated by the policy goal of growing the national economy, at the expense of environmental principles such as the precautionary principle.

6.3.1 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) is the principal Commonwealth Act. Its objects are stated in section 3:

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(a) to provide for the protection of the environment, especially those aspects of the environment that are matters of national environmental significance;
(b) to promote ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources; and
(c) to promote the conservation of biodiversity; and
(c) to provide for the protection and conservation of heritage; and
(d) to promote a co-operative approach to the protection and management of the environment involving governments, the community, land-holders and indigenous people; and
(e) to assist in the co-operative implementation of Australia’s international environmental responsibilities; and
(f) to recognise the role of indigenous people in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia’s biodiversity; and
(g) to promote the use of indigenous peoples’ knowledge of biodiversity with the involvement of, and in co-operation with, the owners of the knowledge.

Section 3A of the EPBC Act is of particular relevance to finding an acceptable policy balance between CSG mining and environmental concerns. It draws on the four principles of environmental policy specified in the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment to define the principle of “Ecologically Sustainable Development” (ESD) as encompassing:

- integration of long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations;
- not using lack of full scientific certainty as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;
- intergenerational equity;
- conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity; and
- promoting improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanism.

The Act was reviewed in 2009, 10 years after it was enacted. The terms of reference for this review included

- to promote the sustainability of Australia’s economic development to enhance individual and community wellbeing while protecting biological diversity and maintaining essential ecological processing and systems;

... to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden on people, businesses and organisations, while maintaining appropriate and efficient environmental

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standards in accordance with the Australian Government’s deregulation agenda.\textsuperscript{21}

In exploring the extent to which the objects of the Act were being achieved, the review noted the aspirational aspects of the Act, and the tension between environmental protection and social and economic considerations:

Identifying an object that reflects the aim of protecting the environment within the context of ESD is important. However, establishing an object that promises strict environmental protection when it is clear that in certain circumstances social and economic considerations will legitimately be brought into decision-making, risks drawing the legislation into disrepute and should be avoided.\textsuperscript{22}

As a way ahead, the review recommended that the objects of the Act be recast to affirm the primary object to be

\textit{to protect the environment, through the conservation of ecological integrity and nationally important biological diversity and heritage … to be achieved by applying the principles of ecologically sustainable development as enunciated in the Act.}\textsuperscript{23}

It also recommended that the Act should emphasise one ESD principle in particular, namely that ‘the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision-making.’\textsuperscript{24}

In responding to the Review’s recommendations, the Australian Government supported the retention of key concepts of the Act, including the principles of ESD being fundamental to the operation and administration of the Act, but did not consider legislative change to the Act’s objects was necessary. Nor did it support emphasising the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity as a fundamental consideration in decision-making; it considered this was not necessary or desirable, on the basis that it was already included in section 3A of the Act.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 27.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In summary, the Act's environmental objectives and principles were not changed, and the principles of ESD and the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity were supported but not strengthened. The Australian Government did, however, extend the Act to include a significant impact on a water resource involving CSG development or large coal mining development as a matter of national environmental significance.26

What policy balance has been implemented in practice? Examination of key reports indicates a shift in focus by the Australian Government over the last five years towards an interpretation of ESD in terms of economic development.

Until recently the orientation of Commonwealth Government reports on CSG-related matters has been towards scientific matters such as fugitive emissions and water management, as instanced in reports prepared by Geoscience Australia, the NWC, the Senate and the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, and the establishment of the IESC.

During 2013, however, this orientation shifted, as reflected in a report by the Productivity Commission on its *Inquiry into Mineral and Resource Exploration*, the announcement of policy reviews of two industry sectors impacting on CSG production (Energy and Agriculture), and the introduction of an Emissions Reduction Fund. These initiatives target economic development as a primary policy objective, within a framework of meeting regulated environmental protection standards.

6.3.2 Geoscience Australia (2010)

Geoscience Australia, a Commonwealth agency, provides geoscience information and services to the Australian Government and industry. It prepared a report for the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities on the potential impacts of coal seam gas

extraction in the Surat and Bowen Basins.\textsuperscript{27} The report’s primary concern was the uncertainty surrounding the potential cumulative, regional scale impacts of multiple developments. The report also put the view that

- the potential risks posed by fracking were low;
- subsidence may occur but the risk of impacts to surface water or shallow groundwater was very low; and
- initial cumulative impact assessments were inadequate.

It therefore recommended further action be taken to model regional scale impacts of cumulative CSG developments that would then assist in the management of long-term water balance impacts.\textsuperscript{28}

6.3.3 National Water Commission (2010, 2012)

In 2010 the NWC’s Position Paper on CSG and water noted that the CSG industry offered substantial economic and other benefits to Australia but risked having significant long-term impacts on adjacent surface and groundwater systems. It recommended the adoption of a precautionary approach to CSG developments to ensure that risks to the water resources were carefully and effectively managed. It was updated in 2012 to include mention of a Commonwealth reform package designed to

build scientific evidence and understanding of the impacts on water resources of extractive industry activities to underpin bio-regional assessments and improve the standards of regulation of these industries.\textsuperscript{29}

6.3.4 Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee (2011)

As part of a broader inquiry into the management of the Murray-Darling Basin, the Senate Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee produced an Interim Report into the impact of mining CSG on the management of the Murray-Darling Basin. Its recommendations addressed:

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 2 -9.
\textsuperscript{29} National Water Commission, "Position Paper - Coal Seam Gas and Water."
• information gaps regarding the cumulative and long term impacts of the industry;
• the need for the development of a consistent national regulatory framework for all aspects of the CSG industry;
• a moratorium on CSG approvals in the Murray-Darling basin pending the outcome of further scientific studies;
• the inclusion of sustainable use of the Great Artesian Basin as a ‘matter of national environmental significance’;
• independent monitoring and water management practices;
• the concept of strategic agricultural land and buffer zones around houses; and
• compensation to landholders.

A particular issue noted by the Committee was that

public anxiety has grown dramatically with the intrusion of the industry into regional areas with highly productive agricultural industries and urban centres … leading to a sense that regulators are playing ‘catch up’, responding to issues once they emerge rather than anticipating them.\(^{30}\)

6.3.5 Independent Expert Scientific Committee (2012)

The Senate report was followed by the development of a national agreement on CSG in 2012,\(^{31}\) which established the IESC. This agency

provides independent, expert scientific advice to federal and state governments on the potential impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining proposals on water resources. This advice is designed to ensure that decisions by environmental regulators on coal seam gas and large coal mining development proposals are informed by the best possible science.\(^{32}\)


\(^{31}\) COAG, "National Partnership Agreement on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Projects," (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

Since then the IESC has produced Information Guidelines for proposals relating to the development of CSG and large coal mines where there is a significant impact on water resources.33

6.3.6 Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (2013)

As well as these water-related initiatives, in 2013 the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education released a Technical Discussion Paper on Fugitive Emissions. The purpose of circulating this paper was to seek comment on proposals that address the implications of differences between conventional gases and CSG and to elaborate CSG-specific proposals for the estimation of fugitive emissions.34 There is no indication of any action being taken as a follow up to this paper.

6.3.7 Standing Council on Energy and Resources (2013)

In 2013 SCER endorsed a National Harmonised Regulatory Framework for the extraction of gas from coal seams.35 The preface to the framework identifies the context that has shaped its development:

The Framework does acknowledge that natural gas from coal seams is, and will continue to be into the future, an important component of eastern Australia’s domestic gas supply. It also acknowledges that as the Queensland Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) projects commence production from 2014-15, the industry will contribute substantial export income to Australia’s economy and is already creating jobs and business opportunities in the rural and regional areas where the development occurs. However, the Framework provides guidance in developing regulatory tools required to ensure that this development is managed sustainably.36

36 Ibid., 3.
It notes that the successful development of the industry depends on achieving a balance in environmental, social and economic outcomes in a way that maximises benefits to the community while protecting the environment and human health. In this regard it asserts that Australia cannot reap the benefits of this development if the industry’s social licence to operate and community confidence are not established and maintained. By ‘social licence to operate’ it draws on the concept of an organisation achieving ‘ongoing acceptance or approval from the local community and other stakeholders who can affect its profitability.’\textsuperscript{37} It then provides guidance on leading practices in well integrity, water management and monitoring, hydraulic fracturing and chemical use.\textsuperscript{38}

Key features of the framework include respecting the rights of all land users (“co-existence”), maximising the economic and social benefits of regulated land use, applying ESD principles and adopting an “adaptive management” approach where there is community concern about a potential risk, but with a limited likelihood and/or scale of impact.

Adaptive management has been described by the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer as an approach ‘which tracks the progress of activities, and allows for a change or cessation of those activities as risk thresholds or triggers are realised.’\textsuperscript{39}

In advocating the adoption of adaptive management, there is an implicit shift towards determining the Common Good in terms of (anthropocentric) cost/benefit analyses. The framework states:

ESD aims to balance the environmental, economic and social costs and benefits of a proposed activity. However, the appropriate balance can be difficult to achieve where there is uncertainty about the costs and benefits of particular developments.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, "Managing Environmental and Human Health Risks from CSG Activities," (Sydney: NSW Government, 2014), 1.
\textsuperscript{40} Resources, "The National Harmonised Regulatory Framework for Natural Gas from Coal Seams," 14-15.
It then asserts that the precautionary principle complements the objectives of ESD in such circumstances, and that risk management (as exercised through adaptive management) is a necessary addition to the precautionary principle, concluding that:

the precautionary principle in conjunction with adaptive management is part of a hierarchy of risk control measures that apply to all aspects of the development of natural gas from coal seams.\footnote{Ibid.}

This is a subtle, but very significant, recasting of the precautionary principle. It now prescribes a level of scientific measurement in its operation, whereas the 1992 statement on national environmental policy specifies that a lack of full scientific certainty may not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. In other words, the 1992 statement requires no scientific prerequisite to be satisfied, before environmental protection activities can be required.

Adaptive management, however, relies on setting quantified levels of acceptable environmental pollution, with corrective measures only required if pollution levels exceed these prescribed levels. In other words, adaptive management re-introduces a reliance on scientific proof (that a specific pollution level has been exceeded, for example) before any environmental protection action can be required.

This may be acceptable if the environmental trigger points are set at a lower level of risk of environmental degradation than that at which application of the precautionary principle might be considered appropriate. If they are set at a higher level of risk of environmental degradation, however, then the application of the precautionary principle will be diluted. There is no guarantee, however, that adaptive management environmental trigger points will be set at these lower risk levels. A further consequence could be a shift in environmental protection strategy away from prevention towards remediation. The intrinsic interests of the land get little recognition in this approach.
It also raises new issues such as how to respond to a claim that there has been environmental degradation of a type for which there is no monitoring. In such circumstances the burden of proof will lie with the affected parties such as landowners, farmers and local communities. They are often financially and politically powerless, however, compared to state governments and mining companies who have greater access to financial resources and may also benefit from cost savings achieved as a consequence of not engaging in preventative measures.

This imbalance was exacerbated at the end of 2013 when the Commonwealth Government announced it was withdrawing funding to the non-profit, non-government Environmental Defenders Offices (EDO) around Australia. In the words of the Queensland EDO:

The withdrawal of funding guts EDO Qld's ability to help landholders, individuals and community groups understand and act on their legal rights to protect their communities and the environment against major coal mines, and massive coastal developments affecting the Great Barrier Reef.

Without EDO Qld there is no free legal support available for those that want to protect the environment. This means that individuals seeking environmental justice are often priced out of the legal system.42

In her final report on CSG, the NSW Chief Scientist noted the importance of having ‘a clear, revised, legislative framework which is supported by an effective and transparent reporting and compliance regime and by drawing on appropriate expert advice.’43 But when the burden of proof for establishing environmental degradation lies with affected parties, and their ability to obtain appropriate expert advice is reduced by the withdrawal of funding to agencies such as the EDO, then the effectiveness of such a regime must diminish.

In the absence of any significant legal remedy, if there is to be any negotiated resolution, it might well take the form of some sort of financial arrangement, as already instanced in the provision for compensation of landowners.

Adaptive management is thus not just a matter of better scientific monitoring of the impact of mining on the environment. It also represents a very significant regulatory repositioning by relying on remediation rather than precautionary action. Further, if a party asserts environmental damage has occurred then onus of proof, in the form of verifiable scientific data, rests with that party. If that party has few financial resources, however, and so seeks assistance from bodies such as the EDO whose scope to assist has diminished, then the fair operation of the legislative framework is at risk. This weakens its effectiveness in protecting the environment.

At the same time as developing this harmonisation initiative, SCER also endorsed a Multiple Land Use Framework (MLUF), developed in recognition of conflicts arising over land access and land use. The MLUF’s objective is to instil a shared commitment between industry and regulators on multiple and shared land uses, better inform public discourse, provide for merit based land access decisions and deliver better outcomes for affected communities and landholders.44 It is a voluntary Framework.

6.3.8 Productivity Commission (2013).

In 2013 the Productivity Commission reported on its Inquiry into Mineral and Energy Resource Exploration.45 This inquiry focussed on regulatory issues such as unnecessary regulatory burdens and duplication between local, State, Territory and Commonwealth jurisdictions, and ways to improve the regulatory environment for exploration activities. The inquiry did not review the adequacy of the legislated principles of ecologically sustainable development; rather, its focus was on the efficiency and appropriateness of environmental regulation.

Consistent with the outlook expressed in many other reports, this report states that the policy challenge for governments in environmental management is to achieve an appropriate balance; in this case it is between the benefits afforded

by mineral and energy resource exploration and the potential for any associated environmental cost.\textsuperscript{46}

The report also discusses the concept of a social licence to operate,\textsuperscript{47} and later speaks of an explorer \textbf{earning} such a licence by exceeding the minimum legislative requirements and by engaging and supporting local communities.\textsuperscript{48} This confirms a policy strategy that any new improvements in environmental and community outcomes are to be secured through voluntary, not regulatory, action. The report states, for example, that ‘there is a wide acceptance that explorers should aim to acquire a “social licence to operate” through the development of good relations with landholders and the wider community.’\textsuperscript{49}

Further, the report advocates the use of adaptive management techniques when there is uncertainty as to the environmental impacts of exploration, and notes that this approach has been adopted by the Queensland Government.\textsuperscript{50}

6.3.9 Department of Industry (2013, 2014)

In 2013 the Minister for Industry announced the development of an Energy White Paper that will ‘set out a coherent and integrated approach to energy policy to boost domestic market competition and productivity, maintain international competitiveness and grow our export base.’\textsuperscript{51}

The terms of reference for the Energy White Paper require it to consider:

- policy and regulatory reform to secure reliable, competitively and transparently priced energy for a growing population and productive economy, including the efficiency and effectiveness of regulatory bodies;
- the appropriate role for government in the energy sector;
- opportunities to drive the more productive and efficient use of energy;
- energy related distribution infrastructure to deliver efficient national markets;
- alternative transport fuel sources;

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., xiii.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 237 - 39.
• workforce issues, including national skills development needs;
• emerging energy technologies and new energy sources; and
• future growth in exports of energy products, including our world leading services industries.\(^{52}\)

As a first step an Issues Paper was circulated. The paper is enthusiastic about the Australian energy sector, commenting that ‘the Government supports growth in the energy sector, and seeks to remove unnecessary barriers to continued investment that will deliver economic prosperity and a high standard of living.’\(^{53}\)

It makes particular reference to the advent of CSG, where ‘new opportunities in export markets are driving a boom in coal seam gas (CSG) development … (b)ringing on CSG for LNG at the scale currently seen in Australia is unprecedented’,\(^{54}\) but notes that, even with the adoption of a multiple land use framework and a harmonised framework for CSG regulation, there is not a nationally consistent framework for land access.\(^{55}\)

There is no requirement for the White Paper to take into account the impact on the environment of different energy technologies and new energy sources such as CSG. Since the Minister for Industry announced the preparation of the White Paper, however, it has been reported that he would form a task force with expertise covering all aspects of agriculture, gas extraction and the long running issue between the two … [with a view to] … try and work out a way to get CSG extraction happening on a larger scale where community opposition is widespread.\(^{56}\)

In September 2014 the Minister released an Energy Green Paper.\(^{57}\) Its key themes are attracting investment, putting downward pressure on electricity prices, gas supply and market development, and future energy supply.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{53}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 21.

With regard to environmental issues, the Green Paper advocates more streamlined environmental regulatory processes (it mentions the COAG Energy Council’s work on harmonisation) and the need to ensure the environment is protected and community concerns are considered.\textsuperscript{59} It also notes that social licence concerns have led state governments to introduce regulatory barriers.\textsuperscript{60} There is no discussion, however, of the management of environmental risks, such as through the adoption of adaptive management techniques.

6.3.10 Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce (2013, 2014)

At the same time as the Energy Issues Paper was released, the Minister for Agriculture released an Issues Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness, as a first step in developing a White Paper that would ‘develop recommendations for boosting agriculture’s contribution to economic growth, export and trade, innovation and productivity by building capacity and enhancing the profitability of the sector.’\textsuperscript{61}

The White Paper is required to consider:

- food security in Australia and the world through the creation of a stronger and more competitive agriculture sector;
- means of improving market returns at the farm gate, including through better drought management;
- access to investment finance, farm debt levels and debt sustainability;
- the competitiveness of the Australian agriculture sector and its relationship to food and fibre processing and related value chains, including achieving fair returns;
- the contribution of agriculture to regional centres and communities, including ways to boost investment and jobs growth in the sector and associated regional areas;
- the efficiency and competitiveness of inputs to the agriculture value chain — such as skills, training, education and human capital; research and development; and critical infrastructure;
- the effectiveness of regulations affecting the agriculture sector, including the extent to which regulations promote or retard competition, investment and private sector-led growth;
- opportunities for enhancing agricultural exports and new market access; and

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., ix.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 11 - 14.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{61}See \url{http://www.maff.gov.au/Pages/Media%20Releases/Agriculture-White-Paper.aspx} retrieved 26 November 2014
• the effectiveness and economic benefits of existing incentives for investment and jobs creation in the agriculture sector.\textsuperscript{62}

The Issues Paper locates the agricultural sector within the context of competition for land from other sectors (such as energy), the depletion of groundwater reserves, and cultural and environmental sensitivities. Against this background, the Minister's exhortation to ‘think of the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper as the blank slate and build 21\textsuperscript{st} century policies that bring a better return to the farm gate’\textsuperscript{63} provides an encouragement for the thesis’ exploration of worldviews that are shaping policy decision-making in Australia and how theology might contribute to the development of public policy with regard to CSG mining in Australia.

Three key concepts occur throughout the Issues Paper. They are competition, human utility and environmental protection. Assumptions about them shape the attitudes and values embedded within the paper.

\textbf{6.3.10.1 Competition}

The reference to competitiveness in the Issues Paper’s title points to reliance being placed on the operation of market forces to secure the most efficient and high value outcomes that are in Australia’s best interests. The Paper contains around 50 references to the concept of agricultural competitiveness,\textsuperscript{64} which it defines as ‘the ability to efficiently use our nation’s land, water, human and other resources to achieve sustainable improvement in the standard of living for all Australians and growth in profit for our businesses.’\textsuperscript{65}

The implicit assumption is that competition is a good pragmatic foundation for 21\textsuperscript{st} century agricultural policies, with regulatory intervention primarily being needed to secure those public policy outcomes that the market place might not otherwise deliver. The policy debate focus is thus directed towards the nature and extent of that intervention, not the basic reliance on competition.

\textsuperscript{62} Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, “Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper,” (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2014), 1.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., ii.
\textsuperscript{64} Included in this are the words compete, competing, competition, and competitive
\textsuperscript{65} Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, “Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper,” 1.
The concept of competition, however, has a wide reach. Indeed the paper describes three very different competitive scenarios – Australia competing with other nations in domestic and international markets; different industry sectors within Australia competing for limited resources such as land; and Australians competing against the power of nature:

Key challenges and opportunities for the sector include increasing competition from overseas suppliers … competition for prime agricultural land; and increasing frequency and intensity of adverse weather events.\textsuperscript{66}

Identification of those occasions where a reliance on competition might be inadequate, however, is not explored in any depth; yet market failure is an issue of particular concern to state governments.

The NSW Government, for example, has introduced CSG-related reforms specifically to safeguard the state’s most valuable farmland from CSG activities. As stated by the Deputy Premier in a media release on 28 January 2014: ‘Today marks a significant milestone in this Government’s commitment to balance the energy needs of the State and the need to support our vital agricultural industry.’\textsuperscript{67}

Similarly, through the \textit{Regional Planning Interests Act 2014}, the Queensland Parliament has defined a priority agricultural area to be an area of regional interest\textsuperscript{68} whereby mining can only occur in such areas if the proponent has reached an agreement with the landowner or if a Regional Interest Development Approval is granted.\textsuperscript{69}

Further, the Premier of Victoria, in his media statement of 21 November 2013 announcing a continuing moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, stated

\textit{I want to make a clear commitment to all Victorians that protecting regional and rural Victoria’s food and fibre production, water aquifers, prime agricultural land and general liveability is fundamental to the Victorian Coalition Government’s approach to these issues.}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{66} Ibid., 2.
\bibitem{69} Ibid., Section 19.
\end{thebibliography}
6.3.10.2 Human utility

The Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper states that the White Paper will provide a platform for enhancing the contribution of agriculture to economic growth, employment creation and national prosperity ... increasing farm prosperity and strengthening our rural and regional communities.\(^{70}\)

It then refers to economic growth four times, employment 10 times, prosperity four times and communities 30 times. Further, it argues that these objectives are to be achieved through the efficient use of national resources such as land, water and people. Contrasting with this, however, there is little more than incidental mention of environmental issues,\(^{71}\) and no definitive discussion of how the forecast growth in the agricultural sector might impact on the environment. Nor are environmental goals presented as important for achieving and sustaining agricultural competitiveness.

The implicit assumption is that the development of the Australian agricultural industry is to be driven primarily by the objective of maximising its delivery of beneficial returns to the human community (such as food security, export earnings, employment, and improved standards of living), qualified as might be deemed necessary by social and environmental considerations. This gives the paper a strong utilitarian and anthropocentric focus.

6.3.10.3 Environmental protection

This orientation towards human utility puts environmental policy objectives in a subordinate role. It lends itself to the rhetoric of a ‘balanced’ approach whereby the establishment of a competitive agricultural industry in the 21st century is a primary goal, modified as necessary by policy goals such as ESD. The Issues Paper notes, for example, that the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia will

\(^{70}\) Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, “Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper,” 1.  
\(^{71}\) The Issues Paper refers to environmental pressures, sensitivities, benefits, risks, standards, regulation and health, but does not expand on any of these terms
examine the scope for an expanded agricultural footprint in our northern regions. Harnessing these opportunities will require new investment capital, which in turn depends on the prospects for favourable returns at the farm gate, while taking into account cultural and environmental sensitivities.\textsuperscript{72}

The implicit assumption is that existing environmental policy and regulatory arrangements, perhaps with some incremental ‘tweaking’, already provide sufficient environmental protection in the implementation of other policy initiatives to make the Australian agricultural sector more efficient and competitive. The 1992 environmental principles are not mentioned in the Issues Paper and there is no suggestion of any need to extend environmental regulation. Indeed, there is even one suggestion (by the National Farmers Federation) that environmental protection is a key priority for a reduction in regulation.\textsuperscript{73}

6.3.10.4 Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper

Nearly 700 submissions were received on the Issues Paper, and in October 2014 a Green Paper was released for comment.\textsuperscript{74} It nominates nine key agricultural policy principles – farm gate returns; keeping families in farming; building infrastructure; creating employment; reducing regulation; improving access to export markets; exploiting Australia’s competitive advantages; supporting communities; and access to quality and affordable food.\textsuperscript{75} These principles align closely with the scope of the White Paper and reflect the same strong utilitarian and anthropocentric orientation as the Issues Paper.

The principles do not, however, include any specific reference to the concept of environmental sustainability which, unlike the Issues Paper, gets significant coverage in the Green Paper. The Issues Paper, for example, mentions sustainability less than ten times, and then only with reference to sustainable living standards, debt, businesses and communities; it contains no direct references to environmental or natural resource sustainability.

\textsuperscript{72} Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, “Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper,” 9.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{74} “Agriculture Competitiveness Green Paper,” (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2014), vii.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., viii.
The Green Paper, on the other hand, makes 25 references to agricultural and natural resource sustainability. It locates them within the context of finding the right balance between the two, but does not define ESD or give guidance on how ESD is to be achieved, other than through a reliance on knowledge:

This enviable record [of the Australian agricultural sector], however, can only continue if we achieve the right balance between exploiting our natural resources for agricultural production and protecting them for long-term sustainable use.

... with the greater knowledge our capacity for both robust and environmentally sustainable development is greater than ever before. But to take advantage of this capacity, we need to ensure environmental regulations and processes affecting new development are based on science and not emotion.\(^76\)

There is no discussion, however, of how this might be achieved (such as through the adoption of adaptive management techniques to balance economic development and environmental risk); nor is there recognition of the need for any regulatory intervention in the competition between the energy and agricultural sectors for natural resources other than the protection of prime agricultural land. Rather, there is an implicit reliance upon and faith in the effectiveness of market mechanisms as the primary means for securing outcomes that are in Australia’s national interests, with regulatory intervention limited to specific anthropocentric objectives.

With regard to the CSG industry, for example, the three (regulatory) principles the Green Paper identifies as being ‘at the heart of CSG development’ are:

(i) protection of prime agricultural land and financial compensation for farmers;

(ii) no long term damage to water resources used for agriculture or local communities; and

(iii) protection of land and water for future generations.\(^77\)

There is no principle addressing the intrinsic interests of the land.

\(^76\) Ibid., ix.
\(^77\) Ibid., 78.
6.3.10.5 Discussion

The policy development process being followed in the production of a White Paper on Australia’s Agricultural Competitiveness gives insights into attitudes towards the land and the policy decision-making framework for CSG mining.

It advocates a primary goal of developing a sustainable, competitive and robust agricultural industry that delivers substantive benefits to the Australian community, regulated by a requirement to meet threshold environmental protection standards. The policy mechanism for achieving this is to rely on the effectiveness of competition in the marketplace, with regulatory intervention where there is market failure (such as the protection of prime agricultural land). It has a strong anthropocentric and utilitarian orientation. The policy strategy assumes that no extensions to environmental principles or policies are needed.

Is this faith in market mechanisms and limited regulatory intervention defensible? The Green Paper advocates an approach ‘based on science and not emotion’, but also draws on a policy reductionism that privileges the effectiveness of competition, the quantification of environmental risk and the rewards of economic development. There is an embedded belief here that such an approach will deliver the best balance in policy outcomes, even though this is a belief that goes beyond the boundaries of scientific certainty.

The Green Paper, for example, regularly uses the rhetoric of environmental sustainability, but does not clarify what this means in practice, such as in the application of adaptive management techniques where value judgements are made in balancing economic benefits and environmental risks.\(^7^8\) Judgements such as these, however, are not based on science and economics alone. This suggests a need to identify and discuss the value frameworks and worldviews that shape the exercise of these judgements.

\(^7^8\) See the discussion of ESD in subsection 6.3.7.
6.3.11 Department of Environment (2013, 2014)

In 2013 the Minister for the Environment released an Emissions Reduction Fund Green Paper for public comment.\(^{79}\) The objective of this scheme is to reduce Australia’s greenhouse emissions. The Australian Parliament subsequently passed the Carbon Farming Initiative Amendment Bill 2014 in November 2014. This legislation establishes the Emissions Reduction Fund.

The Fund is a classic market mechanism,\(^{80}\) using economic incentives to secure a reduction in greenhouse emissions in Australia. Whilst there may be disputes about whether this is the best, or most appropriate, mechanism, of relevance to the thesis is that it is a strategy that relies on economic tools to secure environmental objectives. This suggests a policy judgement that the use of economic incentives rather than, say, reliance on how people regard and value the environment is a better mechanism for securing behavioural change.

6.3.12 Summary of Australian Government policy orientation

Four principles of environmental policy were agreed in 1992 and adopted as principles of ecologically sustainable development in the EPBC Act. In a 2009 review of the Act there was no re-evaluation of these principles. Recent reports have focused on economic growth and regulatory efficiency as primary goals in the exploitation of Australia’s natural resources, and implicitly assume that the regulatory framework adequately protects the environment through the adoption of appropriate threshold environmental standards.

This subordination of environmental principles to the objective of developing the national economy can be found in the development of the Energy and Agriculture White Papers, The National Harmonised Regulatory Framework for Natural Gas from Coal Seams, the Minerals and Energy Resource Exploration report, and the introduction of the Emissions Reduction Fund. None require any direct (or new) consideration of environmental policy goals.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., Ministerial Foreword.
Indeed, there is little evidence of any recent CSG-related environmental policy initiatives at a Commonwealth level going beyond regulatory coordination across states and the application of scientific knowledge, research and expertise to address the possibility of environmental pollution threatening food production, housing and human health. Rather, the policy trend is towards implementing environmental principles in anthropocentric and economic terms. This is epitomised in the adoption of adaptive management practices that subtly but very significantly change the application of the precautionary principle.

Further, this Chapter’s analysis of recent Australian Government reports that comment on the complex issue of securing the right policy balance between environmental protection and economic growth have found no evidence of any strengthening of the 1992 environmental principles. Rather, the analysis has identified that the regulatory implementation of these principles is increasingly being influenced by the policy goal of strengthening and growing the national economy.

The wide spectrum of policy options that surrounds this issue, however, is illustrated by the Minister for Agriculture’s invitation to view the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper as a policy blank slate, the regulatory creep within environmental policy towards economic and efficiency goals, and the reported desire of the Queensland Government to limit ideological objections to mining projects.  

6.4 Queensland Government initiatives

This subsection explores the evolving policy framework surrounding the emergence and regulation of the CSG industry in Queensland. It draws on legislation, Ministerial statements, Petitions to the Parliament, Questions in Parliament and Parliamentary Committee Inquiries to gain insights into the formation of CSG policy and the growth of the industry in Queensland. It concludes that anthropocentric utilitarianism has a dominant influence in the shaping of environmental protection policies in Queensland.

6.4.1 Environmental Protection Act 1994

In Queensland, environmental protection is regulated through the *Environment Protection Act 1994*. The object of this legislation is to protect Queensland’s environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.\(^{82}\)

Key phrases are ‘improves total quality of life’ and ‘maintains ecological processes on which life depends.’ They are open to different interpretations.

If ‘life’ refers to human life, then the objective of improving the quality of human life could be achieved at the expense of the quality of life of the environment, provided ecological processes on which human life depends are not adversely affected. This would legally sanction some degradation of the environment by CSG mining and make the interests of the environment subordinate to those of humanity.

A utilitarian approach to natural resource development aligns with this interpretation. In this scenario, the case for natural resource development includes desirable human goals such as employment, export earnings, economic growth, pollution controls, rehabilitation of the land, funding community development and reducing harm to the environment.

Then, in those instances when policy conflicts arise (such as competing uses of the land and water, the rights of landlords and associated compensation, and social and cultural factors), a assessment of ‘total quality of life’ would centre on an evaluation of what maximises the (human-centred) Common Good. This infers a teleological ethic that uses the language of ‘balance’, but includes no obligation to improve the quality of life of the environment.

This could be seen to be consistent with the Act’s definition of ‘environmental value’ as ‘a quality or physical characteristic of the environment that is

\(^{82}\) Section 3
conducive to ecological health or public amenity or safety, where ‘ecological health’ is interpreted within the context of maintaining ecological processes on which human life depends.

The Act also specifies that three principles of environmental policy found in the *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment*, namely the precautionary principle, intergenerational equity and the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity, form the standard criteria to be used in assessing a mining application. But the fourth principle, that environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services, is not in the Act.

Further, the Act excludes ‘economic conditions’ from the definition of natural environment. This could reinforce an interpretation that life refers to human life, as there is no statutory provision for an economic value of the natural environment. How, then, an intrinsic (non-economic) value of the environment might be taken into account is unclear.

If ‘life’, however, is taken to refer to all life, then the Act’s object could be interpreted to set a higher standard for environmental protection that moves towards recognition of the environment’s intrinsic value, namely a requirement on resource developers to maintain ecological processes on which all life depends. So, for example, this might include recognition of the rights of the land and the protection of a unique habitat for a species threatened by a CSG operation; this goes well beyond pollution control, minimising degradation of the environment and rehabilitation.

Given this ambiguity, does Queensland’s experience in the regulation of the CSG industry shed any light on whether the Act’s object is being interpreted to focus primarily on the quality of human life, or more broadly? In particular, what environmental values are evident in policy developments and the public debate surrounding the CSG industry in Queensland?

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84 Ibid., Section 9.
6.4.2 Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004

In 2004 the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines & Energy, tabled a Statement on “Queensland’s Coal Seam Gas Industry” in support of the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004 that would ‘implement a regime that will give greater stability for the coal seam gas industry.’

This statement spoke of the industry as a success story, the large investment it represented, providing a level regulatory playing field across the resources sector, certainty for industry, a safety management regime for workers and, ultimately jobs and prosperity for Queensland in the future. Nowhere, however, is there mention of environmental impact – maybe the Minister assumed that provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1994 met those needs. Rather, the Minister highlighted particular state, economic and industry objectives.

6.4.3 Coal Seam Gas Water Management Policy (2012)

More recently the Queensland Government released guidelines for applicants seeking approval of CSG water for beneficial use and in 2012 a water management policy ‘to ensure that salt produced through coal seam gas (CSG) activities does not contaminate the environment and to encourage the beneficial use of treated CSG water.’ These documents focus on protection against environmental damage impacting on human use of the land, rather than protecting the environment for its own sake.

6.4.4 Inquiry into Queensland’s Agricultural and Resource Industries (2012)

In 2012 the Government also released the report of a Parliamentary Committee inquiry into Queensland’s Agriculture and Resource Industries. The terms of

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86 Robertson, “Queensland’s Coal Seam Gas Industry.”
reference were to investigate and report on methods to reduce regulatory requirements impacting on agriculture and resource industries in Queensland, and to further promote economic development whilst balancing environmental protections. The inquiry attracted 29 submissions from individuals, a political party, community and conservation groups, agriculture and mining groups, and government bodies.

In conducting the inquiry, the Committee resolved to ‘focus on “methods” to reduce regulatory requirements or “regulatory burdens” having regard to the need to promote economic development whilst balancing environmental protections.’ Accordingly, many of the submissions, and much of the final report, address regulatory processes and economic development; they do not, however, address in any significant way what ‘balancing environmental protections’ might mean.

Nor is the term ‘protecting the environment’ defined or discussed. In this regard, there were three submissions (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Mackay Conservation Group and Queensland Murray-Darling Committee) that linked quality of life with protection of the environment (cast in anthropocentric terms) and one submission (from the Wilderness Society) spoke of the ‘environmental burden of inadequate regulation’. But no submission explicitly addressed how to value the environment.

Throughout the report there is an emphasis on regulatory process and the cost of that process, rather than whether the objectives of regulation are being achieved. Whether the environment’s interests were properly represented or achieved is not discussed. Further, the report notes the view of the Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) that ‘rigorous cost-benefit analysis should be applied to any new regulation … existing regulation that cannot be demonstrated to provide a net overall public or community benefit should be revised or removed.’

90 Ibid., 1.
91 All submissions can be found at http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/AREC/inquiries/past-inquiries/QldARIndustries
In 2013, the Queensland Government advised Parliament that it accepted the advice of the QCA that it was not necessary to establish an independent forum or expert panel to consider contentious regulatory proposals with competing economic and environmental issues. There was no discussion, however, of how this might work, given the Act defines natural environment to exclude ‘economic conditions’\(^{84}\) and does not include the valuation of environment factors as a principle of environmental policy.

The overall orientation of the report is reflected in remarks by the Committee Chair:

> The very best scenario is to grow the economy and target environmental improvements, and we welcome the continuing work by the Queensland Competition Authority to help develop a regulatory framework across Government that helps to do this.\(^ {93}\)

Confusingly, the Chair advocated reliance on an economic regulator who seeks to apply rigorous cost-benefit analysis for securing the best policy outcomes, even though the Act does not provide for any economic valuation of environmental factors.

6.4.5 Coal seam gas in the Tara region: summary risk assessment of health complaints and environmental monitoring data (2013)\(^ {94}\)

The Queensland Government also explored possible links between human health and the CSG industry. In 2013 the Queensland Department of Health produced a report that provided a summary risk assessment of (human) health complaints and environmental monitoring data relating to the recent development of the CSG industry in the Tara region.

Drawing on studies undertaken by a number of government, academic and private sector organisations, the report concludes that

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\(^{93}\) Ibid., v.

a clear link cannot be drawn between the health complaints by some residents in the Tara region and impacts of the local CSG industry on air, water or soil within the community. The available evidence does not support the concern among some residents that excessive exposure to emissions from the CSG activities is the cause of the symptoms they have reported.  

This wording suggests that any assessment of environmental well-being was limited to a consideration of flow-on effects on human health.

6.4.6 Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill (2013)

In 2013 the Parliament’s Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee held an inquiry into this Private Member’s Bill. There were two public hearings (at which briefings were given by departmental officers) and 11 submissions. The proposer of the Bill spoke of the need to protect prime agricultural land from CSG exploration and mining and associated activities, to ensure the sustainability of the agricultural industry and food security into the future. At the first public hearing he also mentioned the issues of water pollution and competing demands for water.

Other than Arrow Energy advocating a ‘fundamental premise that agriculture and natural (coal seam) gas production are able to coexist’, the issues raised in the submissions and public hearings were a subset of those covered by the Committee’s Inquiry into Queensland’s Agricultural and Resource Industries. It is not surprising, therefore, that the final report had a strong economic development orientation.

The following year the Queensland Parliament passed the Regional Planning Interests Act 2014 which, according to the Queensland Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning,

95 Ibid., 18.
97 18 October 2013 letter from Tony Knight, Vice President Exploration, Arrow Energy, to Ian Rickuss, MP, Chair, Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee.
98 Resources and Environment Committee Agriculture, “Protection of Prime Agricultural Land and Other Land from Coal Seam Gas Mining Bill 2013,” (Queensland Parliament).
protects areas of regional interest from inappropriate development and assists with resolving land use conflict between activities which contribute to Queensland’s four pillar economy—agriculture, resources, tourism and construction.  

6.4.7 Parliamentary petitions and Questions on Notice

Several petitions and Questions on Notice relating to CSG have been tabled in the Queensland Parliament.

(i) A call for the independent regulation of the CSG industry development and a moratorium on future CSG activities in view of potential water pollution, disruption to agricultural businesses and culture, inadequate ‘make-good’ provisions. Petitions 1592-10 and 1701-1; 3,542 petitioners. The Minister’s reply noted the Government’s commitment to developing a sustainable CSG industry balanced by the need to protect the environment and social values of regional communities:

As the CSG industry develops, there will be more job and local supply opportunities that will generate further wealth within Queensland communities.

(ii) A call to ban hydraulic fracturing and harness readily available renewable energy, in view of the impact of CSG mining on food production, water security, the natural environment and the health of humans and animals. Petition 1796, 92 petitioners.

(iii) A call for a 12 month moratorium on CSG projects due to adverse impacts on prime agricultural land, drinking supplies and human health. Petitions 1883, 1909, 1912, 1941 and 1956; 2,889 petitioners. The Minister’s responses highlighted the Government’s commitment to

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100 Visit http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au for transcripts of parliamentary petitions, Questions on Notice and Ministerial responses
101 22 June 2011 reply from the Hon Andrew Fraser, Treasurer and Minister for State Development and Trade to 1 and 15 June 2011 letters from the Clerk of the Parliament forwarding petitions 1592-10 and 1701-11 regarding CSG industry developments.
ensuring the CSG-LNG industry develops in a way that complements protecting the environment with supporting the economic future of other sectors.\textsuperscript{102}

He also referred to land use, water quality controls, landowner rights, and the economic and social needs of affected communities.

(iv) Questions on Notice about the emergence and impact of the CSG industry, particularly with regard to water quality, agriculture and environmental pollution. Government responses emphasised the continuing application of environmental safeguards, ongoing consultation with stakeholders, a commitment to ensuring the CSG industry developed in a way that balanced social, environmental and economic considerations and to facilitating the co-existence of the agricultural and mining industries.\textsuperscript{103}

6.4.8 Summary of Queensland Government policy orientation

This review of recent public policy developments that impact on the CSG industry in Queensland points to priority attention being given to economic development, followed by competing human uses of the land, human health, quality of human life and regulatory efficiency. Minimal attention has been given to reviewing the adequacy or otherwise of environmental protection provisions; rather, policy rhetoric has focused on ‘cutting red tape’. Nor is there any substantive evidence of the land being valued in its own right.

This suggests a value framework that centres on improving the total quality of human life, supported by an environmental protection regime designed to ensure the maintenance of ecological systems on which human life depends. There is an implicit outlook that the interests of the environment are subordinate to those of humanity. There is no evidence of any substantive CSG-related policy initiative to improve the quality of life of the environment.

\textsuperscript{102} 17 July 2012 reply from the Hon Jeff Seeney, Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, to 21 June 2012 letter from the Clerk of the Parliament forwarding petitions 1909-12 and 1912-12 regarding a 12 month moratorium on coal seam gas projects.

\textsuperscript{103} See, for example, Questions on Notice 1290, 1617, 1799, and 674
This outlook has been strongly reinforced by the passage through the Queensland Parliament in December 2014 of the Planning and Development Bill 2014 designed to deliver, according its Explanatory Notes, ‘Australia’s best land use planning and development assessment system’.104

What is not clear, however, is what is meant by ‘best’. One interpretation is that ‘best’ refers to human prosperity rather than, say, ESD:

The stated purpose of the P&D Bill is to ‘facilitate Queensland’s prosperity’, with the concept of prosperity encompassing balancing economic growth, environmental protection and community wellbeing. There will no longer be a reference to ‘ecological sustainability’ which was a fundamental concept under SPA and the Integrated Planning Act 1997 (Qld).105

This suggests that ESD, a key environmental policy principle specified in section 3A of the Commonwealth’s Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, is no longer a policy priority for the Queensland Government. With reliance also being placed on the use of economic analysis in the assessment of environmental impact, anthropocentric utilitarianism stands out as a dominant driver of environmental policy in Queensland.

6.5 NSW Government initiatives

This subsection provides an overview of the NSW environmental protection legislation, reports by the NSW Legislative Assembly General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 and the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer on CSG, and various petitions to Parliament and Ministerial Statements. The NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer concludes that the technical challenges and risks posed by the CSG industry can in general be managed through an adaptive management approach within a legislative framework which is supported by an effective and transparent reporting and compliance regime.


6.5.1 NSW Legislation

Principal Acts in NSW are the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and the *Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991*. The first object of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* is to encourage the proper management, development and conservation of natural and artificial resources, including agricultural land, natural areas, forests, minerals, water, cities, towns and villages for the purposes of promoting the social and economic welfare of the community and a better environment.  

Other objects cover the orderly and economic use and development of land; protection of the environment, including the protection and conservation of native plants and animals; ESD; provision of housing; and planning processes.  

Later sections define provisions such as significant effects on threatened species, populations or ecological communities (section 5A), having regard for critical habitats (section 5B), threatened species conservation (section 5C) and vulnerable communities (section 5D).

The term ‘environment protection’ is defined in the *Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991* to include anything that furthers the objectives of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), defined to be:

(a) to promote, restore and enhance the quality of the environment, having regard to the need to maintain ecologically sustainable development, and

(b) to reduce the risk to human health and prevent the degradation of the environment. 

In this Act ESD is defined as requiring

the effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision-making processes … through the implementation of …

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106 Section 5
(a) the precautionary principle – namely, that if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation …

(b) inter-generational equity – namely, that the present generation should ensure the health, diversity and productivity of the environment are maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations,

(c) conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity – namely that conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration,

(d) improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms – namely that environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services.\textsuperscript{109}

These are the four principles of environmental policy that are to be found in the \textit{Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment}.

At the same time, however, the Act uses words such as promoting and encouraging, rather than requiring or enforcing, the betterment and enhancement of the environment. These are not absolute, must-be-achieved, objectives. It is also left up to the EPA to determine the balance between human and environmental considerations.

It is thus relevant to examine recent public policy developments in NSW to gain an insight into what values might influence the determination of a balanced approach. Source documents are the NSW Legislative Assembly General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 Report into Coal Seam Gas, (1 May 2012); the reports of the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer on her Independent Review of Coal Seam Gas Activities in NSW (2013 & 2014); Ministerial announcements about the regulation of the CSG industry; and Ministerial responses to petitions tabled in the Legislative Council since the NSW election in 2011.

6.5.2 NSW Legislative Assembly General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 Report into Coal Seam Gas (2012)\textsuperscript{110}

The terms of reference of the inquiry required the Committee to examine the environmental, health, economic and social impacts of CSG activities, as well

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., Section 6.
\textsuperscript{110} "Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas."
as the role of CSG in meeting the future energy needs of NSW.\textsuperscript{111} The report has 13 chapters, but only one (Chapter 6) explores the potential impacts of CSG on the natural environment without any reference to consequential impacts on human life. Other chapters discuss extensively issues such as the impact of CSG mining on human health, food production, access to clean water and co-existing land use.

There is no discussion or evidence of activities that might \textit{enhance} the quality of the environment or promote a \textit{better} environment. At most, there is a discussion of the dollar amounts to be held in security deposits for remediation and rehabilitation activity, with the emphasis being on damage minimisation and recovery, rather than environmental improvement.

Further, reflecting the lodgement of nearly 1,000 submissions to the inquiry, the report gives extensive coverage of the negative impact of CSG activities on human interests such as
\begin{itemize}
  \item property rights (lack of equity between landholders and mining companies);
  \item mining company practices being less than acceptable;
  \item industry development outpacing the ability of government to regulate it;
  \item a lack of information from government; and
  \item the level of uncertainty relating to the potential impact of the CSG industry – health, fraccing, water, clean energy and economic benefits.\textsuperscript{112}
\end{itemize}

In summary, the report is orientated towards finding an acceptable policy framework for the economic development of NSW’s CSG resources that provided sufficient regulatory protection for human interests through, inter alia, the adoption of appropriate environmental practices. No measures for enhancing the quality of the environment are recommended.

\subsubsection*{6.5.3 NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer (2013, 2014)}

In 2013 the NSW Premier asked the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer to conduct a review of CSG related activities in NSW, with a focus on the impacts of these

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., iv.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., xiii, xiv.
activities on human health and the environment.\textsuperscript{113} The Premier drew particular attention to community concerns about the current operation of CSG activities in NSW.\textsuperscript{114}

6.5.3.1 Initial report

The NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer’s Initial Report describes CSG as

a complex and multi-layered issue which has proven divisive chiefly because of the emotive nature of community concerns, the competing interests of the players and a lack of publicly available factual information.\textsuperscript{115}

It also draws attention to the importance of industry compliance, best practice, risk management and stakeholder interests (although the environment was not identified as a stakeholder). Compensation is raised as an issue, but only for landholders.\textsuperscript{116}

The Initial Report contains a substantive analysis of issues relating to water, health, agriculture, pollution, geology and processes that is supported by research by the University of Western Sydney (UWS) into community concerns and their potential effects.\textsuperscript{117} But there is no evidence of the intrinsic value and interests of the environment being taken into account in more than 230 submissions to the review, or in the report itself. The report lists the top 20 most common issues raised in submissions; this largely mirrored the findings of the UWS study. Most surround the negative impact that the CSG industry has had on human activities, and are treated from this human perspective, rather than from an environmental perspective.\textsuperscript{118}

In summary, this report provides good material for understanding and describing the CSG industry and acknowledges the problems that have occurred with its rapid development in Australia. Its overall position on the CSG industry is best summarised in its statement on the philosophy behind the report

\textsuperscript{113} NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, “Coal Seam Gas Review - Initial Report,” Appendix 1.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., iii.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., iv.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., iv, v.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 12, 13.
to the effect that, to reap significant economic benefits, a set of significant risks and challenges need to be managed.\textsuperscript{119} As in Queensland, the environment’s interests are implicitly held to be subordinate to those of humanity, with a balanced approach to economic resource development and environmental protection being developed within this context.

6.5.3.2 The impact of CSG activity on water in the Sydney catchment area

In May 2014 the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer reported on her research into the cumulative impact of all activities which impact ground and surface water in the Sydney Catchment Special Areas. She concludes that there is insufficient data available at present in a coherent form to provide a deep and reliable understanding of cumulative impact in the catchment.\textsuperscript{120} She goes on to state that current activities should proceed whilst more data is gathered:

\begin{quote}
the current impacts are not seeming to affect water quantity in a major way. Coal seam gas is likely to have less impact than longwall mining but, if it proceeds, increased instrumentation and monitoring should be standard practice as should special provision for the treatment of produced water from CSG production.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

In other words, she gives a ‘green light’ for CSG mining to proceed provided appropriate data gathering and scientific monitoring is put in place.

6.5.3.3 Final report

In September 2014 the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer submitted her final report on her review of CSG activities in Australia. It includes information papers on particular aspects of the industry, such as \textit{Managing environmental and human health risks from CSG activities}.\textsuperscript{122} She concludes

\begin{quote}
the technical challenges and risks posed by the CSG industry can in general be managed … within a clear, revised, legislative framework which is supported by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{120} "On Measuring the Cumulative Impacts of Activities Which Impact Ground and Surface Water in the Sydney Water Catchment," (Sydney: NSW Government, 2014), iii.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., vi.
\textsuperscript{122} "Managing Environmental and Human Health Risks from CSG Activities."
an effective and transparent reporting and compliance regime and by drawing on appropriate expert advice.\textsuperscript{123}

In doing so she comments that

risks can be reduced, through measures that reduce the scale of the consequences of the likelihood of the event occurring. Adaptive management is an approach, which tracks the progress of activities, and allows for a change or cessation of those activities as risk thresholds or triggers are realised.\textsuperscript{124}

In November 2014 the NSW Government accepted all the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer’s recommendations in its release of the NSW Gas Plan. As stated by the Minister for Resources and Energy

The Gas Plan addresses the concerns of the public and the needs of more than a million households, businesses and industries which rely on an affordable and consistent gas supply. It is a historic framework which will give us both a strong environmental and economic future on the back of best practice regulation and management of the energy sector.\textsuperscript{125}

6.5.5 Ministerial media releases

The NSW Government has shown a degree of sensitivity to public concerns surrounding CSG developments. This can be seen in the regular release of public statements on CSG-related matters, including

- the identification of strategic agricultural land, the establishment of a dedicated Land and Water Commissioner, the creation of an Aquifer Interference Policy and the introduction of new CSG Codes of Practice (September 2012);
- the establishment of a two kilometre exclusion zone around residential areas and the conduct of an independent inquiry by the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer into CSG (February 2013);
- the introduction of new enforcement powers to ensure compliance, new offences, increased penalties and new standards to ensure the protection of valuable land and water resources (May 2013);

\textsuperscript{124} “Managing Environmental and Human Health Risks from CSG Activities,” 1.
• regulatory arrangements that balance the responsible growth of the mining and resources industry with the needs of the primary industries and communities (October 2013);

• a hold on the exploration and extraction of natural gas from coal seams within Sydney’s water catchment area (November 2013);

• the introduction of a freeze on new exploration licences and an audit on existing licences (March 2014); and

• the development of agreed principles of land access between Santos, AGL and landholder representatives of the NSW Farmers, Cotton Australia and the NSW Irrigators Council, covering access to private agricultural property for CSG exploration and production drilling operations (March 2014).

6.5.5 Petitions 126

There were nine petitions tabled, with more than 52,000 signatories, which raised concerns about CSG mining such as banning hydraulic fracturing, water security and environmental protection, alternative uses of land, health issues and a moratorium on CSG activities. There was also one petition (with more than 500 signatories), in support of mining.127

In response, the Minister for Resources and Energy progressively refers to

• striking the right balance between important agricultural, mining and energy sectors, while ensuring the protection of high value and strategic resources, banned substances, new public consultation guidelines (8 February 2012);

• the Government’s Strategic Land Use Policy, an independent review by the NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, and stronger compliance requirements (5 June 2012);

• the independent EPA and the Office of Coal Seam Gas, the appointment of a Land and Water Commissioner to provide guidance to landholders and the community in relation to activities surrounding the mining of CSG, protection of aquifers, and two kilometre exclusion zones (2 June 2013); and

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• two new Codes of Practice (29 September 2013).

6.5.6 Summary of NSW Government policy orientation

This overview of CSG-related public square activities in NSW suggests that attitudes to the environment largely mirror those in Queensland. But there is also explicit reference to the implementation of the ESD principle, a matter not addressed by the Queensland Government. In particular, the NSW Government:

• invokes all four of the principles of environmental policy contained in the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment;
• is concerned about balancing resource development and the protection of the environment;
• addresses water management issues;
• acknowledges the existence of competing uses of the land;
• is motivated by the economic benefits resulting from CSG projects;
• recognises the strength of community concerns surrounding CSG developments;
• seeks to have in place appropriate regulation covering safety, social welfare, land access and health impacts, and the public availability of relevant information; but
• has initiated minimal discussion on how to enhance the quality of the environment or to promote a better environment.

As in Queensland, the public policy language discussing CSG developments and associated issues is dominated by the advocacy of the economic benefits to be derived from mining CSG balanced by appropriate regulation to protect the environment. Like in Queensland there is also continuing opposition to CSG mining from some sectors of the community.

One difference between the Queensland and NSW Governments is in their regulatory approach. Whilst the Queensland Government has welcomed the continuing work of an economic regulator to advise on a regulatory framework based on rigorous cost-benefit analysis that helps to grow the economy and target environmental improvements, the NSW Government has established the
EPA as its lead regulator with a prescribed object to ‘promote, restore and enhance the quality of the environment, having regard to the need to maintain ecologically sustainable development.’

This reference to enhancing the quality of the environment is broader than the object of Queensland legislation to protect the environment ‘in a way that maintains the ecological processes upon which life depends’, particularly if life is interpreted to mean human life. The NSW EPA object, however, is qualified by the adoption of adaptive management techniques that dilute application of the precautionary principle.

6.6 Reflection

This overview of CSG-related regulatory developments in three jurisdictions provides a consistent picture of a public policy strategy that seeks to give priority to the objective of securing the benefits of economic growth through natural resource development, subject to minimum levels of environmental protection threshold measures being implemented.

Underpinning this strategy are implicit anthropocentric assumptions that dilute the precautionary principle and the implementation of ESD through embracing a cost-benefit analysis approach in determining the ‘Common Good’, accept an environmental protection strategy that accommodates some environmental degradation occurring, and favour reliance on voluntary codes to strengthen environmental protection measures.

But does this policy strategy represent a way forward that is acceptable to the wide range of stakeholders who have financial, personal, ideological and political interests in how the CSG industry is regulated? It uses the rhetoric of policy ‘balance’, an ideal to which all stakeholders aspire, but the volume of legislative initiatives, ministerial media releases, parliamentary petitions and submissions to various inquiries that continues unabated suggests no balance has been found, and points to a policy gap still needing to be addressed.

This gap is particularly evident in the activities of community groups such as the Bimblebox Nature Reserve, Friends of Pilliga, The Great Artesian Basin Protection Group, Keep The Scenic Rim Scenic and the Lock The Gate Alliance.129 Their opposition to coal and CSG mining is exemplified in a community campaign around the Pilliga Forest near Narrabri where, in March 2014, 57 local communities proclaimed Gasfield Free Declarations: ‘Covering more than 2.4 million hectares of agricultural land, an average of 96.9 per cent of people surrounding the Santos controlled Pilliga-Narrabri project have said “no” to CSG.’130

The political significance of this public outcry can be deduced from the fact that the NSW Government moved quickly to introduce a six month freeze on exploration licence applications. This freeze was then extended by a further 12 months to September 2015.131

Do these community groups, then, value the land in a different way to mining companies and governments? An analysis of the various aims, objectives and visions of the different groups reveals a spectrum of attitudes that range from the Lock the Gate Alliance’s focus on human utility:

Our vision is of healthy, empowered communities which have fair, democratic processes available to them to protect their land and water and deliver sustainable solutions to food and energy needs.132

to activists who promote the natural (non-human) values of the Pilliga region, that include:

- Located in a National Biodiversity Hotspot
- The largest temperate woodland left in eastern Australia
- An important area for migratory bird species as part of the Eastern Australia Bird Migration System


• An area that has been nominated as wilderness under the NSW Wilderness Act 1987
• Known or likely habitat for 24 nationally listed threatened and migratory species
• Known habitat for 48 state-listed threatened species and five state-listed Endangered Ecological Communities
• A vital recharge area for the Great Artesian Basin.  

This spectrum of attitudes to the land in communities resisting CSG mining can also be found in those who are more supportive of CSG mining. Advocates of CSG mining are not alone in objectifying the land in terms of human utility, and environmentalists have no monopoly over recognising the land’s intrinsic value. The differences arise when policy judgements are made that strive to find a balance between competing policy objectives.

No matter how much the economic benefits of CSG mining are emphasised, the continuing strong opposition to it suggests that other costs and benefits are not being given sufficient weight. This is not helped when those who seek stronger environmental protection have to rely on a social licence that is only voluntary, and the onus of proof for establishing any failure in environmental protection falls on those who are not well resourced financially.

It is also compounded by the withdrawal of funding from the EDO and evokes a sense of powerlessness amongst those groups when confronted by strong industry lobbying and the political promotion by governments of their economic development and financial management agendas.

This sense of powerlessness is even more pronounced with regard to the land’s (non-existent?) ability to represent its own interests. This insight, however, leads to consideration of whether there are alternative ways to untie the Gordian knot of CSG public policy.

How would the analysis of CSG policy change, for example, if it were to be addressed from the perspective of the land? Is such an idea outrageous, impractical, philosophically unacceptable, morally meaningless, or too altruistic?

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Or is it just plain naïve to contemplate such a perspective in a world shaped by the realities of self-interest, competition and human need?

Similar issues were face by Wilberforce in his campaign to abolish the slave trade. Slaves were seen as utilitarian cogs in an economic machine, powerless but of vital importance to Britain’s national interests. The existence of slavery also reflected an entire way of seeing the world, a mindset that made slavery acceptable. What he achieved was a change in the ethical outlook of society, described by Metaxas as destroying one way of seeing the world and replacing it with another.\(^{134}\)

A similar transformation is needed regarding CSG policy. Finding a balance between competing stakeholder interests requires more than making good policy submissions, working the political system and negotiating compromise solutions. What is at stake is the very way in which humanity understands its relationship with the created order. The policy gap, then, that needs to be addressed is not, initially, that of finding the right policy balance, but of re-imagining the relationship between humanity and the created order. This is as applicable to those who oppose CSG mining as those who support it.

The thesis takes the view that exploring the CSG policy debate from this perspective will assist in addressing this policy gap. In particular, it uses a theological reading of Land in Australia to analyse the acceptability, or otherwise, of anthropocentric thinking. The thesis also uses it to act as a bridge between advocates and opponents of CSG mining by identifying emerging Australian attitudes towards the land. Land is a common factor across all policy perspectives, and so a theology of land provides an analytical tool for all parties to reflect on their attitudes to the land.

To do this, Chapter 7 explores how attitudes to the land have evolved since European settlement, Chapter 8 reflects personal experience and Chapters 9 to 11 develop a public theology praxis for input to the CSG policy debate.

\(^{134}\) Metaxas, *Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*, xv.
Chapter 7 How Australians regard the land

7.1 Overview

As outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, recent theological reflections suggest land has an intrinsic worth and identity, has relationships with God and humanity, and shares with humanity the hope of eschatological transformation. How then, might Australian experiences of the land inform, and be informed by, these emerging insights? Further, how might this dialogue then shape the policy decision-making processes and outcomes related to the CSG industry in Australia that, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, are driven largely by anthropocentric and utilitarian outlooks?

This chapter explores how cultural expressions such as poetry and art ‘earthed’ in Australian landscape and experience deliver a narrative that challenges attitudes and values embedded within the CSG public debate. Running through this narrative is an interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) that casts land as the traveller beset upon by thieves, and thereby poses the question “Who is the land’s neighbour?”.

7.2 Theological perspectives

Developing a theological narrative is not without its own challenges. As speculated by Lilburne:

any attempt to develop a theology of nature will have to go down to the deepest roots of Western religious sensibility and vocabulary if it is to plumb the depths of the ambiguity we find there in respect to nature and come up to speak with a clear voice.¹

It leads also to a consideration of how to address indigenous insights, such as those provided by Rainbow Spirit Theology,² whose purpose Holst says is ‘to affirm traditional spirituality; to free the church among Aboriginal people from its

¹ Lilburne, A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of Land, 89.
² Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology.
European cultural bondage; and to offer a land-based theological gift to all Australians.³

It is a view that Lee Miena Skye supports when advocating a Christological approach born out of a history of oppression and colonialism.⁴ She asserts that ‘the indigenous people of Australia will be the messengers of a new ecological vision and ecotheology/creation theology for the new millennium.’⁵

This suggests there is a potential for significant polarisation in the theological treatment of the land, ranging from what might be presented as a traditional western Christian perspective that objectifies the land (eg. regarding land as neighbour is not biblical), to one that is aligned with indigenous spirituality and speaks in terms of eco-relationships (eg. of course land is our neighbour).

Further, some might argue, this polarisation can already be found in the wide-ranging debate that surrounds the CSG industry. So what chance, then, does an Australian theology of land have of making a constructive contribution to that debate, if theology already provides a platform for such a broad spectrum of ways to value the land?

7.3 Attitudes at the time of European settlement

To explore these questions, it is helpful first to note that Australian (white and Aboriginal) attitudes to the land have evolved in the 225 years since invasion and settlement.

Cavan Brown⁶ has documented early white explorer impressions of the Australian landscape – the dry interior in particular – from which it might be concluded that it was seen as little more than “Terra Nullius”. For instance:

⁴ L. M. Skye, Kerygmatics of the New Millenium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women's Christology (Delhi: ISPCK, Centre of Millennial Studies, 2007), 108.
⁵ Ibid., 99.
⁶ Brown, Pilgrim through This Barren Land.
nature itself was inverted ... nothing at all of value;\(^7\)

a uniformity in the barren desolateness of this country;\(^8\)

the country is terrible;\(^9\)

it is stony, sterile and hideous, and totally unsuited for occupation or habitation of the white man ... the region is so desolate that it is horrifying to describe;\(^10\)

and

a desert of bare and barren plains ... and even the natives, judging from the specimen I have seen today, partook of the general misery and wretchedness of the place.\(^11\)

In summarising the attitudes of early explorers, Roslynn Haynes refers to a view of Australia as a ‘Hideous Blank’,\(^12\) commenting that

The popular notion of the Australian desert as unchanging, the land that time forgot, conveniently accorded with the British political myth of \textit{terra nullius}: before 1788 Australia had been not only a land of no people but a place where nothing of significance had happened, a Sleeping Beauty land passively awaiting the arrival of its princely (and pre-ordained) colonists,\(^13\)

where frustration with the land is reflected in the naming of Mounts Hopeless, Misery, Barren, Deception, Dreadful, Disappointment, Delusion, Destruction, Terrible and Despair.\(^14\)

The overall tenor of this European attitude to the Australian landscape is succinctly expressed in Giles’ observation that ‘we seem to have penetrated into a region utterly unknown to man and as utterly forsaken by God.’\(^15\)

This view of the Australian landscape being alien to humanity (and God) contrasts with Aboriginal perspectives, where human identity is intricately bound up with the land. For instance Rainbow Spirit Theology speaks of the identity of

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\(^7\) Banks, quoted in ibid., 28.
\(^8\) Oxley, quoted in ibid., 31.
\(^9\) Warburton, quoted in ibid., 45.
\(^10\) Giles, quoted in ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid., 48.
\(^12\) Haynes, \textit{Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film}, Chapter 4, 36 - 57.
\(^13\) Ibid., 5.
\(^14\) Ibid., 54.
\(^15\) Brown, \textit{Pilgrim through This Barren Land}, 55.
Aboriginal peoples being ‘determined by their deep connection with the land’,
Kwaymullina speaks of Aboriginal people being ‘a living, breathing, thinking
physical manifestation of our land – a thread in the pattern of creation’, Magowan records an Aboriginal view that ‘the fibre of one’s ancestral self is
dreamt through the land’, and Gideon Goosen observes that

Aborigines express their religious experience of cosmic manifestations in a
unique way: it is expressed aesthetically in the life-forms of animals, reptiles,
birds, insects and places in the living world.

There is no suggestion here of an alienation between God, humanity and the
land; quite the reverse, in fact. It does suggest, however, an early conceptual
divide between white and Aboriginal attitudes to the land, not helped by a white
settler outlook that Pascoe describes in a rather chilling way: ‘the invasion [of
Australia] was undertaken by people whose psyche was primed to believe that
it was in the best interests of the invaded to lose their land, their spirit and their
lives.’

This divide can also be seen in comments made by Frank Gurrmanamana, from
Gidjingali in the ‘Top End’, on his first visit to Canberra who regarded Canberra:

with a mixture of suspended belief and with some mild revulsion, as if there
were something deeply wrong with this state of affairs. Here was a land empty
of religious affiliation; there were no wells, no names of the totemic ancestors,
no immutable links between land, people and the rest of the natural and
supernatural worlds. Here was just a tabula rasa cauterised of meaning … ‘this
country bin lose ‘im Dreaming.’

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16 Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology, 38.
17 A. Kwaymullina, "Introduction: A Land of Many Countries," in Heartsick for Country: Stories of
Love, Spirit and Creation, ed. S. Morgan, T. Mia, and B. Kwaymullina (Fremantle: Fremantle
18 F. Magowan, "‘It Is God Who Speaks in the Thunder …’: Mediating Ontologies of Faith and
19 G. Goosen, Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millenium
(Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), 80.
20 B. Pascoe, Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country (Canberra:
Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), 38.
21 quoted in Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film, 33.
Gurrmanamana’s view that European settlement had stripped the land of meaning contrasts strongly with the concept of Terra Nullius where ‘the land cries out for European settlers to give it identity, meaning and legitimacy’.22

7.4 Changing attitudes

It is not surprising, therefore, to find evidence of an emerging Aboriginal self-perception of god-forsakenness as they lost their spiritual connection with the land and encountered a sense of land-related spiritual alienation. Features of this are dispossession, exile, loss of identity and disconnection. For example:

- **Dispossession** Paragraph 5 of the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia refers to ‘many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land’;23

- **Exile** Patterson asserts that ‘if land is country, then dispossession is exile’,24 reinforcing the view of a Rainbow Spirit Elder that ‘we now feel like strangers in our own land’;25

- **Loss of identity** Adrahtas speaks of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Land being so damaged by the concept of Terra Nullius: ‘an existential alienation that assumes the ontological proportions of and perpetuates historically the fall of man’;26 and

- **Disconnection** Rainbow Spirit Theology states that the ‘Creator Spirit is crying because the deep spiritual connection with the land and its people has been broken’.27

It is but a small step from here to appreciate Aboriginal abhorrence of the concept of Terra Nullius and to hear the land crying ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’28

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22 Ibid., 32.


This emerging sense of a degree of indigenous disconnection from the land contrasts with a shift from the explorers’ perception of the god-forsakenness of the land towards the non-indigenous community engaging with the land and searching for an understanding of the spirituality of the land.

David Tacey, for example, charts the rise of spirituality in Australia and refers to the contributions made by people within the creative arts and literature community such as Arthur Boyd, Leunig, Les Murray, Peter Sculthorpe, Patrick White, Tim Winton and Judith Wright. As a part of this ‘ReEnchantment’ Tacey highlights the significance of Hope’s 1939 poem *Australia* where Hope imagined that ‘a new “spirit” would arise from the Australian soil, a spirit unlike that which has emerged from European cultures. The Australian spirit would be “savage and scarlet as no green hills dare”’. There are the seeds here of an innovative imagining of the Australian land, though not one that is necessarily inclusive of Aboriginal spirituality.

An early example of this new spirit can be found in the poetry of Dorothea Mackellar, a homesick 19 year old Australian studying in London in 1908. In *My Country* she describes the British landscape of

field and coppice …
shaded and green lanes …
ordered woods and gardens …
brown streams and dim skies

and concludes that

my love is otherwise. I love a sunburnt country …
droughts and flooding rain …
hers beauty and her terror …
hers pitless blue sky …
For flood and fire and famine, She pays us back threefold.

Her depiction and embrace of the harsh Australian landscape provides another example of a cultural migration away from a European heritage, such as that

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28 Ibid., 67.
30 Ibid., 107.
found in the Heidelberg School of Australian Art, which depicts the Australian landscape as it actually exists, rather than in the terms of European Romanticism that presents nature as sublime.

Tacey further reinforces the theme of migration when he states that throughout the twentieth century, most of our artists have felt compelled to break ranks with their northern hemisphere models and guides, and with fashionable existential philosophies, in order to respond creatively to the ancient call of a primordial land.32

7.5 Jindyworobak Club

Significant here is the Jindyworobak movement, which was active between the 1930s and 1950s. It sought to promote indigenous ideas and customs, particularly in poetry, and desired to improve white Australia's understanding and appreciation of them, although it was criticised for harking back to an Arcadian idyll of a pre-colonial era, far removed from the early pioneer period that was haunted by spectres of dispossession and death.33

The movement is significant because the debate surrounding it highlighted the issue of what influence Aboriginal culture might have on Australian culture and, of particular relevance to the thesis, on the formulation of an Australian theology of land. For instance, one critic scorned the idea that 'words from the minute vocabulary of the earth's most primitive race must be used to express Australia.'34

Tacey, however, in referring to the Jindyworobak poets, looks at the tension between the process of 'aboriginalisation' in the white Australian psyche and concerns that dealing with Aboriginality as a spiritual reality might be 'the most unacceptable sign of Western cultural imperialism.'35

33 See the discussion of the Jindyworobak Club in Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film, 266 - 70.
Thus, in seeking to articulate an Australian theology of land, on the one hand there is the prospect of an undue privileging of Aboriginal tradition and perspectives ahead of western values and religion, whilst on the other there is the potential for a western colonisation of the Dreamtime. There is common ground, however, as all Australians value the land, albeit in different ways. And it is in this public space that it is possible to locate a theological dialogue to act as a constructive catalyst in shaping CSG policy development, in a way that accommodates changes over time in attitudes to land.

7.6 Finding common ground

One aim of this chapter, therefore, is to contribute to charting the features of this common ground. It does this by exploring through Australian poetry and art how non-indigenous attitudes to the land have developed since European settlement of Australia. In doing so, it does not ignore or exclude indigenous perspectives; rather, it aims to complement them and thereby foster the identification of common interests and outlooks. Thus the chapter provides a narrative of a journey of exploration and discovery, not propositional proofs, that is not yet completed.

Always present in this journey, however, is the question of ideology, lurking on the edges of theological consciousness and threatening to ambush an open-ended debate. For example, the rhetoric that presents the CSG industry as leading to the promised land of national prosperity gives scant attention to the consideration of other factors such as the intrinsic value of land. Lilburne’s caution about developing a theology of nature that addresses the deepest roots of Western religious sensibility is particularly pertinent here.

Interestingly, Brueggemann acknowledges that he gave insufficient attention in the first edition of *The land: place as gift, promise, and challenge in Biblical faith* to the claim of a promised land being a vigorous ideological assertion that served the purpose of its authors. The same might be said about the CSG debate today – is enough attention being given to the ideological assumptions present in the CSG debate? And this is where recourse to art and poetry

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becomes relevant, as they provide open-ended commentaries on Australian attitudes to the land and stimulate reflection on alternative perspectives.

This chapter explores the poetry of Judith Wright and then the evolution of non-indigenous Australian landscape painting since European settlement, as a way of hearing what poetry and art have to offer. It provides an entry point for theological reflection on how Australians regard land.

7.7 Why Judith Wright?

Wright was a well-known, respected and influential poet in Australia who was not constrained by her white, European heritage; her contribution complements, but does not rely on, the images and symbols of Aboriginal spirituality. Indeed, whilst Aboriginal insights draw on an existing spirituality tempered by a loss of a spiritual connection with the land linked to white settlement, Wright’s poetry reveals a discovery of a spiritual connection with the land, stimulated in part by her reflection on white settlers dispossessing Aboriginals of their land.

The example she sets in her questioning and recasting of inherited values and outlooks, and her empathy with indigenous issues, make Wright a valuable source for this chapter, although she cannot be regraded as representative of all Australian poets. Indeed Indyk asserts she was oppressed by feelings of ‘arrogant guilt’ and engaged in ‘white dreaming,’ and Alexander suggests poet Les Murray subtly accused Wright of ‘cultural authoritarianism.’

Further, Wright is not without her own biases. For example, her long association with Nugget Coombs and Oodgeroo Noonuccal, recognition of her family’s complicity in robbing the Aboriginal people of New England of their land and involvement in Aboriginal activism all point to a strong identification with Aboriginal people as can be seen, for example, in her response to the

40 Ibid., 34.
41 Ibid., 71.
news that her family home was to be repossessed ‘I am glad I am not there, I don’t think I could bear it, which shows that if I had been Aboriginal and had to leave that country it would have been the death of me.’

In a powerful way through her poetry, Wright gives voice to her evolving attitude to the world around her. She uses imagery that is original rather than borrowed from Aboriginal spirituality and insights in addition to those provided by western philosophy. She lets subjective feelings inform her outlook and goes beyond a rational, analytical approach. Her poetry provides an important input to the articulation of an Australian perspective on the land.

This chapter therefore treats Wright as a pioneer in exploring new perspectives that have their genesis in her western heritage but are also shaped by her Australian experiences and exposure to indigenous insights. In this way her poetry provides a template for the thesis. Whilst her poetry is not explicitly theological, it is certainly prophetic in speaking out against perceived injustices regarding the land and Aboriginal people, grappling with mystery, and exploring humanity’s relationship with the land.

7.8 Poetry and theology

The relationship between poetry and theology requires little explanation. One need not look any further than the poetry of the Psalms to find examples of profound theological insights. Poetry can also provide a bridge between the secular and the divine. Huey, for example, has observed that ‘Prophets are poets, really, which might explain why they are such great theologians,’ and Ben Myers notes it was poetry that first sparked Williams’ interest in theological questions and eventually led him into formal theology study.

But it’s not just the soaring prose and the beautifully crafted words of poetry that can inspire theological reflection and insights; poetry can also fill a gap arising

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42 Ibid., 46.
out of the limitations of language ‘poetry begins with disillusionment: an experience of the limits of language, its failure to be transparent to reality.’\textsuperscript{45}

In this vein Fiona Capp notes Wright’s awareness of the limitations of language and rational analysis as she ‘wistfully acknowledges her sense of exclusion from nature’s language’, whilst at the same time recording Wright’s view that our knowledge and understanding of the world had become fiercely analytical and abstract, breaking down this intimate connection between the world and the thing … we had lost touch with the living earth which is the “source of life and language”. Not only were humans alienated from the land but also from any emotional understanding of our place in the cosmos. It was the poet’s responsibility to revitalise the language and help forge a new kind of consciousness.\textsuperscript{46}

In this outlook Wright aligned with her husband Jack McKinney’s view that the gift of the poet is to feel the truth that cannot yet be thought.\textsuperscript{47} Interestingly, Wright had the view that the Jindyworobak movement had succeeded in bringing poetry into the public arena even if some aspects such as ‘Aboriginality’ were ridiculed.\textsuperscript{48}

Murray, too, another well-known and respected Australian poet, has a similar outlook on the role of poetry. As noted by Alexander:

\begin{quote}
 in Murray’s view, poetry and religion were intimately connected, in that poetry was the fullest possible expression of some aspect of life, while religion was the deepest expression of the whole of life itself. In his terms, then, religions were the greatest of all poems.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

This view is simply expressed in Murray’s poem \textit{Poetry and Religion}:

\begin{quote}
 Religions are poems. They concert our daylight and dreaming minds, our emotions, instinct, breath and native gesture into the only whole thinking: poetry. Nothing’s said till it’s dreamed out in words and nothing’s true that figures in words only.
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{45} Ibid., 25.
\bibitem{46} Capp, \textit{My Blood's Country}, 37, 38.
\bibitem{47} Ibid., 96.
\bibitem{48} J. Wright, \textit{Because I Was Invited} (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975).
\bibitem{49} Alexander, \textit{Les Murray: A Life in Progress}, 223.
\end{thebibliography}
… God is the poetry caught in any religion, caught, not imprisoned.  

This view connects, too, with the view of another Australian, Clive Hamilton, that a new consciousness cannot be forged only through a scientific understanding of the world, but must come to a different conception of reality that allows for ‘mystery of being’ and ‘participatory knowledge’ as well as scientific knowledge and certainty.  

So what reliance can be placed on Australian poetry providing useful insights into a theology of land? Is it still in its infancy, struggling to establish an identity separate from its European heritage? Or is it sufficiently distinctive in its own right to be able to contribute to the development of a ‘new kind of consciousness’?

Murray’s position with regard to ‘Boeotian’ and ‘Athenian’ influences on Australian poetry is helpful here. Boeotia, north-west of urban-minded, slave-holding Athens was scorned by Athenians as rude, boorish and stupid, its arts condemned as old-fashioned and tedious. Kinsella says the concept of the Boeotian and the Athenian are central to Murray’s poetry:  

Athens symbolises the new, the crass, the commercial. It is the abstracting part of the brain (the "forebrain"), the producer of Rationality, while Boeotia is that part of the brain that is imagination, dream and inspiration; it is the place of ritualism and ancestral inheritance (the "poem"). Murray examines history as a struggle between these two forces or states of mind … Murray sees white Australian history as being a continuing process of distancing between the urban and the rural … Murray frames his poetry around the conflict between the old values and the new – the dehumanising and indifferent forces of technology and change, against the forces of ancestral purity.  

Further, Bourke quotes Murray’s description of Athens ‘that perennial urbane country of the mind which forever scorns, oppresses and renews itself from my native Boeotia,’ and Alexander refers to the view that ‘[Australian] culture is  

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50 L Murray, New Selected Poems (2012).  
still in its Boeotian phase and any distinctiveness we possess is still firmly anchored in the bush.\textsuperscript{54}

There are several tensions evident here – the embryonic nature of an Australian identity, city versus bush, evolving values and balancing science, rationality, imagination and inspiration. It is unsurprising, therefore, to discover Murray's half-joking self-depiction as 'the last of the Jindyworobaks'.\textsuperscript{55}

Murray's implication that Australian poetry needs to extend beyond a focus on the bush may have merit. This should not discount, however, the importance of theological insights developed through a focus on land. Indeed, it is one of the themes of the thesis that the very uniqueness of the way in which land is shaping the Australian psyche can helpfully inform an Australian theology of land. And Wright's poetry assists in this regard.

In other words, in exploring the elements of an Australian theology of land, it may be premature to construct an 'Athenian' sophisticated, systematic contextual theology approach. But poetry such as that crafted by Wright can suggest a narrative that sets a vision, encourages the exploration of new symbols and imagery, and puts in place a process of theological encounter and mystery that fosters the development of uniquely Australian insights into a theology of land. Assigning a Boeotian tag to Australian poetry that is 'firmly anchored in the bush', however, may reflect more a particular worldview than the sophistication of the poetry and the insights it contains.

7.9 Judith Wright's poetry

Wright was influenced by her relationship with the world around her and her secure, traditional upbringing within a white pastoralist family in New England. She was distraught about the effects of white oppression of Aboriginals and the land, conscious of a chosen life style that defied conventional morality.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Alexander, \textit{Les Murray: A Life in Progress}, 171.


\textsuperscript{56} As instanced by her 20 year relationship with a married man, Jack McKinney, with whom she had a child out of wedlock in 1950, and whom she married 2 years before he died, and her later
disturbed that her advantageous start in life came at a cost to the local Aboriginal community and struggled with the limitations of Western philosophy.

She believed that if there was to be any hope for the future there needed to be a change of attitude, a new way of thinking about our relationship with the land, because mankind had dreamed the ‘wrong dream’, a dream of domination over the earth.\(^{57}\) This sounds similar to White’s linking the ecological crisis with the Christian dogma of man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature.\(^{58}\)

But in her poetry Wright makes no such direct theological claims. Rather, her poetry reflects her powers of observation, her emotional response to events in her life, her concern about past treatment of Aboriginals and the land, and her love of the land, which she describes in *For A Pastoral Family* as serving ‘as a base for poetry’.\(^{59}\)

A central theme in her poetry is that of humanity’s relationship with the land. This is explored below under the headings ‘gardens’, ‘interconnectedness’, ‘guilt’, ‘alienation’, ‘home’, ‘theodicy’ and ‘finitude’.\(^{60}\) The power of her poetry is such that the approach in this chapter is to appeal directly to the reader’s imagination rather than analytical reason. As stated by Wright:

> Our feelings and emotions must be engaged on a large scale. Whether scientists like it or not, it is feeling that sways public opinion, far more than reason; it is this feeling that spurs us to protest.\(^{61}\)

### 7.9.1 Gardens

Gardens are a persistent theme in Wright’s poetry, a subconscious link maybe with the mythopoetic Garden of Eden.\(^{62}\) She initially saw gardening as a way of

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\(^{58}\) White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."


\(^{60}\) Wright did not use these terms. They have been introduced in this chapter to assist theological reflection.

\(^{61}\) Wright, *Because I Was Invited*, 206.

nurturing the land, reminiscent of Gen 2:15 and humanity’s responsibility to serve (‘abad) it, but later

the land and the weather soon taught her the futility of imposing one’s will upon the landscape rather than accepting it for what it was … she was beginning to recognise that the land would heal itself. It did not need her to tend it.63

For Wright the future of the ‘garden’ became independent of the gardener:

Now in the garden where it fell
quite against my plan,
springs up a thing as stray, as fierce,
as tall as a grown man
(That Seed, 1973) 64

7.9.2 Interconnectedness

Wright never called herself a Buddhist, but for her the Buddhist emphasis on unity and interconnectedness was the kind of ecological ethic to adopt.65 In this regard, Capp observes in Camphor Laurel that ‘the tree is a kind of Yggdrasil, the tree of life in Scandinavian … that unites heaven, earth and hell, and represents life, knowledge, time and space.’66

Further, in In South of My Days Wright writes of how her ‘blood’s country’ with all its old stories, still went ‘walking in my sleep.’67 Wright’s poetry sets no boundaries, moving across time, from the physical world to the dream world, from words to action and finding specific expression when she wrote Five Senses, made more poignant by the fact that Wright experienced increasing deafness from the mid-1930s:

Now my five senses
gather into a meaning
all acts, all presences;
and as a lily gathers
the elements together,
in me this dark and shining,
that stillness and that moving,

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63 Ibid., 183, 84.
65 Capp, My Blood's Country, 180 - 82.
66 Ibid., 109.
67 Ibid., 86.
these shapes that spring from nothing,  
become a rhythm that dances,  
a pure design.

While I'm in my five senses  
they send me spinning  
all sounds and silences,  
all shape and colour  
as thread for that weaver,  
whose web within me growing  
follows beyond my knowing  
some patter sprung from nothing –  
a rhythm that dances  
and is not mine.  
(Five Senses, 1963)\textsuperscript{68}

7.9.3 Guilt

This seemingly utopian interconnectedness is mitigated, however, by an abiding sense of guilt found throughout Wright’s poetry, epitomised by the shock she felt on learning of the massacre of Aboriginals at Darkies’ Point when, in retribution for the spearing of cattle, white settlers drove a group of Aboriginal men, women and children over the cliff.\textsuperscript{69} Her poem about this event, Nigger’s Leap, New England, has a dark brooding sense of white blindness to the crime, and history coming back to haunt and envelop us:

Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull  
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff  
and then were silent, waiting for flies …

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers,  
and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?  
O all men are one man at last. We should have known  
the night that tidied up the cliffs and hid them  
had the same question on its tongue for us.  
And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange.

Never from earth again the coolamon  
or thin black children dancing like shadows  
of saplings in the wind. Night lips the harsh  
scarp of the tableland and cools its granite.  
Night floods us suddenly as history  
that has sunk many islands in its good time.  
(Nigger’s Leap, New England, 1946)\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68} Wright, Collected Poems 1942-1985, 186 - 87.  
\textsuperscript{69} Capp, My Blood’s Country, 79.  
\textsuperscript{70} Wright, Collected Poems 1942-1985, 15, 16.
Interestingly, her sense of personal guilt about the treatment of Aboriginals also gave a means of atonement. As described by Capp, Wright argues that our last chance to make amends is to protect the original beauty of the country:71

It was not “wilderness” to the people who lived by it and through it, but the source of their very life and spirit; and to those of them who somehow survived our invasion it remains so. And for us, too, it can be a place where we can find some kind of rest, joy and even forgiveness.72

Here Wright sets out a form of atonement that connects humanity with the land, with land as the healer.

7.9.4 Alienation

Wright’s guilt about her ancestors’ treatment of the Aboriginals informed her relationship with the land, as did her rejection of the concept of ownership of the land: ‘this is not my land – nor anyone’s; greed and passion for ownership have done it endless damage.’73 It is an alienation that seems to haunt Wright: she did not belong … the garden can exist without her … she was in exile:

The blue crane fishing in Cooloolah’s twilight
has fished there longer than our centuries.
He is the certain heir of lake and evening,
and he will wear their colour till he dies,

but I’m a stranger come of a conquering people.
I cannot share his calm, who watch his lake,
being unloved by all my eyes delight in,
and made uneasy, for an old murder’s sake.

Those dark-skinned people who once named Cooloolah
knew that no land is lost or won by wars,
for earth is spirit: the invader’s feet will tangle
in nets there and his blood be thinned by fears
(At Cooloolah, 1955)74

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71 Capp, My Blood’s Country, 82.
73 Capp, My Blood’s Country, 187.
74 Wright, Collected Poems 1942-1985, 140.
This alienation from the land is taken further by her anger at humanity’s degradation of the land, and an almost overwhelming sense of despair at what was happening, even despair at the brutal reality of nature:

Die, wild country, like the eaglehawk, dangerous till the last breath’s gone, clawing and striking. Die cursing your captor through a raging eye

Die like the tiger snake that hisses such pure hatred from its pain as fills the killer’s dreams with fear like suicide’s invading stain.

Suffer, wild country, like the ironwood that gaps the dozer-blade. I see your living soul ebb with the tree to naked poverty.

Die like the soldier-ant, mindless and faithful to your million years. Though we corrupt you with our torturing mind, stay obstinate; stay blind.

For we are conquerors and self-poisoners more than scorpion or snake and dying of the venoms that we make even while you die of us.

I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust, the drying creek, the furious animal, that they oppose us still; that we are ruined by the thing we kill.

\[(Australia 1970)\]^{75}

Here Wright struggles with the reality of the harsh Australian landscape, human failings and the presence of death, asking impossible questions about the presence (and triumph?) of evil. It’s as if Wright is saying that dying is the only way forward, the only way the land can make itself heard, a theme that points to the Easter story, with the Australian landscape as the one resurrected through death such as when, for example, the searing heat of a bushfire regenerates life. Maybe Wright, through her despair in reading the Australian landscape, found death offering hope:

\^{75} Ibid., 287, 88.
I aim towards Forever,
but that is no one’s country,
till in perhaps one moment,
dying I’ll recognise it;

those peaks not ice but sunlit
from sources past my knowing,
its beauty of completion
the end of being human

(Some Words – Forever, 1973)76

7.9.6 Home

She found a sense of peace and sanctuary in her exile, however, as seen in her poem on the house “Calanthe” that she and McKinney bought in 1951 and lived in together until his death in 1966, and where she lived for 10 more years:

We were fortunate, house; in a world of exiles
stateless, homeless, wandering, spying, murdering,
wars, bewilderments, losses and betrayals,
we found each other.
In your spaces and awkward corners
We spread our lives out, fitted and grew together.
(Habitat, 1973)77

But even in this poem there is still a sense of impermanence: she compares the psyche to a house with handsome front rooms but where ‘all the action goes on at the back’ – in the unconscious. According to Capp ‘the only shelter, in other words, is not an actual place, as beloved as it might once have been, but the dreamhouse of one’s mind.’78

7.9.7 Finitude

Then Wright returns to the rainforest and her love for the land. Here she revisits the theme of interconnectedness (‘one is all and all are one’) and accepts the mystery and the transience of life that go beyond scientific understanding. It is a humbling vision that puts humanity in its place, alongside the rest of the world in which it lives:

76 Ibid., 312.
77 Ibid., 308.
78 Capp, My Blood’s Country, 86.
The forest drips and glows with green.  
The tree frog croaks his far-off song.  
His voice is stillness, moss and rain 
drunk from the forest ages long.

We cannot understand that call
unless we move into his dream,  
Where all is one and one is all 
and frog and python are the same.

We with our quick dividing eyes 
measure, distinguish and are gone.  
The forest burns, the tree frog dies, 
yet one is all and all are one.  
(The Rainforest, 1978-80)\textsuperscript{79}

7.9.8 Theological reflections on Wright’s poetry

Wright reinforces, rather than questions, the concept of land having an intrinsic value and identity. For her, land in Australia is alive and tells its own unique, suffering story, a suffering that has come particularly at the hands of humanity. She tells the story of the land in terms of its relationship with humanity. It could be the traveller in the parable of the Good Samaritan, with the suffering of that traveller a central part of the narrative. But who is neighbour to the land?

Wright’s treatment of the causes, consequences and nature of suffering in particular is significant, as it stimulates reflection on how to find God in an environment that kills. The land is no different to human communities with their potential for violence, breakdown, healing, joy and peace. Treatment of land thus leads into a broader consideration of issues such as the nature of sin, the mystery of reality, theodicy and God’s economy of salvation.

Further, the Australian landscape has a unique character that cannot be colonised into defining its identity in terms of a familiar European landscape. It thus encourages the use of Australian symbols and images that integrate the concept of humanity as neighbour to the land into a challenging theological narrative.

\textsuperscript{79} Wright, Collected Poems 1942-1985, 412.
An image of the land that emerges from Wright’s poetry is that of land being deeply wounded by human actions but striking back through ‘the scoring drought, the flying dust, the drying creek, the furious animal.’ This casts the land as a protagonist where we might be wary of, in Ruether’s words, “Mother Earth” rising up like a chthonic Jehovah to topple human empires and return earth to pre-civilised simplicity … a justified revenge of “nature” against “civilisation”.\(^8\)

But Wright also sees land as healing itself, giving identity to its inhabitants and having an important role in the healing of relations between white and Aboriginal people.

This is land giving of itself, as well as being a gift of God and a stage for the drama of human existence. The land becomes the Good Samaritan as well as the traveller. This introduces a Christological element that sits comfortably with the incarnational claim by Rainbow Spirit Theology that ‘Christ is in our camp, in our land, and is a part of our culture.’\(^9\)

Mystery surrounds this, a truth that cannot be fully told in words, but Wright’s poetry provides some glimpses that point to a greater truth about Australians’ relationships with the land. It encompasses alienation, grief, hope and reconciliation. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, when reflecting on the gift of ‘Dadirri’ (a land-orientated inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness), talks about relationships between divided people in this way: ‘We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us – to catch up – but waiting with us, as we find our place in this world. There is much pain and struggle as we wait.’\(^9\)

Perhaps Wright might have adapted these words along the following lines to speak of the turbulent relationship between the land and all Australians:

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\(^8\) Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, 84.


“We [the land] hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us – to catch up – but waiting with us as we gain recognition and respect in this world. There is much pain and struggle as we wait.”

7.10 Australian landscape art and theology

The second research source used to develop an understanding of Australian attitudes to the land was that of Australian landscape art. Art is in the vanguard of identifying, reflecting and influencing social attitudes. It has the capacity to speak when language fails, to give insights that cannot be fully expressed in words and to complement poetry as a medium for inspiring visions, exploring mystery and ambiguity, and challenging dominant worldviews. It defies the systematic theologian, erudite philosopher and political economist.

Australian landscape art is a genre in its own right, with the potential to make a particular contribution to the development of an Australian theology of land. In the words of Sir Kenneth Clark: ‘in Australian landscape painting, as in all great landscape painting, the scenery is not just painted for its own sake, but as a background of a legend and a reflection of human values [my emphasis].’

An initial foray into Australian landscape art revealed an abundant richness of material that tells its own story of changing attitudes. This chapter, therefore, is necessarily selective in the paintings it discusses, but sufficiently eclectic to provide a representative narrative. It contrasts with the case study of Wright’s poetry by delivering complementary insights derived from many paintings by a range of artists.

7.11 Overview of Australian landscape art

Australia is an enormous continent and Australian landscape art inevitably has a focus on its vast interior, of which deserts comprise a significant part. Not surprisingly, then, commentaries on the evolution of Australia’s landscape art, such as that written by Sandra McGrath and John Olsen (The Artist & The

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83 Quoted in Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film, 209.
Desert\textsuperscript{84} and Roslynn Haynes (Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film)\textsuperscript{85} reflect this.

The significance of the Australian landmass, and thus Australian landscape art, however, is more than geographic. It also has a quality that potentially can transform the Australian psyche. Ireland puts it this way:

\begin{quote}
The future is somehow …
somewhere in the vast and neglected desert,
the belly of the country
not the coastal rim.
The secret is in the emptiness.
The message is the thing we have feared,
the thing we have avoided
that we have looked at and skirted.
The secret will transform us
and give us the heart to transform emptiness.
If we go there
If we go there to listen
We will hear the voice of the eternal.
The eternal says that we are at the beginning of time.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

How, then, has the transforming potential of the Australian landmass been portrayed in Australian landscape art?

An entry point for exploring this question is McGrath and Olsen’s commentary on the work of 22 European-Australian artists, ranging from Becker, a non-surviving member of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition across Australia in 1860, to Storrier, who first visited the Australian desert in 1973. They provide a narrative that discusses the different ways in which the Australian desert was/is seen through artistic European-Australian eyes, from an initial impression of malevolence and the desert’s enigmatic, vast emptiness to one of hope and inspiration, a place for mythical contemplation that generates a sense of exhilaration, independence and freedom.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{84} McGrath and Olsen, The Artist & the Desert.
\textsuperscript{85} Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film.
\textsuperscript{86} D. Ireland, A Woman of the Future (Melbourne: Allen Lane, 1979), 349.
\textsuperscript{87} McGrath and Olsen, The Artist & the Desert, 10.
But is there something missing in this? Is the land’s perspective adequately captured? Artists can objectify the land in a metaphorical and anthropocentric way, but as a result glide over its intrinsic value and identity:

we are continually creating the landscape that we ‘see’ ... In the two centuries since European settlement of the continent it has been promoted from ‘best forgotten’ oblivion to centre stage prominence … Uluru vies with the Sydney Opera House as the icon of the continent.88

In addition to a focus on human utility, a number of conflicting themes also emerge. In particular:89

- fear and awe inspired by the macro vastness and immensity of the desert (Becker, Frome) contrasting with delight in micro detail (Wolseley, Martin);
- the Darwinian wildness and savagery of the desert (Pugh) contrasting with a non-malevolent desert of hope (Bastin);
- the paradoxical, majestic, enigmatic and mystical nature of the desert (Rees) contrasting with humanity’s polarised response to it (Hart);
- the ‘natural’ beauty in wilderness (Heysen) contrasting with the imported beauty of urban areas (Rivers);
- humanity either belonging (Long, Robinson, Preston) or not belonging (Nolan, Drysdale) in the land; and
- life (Olsen) contrasting with death (Gill, Molvig) and the cycle of life and death (McCubbin, Juniper).

Despite these complex, ambiguous contradictions, however, what these different perspectives have in common is their desire to make sense of Hope’s Australian spirit that is ‘savage and scarlet as no green hills dare’, and McKellar’s love of a sunburnt country. This suggests that the exploration of Australia is by no means complete, and invites further expeditions into its mysterious reality that might learn from the pain and struggle of Dadirri.

88 Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film, 3.
89 Subsection 7.12 comments on, and references, the artworks in more detail
7.12 A journey of hope through Australian landscape art

This subsection explores the worldviews that are to be found in Australian landscape art on the assumption that worldviews – be they theological, philosophical or ideological – fundamentally shape values, and thus the positions developed on policy issues like CSG.

What is the worldview, for instance of Professor Simpson who, in the 2012 ABC documentary “Great Southern Land”, spoke of ‘conquering the land … of harnessing and taking … and of Australians forever being locked in battle with the elements?’

Or the worldview of Michael McGirr who wrote in 2004 of the Hume Highway

roads are a significant part of bringing a strange land to book, the act of domestication that needs to follow conquest … and that the railway showed how the land was finally brought into captivity … it tamed the land?\textsuperscript{90}

In this modern day and age the language about relationships with the land is replete with words like conquest, control and taking. But do non-indigenous Australian artists see Land this way? Drawing on a Christian heritage, a starting point for exploring this is paintings of Adam and Eve.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{images}
\caption{Painting 1: Margaret Preston, \textit{Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden}, 1950 (L)\newline Painting 2: Margaret Preston, \textit{The expulsion}, 1952 (R)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{90} M. McGirr, \textit{Bypass: The Story of a Road} (Sydney: Picador, 2004), 25, 198.
Painting 1 is a very Australian scene. Beautiful and diverse, flora and fauna abound. Margaret Preston depicts a strong sense of harmony and peaceful coexistence, even of Rousseau’s Noble Savage. But did the first white settlers see the land in this way, as an idyllic, pristine paradise?

Her second painting gives some clues. Now there is a large dividing fence, Adam and Eve are dominant, there are thistles as well as beauty in the garden – the land is not perfect, it suffers with Adam and Eve. Rosemary Crumlin says there is little evidence that Preston spoke in a polemic way about the dispossession of Aboriginals by white Australians, but the painting can be seen to be judging Aboriginal people (e.g. evicted by a white angel), stripping them of any prior rights to the land and legitimising European colonisation: perhaps a subtle modern-day myth for Australia. Here the land is discordant, a stage for conflict, but providing the spoils of victory to the colonisers.

![Painting](image)

Painting 3: Edward Frome, *First View of the Salt Desert – Called Lake Torrens*, 1843

This myth is reinforced by paintings such as this of the early explorers. The telescope held parallel to the horizon emphasises the flatness of the country and an equally featureless expanse of sky. The land is nothing, there’s no-one there and there’s nothing to see, a powerful picture of *Terra Nullius*.

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92 Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, 91.
Then there emerges a sense of silent, forbidding desolation,\textsuperscript{93} with the desert as the murderer accused by the ‘grim evidence’ of its blistering heat and dryness causing the traveller and his animals to die.\textsuperscript{94} The land is malevolent.

But Becker, a member and casualty of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition, introduced a sense of mysticism into the landscape. The luminescence suggests romantic grandeur in a forbidding landscape. Here land has a sense of unfathomable immensity, remoteness and strangeness and wonder.\textsuperscript{95} Haynes says that for Becker, fixated on notions of the sublime, ‘the desert, with its ghostly images, its potential terrors to survival, and the lure of mystical enlightenment, was the counterpoint of the Alps for the Romantic artists.’\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{93} McGrath and Olsen, \textit{The Artist & the Desert}, 24.
\textsuperscript{94} Haynes, \textit{Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film}, 97.
\textsuperscript{95} McGrath and Olsen, \textit{The Artist & the Desert}, 16.
\textsuperscript{96} Haynes, \textit{Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film}, 4.
She may have had in mind Eugene von Guérard and his depiction of the Australian landscape having its own majestic grandeur, such as in this painting of Mount Kosciusko. The influence of the Romantic movement in Australian art has been described in the following way:

The German Romantics had a profound influence on the way the Australian landscape was first imagined … invoked the sublime through the vastness and otherness of the wild … Germanic visions of unspoiled wilderness lent themselves perfectly to the exploration of Australia as ‘terra nullius’.  

Romanticism reached a peak in paintings like Long’s that depict Australia as a Greek Arcadia. Queensland Art Gallery Notes suggest it gives a ‘vision of Australia as a kind of pantheistic dissolution of the distinction between humans and the natural world and so creates an authentic Australian myth.’ Here the land works its way into Australian culture, asserting its place as an unspoilt paradise.

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A sense of paradise is captured, too, in Godfrey Rivers’ painting, but in a different way. Queensland Art Gallery Notes suggest it ‘may be considered a quintessential image of Brisbane’. But is it in fact Frome’s ‘Terra Nullius’ transformed by British colonisation, a civilised paradise that bears little resemblance to the Arcadian wilderness? The jacaranda is imported, as is the genteel English custom of taking afternoon tea, complete with European clothes and a domestic servant. This land is firmly under human dominion.

At the same time a different perspective was emerging, epitomised by the Heidelberg School of Australian Art, that distanced itself from a European heritage. McCubbin’s painting links the Australian bush with the hardships...
experienced by the early pioneers. Unlike Gill’s *Grim evidence*, here the land is not condemned, but compassionate in providing a final resting place.

This theme can also be found in Heysen’s paintings who, when seeking escape from the personal tragedy of the death of his daughter, started painting in the Flinders Ranges. He talked of painting a picture of ‘blasted hopes’ and finding beauty in the land’s harshness; his paintings educated people to see barrenness as beautiful. So the land connects pain and joy.

Drysdale, however, grapples with the harshness of the landscape, in a different way. His characters epitomise the Aussie Battler as heroic, unconquered by, and not alien to, the landscape. According to Gleeson, Drysdale saw the desert as a testing ground for a man’s eternal duel with nature. The land competes.

Whereas Drysdale gave a certain nobleness to pioneers, Nolan found the desert to be an irrational joining between white men and the landscape:

In European landscapes man is always there, has been there. By contrast in the Australian desert there seemed no place for man at all ... only an overwhelming withering of the will and a numbing sense of despair.

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99 Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, 166.
Here Burke sits uneasily on a camel, naked and incongruous in the desert. The land is alien, and blacker images of the land begin to emerge.

A theme of violence is picked up in Pugh's unsentimental view of the bush, where only the fittest survive: a vision of 'nature red of tooth and claw.' Life is a battlefield, as is the land.

So it is inevitable that carcasses litter the landscape. Many artists have picked up this theme. Molvig's clever painting implies the whole of Australia is a carcass. There is talk of the “Dead Heart” of Australia. The land seems dead.

But maybe there is some hope. In Pretty Polly Mine Nolan suggests that it is the human (already dated in old-fashioned clothes) and the mine that are dying, transient objects outlasted by a parrot that is free to fly wherever it wishes. The land is eternal.

103 Ibid., 249.
And Pugh seems to confirm this: the birds are still flying free, the human has disappeared and the mine is abandoned. It’s as if the battle has been fought, it is humanity that is dead and the land has emerged … victorious.


Then into the frame steps Pro Hart, who extends the Aussie Battler theme. The focus of his painting is *The Holy Tower*, reminiscent of the doomed Tower of Babel. He presents it as a vain product of the Establishment, represented by the church at its base and the mining community. But walking down the road is a rabble, led by someone with a cross … Perhaps there is hope for humanity (and the land) after all. The land is the silent, innocent, injured witness to the struggles and inner conflicts of humanity.

Boyd also suggests there is conflict, but for him the struggle is about cultural domination. For him, the rose in his painting represents ‘the desperate attempts of the Europeans to impose their culture on an essentially primitive landscape. It floats because it cannot take root. If it does, it destroys, like lantana.’

But his crucified figure also has a form resembling the stark landscape within which it hangs: both are lonely, vulnerable, undignified, suffering and half-dead. So it identifies with land rather than humanity, thereby giving the land an intrinsic value, that is suggestive of a soteriology going beyond humanity. The land is being transformed.

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With the more recent arrival of planes, helicopters, two way radios and four-wheel drives, the desert is no longer seen as a threatening environment that kills. The land is now safe, and the desert is

without menace, death or evil, it is a place filled with flowers, beautifully plumed birds and wonderful decorated gum trees. Heat simmers in his [Bastin’s] paintings like the rich gold music of a Byzantine mosaic: rocks, pebbles, flora of all species are minutely and lovingly rendered.¹⁰⁵

Rees goes further. New South Wales Art Gallery notes state Rees compared his visit to Uluru with that of visiting Chartres cathedral ‘coming up against the immensity and miraculousness of nature.’ The land is spiritual.

This romanticism, however, is tempered somewhat by Juniper’s more stark portrayal of the land as a survivor. He describes the desert as a place of ruins

and the debris of a vanished civilisation, ‘everywhere there is this feeling of awe, a sense of unspecified danger which yet does not inspire hostility because it is a part of the cycle of life and death’¹⁰⁶ and the riverbed is ‘a metaphor for human suffering and extremity. By extension it is a reminder of survival and renewal.’¹⁰⁷

Olsen picks up the theme of renewal. Lake Eyre is like a womb, surrounded by squiggles and blobs of squirming life; the lowest point below sea level in Australia, it hosts a festival of life. The land, at the ‘dead’ centre, is a womb.

Wolseley takes this further by focusing on detail, seeing the desert ‘as an accumulation of exquisite fine details. It’s an endless Persian carpet.’¹⁰⁸ Grishin notes that ‘the viewer is not an objective witness but is an active participant in this intricate, elaborate treasure map of exploration.’¹⁰⁹ The artist becomes a modern day explorer and the land is about discovery.

A trap, however, is that exploration and discovery can lead to colonisation. Robinson hints at this, as Queensland Visual Arts Online notes:

> Every landscape is created by its observers. Without them it is merely country. Here William and Shirley Robinson gaze steadily back at us. They seem in the

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in McGrath and Olsen, *The Artist & the Desert*, 166.
landscape but not of it. Their position in the painting irresistibly recalls Sir Thomas Gainsborough’s celebrated painting “Mr and Mrs Andrews 1750” which above all others proclaimed the proprietorship of the English gentry over their domains. William and Shirley ‘bear witness’ to their Beechmont property in the traditional way, but they share the title with the forest and the animals. This is a gentle but purposeful parody of English landscapes, for a new environment.¹¹⁰

![Painting 24: William Robinson, William and Shirley, flora and fauna, 1985](image)

So here is Boyd’s struggle benignly repeated: the need to move on from European culture. But the painting also strongly resembles Preston’s *Garden of Eden*, albeit with an Aboriginal couple replaced by a white couple. Does this white couple, then, have a fated vulnerability to expulsion? And, like the Garden of Eden, will the land be cursed through human colonisation, such as the advent of CSG?

7.13 Australian landscape art in the public square

How might these images of Land contribute to public policy decision-making? A lead comes from the Australian Parliament House in Canberra. This building, opened by the Queen in 1988, is deliberately incorporated into the landscape, consistent with Walter Burley Griffin’s vision for Canberra, which integrated the built and natural environment. Architect Romaldo Giurgola observed that Parliament House

   could not be built on top of the hill as this would symbolise government imposed upon the people. The building should nest with the hill, symbolically rise out of the Australian landscape, as true democracy rises from the state of things.

Further, the building intentionally incorporates colours of the Australian landscape, representations of Australian flora and fauna, an indigenous mosaic, and a foyer that creates an impression of walking through a forest.\(^{111}\) Three artworks on view in Parliament House in Canberra extend this theme by bringing the Australian landscape deliberately into the public spotlight.

![Painting 25: Arthur Boyd, *Untitled (Shoalhaven Landscape)*, 1984](image1)

The first of these is Boyd’s tapestry that hangs in the Great Hall. Quoting from Australian Parliament House notes: ‘The architectural vision for the Great Hall was that it would convey a sense of the Australian land, emphasising the importance of the physical environment in shaping Australian values [my emphasis].’\(^{112}\) The tapestry incorporates a koala, a cockatoo and a multitude of trees, but there is not a human to be seen.

![Painting 26: Tom Roberts, *Opening of the First Parliament of Australia*, 1903](image2)

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Second, Roberts’ picture in the foyer to the Main Committee Room contrasts strongly with Boyd’s tapestry: the painting is overflowing with human architecture and people, and there is little representation of the presence of land in this painting.

But then it is a delightful surprise to find hanging in the Main Committee Room Mandy Martin’s *Red Ochre Cove*. Peter Haynes refers to Martin as an artist/explorer and describes her painting as

a picture full of associations – making reference to Aboriginal culture, European settlement, the clash of cultures, and the clash of people and nature. Nature, the only constant, is the key theme in our ability to link the various cultural representations which inhabit it.¹¹³

Here the shaft of light shines on an Australian Cove not a British Duke, the land not the people acts a witness and the curved sky replaces the curved roof of the building. The painting thus places the land centre stage in the human ordering of public policy decision-making and thereby integrates it into the complexities involved in that process.

And these complexities are, in turn, informed by the plethora of words used to describe the land, which have been stimulated by this journeying through Australian landscape art – harmony, discordant, terra nullius, malevolent, mystical, arcadia, dominated, compassionate, pain, joy, alive, competing, alien, metaphor, battlefield, dead, eternal, victorious, witness, reflection, values, safe, full of grace, spiritual, survivor, womb and discovery.

What's in a name?

This abundance of concepts provides a rich foundation upon which to develop a public theology contribution to the public policy debate surrounding the CSG industry. But a degree of caution needs to be exercised in how words are used to describe the land’s identity, as they influence the relationship between the land and humanity.

For example, the names ‘Mother Earth’ and ‘Mother Nature’ occur frequently in the literature and quite properly reflect the creative and nurturing aspects of the land. As pointed out by Roslynn Haynes, however, casting the land as female also provides a platform for the rhetoric of domination to shape the nature of the relationship between humanity and the land. Haynes talks of early explorers conquering a gendered land, and of a ‘female’ land being a ready metaphor for male explorers to use. She also quotes the conclusion of Miriam Dixson that Australians see Australia as ‘the body of an unloved woman’, and that

> The infertile, drought-ridden land was characterised as an old hag, barren and past her time; the irregularity of seasonal rainfall, the erratic rivers and the mirages that teased the struggling explorers were readily construed as expressions of female fickleness and deception, a wilful shrewishness that required taming through the well-worn tropes of conquest and possession.\(^{114}\)

But Olsen’s *Lake Eyre 1975* speaks powerfully against this view. Olsen represents Lake Eyre as a microcosm of the cycle of life and death, a fertile womb that gives birth to a multitude of life forms in a festival of life – a complete reversal of the image of the desert as a barren woman past her time. Olsen finds evidence of life in the ‘dead centre’ of Australia. Land is the ultimate source of life but, like Lake Eyre, is subject to extreme changes. The world is mysterious, full of beauty but also of the uncertainty of existence, where the way ahead combines joy and pain, life and death.

Metaphors for describing the land, therefore, need to hold in dynamic tension a diversity in outlooks and not be seduced into privileging one particular view. Insisting on one perspective would be as inappropriate as describing Australia’s multiculturalism in terms of one homogeneous culture.

\(^{114}\) Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film*, 50 - 52.
Theological reflection on Australian landscape art

One of the objectives of researching the debate surrounding CSG has been to identify how Australians regard the land. Art provides a dictionary that helps to articulate more clearly the diversity that exists. It suggests no one dominant concept of Australians’ relationship with the land should be privileged ahead of other outlooks when developing policy responses to CSG. Rather it suggests the need to recognise and take into account the multiterranean\textsuperscript{115} nature of the ways in which Australians regard the land.

Do we, for example, see Australia as a new Arcadia where we focus on its pristine beauty and sacredness, a safe and secure haven needing protection from the oppressive and greedy practices of the ‘Powers That Be’? If so, Long’s \textit{Spirit of the Plains} might be our inspiration and Hart’s \textit{The Holy Tower} our call to arms. This is akin to deontological ethics – absolute values to be observed, no matter what.

Or do we see Land as one player in the struggle for life, where life is not meant to be easy? It’s a tough world out there. Drysdale’s \textit{Man Feeding his Dogs} comes to mind here, a reality check that we live in a painful world, with Juniper’s \textit{The River Dies in January} reminding us of the price of survival – there are always some losers. This is more teleological ethics, the kingdom of the (anthropocentric) Common Good.

Or maybe we see Land as mysterious, there are risks in our decision-making, and we have to step out in faith, as it were. Here Olsen’s \textit{Lake Eyre} reminds us of the beauty, mystery and uncertainty of life, and Heysen’s \textit{Guardian of the Brachina Gorge} encourages us to discover a way ahead that somehow comes to terms with the pain and joy of life. Here we venture into value ethics and the exercise of trust and good judgement.

Two complementary theological themes emerge from this analysis that can assist this conceptualisation and thus contribute to the policy decision-making

\footnote{\textsuperscript{115} In other words, the diverse range in attitudes towards the land}
processes that seek to balance the observance of absolute ethical principles, the maximisation of the Common Good and the exercise of value judgements

The first, already introduced, is that of recognising and giving due policy regard to the intrinsic identity and value of the land. This can be understood in terms of regarding the land as ‘neighbour’, particularly in the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Care must be taken, however, to avoid this becoming an exclusive paradigm for describing humanity’s relationship with the land.

The second is more Christological in nature. It draws on theological themes found in Wright’s poetry (gardens, interconnectedness, guilt, alienation, home, theodicy and finitude), the incarnational perspective found in Rainbow Spirit Theology (Christ is in our camp, in our land and is a part of our culture), the multiterranean insights provided by Australian landscape art and Boyd’s relocation of the crucifixion of Christ into an Australian setting. It is a theme that addresses the very nature of the created order.

Both themes can inform the development of a new consciousness, a new worldview. A focus on an Australian theology of land is well placed to do this by drawing on a strong indigenous spirituality, an evolving cultural separation from a European heritage and the distinctiveness of the Australian landmass.

7.16 The place of personal experience

What became apparent in this exploration of Australian poetry and landscape art was the way in which personal insights and experience had profoundly shaped the creative outputs of the artists. My initial response was, however, largely academic and cerebral. But was there a place, I speculated, for adding my own experiences to their insights in shaping my research into, and evolving conclusions about, an Australian theology of land?

Put another way, if the development of the thesis is a creative act in its own right, can it be crafted in a way that is more than ‘fiercely analytical and
abstract” and presents ‘a feeling for the truth that cannot yet be thought’? If poetry fills a gap arising out of ‘the limits of language’ and landscape art provides ‘a reflection of human values’, then is there not a place in the thesis for an account of creative responses to personal experiences of the Australian landscape?

Not only is this appropriate in locating my position in a public policy debate that can never be completely neutral, objective and value-free, but also it has the potential to inform the debate through new insights that include feelings as well as scientific reason. As noted by Wright, ‘it is feeling that sways public opinion far more than reason’, if also ‘the illumination of nature floods the scene with light,’ then experiences of the Australian landscape have a place in contributing to the emergence of a new consciousness.

Further, if an Australian theology of land points towards consideration of the land in terms of a relationship rather than objectification, then space needs to be given to exploring that relationship – what it means, for example, to feel with and for the land in responding to the advent of CSG mining.

Chapter 8 therefore provides an account of a ‘Spiritual Journey’ that was explicitly undertaken as a research activity. It is inevitably personal, but also was challenging in its exploration of scientific, theological, rational, emotional and experiential insights stimulated by the activity.

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116 Capp, My Blood's Country, 37, 38.
117 Ibid., 96.
118 Myers, Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams, 25.
119 Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film, 209.
120 Wright, Because I Was Invited, 206.
121 Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film, 178. 79.
Chapter 8  A personal experience of Land

8.1 Overview

My journey started in July 2013 when I participated in a ‘Spirit Journey’ led by Rev Dr Ian Robinson, travelling overland from Alice Springs down to the Great Australian Bight. I embarked on this Journey explicitly looking for experiences that might take me beyond a rational, reasoned, intellectual and scientific view of the world around me. This was in response to the challenge “How can you write about an Australian theology of land if you have not experienced the Red Centre first hand?”

The outlook I brought into this Journey was moulded by my formal education in mathematics and the physical sciences. It was subsequently shaped by 20 years working in public policy development, an environment that championed the provision of informed, objective, rational and independent policy advice.

I was therefore sceptical about how to incorporate any experiences I might have into both an academic research thesis and the public square. Conscious of this, of the traps of experiential discernment and of going well outside my comfort zone, however, I was eager to test out ideas invading my mind about how to conceptualise the land, my relationship with the land, and how this might inform public policy.

This chapter describes key aspects of the Journey, how it has extended well beyond the time spent physically located in Central Australia, and theological reflection that incorporates poetry stimulated by, and artwork encountered during, the Journey.

8.2 The Journey

The departure point was Alice Springs. Beautiful white gums, offsetting stunning blue skies, the rich red cliffs of Honeymoon Gap and the grandeur of the McDonnell ranges provided an uplifting start to the Journey. A 400 kilometre drive past Santa Teresa and Old Andado Homestead led to setting up
a bush camp near the Finke River, one of the most ancient watercourses in the world.

En route, it was so obvious where cattle had been grazing: the vegetation was stripped bare, a silent witness to human-induced desertification. But the presence of wild flowers surrounded by the red desert was a delight to behold, a reminder of the survival and triumph of beauty even in the most testing conditions.

That evening heralded the start of rain, which persisted for a day. I woke at 3.00 am the following morning to find my swag soaked and my sleeping bag sodden, I had a splitting headache and I couldn’t sleep. But somehow I had to venture into the rain to go to the toilet, armed with a trowel but no umbrella. I wondered what ‘on earth’ had induced me to test myself like this. With hindsight I like to think it was Land itself. But it was a low point; I was fed up and miserable.

At daybreak, what was to have been a day of contemplation and solitude, became a day of coffee, drying wet mattresses, sleeping bags, clothes, hats … and companionship. How the weather united us! And my spirits lifted as I came to realise that I was encountering the very thing I sought … a life experience, although I would never have imagined that flooding rains in the middle of the hot, arid Australian desert would have brought me to my knees.

The following day was dry but the track treacherous. Two out of three cars got completely bogged, but somehow we survived only then to encounter the gibber plain, a vast flat landscape, stretching to the horizon, full of rocks but little else. Nature, however, was not finished with us. Two hours later we were relaxing in the warm mineral waters of Dalhousie Springs before setting up camp at 3 O’Clock Creek, listening to dingoes howl. This time the night was dry, the sky was clear and I was treated to a spectacular view of the Milky Way and the *Emu in the Sky* in the southern night sky.

I learnt from this that Aboriginal people find meaning in the dark patches in the night sky. The Coalsack (the small dark patch of sky between the Pointers and
the Southern Cross) is the head of the emu and stretching away to the left is the emu’s long dark neck, round body (near Scorpius) and finally (towards the horizon) the legs.¹

The next day we drove past the sad ruins of Dalhousie Homestead, once the focus of dreams and now abandoned, along with, it seems, much Aboriginal heritage. But the Painted Desert beckoned, hills full of grace and colour contrasting strongly with the enigmatic nothingness of the gibber plain, now left far behind.

The camp that night was in the grounds of Arckaringa Homestead, a location that seemed like a twenty-first century Dalhousie re-incarnation – isolating for its occupants but a welcoming oasis for travellers with its hot showers and toilets.

Despite a breathtaking dawn, weather reports suggested the road into Maralinga (a former British nuclear test site south-west of Coober Pedy) was closed. The group decided to split, with three members heading east back to Sydney and others taking an alternative route west back to Perth. This was disappointing, as we had all looked forward with both anticipation and some apprehension to what we might experience at Maralinga.

So the final night together was spent in the middle of nowhere, 240 kilometres south of Coober Pedy. It was so good to be back off-track, camping amongst the spinifex and saltbush. It was a night to remember, with lightning flashing and thunder crashing all around. It was as if the land was singing its farewell, giving me a grand finale.

After a 300 kilometre drive the next day, I spent a night at Port Augusta then caught the bus to Adelaide from where I flew to Broken Hill. More surprises – this mining town is full of art galleries providing serendipitous experiences, such as viewing a painting of imported poppies and barbed wire coexisting within the Australian landscape – Life in the Desert. It reminded me of beauty being found amidst the horrors of the trenches in the First World War. I also saw it as

symbolic of the blessings and curses of European settlement ... and a metaphor for the conflict between humanity and the land. It spoke to me of the reality of life.

There was also a painted sculpture of a woman with landscape as her skin, *Born into this Landscape*, the artist’s response to a woman in an isolated Outback community and very much a part of her environment, contemplating the dilemma of a cancer diagnosis whilst being far removed from the required specialist services. I loved this sculpture as it incorporated beauty, a sense of interconnectedness and the presence of pain in the created order, reminding me of the heartache of life.

More contentiously I also saw it as the land wondering if CSG would be diagnosed as a cancerous growth. Little did I anticipate then the significance it would come to have for me later.

It was in Broken Hill that I also came across Hart’s *The Holy Tower*.\(^2\) It seemed that I could not escape the existence of conflict when experiencing the land, but two days later, after a 20 hour train trip on the Indian Pacific, I saw a rainbow dancing over the Blue Mountains as the train neared Sydney. A portent of hope, I thought, at Journey’s end.

This hope was reinforced on discovery in Sydney of a modern Aboriginal painting – *Milky Way Dreaming*. I was reminded that the land and humanity co-exist beneath the same stars that rotate majestically above their heads, a cosmic interconnectedness that resonates with light and joy and points to the mystery of life.

The Journey, however, did not finish in Sydney. Two months after my return to Brisbane, my wife was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. This led me to revisit *Born into this Landscape* in particular, and to review the way I understood the nature of the created order.

8.3 Theological reflection on my ‘Spirit Journey’

At some point on my Journey I began to connect with the land in terms of a relationship, rather than an object. The land became ‘Land’. Maybe it was in the grounds of the Arckaringa Homestead, as I watched the spectacular dawning of the day, reflecting on the experiences of the previous two days when we had rescued cars from the mud, crossed the gibber plain, swum in the warm mineral water of Dalhousie Springs, viewed the nothingness of the *Emu in the Sky* and heard the dingoes howling in the middle of the night. Why did they
howl, I wondered? Perhaps it was Land, grieving over my lack of empathy with Land. This prompted me to craft the poem *Undressed*.³

We played, you and I, on that day,  
children wrestling in the mud,  
delighting in life, together –  
cars bogged, but land abundant  
with the Spirit's blessings.

I, ecstatic with the sweet, soft rain  
and you to share my joy;  
you with horsepower, spade and rope,  
proud of my mud that dressed  
your car in glory and in hope.

"She'll be right, mate!"  
we thought in silent concert,  
barely knowing the other voiced  
a mutual longing for Grace:  
a prayer of life for all.

Later, my caresses bathed your mind,  
reclaimed that mud and  
refreshed your weary body  
floating peacefully in  
my warm embrace, freely given.

You loved me then  
but did you love me when  
you crossed the gibber plain,  
rocks stretching to my  
vast, flat horizon of unending shame?

I let you see me as I am,
undressed, vulnerable . . . exposed
to your probing eye that seeks
the soaring mountain, moonlit beach,
and pulsing, bountiful rainforest.

I did not hide my nakedness,
my soul stripped bare, honest to God
in all its barren emptiness,
but wounded by your cry
"There's nothing there".

And will you love me when
my scorching heat undresses you
and seeks you out, another Job to test?
Or will you curse the day
my harsh embrace squeezed you dry?

We're so alike, you and I,
hidden and safe in Eden's clothes;
but dare you shed those skins and leaves
and trust in God's Shalom?
Will I still love you then?

There is an ambivalence, however, surrounding this relationship with Land. It offers no pantheistic glorification and idolisation of nature; it includes pain, shame and brokenness that spoke of Adam and Eve, naked and fearful when God walked in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:7, 10, 21). Significantly I saw Land too was conscious of its nakedness.

The sense of Land's shame was also present when I reflected on the decision to abandon the trip to Maralinga, which I had looked forward to as the climax of the Spirit Journey. It accompanied a growing realisation that Land is not to be taken for granted, is not just there for human consumption. I then wrote Land
Says No!\(^4\) as I wrestled with the disappointment of not being able to visit Maralinga, but aware of my arrogant anthropocentrism:

\begin{quote}
What?
The Land
has said "No!".
This cannot be true!
Does the Land not know
I'm well beyond my comfort zone?
How dare the Land deny
my chance to see
the desolation of
the Maralinga
rape?
\end{quote}

The reality of a broken journey that led to Broken Hill, however, had its unexpected benefits as it inspired me to write the poem Broken\(^5\) in which I reflected on the significance of ‘brokenness’ for the Australian psyche:

\begin{quote}
A broken journey
full of surprises
metaphor of nation.

A broken Koori
full of loss
challenging a nation.

A broken eucalypt
full of fire
regenerating a nation.

A broken convict

\end{quote}

\(^4\) Land Says No!, 2013.
\(^5\) Broken, 2013.
full of nothing
seeding a nation.

A broken explorer
full of dreams
inspiring a nation.

A broken hill
full of silver
funding a nation.

A broken Anzac
full of mateship
shaping a nation.

A broken refugee
full of hope
embracing a nation.

A broken Land
full of life
feeding a nation.

A broken church
full of shame
serving a nation.

A broken Christ
full of Grace
transforming a nation.

This had the right contextual theology feel about it. It interconnected the brokenness of Land with a message of hope, with Rainbow Spirit Theology’s incarnational perspective, with the character of the emerging Australian nation.
and, ultimately, with God’s cosmic economy of salvation. It linked, inextricably, abundance and brokenness.

A crisis came, however, with my wife’s cancer diagnosis. I was drawn back, reluctantly, to the painted sculpture *Life in the Desert*, which I had interpreted as a metaphor for Land wondering if CSG would be diagnosed as a cancerous growth. An additional notion, however, persistently clamoured for attention:

*Look at how you respond to what’s happening to your wife. Do you respond to what’s happening to Land in a similar way?*

My response to a human cancer diagnosis was both rational and experiential; no-one would expect it to be otherwise. It reflected my worldview and was informed by how I valued a person. Should the same motivation, then, apply to my response in the public square to what was happening to Land? It was not an easy question to answer, the issue had become very personal. I found refuge in composing a poem, *Mortality*,⁶ that howled like the dingoes in the middle of the night:

*And now the time of Job is here*
*arriving as a thief at night,*
*stealing dreams of love and joy,*
*replacing them with fear and grief.*

*I howl in predawn sleeplessness,*
*lonely terror fills my soul;*
*in agony I voice my hate*
*of a world that hosts such pain.*

*“Would that I had not been born”,*
*I echo Job’s despair of old:*
*a witness to heart-breaking truth,*
*that loss takes root in love.*

—*

And you, O Land, do you cry out
in pain and grief at all you've lost?
And do you curse the day that brought
you forth from living breath?

What Dreaming, Land, now fills your mind
where shadows of the anthropocene
with colonising guile invade,
demanding that you give up more?

And do you howl with fear and grief
about our energetic lust for more,
a cancer of our souls and lives
metastasising in your womb?

For mortal nature claims you, too,
companion on this finite road,
where thieves can strike in lonely place,
half dead you’re left to suffer.

Creation’s pains no boundaries know,
from human heart to nature raw,
but in that cacophonic mix
rebounding love and joy are found.

Yes, you and I are so alike,
with tooth and claw we leave a mark,
but in our common gift of life
the one, the other can embrace.

Painful though they were, these reflections reinforced my conceptualisation of
Land as neighbour and also the place of poetry and landscape art in shaping
worldviews, complementing the insights gained through reason and scientific
investigation and analysis. But in addition to this, they led me to question the nature of the ‘otherness’ of the Australian landscape.

After returning to Brisbane I was further influenced by an ABC documentary that traced the evolution of Australian art. In it Edmund Capon speaks of early attitudes to the land in terms of ‘triumphing over nature … imposing one’s imagination on the landscape … intrepid men taming the landscape … this land is ours, we have tamed it.’ In a land regarded as empty, alien and other, the colonial language of domination and conquest is not out of place. But then Capon describes the approach of the Modernist painters Nolan, Drysdale and Boyd as changing the soul of Australian art in the late 1940s: a result of their venturing into Australia’s Red Centre and exploring its otherness.

He concludes that the landscape’s perceived barrenness and harshness was all in our European eyes and that, inspired by the immensity and otherness of the Outback, Australian art was starting to reflect how Australia was moving on from its British monoculture past. I identified with this example of Land informing the Australian psyche, as it was also remoulding my worldview that had its genesis in a British heritage.

I wondered, however, what theological boundaries separated humanity from Land, and whether otherness was a helpful differentiator. Reflection on my Spirit Journey suggested that humanity and Land both have intrinsic value in the eyes of God, experience brokenness, reflect the glory and grace of God but are other to the reality of God, and are co-heirs in God’s cosmic economy of salvation. Boundaries might exist, but should they influence our behaviour?

This cartoon by Leunig helped me to explore the nature of otherness:

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8 Ibid. Episode Two "Coming of Age"
9 New Philosopher, November 2014
Leunig locates the objectification of the landscape within the context of the development of natural resources. Emphasising the otherness of the tree leads to the tree’s exploitation. It suggests a reductionist worldview with a conception of beauty that provides little opportunity for the creativity of imagination to inspire consideration of broader perspectives.

A more subtle perspective can be found in the Australian children’s literature classic, *The Magic Pudding*. Here the Magic Pudding, protected by Bunyip Bluegum and his likeable friends, loves to be eaten and constantly re-forms to provide an inexhaustible supply of food for his protectors.\(^{10}\) There is no obvious otherness and the rhetoric of the narrative can be interpreted to endorse unconstrained consumption if sufficient protective measures are put in place.

The otherness in this iconic feel-good Australian story, however, is hidden. The Magic Pudding must be other for it to provide an inexhaustible supply of food, without receiving anything in return, for this sacrificial generosity cannot be described as a characteristic of humanity. The embrace of otherness can thus bring with it the beguiling temptation of unaccountability. Does it matter what

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\(^{10}\) Norman Lindsay, *The Magic Pudding: Being the Adventures of Bunyip Bluegum and His Friends Bill Barnacle & Sam Sawnoff* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1918).
Land feels about our consumption, be it for minerals, energy, farming, housing or spiritual retreat? And is the notion that we should pay for what we take from Land, or give something back to Land, totally outlandish? Do these questions even make any sense if we consider Land to be other?

An alternative view that sees Land as a neighbour, a travelling companion on life’s road in a mysterious awe-inspiring universe, defies the anthropocentric utilitarianism that characterises public policy decisions. It is, perhaps, a more costly route to take, as epitomised by the Good Samaritan who looked after the welfare of the wounded traveller at his own expense.

At this point in my theological reflection I recalled a poem, Transformation,\textsuperscript{11} which I had written a few years previously on the occasion of a foray into exploring the mystery of God’s cosmic economy of salvation:

\begin{quote}
I see her hanging from a tree, \\
brilliant, radiant beauty: \\
deep blues of ocean, \\
red ochres of desert, \\
verdant greens of bush, \\
purple clouds of storm – \\
nature’s kaleidoscope, a glorious mosaic.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The figure turns her head my way \\
and with horror then I sense \\
burning from her eyes the light, \\
acrid from her nose the fumes, \\
swollen tears of acid rain and \\
deep unutterable groans \\
that can’t be heard.
\end{quote}

“Why”, she cries, “forsake me so? \\
You know not what you do.” \\
Heart piercèd by my mute reply,

\textsuperscript{11}C. Dalton, Transformation, 2009.
she shakes her head and slumps and then
“It’s finished” is her sigh.

I bow my head in grief and shame
But in the tree from which she hangs,
its own once full of light and life,
and proud in Eden’s garden,
now twisted, gnarled and broken, too
with blue, red, green and purple hue,
the sacred mosaic is woven.

Too late, I thought, to right the wrong,
but had I known the apple’s price
would I have wisdom sought?

Then as I look the outlines shift,
they leap and dance and shout and sing –
creation in the making.

Where once was tree and figure, now
is just a riotous, swirling mist
from which appears outside of time
her joyous, loving rapture.

Central to this poem are the metaphor of a tree – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:9), the Crucifixion Tree (Acts 10:39) and the Tree of Life (Rev 2:7) – and the incarnational nature of Land (Rainbow Spirit Theology). My by-line for the poem was ‘In integrated harmony Land and humanity become a new creation through the transformed Christ.’

Leunig’s tree, a symbol of exploitative natural resource development, gives it an extra depth, as do the trees in *Crucifixion and Rose*, (Painting 8, chapter 7)\(^\text{12}\) strengthened by the divine otherness embedded in the Magic Pudding’s sacrificial giving leading to abundant re-creation. New life can arise out of

brokenness. Heysen’s talk of painting a picture of blasted hopes (Painting 10, chapter 7) and of finding beauty in land’s harshness,\textsuperscript{13} rang true for me.

8.4 Where to from here?

This theological reflection, stimulated by my Spirit Journey, became a catalyst in encouraging me to revisit earlier theological research, now informed by my analysis of the CSG industry in Australia and this personal encounter with Land. This might be described as a Boeotian exercise, given its origins in the bush and the unsettled and somewhat speculative nature of its insights. But it provides an insight into an evolving theological outlook upon which I have developed conclusions about how an Australian theology of land can inform the public debate surrounding the CSG industry.

\textsuperscript{13} Hans Heysen, \textit{Guardian of the Brachina Gorge}, 1937.
SECTION 3

. . . SEEKS RECOGNITION IN THE LAW
Chapter 9  A public theology strategy

Over the last few years there has been a transition in the CSG policy debate. This transition has been from a focus on scientific issues towards consideration of regulatory efficiency, and environmental issues such as Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) being interpreted against the policy backdrop of economic development. There has been little reflection on, or re-appraisal of, the principles underpinning environmental protection policies. And yet there is significant continuing community disquiet over CSG developments.

One response to this disquiet would be to contribute to the ongoing process of policy fine-tuning. This would focus on improving scientific monitoring, strengthening environmental protection legislation and relying on efficiency in the operation of the market place to deliver optimum outcomes. But it is hard to identify what significant added value a theological perspective would bring to the multitude of scientific, environmental and business inputs that already exist.

As identified in Chapter 6, however, an issue that has not been addressed is how to find the right balance between the competing policy objectives that give rise to an emotive and polarised debate. Public theology strategy can act as a catalyst here to assist in a critical examination of those objectives, by initiating a conversation about the worldviews that shape them.

For example, should Land be protected because it has intrinsic value in its own right, or because humanity needs to ensure there is a healthy environment for future generations? Further, is Land to be treated as a commodity in a growth economy or as a valued part of a worldwide ecological community that has certain rights?

The fundamental issue at stake here, that the thesis targets, is the need to reflect on the worldviews that underpin natural resource development policies. Its theological reading of Land in Australia serves as an independent platform for examining issues raised by CSG mining from a different angle, and so to question the embedded assumptions upon which CSG policy is based.
9.1 Underlying assumptions

9.1.1 A ‘reality check’

A central and critical assumption in developing a public theology strategy for CSG is that the issues surrounding CSG mining are a subset of a broader set of issues relating to the relationship between humanity and the environment. These broader issues require an examination of how reality is understood. Northcott and Scott, for instance, refer to ‘the theology of crisis’\(^1\) and Tacey states that ‘the environmental crisis is not just a moral problem or an economic issue relating to how we manage our natural resources: fundamentally it is a spiritual problem about how we experience ourselves in the world.’\(^2\)

It is a theme that complements Moltmann’s assertion that

> the dying of the forests finds its correspondence in the spread of mental and spiritual neuroses, the pollution of the seas and rivers is paralleled by the nihilist feeling about life which is prevalent among many people who live in the mega cities. The crisis we are experiencing is not just an ecological crisis.\(^3\)

Sponsel puts it this way:

> Numerous individuals from diverse backgrounds and persuasions are convinced that the eco-crisis will only be resolved, or at least markedly reduced, if there is a very fundamental rethinking, refeeling, and revisioning of the place of humans in nature.\(^4\)

The common theme in these statements is well expressed in the observation by Deane-Drummond that

> Moltmann has looked behind the immediate ecological crisis as such, to the anxiety that pervades human attitudes to our environment. He roots the cause of much of this anxiety to our failure to have an adequate understanding of God as the loving creator, and as one who promises a future of fellowship with both humankind and creation.\(^5\)

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This urges a theocentric approach. In response, the thesis adopts a public theology strategy that seeks to add value to insights provided through scientific and economic considerations by encouraging discussion on how views of reality underpin and shape those very considerations. God as Creator is a central tenet upon which this strategy is built.

9.1.2 Recognising public policy distortions

A second assumption is that there is a gap between the goals of ecojustice and what is actually achieved through public policy. This draws on the discussion in Chapter 4 of the potential of the law to corrupt the achievement of justice that exists alongside the law’s role in securing justice. The thesis adopts a strategy that recognises the inevitability of distortions in the way in which environmental public policy is given effect, but also provides ways to assist in discerning when they occur so that corrective action might be taken. It invites consideration of the concept of justice as well as that of legality.

The terminology that the strategy uses is important. The thesis preferences the words ‘public policy distortions’, although ‘environmental sin’ is an option. For instance Pope Francis has branded the destruction of South American rainforests and other forms of environmental exploitation as a ‘sin of our times’ and the worldwide Anglican Communion Environmental Network has declared that the ‘wilful destruction of the environment is a sin.’

Sin is a well-recognised and debated concept in theological circles, but its use in a public square dominated by pragmatic atheism might distract and also appear to be an act of hegemony. This could result in theological insights being dysfunctionally relegated to those gaps where the explanatory power of secular discourse gives out. This, then, could reinforce a spiritual/material dualism, as epitomised by McFadyen’s rhetorical question: ‘Is “God-talk” only

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6 See, for example, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/07/05/uk-pope-environment-idUKKBN0FA0BC20140705, retrieved 14 April 2015
7 See, for example, http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=99, retrieved 14 April 2015
possible by distancing God from the world, by making God utterly transcendent and “other” to it.” For a public theology strategy seeking to be ‘earthed’ in a theology of Land, this would be distinctly unhelpful!

As an alternative, Deane-Drummond speaks of the need for public theology to be bilingual, involving a constant effort to ‘translate theologically opaque concepts into a language understandable by the public that is increasingly characterised by a pluralism of world views, including those that might be secular rather than explicitly religious.’

The term ‘public policy distortions’ does not require acceptance of a faith outlook; nor does it invalidate the views of those who describe distortions in moral terms that reflect particular views of human nature. The common ground it provides is its implicit assumption that policy outcomes are less than perfect and can be assessed against the principles of justice that underpin the legislation.

In other words, the thesis proposes a public theology strategy that goes beyond asking whether an action is legal, by stimulating consideration of whether an action is just. In doing so it uses language that has traction in both secular and faith communities.

9.1.3 Public theology as a catalyst

A third assumption in scoping a public theology strategy is that there is a need for an invitational and enquiring approach. This approach is very relevant to the CSG industry in Australia, where the dominance of the rhetoric of economic development in the public policy debate fails to allay the concerns and fears that landowners, environmental groups and the community continue to express.

What role, then, does public theology have in this polarised, but well-informed, public space? There is already a plethora of experts offering advice and

10 Ibid.
11 Deane-Drummond and Bedford-Strohm, Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere, 8.
opinions across a wide range of disciplines including engineering, health, law, geology, politics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics.

Several metaphors for describing a role for public theology come to mind. Simpson, for example, has suggested that the church might be a ‘prophetic public companion’,\(^{12}\) Clive Pearson draws on Hauerwas’ term ‘resident aliens’, suggesting a public theology expressed ‘in a world of resident aliens strangely at home and yet with one eye on the eschatological “other city”’\(^{13}\) and Storrar speaks of ‘neighbourhood saints’.\(^{14}\)

Each has strengths and weaknesses. ‘Resident aliens’ suggests a subversive role that challenges the status quo of the Establishment, but could imply an otherworldliness; ‘neighbourhood saints’ invokes the image of the Good Samaritan, but could infer a sanctimonious piety; and ‘prophetic public companion’ suggests speaking out, worldly involvement and travelling together, but a prophet may struggle to be heard in a local community (Mat 13:57).

All face a challenge, too, if public theology is seen to be more akin to the death rattle of a fading Christendom, an echo chamber\(^{15}\) wherein the church speaks to itself, hears itself and convinces itself of the importance of what it is saying, but in reality has little impact on public policy.

Also relevant is the outlook that is reflected in Lord Melbourne’s outrage at Wilberforce daring to inflict his Christian values about slavery and human equality on society: ‘Things have come a pretty pass when one should permit one’s religion to invade public life’.\(^{16}\) In other words, religion should not intrude into politics. This has its modern-day equivalent in Jeb Bush’s comments on the Papal Encyclical on the Environment: ‘I don’t get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinal or my pope … [religion] … ought to be more about


\(^{14}\) Discussed by Storrar at UTC seminar in 2004.

\(^{15}\) This term was used by Mark Scott, ABC Managing Director, in a presentation to a *Rethinking A Public Faith Conference* in Sydney, March 2014, organised by the Centre for Public Christianity.

\(^{16}\) Metaxas, *Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*, xix.
making us better people, less about things [that] end up getting into the political realm.\textsuperscript{17} Such comments, it would seem, have no regard for White’s assertion that the ecological crisis could be attributed to a Christian dogma of ‘man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature.’\textsuperscript{18}

Against this perspective, the thesis assumes that it is possible to offer theological insights to stimulate discussion on the worldviews that implicitly shape CSG policy development, but without being prescriptive. To do this, it uses a theological reading of Land in Australia as a catalyst to generate new policy perspectives and insights.

The thesis thus uses theology to stimulate innovative policy thinking, but does not assume its theological tenets will themselves be adopted as policy principles. Rather, it seeks to secure policy outcomes that are consistent with those theological tenets. Adopting a metaphor provided by Tom Wright, this public theology strategy is like providing ‘a set of signposts pointing into a bright mist … a true indication of the direction we should be travelling in.’\textsuperscript{19}

At a time when the CSG policy debate is home to entrenched views and self-interest, this public theology strategy offers visions of justice for Land that transcend anthropocentric utilitarianism. In doing so, it encourages dialogue by presenting contrasting scenarios for describing the nature of the created order, against which complex and emotive policy options can be assessed. It does not, however, assert privileged access to truth, but invites participants to explore for themselves truths to which it points.

9.2 Public theology in a post-secular age

In exploring what this might involve, assumptions must be made about the nature of society (such as secular, pluralist and post-modern) and faith (such as individual, private and corporate), the relationship between Church and State

\textsuperscript{17} See \url{http://time.com/3924287/pope-francis-climate-change/}, retrieved 5 July 2015
\textsuperscript{18} White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” 1206.
\textsuperscript{19} Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, 118.
(such as privileged and separated), and the public mission of the church (such as prophecy, evangelism, peace-making and pastoral).

Graham, in her thoughtful book *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*,²⁰ takes the view that we now live in a post-secular society and explores what this might mean in terms of how the Church engages with civil society, and political processes in particular. It makes interesting and compelling reading. Although she speaks from within a British context, her observations are sufficiently general to have application within Australia.

In her Introduction Graham notes the paradoxical co-existence of the religious and the secular, and emergence of the ‘post-secular’ society, and asserts that the nature of religious faith is changing too:

> The kind of religious faith that is emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and which dominates public imagination, is very different from what went before. It represents much less of a religious revival and more of a quest for a new voice in the midst of public debate that is more fragmented, more global, more disparate."²¹

As a consequence, she argues, the focus in the public square is not on beliefs as such, but rather on what action those beliefs lead you to pursue. This is not a result of the secular voice being diminished or the truth of a religious belief being accepted; a tension still exists. Indeed, Graham draws on de Vries’ definition that ‘a society is “post-secular” if it reckons with the diminishing but enduring – and hence, perhaps, ever more resistant and recalcitrant – existence of the religious.’²² Rather, it recognises the value of creating a ‘dialogical sensibility’²³ across secular and faith outlooks, even if they are strange bed-fellows.

Her basic proposition is that, in a post-secular society, religious perspectives should have a place at the policy table:

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²⁰ Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.
²¹ Ibid., xvi.
²² Ibid., xviii.
²³ Ibid., xiii.
One of the implications of the phenomenon of the post-secular, therefore, is that conventional demarcations of ‘public’ and ‘private’, ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ are breaking down, along with the protocols governing the nature of public discourse and civil activism in liberal democracies. It is not clear, for example, that non-theological reasoning is any the less subjective or partial than any other form of public discourse. Similarly, the expectation that only people of faith might ‘bracket out’ their deepest moral convictions is no longer viewed as the ideal condition for participation in political life – on the contrary, it is increasingly regarded as a restriction on the exercise of free citizenship.²⁴

Her questioning of the concept of public policy neutrality is taken up by others. Kim, in his overview of theology in the public sphere, for instance, records Cady’s view that theologians must unmask impossible pretensions to neutrality and universality that underlie the Enlightenment understanding of public, and the public exercise of reason.²⁵ He also refers to Parekh’s outlook that secular reason is not politically and culturally neutral²⁶ and Williams’ statement that

the sphere of public and political negotiation flourishes only in the context of larger commitments and visions, and that if this is forgotten or repressed by a supposedly neutral ideology of the public sphere, immense damage is done to the moral energy of a liberal society.²⁷

At the same time Kim, along with other theologians, notes that public theology does not require any privileging of Christianity in public life.²⁸ Christianity is but one voice in a post-secular, multicultural and multifaith society that is now at least prepared to listen to faith inputs provided. As pointed out by Horne, the exponents of any particular belief system must make no imperialistic claims for the truth.²⁹

Indications of a growing acceptance of religious pluralism in Australia can be found in events like the Exploring Spirituality Workshop, which was organised by the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) in 2014. AELA’s mission is to promote the understanding and practical implementation of Earth Jurisprudence and ‘Wild Law’ in Australia. It has no religious affiliation, and the Workshop was

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²⁴ Ibid., 65.
²⁵ Kim, Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate, 8.
²⁶ Ibid., 13.
²⁷ Rowan Williams, quoted in ibid., 181.
²⁸ Ibid., 21.
open to people from different faiths, environmentalists, students, academics, researchers and anyone interested in ecospirituality and the role it plays in modern life.\textsuperscript{30}

Nor should the influence or importance of secular perspectives in the public square be discounted. Rather, Graham argues, the challenge for public theology is to find ways of negotiating a path between the ‘rock’ of religious resurgence and the ‘hard place’ of institutional decline and secularism. Further, she asserts that this cannot be conceived as a return to Christendom, or a simple ‘re-enchantment’ of modernity, but requires a rethink of the ways in which religious voices might contribute to the public debate.\textsuperscript{31}

Public theology needs to address this shift in focus and methodology. It comes at a time when public theology already faces challenges, described by Storrar as a ‘kairos’ moment.\textsuperscript{32} With reducing Christian influence in affairs of state, declining church attendance, a perception of out-of-date attitudes to sexual mores, the shame and stigma of paedophilia and the public projection of faith as a highly individual, private matter well separated from the political realm, acceptance of a Christian input to the public square can by no means be assumed, even in a pluralistic, multifaith society like Australia. And so some conceptual rethinking or re-imagining of the shape and practice of public theology in a post-secular society is appropriate.

In this regard Graham advocates an approach to public theology based on what she calls Imaginative Apologetics, which points to transformational rather than propositional truth and generates a paradigm shift in one’s basic premises and assumptions.\textsuperscript{33}

In advocating Imaginative Apologetics, Graham suggests there is something lacking in contemporary (Christian) apologetics:

\textsuperscript{31} Graham, \textit{Between a Rock and a Hard Place}, xxvii.
\textsuperscript{33} Graham, \textit{Between a Rock and a Hard Place}, xxv.

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The term has come to denote a justification by appeal to rational, propositional argument with a view to leading another to their own profession of faith ... the resulting emphasis within contemporary evangelical approaches on the rational plausibility of Christian doctrine has led to an epistemological dominance of rationalist, scientific and propositional proof-arguments, at the expense of more contextual or sacramental ways of knowing.34

She then explores how apologetics might be strengthened by going beyond a rational, propositional approach. For this she refers to Stackhouse extending the concept of public theology beyond ‘translation’, ‘mediation’ and ‘bilingualism’ and to Davison’s view that

it is through the media of culture, literature, art and science that Christians should be defending and justifying their faith ... a very different way of conceiving the nature of Christian conviction ... apologetics may now be framed as an invitation to participate in a community of practice and to apprehend the gospel as attractive, compelling and beautiful – and not just empirically or rationally true.35

A move towards the use of cultural insights in policy formulation can be found in groups contributing to the public debate surrounding natural resource development. The Bimblebox Art Project, for instance, was initiated three years ago as part of a strategy to protect the Bimblebox Nature Refuge from coal mining in the Galilee Basin in Queensland. It is described in the following way:

Through their artworks the artists are exploring the material, visual, historical, scientific and physical existence of the Bimblebox Nature Refuge while asking our community and our society as a whole what the future holds for this nature refuge and what human and societal value we place on it.36

Further, AELA has created an Earth Arts project in the belief that ‘cultural change is a vital part of building Earth jurisprudence’, and that ‘artists are well placed to facilitate this ‘re-imagining’. It asserts:

In Modern times, ‘Art’ has been relegated to the fringes, not as a knowledge source, but as a form of control, a romantic ideal. So it may not seem obvious then, for Art to be represented at a ‘governance roundtable’, but that is precisely where it can help at this juncture of global environmental crisis.37

34 Ibid., 181.
35 Ibid., 182.
One feature of this approach is that it aims to speak to society as a whole. A public theology strategy also needs to define its audience.

9.3 Theology and the public sphere

Public theology literature describes a range of different ‘publics’ present in the public sphere. It is a somewhat confusing picture, however, that has the potential to cause a public theology strategy to lack sufficient focus, and thus undermine its effectiveness.

Under the heading ‘Whose Public?’, for example, Graham discusses Tracy’s three ‘publics’ (Church, Society and Academy), Stackhouse’s ‘economics and the market’ and his categorisation of four areas of public life as holiness, justice, truth and creativity. She equates them with Church, society, academy and market, suggesting ‘consumption’ be identified within the market ‘for our incorporation into late modernity’s further “publics” of consumerism, media and leisure.’

She then refers to Smit’s fourfold definition of public life (politics, economics, civil society and public opinion), placing this within the context of Kim’s six players engaged in the public sphere (State, Media, Religious Communities, Civil Society and Market) and Habermas’ demarcation of four spheres of the democratic public, which she describes as:

Formal institutions and processes of governances, including political parties, judiciary, civil service and regulatory agencies appointed by the state; the market and labour, what Habermas terms the “customers”, the “suppliers”; voluntary and community organizations; and fourth, public opinion.

An embrace of cultural inputs, however, can bypass this rather technical discussion. It can do this by providing an insightful and creative medium for public theology to explore complexity and diversity that is not limited by categorisations of the public sphere. Art does not set boundaries. Accordingly, the thesis combines art and theology in a public theology strategy directed towards the CSG policy debate.

38 Graham, Between a Rock and a Hard Place, 82 - 84.
39 Ibid., 85.
9.4 Art as a medium for public theology

Chapter 7 examines how cultural expressions such as poetry and art ‘earthed’ in Australian landscape deliver a narrative that challenges attitudes and values embedded within the CSG public debate. It concludes that art provides a dictionary that helps to articulate more clearly the diversity in attitudes towards the land that exists within Australia today. Further, it argues that public policy needs to recognise and take into account the multiterranean ways in which Australians regard the land. It then identifies two theological themes embedded in the various attitudes towards Land – the intrinsic worth of Land, and the ultimately unknowable nature of the created order.

The thesis, informed by the powerful insights evident in Australian landscape art and poetry, develops these theological themes further through reference to personal experience and concludes that they can be used constructively in the development of a public theology strategy. To do this, the relationship between art, theology and Christian apologetics needs further examination.

9.4.1 Art and public theology

Much has been written on the relationship between art and religion. A useful starting point is the following observation by Horne:

There are the voices of many of the modern theologians who have proposed that the primary language of religion is metaphorical and figurative and that the specific insights of religion, even the very content of faith, seem often to be most profoundly grasped and articulated, not in theological language as it has traditionally been perceived and understood, i.e. in dogmatic statement and rational argument, but in a register that engages the imagination rather than the intellect. Attention is thus directed, in the first instance, away from conceptual reasoning and logical deduction to narrative patterns and symbolic structures. If this is true then we should have to conclude that the language of religion and the language of art has, at the very least, a close family resemblance.40

Whilst he questions a purely aesthetic approach to life and religion, Horne refers to the ethical and moral seriousness of art, and its essential role in the formation of an ethically responsible society. He agrees with the view that it is ‘a theological miscalculation that verbal theology stands on its own in explaining

what faith is’ and that ‘art and beauty are appropriate concepts to describe the communication of faith’.\textsuperscript{41} This opens the door for public theology to move beyond ‘conceptual reasoning and logical deduction’ (a empirical, rational, propositional approach that relies on words) to draw also on art to assist in communicating its message.

Additional insights into the role of art as a legitimate tool for theological communication can be found in Anne Mallaby’s discussion of the relationship between art and faith, where she emphasises the interactive and dynamic nature of art in its epistemological role:

Art presents us with a metaphor. Art as poetry, as dance, as visual image, as music; these all seek to deepen our experience of something otherwise difficult to name … it seeks to represent the narrative [of life] to us in such a way as to stimulate response … art has the potential to become an authentic meeting place … engagement with art as a mediator of meaning acknowledges the artist, viewer and art as partners in the exploration of that meaning.\textsuperscript{42}

She speaks of art as ‘conversation’ that extends an ability to ‘imagine’ God and is open to mystery. She therefore is concerned if we ‘confuse logos with the literal, and elevate the words as the most significant communicator of meaning, rather than understanding the logos as the creative communicator of God.’\textsuperscript{43}

These insights reinforce the role of art as a medium for translating theological truths into a language that is understood outside the Christian tradition. A common theme in public theology literature is that one of public theology’s core features is ‘translating’ theological truths in the public square. As previously cited, the second of de Gruchy’s theses regarding good public theology praxis requires the development of a language that is accessible to people outside the Christian tradition, and is convincing in its own right.\textsuperscript{44}

Art is accessible to all and provides a unique and imaginative language for reaching towards truths that are both immanent and transcendent. However, it invokes mystery, ambiguity and uncertainty, and can be subversive in its

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{44} de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," 39.

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exploration of meaning. Is it, therefore, an appropriate medium to use in a policy debate surrounding the emergence of a contentious industry such as CSG where inevitably there are policy conflicts? Is not an established and proven policy strategy, based on economic development through the operation of market forces and mitigated by some measure of statutory scientifically based environmental protection, a more practical and pragmatic approach?

Derrida and Paul’s wrestling with the concepts of justice and law, and their anguish over law’s failures, suggest otherwise, particularly where there is policy conflict. Rather, they lay the foundations for art and theology, in all their subversiveness, creativity and imagination, to work as epistemological partners in critiquing CSG policies and assisting in the formulation of policy options for securing just outcomes for all parties.

Many of the conflicts in CSG policy are, ultimately, not about scientific fact, nor about the goals of economic development, but about competing views regarding the way reality itself is perceived:

- Is Land a policy stakeholder?
- Does the concept of justice for Land have any currency?
- Should humanity’s needs be privileged ahead of those of Land?
- Are the main policy conflicts about competing human uses of Land?
- Is Land a gift to humanity and not subject to considerations of exchange?
- Is the balance between environmental harm and economic development to be found primarily through financial and scientific considerations, which ultimately value Land as a commodity?

In the context of the rhetoric of economic development dominating the regulation of the CSG industry in Australia, however, there is little evidence to suggest that these questions have received significant policy attention in the public debate. On the other hand, Land is receiving increased theological attention in its own right and is becoming deeply embedded within the Australian psyche.
In response, the thesis asserts that a theology of land can contribute positively to the CSG public policy debate. To make an effective response, however, the thesis needs to go beyond propositional, rational discourse.

9.4.2 Art as secular parables

The relationship between art and theology is developed by Gorringe in a way that lends itself to application within the public square. In his extensive and persuasive discussion of his concept of great art as secular parables, he explores art's insights into the world around us, and how it can encourage us to see things differently. He likens paintings to parables which, he says,

provoked, tease, challenge, illuminate, surprise. As a literary form they are, themselves, often described as "word pictures". In Jesus’ use they challenge his hearers to think about God’s reality in the midst of ordinary things. Rather than a collection of moral platitudes, which is how the nineteenth century understood them, they are invitations to reflection.45

Gorringe quotes Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that ‘the painter can do no more than construct an image; he must wait for this image to come to life for other people.’46 He then links this to theology which, he says, is ‘essentially interrogative, something which art, in its challenge to our lazy and pre-conceived ways of seeing, shares.’47 He later refers to Williams’ view that ‘Art in one sense “dispossesses” us of our habitual perception and restores to reality a dimension that necessarily escapes our conceptuality and control.’48

Central to Gorringe’s concept of art as secular parables is Psalm 24.1: ‘the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it’; he sees creation as an expression of grace. Accordingly, Gorringe asserts,

we cannot possibly think in terms of the disenchantment of the world, a secular reality to which more has to be added if God is to assume centre stage … What we are thinking of, then, is the way in which portraits, landscapes, still life, pictures of markets, of Venus, of peasants may become ‘real testimony to the real presence of God on earth’.49

45 Gorringe, Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art, 14.
46 Merleau-Ponty, quoted in ibid., 15.
47 Ibid., 17.
48 Rowan Williams, quoted in ibid., 139.
49 Ibid., 15.
He concludes that secular parables are part of God’s revelation,\textsuperscript{50} suggesting three ways in which painting can function as a parable of the kingdom:

- art is understood within the context of a theology of hope, of the belief that the world may be shaped more faithfully to the vision of God’s kingdom;
- art contributes to the greater good, to the shalom of which aesthetic delight is a key component; and
- art teaches us to see things differently.\textsuperscript{51}

On a more cautious note, he mentions Collingwood’s view that ‘all art represents a struggle for truth, and that every artist is engaged in a perpetual struggle against corruption of consciousness,’\textsuperscript{52} but concludes that

\begin{quote}
All that is, is the product of the divine Word, which is to say the divine imagination and joy, loving reality into being. To be sure sin warps our perception of that, and mis-shapes the world we are given. A truthful art cannot help but discern that as well. But the emphasis in the parables is not on this mis-shaping but on the joy and beauty of a world in which God is profoundly engaged.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

These insights suggest that art, informed by theology, has the potential to contribute significantly to public policy making through:

- its representation of the divine creativity found in all parts of the reality within which we live (art as secular parables);
- providing a medium for recognising and exploring complexity and diversity (authentic meeting place where art is a mediator of meaning); and
- being a catalyst for encouraging new ways of truth telling, liberating policy analysis from an automatic adoption of established ways of thinking.

In realising its potential application in public theology, however, a challenge for art is its powerlessness. Artists lose control of their creations as soon as they are made public. Further, a work of art does not necessarily appeal to logic, rationality, objectivity, quantification, science and economics, features that dominate the anthropocentric utilitarianism of public policy processes in Australia today.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 21, 22.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 193.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 192, 93.
\end{flushright}
The same observation about powerlessness applies to Jesus’ parables, however, with his crucifixion being the *sine qua non* embodiment of powerlessness in the public square. So it is to the incorporation of (powerless) art into a public theology strategy, described metaphorically as placing exhibits in a ‘*Divine Art Gallery*’, that the focus of the thesis now turns.

9.5 The Divine Art Gallery

This metaphor builds on similarities in approach between art and theology in their insights into morality, justice, truth and the created order. Both can be questioning, invitational, visionary, ambiguous, subversive and powerless. The metaphor was inspired by Father George Tyrrell who, in 1903, urged a transformation of the church from an authoritarian institution to an ‘art-school of Divine Majesty.’

It also aligns with Wright’s ‘signposts pointing towards a bright mist’, Kim’s notion of public theology being a catalyst for truth-telling and Forrester’s outlook that the task of theology is to offer

“fragments” – insights convictions, questions, qualifications – some of which may be acknowledged as true and as necessary complements or modifications or enlargements of conventional and commonly accepted accounts of justice.

Graham, too, is attracted to the notion of fragments, even if they cannot be transported wholesale into the pluralist discourse of public debate: ‘Fragments are best because they do not claim to represent absolute, reified truths, but are rather offered as pragmatic insights from a particular community which may prove “illuminating” for the wider body politic.’

A Divine Art Gallery is an appropriate home for diverse fragments of reality, interpreted in the thesis as artworks that illuminate the created order. And, consistent with Kim’s public theology principle of ‘openness’, a Divine Art Gallery is open to all for reflection and discussion and offers the visitor a freedom to interpret the artwork and to determine their response without coercion.

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In public theology terms, this encourages a non-dogmatic approach that is inspirational rather than defensive. Kim, for example, reports Williams wishing ‘to see Christianity having a “proper confidence” to “capture the imagination of our culture”‘ and to ‘crystallise … a moral vision that’s communicable to the nation at large’.57 This approach relies on persuasion and the attractiveness of its fragments/artworks, provides a forum for discussion with people from diverse faith and secular backgrounds, and fosters a dialogical approach to issues. Its very powerlessness in the face of the constraints and demands of post-secularism reflects its centrality in the Kingdom of God.

In summary, in a post-secular society that encompasses a diversity of views, beliefs and values, public theology can communicate through engagement with the arts as well as rational propositional arguments. In this regard, the use of the metaphor Divine Art Gallery encompasses a public theology strategy that can accommodate and respond to mystery, ambiguity and uncertainty. It is a strategy that has the potential to challenge pre-conceived ways of developing CSG policies by presenting an alternate worldview.

9.6 Mining CSG: an exhibition in the Divine Art Gallery

A Divine Art Gallery approach provides a way for the different spheres of a democratic public (State, Media, Religious, Academies, Civil Society and Market) to interact, by engaging in a shared exploration of art and experience as well as science and economics. It also invites an interrogative approach as a consequence of the very nature of art.

In this regard, and noting Mallaby’s acknowledgement of ‘the artist, viewer and art as partners in the exploration of meaning’, 58 the thesis embraces the concept of artist/explorer59 as central to stretching the boundaries of how the created order is to be understood. At the same time it accommodates the impossibility of neutrality by being invitational and accepting of diverse inputs and interpretations.

57 Kim, Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate, 180.
It is inevitably subversive, however, as it has an implicit orientation towards exploring new ways of approaching public theology and public policy decision-making. The artworks metaphorically exhibited in the Divine Art Gallery thus function as parables that ‘provoke, tease, challenge, illuminate, surprise … [and are] … invitations to reflection’.  

As a part of this, the function of public theology as a catalyst in contributing to public policy development is critical. Just as Australian landscape artists have fired the imagination with ‘multiterranea’ projections of Land in Australia, so too theology can stimulate the imagination into ‘a very fundamental rethinking, refeeling and revisioning of the place of humans in nature’ and how this might impact on CSG policy.

This fundamental reappraisal of the relationship between Land and humanity is something to be embraced, rather than feared. Politicians may resist the intrusion of ‘religion’ into the public arena and be reluctant to engage in philosophical reflection but, as pointed out by Williams, society would be the poorer if broader visions and commitments were not discussed and evaluated.

CSG policy provides a good candidate for initiating a conversation about broader visions and commitments in view of the polarising nature of the debate surrounding it. As noted at the start of this chapter, however, there has been little reflection on, or re-appraisal of, the principles underpinning environmental protection policies.

In response, the thesis asserts that an appropriately crafted public theology strategy can assist in addressing this gap in the evolution of CSG policy, by acting as a catalyst in critiquing the foundational principles and values upon which CSG policy is based. To do this, it treats Chapters 5 to 7 as artworks hanging in an exhibition in the Divine Art Gallery on CSG mining.

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62 Note earlier comments by Lord Melbourne and Jeb Bush
64 Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 181.
The description of the Australian CSG industry, for instance, explains the science of CSG mining, but also prompts wonder at engineering ingenuity and sorrow at ecological pollution; the analysis of Australian CSG public policy describes industry regulation but also evokes delight in the benefits of CSG mining and anger at a loss of lifestyle; and the overview of how Australians regard the land’ charts changes in attitude towards Land but also finds joy in earth-based spirituality and a fear of violence in nature.

These different insights inevitably introduce ambiguity, uncertainty and mystery into the CSG policy debate. They also make that debate more inclusive, however, as they provides a place for those who consider policy should encompass factors such as wonder, sorrow, delight, anger, joy and fear. Such factors become all the more relevant when, as discussed in Chapter 10, Land is regarded in terms of a relationship such as ‘neighbour’ rather than in terms of being a commodity for human consumption.

A public theology strategy, as envisaged by the metaphor ‘Divine Art Gallery’, invites such broader considerations. It also aligns closely with the need for a fundamental reappraisal of the relationship between humanity and the created order, to which so many commentators refer.

9.7 A personal response

Recourse to the use of cultural expressions for understanding the nature of a relationship with Land has been of great value to the author in developing the thesis. The topic has much complexity, needs a transdisciplinary approach and leads to the exploration of unknown theological territory.

For someone who commenced this research with a rational, scientific and analytical approach, exposure to poetry, landscape art and life experiences has been liberating and opened imaginative and new ways of exploring new ideas and concepts. It has led to the author creating his own ‘artworks’ (poetry, policy submissions, media articles, public presentations) to be hung in the Divine Art Gallery, as a way of giving expression to emerging thoughts and thereby furthering the development of the thesis.
Put another way, the concept of a Divine Art Gallery has assisted in the development of the thesis as different theological insights took shape during the course of the research.

9.7.1 Poetry

Chapter 8 records a trilogy of connected poems – ‘Undressed’, ‘Mortality’, and Transformation’ – that explore human/nonhuman relationships, suffering, joy and eschatological hope. Some people might find the poems provocative: is the representation of Land too anthropomorphic … should attitudes to Land be influenced by human relationships … are the poems theologically sound?

These are the most experiential of the artworks, and build on Paul’s reference to the whole of creation groaning in labour pains, poetic language that expresses strong feelings, with sighs too deep for words (Rom 8:22 – 26). In the same way, Paul’s anguish about his inner conflicts (Rom 7:14 – 25) highlights the intensity of feelings that have shaped his theological insights, with his verses continuing to inform theological reflection. The trilogy’s link with Leunig’s tree then gives it a public square dimension.

9.7.2 Policy submissions

Chapter 6 discusses the background to the preparation of a White Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness. At Appendix 3 is a synopsis of a submission made to this policy development process. It uses Australian landscape art as a way to depict how attitudes to Land have evolved since European settlement.

The Submission calls for Land to be given legal identity and treated as a stakeholder, appealing to factors beyond human utility and rational propositional discourse, and presents Australian landscape art as a legitimate input to the policy development process. It is provocative in questioning accepted ways of thinking about Land.
9.7.3 Media articles

During the course of the research, two online articles were published. The first, ‘Not taking the land for granted’, appeared as a Feature article in the South Sydney Herald.\(^{65}\) It uses the iconic Australian children’s literature classic ‘The Magic Pudding’ to challenge readers’ attitudes to CSG mining. Its underlying narrative is that of the Good Samaritan, with Land cast as the traveller set upon by thieves, and concludes by asking whether humanity acts as Land’s neighbour.

The second article, ‘What’s theology got to do with coal seam gas?’, provides a similar but expanded narrative, and appeared in the online journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology (ISCAST).\(^ {66}\) Contentiously for some, it locates theology as a travelling companion with science in seeking ways to respond to today’s environmental crises.

9.7.4 Public presentations

Six public presentations were made during the course of the research, each testing the boundaries of thinking about theology and Land:

- In Auckland in 2013 at the annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS), where the concept of Land as community was explored through reference to Judith Wright’s poetry.\(^ {67}\)
- In Brisbane in 2013 at an AELA conference, where use was made of non-indigenous Australian landscape paintings to explore evolving attitudes towards Land.\(^ {68}\)
- In Melbourne in 2014 at an ISCAST Symposium, where an early version of the wall hanging on the theme of Land was presented.\(^ {69}\)

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\(^{67}\) See http://www.anzats.edu.au/conferences-past.html, retrieved 22 April 2015

In Sydney in 2014 at the Biennial Conference of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, where the concept of a Divine Art Gallery was broached.\textsuperscript{70}

In McLaren Vale in 2015 at a Graeme Clark Research Institute (GCRI) Conference, where the theological foundations for the Rights of Nature were outlined.\textsuperscript{71}

In Brisbane in 2015 at a workshop organised by the Sisters of Mercy, where there was a discussion on what difference the Papal Encyclical could make.\textsuperscript{72}

9.8 Summary

The policy debate surrounding the CSG industry needs to be set within the context of a wider discussion about the environmental crisis facing humanity. It is a debate where there is continuing community disquiet that is not laid to rest by appeals to economic benefits and national prosperity. Some groups seek to re-imagine humanity’s relationship with the environment and present cultural expressions of this as contributions to public policy development.

Four separate threads feature in the public theology strategy developed in response to issues raised in the policy debate, namely communication, powerlessness, transcendence and dialogue.

Communication  Being able to translate theological concepts into language understandable by the general public is a fundamental aspect of public theology. Those wishing to see greater recognition in public policy of Land’s intrinsic value face a similar communication issue. In both cases, use of cultural expressions provides a way to communicate concepts that are inadequately expressed in scientific reports, economic analyses and parliamentary inquiries.

\textsuperscript{69} See http://www.iscast.org/node/824, retrieved 22 April 2015
**Powerlessness**  In a post-secular society in which secular and faith outlooks are unlikely bedfellows, the contribution of public theology can be attractive and compelling in its own right, without appealing to a divine authority or demanding an acceptance of its particular set of beliefs. It is also an approach that speaks in terms of public policy distortions rather than environmental sin, and leaves the question of what is right and wrong to participants in the debate.

**Transcendence**  Contrasting with trends towards scientific and economic reductionism, and accepting the need for a re-imagining of humanity’s relationship with Land, a public theology strategy can inspire and stimulate the consideration of alternative worldviews that challenge established ways of thinking. This involves embracing mystery, ambiguity and uncertainty as positive inputs to the policy development process.

**Dialogue**  Dialogue is central to the development of public policy and involves input from diverse secular and faith perspectives that hold differing worldviews about the nature of the created order. A public theology contribution to the process can foster a dialogical sensibility that questions pretensions to neutrality and acts as a catalyst in assisting the formulation of new policy approaches.

The metaphor Divine Art Gallery describes a strategy that addresses these criteria. In presenting a range of (theologically-based) insights to stimulate reflection on humanity’s relationship with Land, the strategy provides a forum for communication across secular and faith boundaries, is not dogmatic, invites imaginative and diverse inputs, and encourages dialogue on what values should shape CSG policy.
Chapter 10 Theological insights arising from an Australian context

Research undertaken for the thesis uncovered a substantial body of literature focussing on spirituality and the land. There was little analysis, however, of what distinctive insights might be gained through a theological reading of Land in Australia. Perspectives developed in the thesis provide source material for such an analysis:

- indigenous spirituality;
- the experience of early European explorers;
- the environmental values of a settler society;
- Australian landscape art, poetry and architecture;
- community and landowner responses to the advent of CSG;
- natural resource development and economic growth policies;
- environmental protection legislation; and
- personal experience.

Drawing on these sources, three Australian contextual influences have shaped the theological analysis developed in this chapter:

- theological revelations embedded within the Australian landmass;
- Australians learning from an indigenous spirituality that is aeons old; and
- Australians testing, and moving beyond, a European heritage.

A common theme that runs through them is the enigmatic nature of Land and its impact on the Australian psyche. A core issue is the way in which Land is perceived, ranging from it being treated as a commodity to it being regarded as sacred. A compelling conclusion is that Land is crying out for justice.

10.1 Land as a defining contextual perspective

As discussed in Chapter 7, notwithstanding the utilitarian orientation towards Land found in the economic development rhetoric in the CSG debate, people in Australia have a deep awareness of, and affinity with, Land. Noting Cain’s claim that ‘the quality of relationship between people and the land is an
accurate gauge of that people’s capacity for a true spiritual awareness,\textsuperscript{1} this suggests Australians have a strong sense of spiritual connection with Land.

An example of this can be found in comments made by Elaine Wainwright (an Australian theologian) on Land, stimulated by the dominance of moana (ocean) in the Oceania region:

As I came to appreciate my Pacific colleagues’ affiliation with ‘moana’, this led me to a deeper consciousness of how profoundly land shapes my consciousness – land is for me the overarching context … a much greater recognition of the very explicit and huge array of other than human beings that constitute the habitat of my theologizing.\textsuperscript{2}

Goosen holds a similar view, stating ‘because of the land’s vastness and sheer imposition on the psyche, it is an unavoidable and key element in theological reflection in Australia.’\textsuperscript{3} Use of a theological reading of Land as a defining contextual perspective from which to explore CSG policy issues reflects this outlook.

The identification of Land as an important factor that can inform Australian theological insights has parallels with Kosuke Koyama’s contextual theology characterisation of countries in South East Asia.\textsuperscript{4} With regard to Singapore, for example, ‘an island of efficiency in an ocean of South East Asian inefficiency’, Koyama speaks of ‘a slower and more human and ‘slow’ theological eretology’. When discussing China he focuses on comparing the Pentateuch and the credos of Mao Tse-Tung. For Thailand his emphasis is on mercy, reflecting a strong Buddhist influence; and for Hong Kong in the context of an uneasy relationship with mainland China he invokes the image of the wandering Aramean.\textsuperscript{5} Each of his metaphors gives insights into the country to which it relates, but also ‘translates’ theology into contextual terms.

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\textsuperscript{1} Quoted in C. Hammond, ed. \textit{Creation Spirituality & the Dreamtime} (Newtown: Milenium Books, 1991), 75, 76.

\textsuperscript{2} Quoted in H. Bedford-Strohm, F. Hohne, and T. Reitmeier, eds., \textit{Contextuality and Intercontextuality in Public Theology} (Zurich: LIT-Verlag, 2013), 158.

\textsuperscript{3} Goosen, \textit{Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millenium}, 195.


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 3 - 19.
Similarly, a focus on Land provides a meaningful way to engage in debate in the public square in Australia, given Australians’ close connection with Land. The second of de Gruchy’s public theology theses, which ‘requires the development of a language that is accessible to people outside the Christian tradition and is convincing in its own right,’ is also at work here.

10.2 Australian distinctiveness

In exploring insights gained through a theological reading of Land in Australia, the thesis does not seek to develop a systematic or unique Australian theology of land. It avoids terminology such as platypus theology that, although encouraging exploration beyond established ways of thinking, may be taken to infer a theological uniqueness. This could unnecessarily divert attention towards a discussion of the nature of theology. Rather, the thesis uses a theological reading of Land in Australia to gain fresh insights into the nature of the created order that inform humanity’s relationship with Land.

Pursuant to this, central to the thesis is recognition of Land having its own intrinsic value as a beloved part of God’s creation, as discussed in Chapter 4. This sits comfortably with an outlook that Land has become so embedded within the Australian psyche that it should have a place at the policy table alongside humanity, rather than merely being treated as a commodity for human consumption.

Scientific and economic analyses provide quantitative, rational and fact-based ways to address the interests of Land. Experiencing Land in Australia acts as a catalyst for injecting distinctive insights into the policy debate that complement these inputs. This reflects the fourth of de Gruchy’s public theology theses, which ‘requires doing theology in a way that is interdisciplinary in character and uses a methodology in which content and process are intertwined.’

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6 de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre."

7 See Pfitzner’s discussion of the scope for a ‘platypus’ theology in Lamb and Barns, God Down Under: Theology in the Antipodes, 65. The platypus is uniquely different to any European animal. Early scientific debate did not know how to classify the platypus, an egg-laying mammal with features resembling those of other animals – webbed feet and beak of a duck, tail of a beaver, body of a rabbit, skin of a mole, and reproductive system of a bird.

8 de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre."
Two particular concepts are used in the thesis to analyse insights gained through a theological reading of Land in Australia, namely ‘theology from below’ and ‘diaspora’.

10.3 Theology from below

A first distinctive insight the Australian context provides comes from that of listening to ‘theology from the underside of history.’ In this regard, Bonhoeffer speaks of the value of taking account of the view from below:

there remains (for us) an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short from the perspective of those who suffer.

The thesis adopts this approach by listening to indigenous voices and explores how this assists in identifying and hearing the voice of a suffering Land.

10.3.1 A theological terra nullius?

What do indigenous voices say about the relationship between Christianity, European settlement of Australia and Land? Indigenous reactions to the concept of terra nullius provide some insights. Adrahtas, for example, says the concept was more than a mere factual error, describing it as ‘an existential alienation that assumes the ontological proportions of and perpetuates historically the fall of man.’ He assigns a theological meaning to terra nullius.

This is also implied by Pascoe. He asserts that ‘the invasion of Australia was undertaken by people whose psyche was primed to believe that it was in the best interests of the invaded to lose their land, their spirit and their lives’. Anecdotal evidence also suggests explorers implicitly regarded Australia as theologically, as well as physically and legally, terra nullius: ‘We seem to have penetrated into a region utterly unknown to man and as utterly forsaken by

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10 Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, 17.
12 Pascoe, Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country, 38.
God'.

Ironically, Australia had earlier been named ‘Australia del Espiritu Santo’, the Southland of the Holy Spirit.

This sentiment can be found in Rainbow Spirit Theology, which speaks of ‘the forceful imposition of western religion and customs, laws and social structures’ leading to ‘cultural genocide’, and in attitudes that devalue Land. Pascoe, for example, records Langton’s view that Christian assumptions of land use led to catastrophic land degradation and blindness to Aboriginal land utilisation.

The following observations by indigenous authors extend these views in depicting an outlook that demeaned indigenous spirituality, was insensitive to Aboriginals’ spiritual relationship with Land, and privileged European interests and culture:

The diabolical system reigning this land – a system of political and religious contempt with an imported Christ and an imported God.

There must be no other God than the one favoured by the Europeans.

They [the Europeans] were taking the only material possession they [the Aboriginals] had, the Land.

If land is country then dispossession is exile ... the land and the meaning of life were bound together.

Only through our spiritual connection to the earth can we continue our identity.

We now feel like strangers in our own land.

The Reformation gave western culture the freedom to explore the dialogue between Gospel and culture in many directions. The Western Church has not,

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13 The explorer Giles, quoted in Brown, Pilgrim through This Barren Land, 55.
15 Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology, 51.
16 Pascoe, Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country, 224.
18 Pascoe, Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country, 105.
19 Skye, Kerygmatics of the New Millenium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women’s Christology, 5 - 9.
20 Patterson, "Reconciliation and Responsibility," 68.
21 Pattel-Grey, quoted in Skye, Kerygmatics of the New Millenium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women’s Christology, 59.
22 Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology, 46.
in turn, given that same freedom to Aboriginal people to explore that dialogue through their own culture.\textsuperscript{23}

There is much pain and struggle as we wait ... My people are used to the struggle, and the long waiting. We wait for the white people to understand us better ... We have learned to speak the white man's language. We have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways.\textsuperscript{24}

It is an outlook also identified by the non-indigenous community. Brady, for example, speaks of early missionaries rejecting Aboriginal culture as ‘pagan, barbaric and evil’\textsuperscript{25} and McKenna, in describing encounters between white settlers and the local indigenous community on the far south coast of NSW, quotes an Austrian, Baron von Hugel, who visited the region in 1834:

What effect can the Christian religion possibly have on these people? The first principle is: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”, but they see the whites gorging themselves and in possession of immense flocks and herds, while they themselves are frequently on the verge of starvation.\textsuperscript{26}

McKenna then contrasts the cultural identity of the Aboriginal people being inseparable from land with the settlers’ faith being inseparable from bricks and mortar,\textsuperscript{27} and Thompson, commenting on the debate within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) to amend the Preamble to the UCA Constitution to recognise the First Peoples, notes:

That the First Peoples are fully human might seem to be an obvious thing to assert in our age but in fact it has not always been obvious, which is part of the reason they have suffered so much at the hands of colonizers.\textsuperscript{28}

Budden provides a critique of this from within his western Christian tradition of the colonisation of Australia. He questions, for example, the language used

\textsuperscript{23} According to Rev Djiniyini Gondarra, as quoted in Magowan, ""It Is God Who Speaks in the Thunder ...": Mediating Ontologies of Faith and Fear in Aboriginal Christianity," 309.
\textsuperscript{26} Quoted in M. McKenna, \text{Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place} (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004), 29.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 99.
such as European settlement (rather than invasion) and whether Australian churches have internalised the values of an invading society.\textsuperscript{29}

Further, Budden states that for European invaders land was a commodity, whereas Aboriginals saw the land was harmed by invasion,\textsuperscript{30} and regards churches as complicit with Government in the maltreatment of Aboriginals. He draws a distinction between First and Second Peoples, arguing that if the Church is to do theology in Australia then it needs to deal with a history that still shapes a nation.\textsuperscript{31}

The lack of discussion of indigenous insights by some commentators also speaks through its silence. Brown’s theological exploration of the Australian desert,\textsuperscript{32} for example, makes no reference to what might be gained from Aboriginal insights. In it he explores the concept of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, whose character emerged in the imagery of the desert, but does not mention the suffering of the Aboriginal people or their relationship with Land.

Rather, Brown speaks of his search as starting with a ‘blank page’, much like the early explorers, and develops a desert theology that reveals the God of the Israelites who can be found in emptiness, otherness and silence, all features of what he depicts as a barren Land.\textsuperscript{33} Whether this is theological colonisation replacing an ancient indigenous spirituality, or just a narrative of a personal theological journey, it serves to highlight the incompleteness of a theological approach that strayed little beyond a western Christian heritage.

Summarising, indigenous voices ‘from below’ cry out against political and religious oppression and injustice. In doing so they point to an implicit theological terra nullius outlook that devalues both Aboriginal people and Land. What, then, might be learnt from an indigenous spiritual perspective?

\textsuperscript{29} C. G. Budden, Following Christ in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 7.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 20, 21.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{32} Brown, Pilgrim through This Barren Land.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 14.
Rainbow Spirit Theology provides some insights. The outcome of two workshops held near Townsville, far north Queensland,\(^3^4\) Habel describes it as ‘a stage in a process, an invitation to other Aboriginal groups to join the dialogue and explore their Aboriginal culture as a source of mystery, meaning and theology.’\(^3^5\)

Holst extends this to the non-indigenous community and speaks in terms of a gift. He states the purpose of Rainbow Spirit Theology is ‘to affirm traditional spirituality; to free the church among Aboriginal people from its European cultural bondage; and to offer a land-based theological gift to all Australians.’\(^3^6\)

The theme of gift is one that Edwards picks up when he speaks of the Australian church being ‘in apprenticeship to the Aboriginal view of land’ and reaffirms Ungunmerr-Baumann’s remark that ‘Dadirri’, a deep listening to and awareness of the land, ‘is the gift that Australia is thirsting for.’\(^3^7\)

But what is the nature of this gift? Minniecon, for instance, suggests that one of the deepest needs of our era is ‘to have an Aboriginal Theology that challenges religious and political structures and their ideology which have wrongly used this Book (the Bible) against our people’\(^3^8\) and Brady speaks of the need to correct the negative consequences of religious imperialism.\(^3^9\)

One element of the gift of indigenous spirituality, therefore, is that it provides a different way to examine the early settlement of Australia, where Lake has concluded that natural resource development was motivated and shaped by a religious worldview:

\(^3^4\) Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*, viii.
\(^3^5\) Ibid., vii.
\(^3^9\) Brady, "Rainbow Spirit Theology: An Extended Review," 86.
Protestantism helped lay the foundations for colonial society by encouraging the transformation of the environment according to colonists’ values and needs, and by providing the ideological support for the British use and occupation of the territory. Prominent Protestants applied their religious beliefs to Australia in ways that tended to assist, legitimate or even necessitate the colonisation of the land.\(^{40}\)

A second aspect of indigenous spirituality is found in the insights it provides into humanity’s relationship with Land. These inform theological consideration of the concept of Land being Beloved, as discussed in Chapter 4, and also encourage reflection on the behaviour of humanity towards Land within a relationship setting, rather than one that objectifies Land just as a utility.

A third contribution of indigenous spirituality is that of using insights it has gained from the experience of European settlement to hear Land’s voice with regard to natural resource development. This is illustrated by making Land, rather than First Peoples, the subject of Thompson’s remarks on the Preamble to the UCA Constitution, as follows: ‘That the Land is a Beloved part of Creation might seem to be an obvious thing to assert in our age but in fact it has not always been obvious, which is part of the reason Land has suffered so much as a result of resource development.’

This is a contentious, speculative statement. Is it obvious that Land is a Beloved part of Creation? Does Land suffer? Is it appropriate to apply the principles underpinning criticisms made about the treatment of Aboriginal people by European settlers to the treatment of Land by resource developers? Or is Land sufficiently different theologically from humanity to render such questions rather meaningless?

Assumptions about the nature of the created order are thus at the heart of how Land is treated. This conclusion complements that reached through the case study on CSG mining that the policy domination of one attitude towards Land, namely anthropocentric utilitarianism, would benefit from being put under a theological spotlight. It also sits comfortably within the ‘wall hanging’ on the theme of Land developed in Chapter 4.

\(^{40}\) Lake, “Protestantism, the Land and the Colonisation of Australia, 1788 - 1850,” 1.
In summary, the gift of indigenous spirituality with regard to an Australian theology of Land is that it:

- helps to disentangle links between Christianity and colonialism, particularly with regard to natural resource development;
- extends an understanding of humanity’s relationship with Land; and
- gives a voice to Land’s experience of natural resource development by drawing on its own experience of European settlement.

10.3.3 Hearing Land’s Voice

The thesis asserts that, just as the actions of Wilberforce against the slave trade led to a new worldview about slaves, and reflections on Australia’s colonial past have prompted critical review of the treatment of Aboriginal people, so now hearing Land’s voice can transform humanity’s relationship with Land. But how can this happen?

Here, again, indigenous insights provide assistance. Kwaymullina, for example, sees Aboriginal people as ‘a living, breathing thinking physical manifestation of our land – a thread in the pattern of creation,’ and Eugene Stockton provides other indigenous insights:

That is why we conceive ourselves in terms of land. In our view the earth is sacred. It is a living entity in which other entities have origin and destiny. It is where our identity comes from, where our spirituality begins, where the Dreaming comes from; it is where our stewardship begins. We are bound to the earth in our spirit. By means of our involvement in the natural world we can ensure our wellbeing.

The land is my mother. Like a human mother, the land gives us protection, enjoyment and provides our needs – economic, social and religious. We have human relationships with the land: mother-daughter, son. When the land is taken from us or destroyed, we feel hurt because we belong to the land and we are part of it.

In other words, indigenous spirituality does not draw boundaries between humanity and Land. It assumes an intimate relationship between humanity and Land through which the Voice of Land is heard.

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42 Pattel-Grey, quoted in Stockton, The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation, 81 (check page number, St Francis library).
43 Gondarra, quoted in ibid., 84.
So Wainwright, for example, speaks of the groaning of the earth when reflecting on ecological disasters such as Island States in Oceania being threatened by rising sea levels.\(^44\) She also speaks of the ‘cry of the earth’ and a sacramental approach, suggesting ecojustice must go beyond an anthropocentric bias to include justice for all Earth constituents.\(^45\) And Anne Elvey, reflecting on her experience of bushfires in Victoria, asks whether the land itself needs time to mourn disasters.\(^46\)

The same assumption is made by Jan Morgan, who puts a theological structure around the way Earth’s cry might be heard. She suggests this can include

- hearing not silencing Earth’s cry;
- acknowledging and giving expression to the grief that accompanies it;
- celebrating the divine presence in sharing the joy, vulnerability and pain of finitude, mortality and transience in all of Creation; and
- exploring the implications of a role for humanity in serving Creation.\(^47\)

The Voice of Land, however, carries beyond the Religious Sphere. It can be heard in the cries of those confronted by governments and CSG companies pressing for natural resource development; they are people whose very identities have often been bound up with Land for generations. It can also be heard in the outpouring of poets and artists in their creativity, environmentalists in their passionate love of Land, farmers in their deep respect for the land upon which their livelihood depends, economists in their inclusion of Land as an endogenous factor, and people of faith in their care for Creation.

The issue is whether this Voice is recognised and acted on in the public square. It may take time for Land’s Voice to be heard. In this regard, Ungunmerr-Baumann’s hope that ‘the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us – to catch up – but waiting with us, as we find our place in this world’\(^48\) is somewhat prescient: a similar principle of hope might be expressed by Land,

\(^{44}\) Quoted in Ammicht-Quinn et al., eds., *Evil Today and Struggles to Be Human* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 108 - 16.


\(^{46}\) Quoted in ibid., 37 - 38.


\(^{48}\) Ungunmerr-Baumann, "Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness".
that ‘the people of Australia, in developing natural resources, will wait for Land to find its place in the public square’. Such an outcome would require an acknowledgement of Land’s spiritual reality.

10.3.4 An incarnational spirituality

How might this spirituality be described in a theology of Land? Conradie speaks of the restless journey of the cosmos, which the thesis explores in terms of humanity and Land being fellow travellers. This has similarities with the emphasis that indigenous spirituality places on the interconnectedness between humanity and Land. The restless journey, however, is more than a generic pantheistic quest. As discussed in Chapter 4 it also encounters Christ in its wrestling with eschatology, suffering, finitude, sin, mortality, immanence and transcendence.

If Land is Beloved, a part of God’s household, and if the voice from below is to be heard, then the sentiment expressed in Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40 is particularly challenging – ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’ – particularly if Land is described in familial terms such as Mother. Land becomes much more than an object provided for human utility.

This assumes an incarnational aspect to Land, a theme that is also found in the statement in Rainbow Spirit Theology ‘Christ is in our camp, in our land, and is a part of our culture’ and in the groaning of Rainbow Spirit Theology Elders: ‘The Christ who has suffered on the cross continues to suffer with the land and the people of the land. In the suffering of the land and the people of the land, we see Christ suffering and we hear Christ crying out.’

Skye also suggests a Christological foundation, which she links with the close identification of Australian Aboriginal Christian women with Land: ‘Christ is infused with their cultural/spiritual identity; He is one of them and the Land,

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49 Conradie, An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?, 139.
50 Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology, 60.
51 Ibid., 67.
therefore, He is with them in their fight for land-rights because in claiming the Land, they are claiming its sacredness, they are claiming God.\textsuperscript{52}

In ways such as this Land is given a distinctive status and value when the Christian faith is interpreted through indigenous life, culture and tradition. It draws on ‘one of the world’s oldest spiritual heritages ... a genuinely theocentric way of life,’\textsuperscript{53} and provides a foundation for Skye’s view that ‘the Indigenous people of Australia will be the messengers of a new ecological vision and ecotheology/creation theology for the new millennium.’\textsuperscript{54}

This reading of Christ into the Land is at an embryonic stage, with a scope for further dialogue across different faith perspectives and cultures. It informs and is informed by concepts of panentheism, of zimsum, of humanity as priests of Creation, of the cosmic nature of God’s household, of eschatological visions, and of Christ coming to dwell in God’s household to make it habitable and hospitable, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

It is thus part of a wider discussion that goes well beyond the boundaries of issues surrounding the mining of CSG. At the same time, however, analysis of CSG public policy provides good case study material for exploring these theological questions. It helps reduce, for example, the ‘pragmatic distinctions’ Goosen discusses between Boff’s first and second theologies, described as ‘religious’ realities (eg. God, creation, Christ, grace, sin, etc) and ‘secular’ realities (eg. work, mateship, ecology, sexuality), dualisms which he hopes will decline:\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{quote}
In accepting this distinction [between first and second theologies] I am not supporting a dualism of the natural and the supernatural. I am accepting that for many, for example, the topics of ecology and sexuality do not appear as obviously the subject matter of theology as do topics like God or sacraments ... Hopefully as people begin to theologise about all aspects of life former dualisms will decline.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Skye, \textit{Kerygmatics of the New Millenium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women's Christology}, 60.
\item[54] Skye, \textit{Kerygmatics of the New Millenium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women's Christology}, 99.
\item[55] Goosen, \textit{Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millenium}, 35, 36.
\end{footnotes}
The ‘aspect of life’ about which the thesis theologises is summarised by the seminal question asked in Chapter 1: “What’s theology got to do with Coal Seam Gas?” Consideration of indigenous spirituality helps to highlight the dualism implicit in this question. In addition to this, however, it points to a need to wrestle with an approach that treats Land and humanity as travelling companions. This leads to reflection on the nature of the relationship between Land and its occupants in Australia. One feature of this relationship is their shared experience of diaspora.

10.4 Diaspora perspectives

The thesis adopts Sheffer’s open definition of diaspora that incorporates both voluntary and forced migration, settlement in a host country, maintenance of identity and community solidarity, and being an ethnic, cultural and/or religious minority. One of the consequences of diaspora is the impact it has on the faith of those who experience it.

Pearson refers to those who have experienced migration in terms of drifting seeds, *hotu painu*, ‘the likes of us from diverse ethnicities who have been dislocated and relocated’ and Sisilia Tupou-Thomas speaks of being in a liminal space that ‘encourages me to be an inquisitive explorer surveying a new territory that is revealing itself to me in the midst of upheaval.’

Turner speaks of liminality in terms of ‘the *limen*, or threshold, … a no-man’s-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future,’ and Matsuoka describes this liminal space as follows:

> A liminal world is the “place of inbetweeness”. It is at once the world of isolation and intimacy, desolation and creativity. A person in a liminal world is poised in uncertainty and ambiguity, between two or more social constructs …

56 Quoted in S. Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2009), 30 - 33.
One of the constructs is likely to be a dominant construct, whether cultural or linguistic.60

10.4.1 Australians and diaspora

Many Australians have experienced some form of diaspora, be it a spiritual exile from ‘country’, a physical departure from their homeland, a major transition into a multicultural society, a separation from ethnic roots or a theological ‘going-beyond’ a western Christian heritage. And what these experiences have in common is that there is no possibility of returning to the past, although the future destination is not clear.

Australians cannot, for example, go back to a pre-European invasion land, to the iconic monocultural landscape of pre-World War II Australia, to the homeland from which they have fled, or to the culture that existed when and where they were born. Nor is it appropriate for a liberal democratic secular state to privilege the religious traditions of a particular culture in a growing multifaith, migrant society.

Australia is a nation with a high percentage of migrants. The 2011 Australian Census recorded that 43.1% of Australians had at least one overseas born parent.61 Further, Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that in 2013 the number of Australians born overseas was 6.4 million (27.7% of Australia’s population), up from 4.7 million (23.6%) ten years earlier.62

It is thus a country in a state of inbetweenness, where values, goals and identity are still evolving, travelling between its indigenous origins, European settlement and a future that incorporates the dynamic of multicultural and multifaith immigration, but not yet “there”.

So what might the theological implications be for Australians living in this state of inbetweenness and how might they inform the CSG debate? In this regard

60 F. Matsuoka, Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995), 54.
Fumitaka Matsuoka speaks of churches as being a community forming and reforming: ‘*ecclesia semper reformanda* … always en route, our eyes always looking for the new city that God is building among us’.  

This suggests the need for an adaptable theological approach that is informed by the insights of Australia’s diasporic population. In this regard Pearson discusses the emergence of diasporic or second generation theologies, and other authors identify a range of metaphors used by migrants to Australia to describe their identity and faith journey, such as ‘the time for *potatala*’ (Tonga), ‘we are *hoto painu*’ (Tahiti), ‘*kim-chee-pie*’ (Korea), ‘Christ the *Vale*’ (Samoa), and ‘*hospitality*’ (Fiji).

These insights might largely fall within a ‘translation’ model of contextual theology, but Pearson asserts emerging diasporic theologies can go further by engaging with indigenous issues and an ecological reading of the land. In other words, they can explore new theological territory as well as providing new theological metaphors. This is of particular relevance to a theology of Land in view of the diasporic nature of Australian society and the centrality of Land to the Australian psyche.

### 10.4.2 Land and inbetweenness

One such new theological territory to be explored is identified by considering that Land in Australia is itself experiencing a diaspora-type shift, forced on it by farming and natural resource development. In the last 225 years this ‘timeless’

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68 R. Ete, “Christ the *Vale*,” ibid., 80 - 88.
Land has experienced previously unknown levels of change through land clearing, agriculture, mining and human settlement. It now finds itself at the centre of major plans for natural resource development. This is qualitatively different to the stable ecological and spiritual relationship that existed between Land and Aboriginal people prior to the arrival of Europeans. In Sheffer’s terms it is a forced migration; Land cannot return to this earlier state, so is in a liminal state where it is ‘poised in uncertainty and ambiguity’ between the presence of an earth-based spirituality and a ‘dominant construct’ of an anthropocentric utilitarianism (Matsuoka). It is ‘betwixt and between’, but potentially on the threshold (Turner) of being regarded in terms of a relationship with humanity.

The emergence of natural resource development is a large feature of Land’s diaspora-type journey, so what might be learnt from it? How, for instance, are natural resources treated within a market economy? Are they a commodity subject to the usual rules of supply and demand, a mere input to economic development ... or a gift of God for humanity’s use, provided appropriate stewardship and environmental protection measures are put in place ... or even a gift of Land, given to fellow travellers during a shared journey, with no consideration of reciprocity or exchange?

10.4.3 Justice implications

The reality is that in Australia the State has assumed legal ownership of natural resources. In the regulation of the CSG industry there is no suggestion of gift. Rather, the State treats natural resources as a commodity of benefit to humanity, with Land ‘protected’ by the State. As a consequence, the public policy debate is directed towards finding a balance between economic benefits, pollution risks, acceptable levels of environmental degradation and costs incurred. But Land is not a significant stakeholder in this debate and in this reductionist approach little attention is given whether Land is treated justly.

What if, however, the supply of CSG is conceptualised as Land’s gift? This gift has a sacrificial component as Land receives no compensation yet must endure the pain of drilling, extraction and pollution. It also enables the State to develop

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As discussed in chapter 6, this is really ‘harm reduction'
policies that serve the interests of human justice, like supplying energy to developing nations, creating employment opportunities and funding health and education services through mining taxes. Further, there is no obligation to treat Land as a stakeholder, if CSG is regarded as Land’s gift and therefore not subject to the disciplines of an exchange economy.

This outlook, however, is an illusion. Derrida’s discussion of the impossibility of gift in a market economy and the tension between justice and law becomes very relevant: however much environmental legislation seeks to protect Land, Land will still experience injustice as a consequence of CSG mining and of that legislation. As Jennings notes, ‘in precisely willing and doing justice we discover that we are already embedded in a world of injustice in which to respond to the claim of one I betray the claim of the other’. 73

Put another way, mining the ‘gift’ of CSG may deliver outcomes for humanity that are just, but it comes at the price of Land experiencing injustices. In this scenario, the CSG policy maker is trapped between a rock and a hard place. Retreating from this view and regarding Land instead as merely a commodity is an option, but one that is becoming increasingly untenable in a post-secular society like Australia where, as explored in the thesis, attitudes to Land are ‘multiterranean’ and evolving rapidly.

How, then, might the policy complexities inherent in accepting the concept of justice for Land be addressed? Derrida argues that in the consideration of complex policy issues such as immigration, there is a need to go beyond reliance on a market economy, and the perspective that the law provides the benchmark against which the achievement of justice is measured:

> It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law … between the Law of an unconditional hospitality … and the constitutional laws of a right to hospitality, without which the unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire. 74

So how might this be applied with regard to the CSG industry and Land? The following discussion suggests an alternative way to view the relationship

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73 Jennings, Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul : On Justice, 151.
74 Ibid., 125, 6.
10.5 Land, a beloved fellow traveller

The extremes of harshness and softness of Land in Australia are confronting. The precariousness and beauty of life are never far away. This can be seen in Australian landscape art that includes images of carcasses, skeletons and an environment that kills; yet also it portrays Land in terms of survival, beauty, spirituality and being a womb of life.

There are parallels here with human existence. The common threads of finitude, mortality, transience and survival connect Land and humanity. If, then, in response to the nature of the created order humanity relies on the enactment of rights and responsibilities within a legal system, might this not also be appropriate for Land, if Land is regarded as a beloved fellow traveller in God’s creation?

So imagine the metaphor of Land as a beloved fellow traveller in the restless journey of the cosmos as a painting hanging in the Divine Art Gallery. What reflections does this painting inspire? At the heart of the metaphor are loving companionship, journeying and a lack of differentiation between humanity and Land. So the painting might stimulate questions about whether they have a common goal, how their respective interests are addressed and the comparative treatment in law of humanity and Land. This brings the issue of justice for Land into consideration.

10.5.1 Land, a neighbour to humanity

An appropriate title for the painting is ‘The Good Samaritan’ (Luke 10: 29 -37). Not only is this parable good public theology (it continues to speak effectively to the community after two millennia) but the title also captures well the intent of the metaphor – Land, often neglected or abused by humanity, meets at its own expense the needs (such as food, identity, home, healing) of a humanity.
travelling the sometimes lonely road of life where evil waits to pounce. In other words, Land acts as a neighbour to humanity; it is a Good Samaritan.

The parable also exemplifies Derrida’s ‘impossibility of gift’. Did, for instance, the Jewish lawyer who asked Jesus “Who is my neighbour?” consider the parable was a reflection of reality, upon which to base human behaviour? Maybe not, but the parable nevertheless speaks of a loving act that is not motivated by considerations of exchange. Implicit in the parable is a wider concept of justice than might have been in the mind of the lawyer.

The parable is made all the more compelling in view of the anonymity of the traveller (ie no cultural obligations towards the traveller exist), and the religious antipathy between the Jews and Samaritans (the Samaritan, not the priest or the Levite, showed compassion). The parable thus takes the debate about “Who is my neighbour?” beyond political pragmatism, religious tradition and culture towards reflection on worldviews, relationships and justice.

Applying the parable to the CSG policy debate invites decision-makers to move beyond viewing Land and its natural resources as a mere commodity to be taken and used by humanity, towards conceptualising Land as ‘gifting’ these resources to meet humanity’s needs. This provokes consideration of how justly humanity treats Land in return, although a ‘true’ gift does not generate obligations.

The idea of applying the term neighbour to the relationship between humanity and Land is not new theologically. Leal, for instance, reflects on the parable through ecological eyes and broadens its anthropocentric focus on neighbourly obligations to include a responsibility towards the environment. He asks ‘Do we have a “Good Samaritan” to rescue the environment, or at least defend it?’ and concludes that ‘one of our answers to the lawyer’s question “Who is my neighbour?” will be: my neighbour is the creation in which God has set me as
part of the web of life. In doing so he builds on Tuwere’s characterisation of Land as neighbour.

The concept of neighbour has also featured in the debates surrounding the slave trade and the colonial treatment of Aboriginals. Metaxas, for example, describes the slave trade abolitionist Granville Sharp as one who ‘took the injunction to love one’s neighbour literally’, and Baron von Hugel invoked the first principle of the Christian religion as ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ when commenting on the plight of Aboriginals.

10.5.2 Humanity, a neighbour to Land?

Does humanity act as a ‘Good Samaritan’ towards Land? How, for instance, does humanity at its own expense tend to the needs of an anonymous Land left ‘half dead’ by CSG mining? Further, should consideration be given to instituting a preferential option for the suffering Land? Or does the concept of humanity being neighbour to Land sit uneasily with those who regard Land as property to be owned and its resources a commodity to be consumed?

Just as the parable challenged its audience 2,000 years ago, so today the concept of humanity being a neighbour to Land can challenge an audience embedded in a worldview that idolises the rationale of sustainable resource development leading to economic growth and national prosperity. It elevates Land beyond being a commodity or property, owned by humanity, to having intrinsic value and identity in its own right, and so lays the foundations for inclusion of ecojustice as a legitimate consideration in the CSG policy debate.

But is consideration of ecojustice unrealistic in view of pragmatic cultural and political realities, just like the concept of a Samaritan acting as a neighbour may have been unrealistic in the eyes of the Jewish lawyer? Derrida asserts that
‘there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia’ and Jennings speaks of Derrida and Paul coming together in the formulation of ‘law beyond law, of duty (‘must’) beyond debt, of gift (grace) beyond economy.’ They have a common outlook that policy should be shaped by a worldview that rises above pragmatic realities.

Summarising, reflection on this artwork hanging in the Divine Art Gallery can encourage consideration of the inclusion of ecojustice in a worldview, leading to a possible redefining of policy goals beyond existing pragmatic boundaries. One option is the legal recognition of the Rights of Land.

10.5.3 The Rights of Land

Berry argues that ‘nature’s rights should be the central issue in any … discussion of the legal context of our society.’ This point is taken further by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature that advocates that nature, in all its life forms, has the ‘right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycle.’ It contrasts this with the view that

for millennia legal systems around the world have treated land and nature as “property”. Laws and contracts are written to protect the property rights of individuals, corporations and other legal entities. As such environmental protection laws actually legalize environmental harm by regulating how much pollution or destruction of nature can occur within the law. Under such law, nature and all of its non-human elements have no standing.

There are similarities here with issues surrounding the slave trade 200 years ago, when slaves were the property of plantation owners and where, in the words of Metaxas ‘for five thousand years, the idea of human civilization without slavery was unimaginable.’ The very notion of slavery is today met with a moral repugnance. So does a similar repugnance attach to Land also being treated as property? Probably not, although it is incongruous that a company,

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79 Quoted in Jennings, Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul : On Justice, 25.
80 Ibid., 111.
84 Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, xiv.
which is a human construct, has a legal identity and more rights (eg. to own property such as land) than Land, which is a divine creation.

A theology of Land invites reflection on this and on the legal recognition of the Rights of Land legitimising the basis for Land’s voice to contribute to the policy debate. Indeed, just as Graham proposes that in a post-secular society religious perspectives should have a place at the policy table, so too there is a case for Land to be represented, given emerging theological insights into Land and the significance of Land in the Australian psyche.

Implicit in this outlook is the assumption that current environmental protection legislation fails to protect Land’s interests adequately. For example, section 3 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the principal Commonwealth Act, has an object ‘to promote the conservation of biodiversity’ and other objects relating to protecting the environment, such as regulating the level of environmental degradation. But the Act does not give Land any rights to ‘exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its natural systems’.

As discussed in Chapter 6, in recent years implementation of environmental protection legislation has relied increasingly on financial cost/benefit analyses; the treatment of Land as property reinforces this outlook by quantifying its value as a commodity. Giving consideration to the Rights of Land, however, extends the flexibility of the policy development process by providing a structured and transparent way to consider the unrelenting concerns about CSG that do not readily lend themselves economic quantification.

Summarising, artworks hanging in the Divine Art Gallery (such as ‘The Good Samaritan’) invite consideration of normative reasons for including the Rights of Land in the development of CSG policy. In addition, the formulation of the Rights of Land in legislation, although a complex task, would provide a structured framework for addressing the continuing perceived failure of financial cost/benefit analyses to deal with stakeholders’ non-quantifiable concerns. This would make the policy development process more robust and defensible.

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85 Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 65.
A proposal to incorporate the Rights of Land into legislation will meet with resistance, particularly from those who benefit from CSG mining rather than those who resist it. The fifth of de Gruchy’s theses for good public theology praxis, however,

gives priority to the perspectives of victims and survivors, and to the restoration of justice; it sides with the powerless against the powerful, and seeks to speak truth to power drawing its inspiration from the prophetic trajectory of the Bible.  

Further, a feature of Segundo’s hermeneutic circle is that of ‘profound and enriching questions about our current reality.’  The thesis, in its theological reading of Land in Australia, asks such questions and through this hears the Voice of Land, a victim and a survivor.  It therefore sides with Land, which is powerless in the public square, and seeks the restoration of justice, drawing inspiration in particular from the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Hart’s painting ‘The Holy Tower’ provides a graphic way to express the narrative running through the thesis: there is a towering CSG legal edifice securely constructed within a well-established society.  At its base is a church, representing the society’s ideological foundations.  Outside the compound, however, another way of understanding reality is on the move, one which could transform that society.

10.6 Concluding comments

Chapter 7 charts evolving representations of Land in Australia from God-forsakenness (Terra Nullius for the early explorers), through idealised beauty (a Greek Arcadia for prospective settlers), a testing ground for man’s eternal dual with nature (Life was not meant to be easy for Aussie Battlers) to the source of life (Womb or Mother for the spiritually inclined).  It presents Land as mysterious, complex, multilayered and full of beauty.  By defining Land in terms of relationships rather than a commodity, it introduces concepts of justice and its treatment in law.

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86 de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre."
87 Segundo, The Liberation of Theology, 9.
88 The Free Dictionary defines edifice as ‘a building, especially one of imposing appearance or size … a complex or elaborate institution or organisation.’  See http://www.thefreedictionary.com/edifice, retrieved 14 July 2015
This multiterranean view of Land, however, is also accompanied by a new sense of forsakenness that has emerged since European settlement. Rainbow Spirit Theology puts it this way: ‘The land is crying because of the evils brought by those Europeans who invaded this land … “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”’

This highlights the policy conflict faced by decision-makers when judgements are to be made between competing policy goals arising from a dominant anthropocentric worldview and the evolving significance of Land in the Australian psyche: in whatever way CSG policy evolves, injustice will be present.

In response to this, a theological reading of Land in Australia suggests injecting consideration of the Rights of Land into the CSG public debate. It questions the legal notion of Land as mere property and points to the intrinsic value and identity of Land that is becoming apparent through theological reflection, indigenous spirituality and a shared sense of travelling together towards a common destiny.

If then Land, like humanity, is a Beloved part of Creation, then the rationale for the existence of law to protect the interests of humanity applies also to the need for laws to protect the interests of Land. The observation by Pascoe that ‘we’re stuck with each other and we’re stuck with the land. What a magnificent prospect!’ highlights the scope for constructive mutual dialogue that builds on a recognition of the intrinsic value and integrity of all parties.

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Chapter 11  Public theology praxis for CSG

Research into theology, the Australian contextual setting and the CSG policy debate has identified a strong common theme, namely the evolving nature of

- CSG policy;
- ecotheology;
- public theology;
- the CSG industry;
- Australian society; and
- attitudes to Land in Australia.

Against this perspective the public theology strategy developed in the thesis is more interrogative than prescriptive. It would be premature to try to tame such a wicked problem. By, metaphorically, hanging in the Divine Art Gallery artworks that draw attention to the many factors that influence the formulation of CSG policy, reflection on underlying worldviews is encouraged. This, in turn, informs consideration of the challenge articulated by Havel: ‘it is not enough to develop new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on earth.’

11.1 A ‘wicked’ solution?

Public theology praxis, however, requires more than abstract conceptual thinking about reality. Pope Francis, for example, has noted that ‘theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract unless they are grounded in a fresh analysis of our present situation.’ Further, the slave trade was not abolished just as a result of theologising about a worldview where ‘the idea of human civilization without slavery was unimaginable.’ Rather, the abolition of the slave trade also required concerted political action over a twenty-year period, culminating in legislation being passed by the British parliament.

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1 Havel, "Spirit of the Earth," 30.
2 Francis, On Care for Our Common Home, para 17.
3 Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, xiv.
Advocating consideration of the Rights of Land into the CSG public debate serves a similar purpose. It provides a focus for reflection that takes the debate beyond philosophical discourse, by suggesting legislative change. But more than this, by introducing the concept of rights, it assigns an intrinsic identity to Land and thereby invites consideration of ecojustice. In this way it identifies policy goals in addition to the formulaic application of the goal of economic growth mediated by ecologically sustainable development.

Introducing the concept of the Rights of Land also reflects the ‘wicked’ nature of CSG public policy. Assigning a legal identity to Land, with associated rights, does not tame the problem; rather, it complicates policy considerations as it opens up debate about property rights.

11.2 Does Land own its natural resources?

A market economy is based on the principle of exchange. One party receives a good from a second party in exchange for another good. In the case of CSG mining, CSG is one of the goods that is exchanged. Land, however, although it is the source of CSG, is not a party involved in the exchange. The prevailing view is that Land is a commodity, the property of one of the parties involved in the exchange. This view is subtly reinforced by a theological outlook that conceives Land as an object, a gift of God.

If Land is given legal status, however, should it be deemed to own the natural resources it supplies? If so, it could be considered to be a party in a market economy, when it supplies a good (its natural resources). So what, then, does Land receive in exchange for supplying CSG? A right to exist? A right to be protected from harmful environmental damage? A right for its quality of life to be improved? A right for the quality of the environment to be enhanced?

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4 Reference the object of Queensland’s Environment Protection Act 1994 ‘to protect Queensland’s environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life’ (Section 3)
5 Reference an objective of the NSW Protection of the Environment Act 1991 ‘to promote, restore and enhance the quality of the environment’ (Section 3)
The potential ramifications of granting Land legal status are significant. On the one hand, the principles of a market economy are extensively applied in the policy debate surrounding the CSG industry in Australia, but on the other, Land does not benefit from any consideration of exchange. Relevant to this de-facto worldview that shapes the regulation of the CSG industry is Pope Francis’ appeal for ‘a dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet ... a conversation which includes everyone.’ A focus on the rights of Land is a suitable topic of conversation.

11.3 Theological narrative

Such a conversation can be engaged without participants needing to agree on a particular faith perspective. In this regard theology acts as a catalyst in bringing about, and contributing to, any subsequent policy transformations, whilst not becoming a part of a new policy regime. There is no demand, for example, that legislation must refer to Land as a ‘Beloved fellow traveller’, or ‘neighbour’.

Such considerations, however, are relevant to faith communities as motivating factors in pressing for policy changes. It is important, therefore, to articulate the theological narrative that supports the thesis’ advocacy of giving consideration to the inclusion of the Rights of Land in environmental protection legislation.

There are two distinct theological threads in the thesis. The first is an exploration of the theological treatment of Land. This exploration covers the evolution in ecotheology over the last 50 years, and then insights gained through specific consideration of the Australian context. It re-imagines Land in terms of a relationship with humanity. The second covers the development of a public theology strategy and concludes by discussing the concept of the Rights of Land.

This chapter weaves together these two threads by exploring the form public theology praxis might take in response to the cry of Land in Australia. It does so by identifying gaps that exist in the CSG regulatory policy, and ways to take

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public policy imperatives beyond environmental protection and ecologically sustainable development.

The underlying theological narrative is that Land is a Beloved fellow traveller in God’s Creation, and that Australians have denied Land this status by treating Land as a commodity in a market economy. What is at stake is not how Land is valued, but a more fundamental issue of what place Land has in the created order, particularly in comparison to humanity.

A focus on rights introduces into the CSG debate the concept of Land having an intrinsic identity, and highlights the policy priority given to the rights of, and benefits delivered to, humanity. This contrasts with the lack of consideration given to the rights of Land. Is such differentiation justified theologically?

11.4 Finding the gap

A proposal to incorporate the Rights of Land into legislation will meet resistance. This resistance could take the form of, for instance, a denial of the concept of seeing Land as more than a commodity, a view that a fine-tuning of the regulatory framework to find the right balance is all that is needed, or a pragmatic outlook that rejects the practicalities of effective implementation of the Rights of Land. There would also be resistance to the concept of Land owning the CSG that it harbours.

What these arguments illustrate, however, is the influence of worldviews on policy decision-making. Is Land a commodity? Does it have property rights? Is incrementalism the best policy strategy? What values shape the determination of ‘the right balance’? Should pragmatism triumph over principle? Values permeate public policy decision-making and give rise to policy gaps:

- the lack of recognition of Land as a stakeholder in the CSG policy debate, for instance, aligns with Land being treated as a commodity;
- the dominance of economic growth in the justification of CSG mining, draws attention to the lack of priority afforded to other policy goals; and
- the failure to respond to the cry of Land raises questions about the place of compassion, feelings and experience in public policy decision-making.
Identifying these gaps highlights the need to critique the worldview that influences these outcomes, particularly given changes in Australian society and in attitudes towards Land. An outlook informed by indigenous spirituality has been overtaken by an anthropocentric utilitarianism that now, itself, faces challenges such as climate change, post-secularism and the growing presence of Land in the Australian psyche.

11.5 Minding the gap

The thesis asserts that it is timely for Australian society as a whole to ‘mind these gaps’ by re-imagining its relationship with Land and to assess the implications this has for regulation of the CSG industry:

- The pioneering nature of CSG policy. Australia has a large reserve of unconventional gas. Some extraction may not currently be economic, but this is likely to change, creating the potential for rapid growth over the coming decades. Production of CSG in 2012 accounted for just 0.1% of Australia’s potential in-ground CSG, and its annual growth rate exceeded 10%. Given this potential, and continuing disquiet about the regulation of the industry, it is good policy both to refine that regulation as shortcomings are identified, and to review the worldview, beliefs and values that shape its foundations. This approach should assist the development of a more stable policy platform for any expansion in the CSG industry.

- Lessons learnt from history. Since Europeans arrived in Australia, there has been a significant broadening in their attitudes towards Land. There is, particularly, some convergence in outlook between the First Peoples of Australia who resisted European occupation, and landowners today who resist CSG exploration and mining. These outlooks include identity and livelihood being bound up with Land, concern about health issues, values and rights not being respected, and the desecration of a Beloved Land. CSG policy development can learn from this.

- The limitations of financial cost/benefit analysis. These attitudinal changes also include a greater recognition of Land’s non-quantifiable intrinsic value. This comes through a better understanding of the interconnectedness of nature, a questioning of a hierarchical view of the relationship between humanity and the non-human environment, knowledge of the destructive
impact of humanity on Land, environmental science, and evolving spiritual awareness. The intrinsic value of Land defies utilitarian quantification, and is yet to find adequate representation in the CSG policy debate.

11.6 Privileging Land

Public theology needs to use language in the public square that is accessible to people outside the Christian tradition. Language is particularly important in view of the desirability of working across faith, cultural and ethnic boundaries, given Australia’s emerging multicultural and multifaith demographic.

For this reason, words such as ‘neighbour’, ‘fellow traveller’, ‘sister’ and ‘beloved’ are used. They are non-theological terms that are in use in everyday language and readily stimulate reflection on how appropriate it is to apply them to Land. They also conceptualise Land in terms of relationships rather than objectification. This anthropomorphic characterisation of Land opens the door for consideration of the application of the ideals of compassion and ecojustice to humanity’s treatment of Land.

In this regard, reference has already been made to Matthew 25:40 and Jesus’ reference to how ‘one of the least of these who are a member of my family’ is treated. This leads to reflection on the concept of a ‘preferential option for the poor’, which Gutierrez introduced in his book, ‘A Theology of Liberation’\textsuperscript{7}, and Wansbrough develops in her exploration of how the NCCA might contribute to public policy debate in Australia.\textsuperscript{8}

Should this principle, motivated by justice and compassion, be extended to include Land, such that a ‘preferential option for Land’ be incorporated within the CSG policy framework? It would then provide a template for exploring if Land is being treated justly and, as a corollary, the adequacy of CSG regulation. Another artwork to be hung in the Divine Art Gallery has thus been created, namely A preferential option for Land.


11.7 Visiting the Divine Art Gallery

The *Mining CSG* Exhibition in the Divine Art Gallery invites discussion of different perspectives on CSG, however controversial they may be. So the artwork *A preferential option for Land* can encourage reflection on the policy treatment of Land. The task of those who visit the Gallery is then to engage in a ‘dialogical sensibility’\(^9\) in ‘a spirit of shared moral reasoning’,\(^10\) to explore what this concept means in terms of CSG regulation. Open-minded consultation is a key element in the development of policy on polarising issues such as CSG.

Explicit privileging the interests of Land is an appropriate public theology approach in a multicultural, liberal democratic society like Australia. The strategy establishes common ground beyond faith boundaries by advancing the interests of Land rather than the interests of a particular faith.

The Exhibition is also open for the inclusion of more artworks. It already houses Australian landscape art, poetry, policy submissions, media articles, public presentations and a wall hanging on the theme of Land. They have now been joined by artworks with a public theology praxis theme that depict Land as a beloved fellow traveller, Land acting as a Good Samaritan to humanity, humanity being a neighbour to Land, the exercise of a preferential option for Land, and the Rights of Land being embedded in legislation. There is also hanging space reserved for Indigenous artworks.

How, then, might this exhibition inform the CSG debate? Art on its own is powerless; it needs an audience that is then sufficiently stimulated to respond. In terms of the public policy process this means identifying who the audience is and then presenting that audience with relevant information and insights that address their particular outlook. The thesis identifies two discrete audiences, namely Australian society as a whole (of which the church community is a subset), and law-making bodies.

\(^9\) Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, xxiii.
\(^{10}\) Stackhouse, quoted in ibid., 185.
The thesis proposes that there is scope for Australian society to re-imagine the way it regards Land. Part of the focus, then, for public theology praxis can be on general education, awareness raising and reflection on viewing Land in terms of a relationship. This outlook is a significant shift from the prevailing view that is found in public policy, that Land is a commodity, merely another resource input to Australia’s economic development and prosperity.

A precedent and blueprint for such a shift in the way Land is perceived can be found in the public debate that surrounded the abolition of the slave trade. Here, slaves were regarded as little more than a commodity but critical to a nation’s economic health and fortunes. An Act of Parliament changed the law, but it was collective actions across the community as a whole, and groups such as the Clapham Circle in particular, that ‘changed the world forever.’

There are many instances within Australia of this form of public theology praxis with regard to the environment. They range across a focus on liturgy, public statements, ecumenical activities, spiritual reflection and community building. They extend beyond the Religious Sphere into Society as a whole, aligning with de Gruchy’s first thesis that they ‘do not seek to give preference to Christianity but to witness to values that Christians believe are important for the common good.’ The following examples provide an overview of this range.

11.8.1 Liturgy

Morgan explores humanity’s relationship with the earth in terms of a four-stage process – cry, silence, grief and singing. She speaks of the ‘profoundly transformative power of sacred practices’ and of the Season of Creation liturgy continuing ‘to inspire the world’. Similarly, Paul Chalson believes that ‘liturgy and spirituality can be a significant form of response to the ecological

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11 Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, 182.
12 de Gruchy, “Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre.”
13 See http://seasonofcreation.com, retrieved 5 June 2015
crisis’ and that ‘liturgy is a significant vehicle in which our identity is shaped and our sense of vocation clarified and sustained.’

11.8.2 Public statements

In 2009 the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia adopted a statement ‘An Economy of Life: reimagining human progress for a flourishing world’ in which it states

We must find a new way to live together in peace with each other and the planet …We must consider the values and principles we need to guide us to more equitable, peaceful and sustainable ways of living. … As a Church it is incumbent on us to explore what might be alternative Christian understandings of the meaning of “progress” and “wellbeing” and how these understandings might shape the way we live as people in a community connected with the planet.

Similar sentiments have been expressed by other denominations in Australia, such as communities in the Anglican Church ‘striving to safeguard creation and renewing life’, which is the fifth mark of Anglican mission, and Catholic Earthcare Australia’s core business being to ‘foster a life-long journey of ecological conversion ... We bring together faith and science to offer initiatives, programs and practices to care for and protect our planet.’

11.8.3 Ecumenical activities

Ayre speaks of the ‘overwhelming support for eccomission to be exercised on an ecumenical basis.’ Two examples are, at a national level, the Eco Mission Project of the NCCA that is ‘intended to be a catalyst and resource for churches and related bodies to be actively involved in the care of God’s Creation’ and, at a State level, the Queensland Churches Environmental Network that

15 P. Chalson, "Earthing God in Liturgy: Spiritual Encounters of an Environmental Kind" (Charles Sturt University, 2011), 9, 10.
16 Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly, "An Economy of Life: Re-Imagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World," (Sydney: Uniting Church in Australia, 2009), 3.
produced a statement of principles relating to mining and the extraction of CSG.21

11.8.4 Spiritual insights

The Earth Bible Project, based in Adelaide, is located within the Christian tradition and seeks

to develop ecojustice principles appropriate to an Earth hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible and promoting justice and healing for Earth;
to publish these interpretations as contributions to the current debate on ecology, ethics and ecotheology;
to provide a responsible forum within which the suppressed voice of Earth may be heard and impulses for healing Earth may be generated.22

Going beyond Christian boundaries, the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) is a multi-faith, member-based organisation representing a variety of religious traditions23 that believes that

as people dedicated to the common good, inspired by our beliefs and energized by our spirituality, people of all faiths can and should be at the forefront of creating a safe climate. While celebrating the uniqueness of our different traditions, we stand together in working for an ecologically and socially sustainable future.24

Further AELA, a secular organisation, initiated a series of events to explore the meaning, diversity and future directions of ecospirituality in Australia. In doing so it welcomed faith inputs, describing the aim of the series as being

to bring together people from secular and faith backgrounds, including academics, students, environmentalists and interested citizens to explore different perspectives of ecospirituality and how it can inspire a shared ethic to care for the earth.25

23 Members include representatives from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Quaker communities
24 See http://www.arrcc.org.au/who-we-are, retrieved 8 June 2015
All these initiatives encourage dialogue and seek to explore and understand what informs current attitudes to the environment, and to shape appropriate responses in the public square.

11.8.5 Community building

Uniting Earth Ministry has provided a study resource to assist congregations ‘to understand and respond to the significant increase in mining activities across NSW in recent years, and the conflict that these projects are causing in regional and local communities.’

The resource does not recommend a particular solution to the conflicts caused by CSG mining, but empowers local groups to reach their own conclusions after a process of fact finding, sharing personal outlooks and reflecting theologically on the issues raised. A similar emphasis on developing strategies at a community level is found in faith based community organising workshops being run by the ARRCC.

11.9 A legislative approach

The thesis urges consideration be given to embedding the Rights of Land into environmental protection legislation. It is a complex issue that relates to the work of a range of bodies at both national and international levels, but lends itself to an open-ended, enquiring consultative approach.

11.9.1 United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

A starting point is UNEP, a global environmental authority that describes itself as ‘an authoritative advocate for the global environment’ with a mission to ‘provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.’

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28 See http://www.unep.org/about/, retrieved 8 June 2015
It is responsible for World Environment Day, a primary strategy of the United Nations for encouraging worldwide awareness and action on environmental matters.\textsuperscript{29} UNEP’s voice, however, has an anthropocentric orientation. In its ‘Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Agenda, including Sustainable Consumption and Production’ no reference is made to the rights of the environment. Rather, the environment is seen as one factor in achieving sustainability: ‘The environment, along with social and economic factors, must play an important role when aiming to achieve truly sustainable development on a global scale.’\textsuperscript{30}

11.9.2 Earth Charter

The Earth Charter began life as a United Nations initiative and then was launched as a people’s charter in 2000 by the Earth Charter Commission, an independent international entity. It also sets sustainability as a primary goal ‘an ethical framework for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century … concerned with the transition to sustainable ways of living and sustainable human development.’\textsuperscript{31}

Further, the Earth Charter advocates a sustainable global society founded on ‘respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.’\textsuperscript{32} It makes 14 references to human rights but, as with the UNEP goals, no mention is made of the rights of nature other than ‘respect’.

11.9.3 Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature

Contrasting with this anthropocentric focus on sustainability, the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature is a ‘worldwide movement creating human communities that respect and defend the rights of Nature.’\textsuperscript{33} It recognises that

\textsuperscript{29} See \url{http://www.unep.org/wed/about.asp} retrieved 9 June 2015
\textsuperscript{30} See \url{http://www.unep.org/post2015/About/tabid/133025/Default.aspx}, retrieved 8 June 2015
\textsuperscript{31} See \url{http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/What-is-the-Earth-Charter%3F.html}, retrieved 8 June 2015
\textsuperscript{32} See \url{http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html}, retrieved 8 June 2015
\textsuperscript{33} See \url{http://therightsofnature.org}, retrieved 8 June 2015
our ecosystems – including trees, oceans, animals, mountains – have rights just as human beings have rights. Rights of Nature is about balancing what is good for human beings against what is good for other species, what is good for the planet as a world. It is the holistic recognition that all life, all ecosystems on our planet are deeply intertwined.\(^{34}\)

Its activities include the conduct of an International Rights of Nature Tribunal, for which the main source of law is the ‘Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.’ This Tribunal considered the plight of the Great Barrier Reef in 2014.\(^{35}\) Although its decisions are not a part of international law or enforceable in any nation state’s legal system, it provides a forum for an alternative rights of nature legal discourse to be articulated and developed. At the Great Barrier Reef hearing, for instance, Michelle Maloney argued that it was ‘important to speak on behalf of life itself – not just present scientific data and legal justifications … [and] … break free of the usual fact based focus of western style law to speak from the heart.’\(^{36}\)

Examples of Earth-centred law and governance include Ecuador adopting the Rights of Nature in its Constitution in 2008, Bolivia’s 2010 legislation and 150 local level Rights of Nature ordinances that now exist in the United States,\(^{37}\) and the granting of legal personhood status in 2012 to the Whanganui River in New Zealand.\(^{38}\)

11.9.4 Earth jurisprudence

This development is part of an emerging body of law, Earth jurisprudence,\(^{39}\) which promotes a number of key principles that include the intrinsic right of nature to exist and flourish. Maloney claims it is increasingly becoming a ‘practical and constructive tool’, noting that legislative action in Ecuador, Bolivia

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\(^{34}\) See [http://therightsofnature.org/what-is-rights-of-nature/](http://therightsofnature.org/what-is-rights-of-nature/), retrieved 8 June 2015


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 47 - 54.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 44, 45.


\(^{39}\) A term coined by Thomas Berry, as noted in Maloney, “Finally Being Heard: The Great Barrier Reef and the International Rights of Nature Tribunal,” 43.
and the United States moves Earth-centred ideas from merely a theory, to a practical framework for action. She also comments that

a rights-based approach is not just about conferring rights on nature. It is a means of giving legal recognition to nature’s inherent worth by recognising what is already there. In operational terms it is a means of redressing the balance between humans and nature.\textsuperscript{40}

It is not surprising, therefore, that Maloney makes a further observation that

Earth jurisprudence suggests a radical rethinking of humanity’s place in the world, to acknowledge the history and origins of the Universe as a guide and inspiration to humanity and to see our place as one of many interconnected members of the earth community.\textsuperscript{41}

11.9.5 A shared vision

The anthropocentric orientation of the UNEP and the Earth Charter towards sustainable development mirrors that found in Australian legislation. It is a dominant discourse that is not evident in organisations such as the Global Alliance for Rights of Nature. This dominance is also countered by the emergence of Earth jurisprudence.

Like a theology of land, Earth jurisprudence is at an early stage. It also has similarities with the hermeneutic approach followed by the thesis in its use of science, questioning of worldviews, embrace of experience and imagination, and preparedness to explore new concepts that challenge the privileging of human interests. In addition, its desire to develop practical and constructive ways to implement new legal insights has much in common with the aims of public theological praxis, defined by Wansbrough as ‘a coalescence of action, spirituality and legal reflection.’\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 43.
Finding common ground

The *Mining CSG* Exhibition can inform a range of initiatives already present in the public square, through awareness raising, education, questioning established practices and outlooks, spiritual reflection, dialogue and consideration of alternative worldviews that recognises Land’s intrinsic value.

Exploration of the option of embedding the Rights of Land into legislation then provides a way to consolidate and build upon the insights gained. Further, application of Earth jurisprudence can give this approach a practical impetus by providing a platform for developing consultative, collaborative strategies for reimagining and implementing a new relationship between humanity and Land.

Relevant here is Wansbrough’s discussion of middle axioms. In her chapter *Completing the hermeneutic circle: from middle axioms to praxis*, she describes middle axioms as ‘provisional. They are not universal and timeless truths or moral principles, but the best wisdom of the moment, based on the information and analysis of the moment. They are evolving.’ This is similar to Valerie Brown’s description of solutions to a wicked problem that ‘are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time.’

Wansbrough, however, locates such an approach within a theological context:

> [Middle axioms] constitute a specific response to a specific reality, time and space, provide the basis for evaluating public policy and for the advocacy of particular directions, but are themselves at a level of generality which allows for a variety of specific policies based on empirical information about what works ... [they] ... translate theological concepts into forms which are usable in the public policy process, and which can link to the policy concerns of people outside the church who nevertheless share similar values and aspirations for society.

With regard to CSG policy, then, a practical approach would be to advocate that environmental protection legislation recognises that nature, in all its life forms, has the ‘right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles.’ This

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43 Ibid., 316 - 18.
has a level of generality that allows for the development of specific policies, whilst at the same time defining common ground acceptable to different faith and secular perspectives. Potentially this could lead to the ARRCC and AELA, for example, engaging in a dialogue to secure greater legal recognition of the Rights of Land in Australia.

11.11  

_Laudato Si’_

In June 2015 Pope Francis released a Papal Encyclical on the environment.⁴⁷ Central themes in the Encyclical are the ecological crisis caused by the destructive impact of humanity on the planet and Pope Francis’ appeal for all people, across all philosophical outlooks, to engage in dialogue about how to respond to this crisis.

There is much common ground between the Encyclical’s commentary on the ecological crisis and the approach taken in this thesis. At Appendix 4 are selective excerpts from the Encyclical that demonstrate this commonality, grouped under themes examined in the thesis. The Encyclical highlights the importance of worldviews in shaping humanity’s relationship with the environment. It recognises the ‘wickedness’ of the problem, champions the role of religion in the public square, hears the Voice of Land and locates policy solutions in the context of justice and the law.

The following three quotes provide an overview of the public theology approach taken in the Encyclical.

_It can be said that many problems of today’s world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society. The effects of imposing this model on reality as a whole, human and social, are seen in the deterioration of the environment, but this is just one sign of a reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life. We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build._ ⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ Francis, _On Care for Our Common Home_.
⁴⁸ Ibid., para 107.
Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since "the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere 'given', as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape."49

As examples, [of themes in the Encyclical] I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle. These questions will not be dealt with once and for all, but reframed and enriched again and again.50

The Encyclical adopts a transdisciplinary approach and the insights it contains align closely with this thesis. For instance, the Encyclical refers to earth as a sister crying out. It also speaks of intrinsic value, the existence of a relationship between nature and the society that lives in it, and interconnectedness. The Encyclical locates this outlook alongside utilitarian views of the earth as property, a recognition of the complexities involved in crafting policy responses to the crisis, and a rejection of reductionist solutions. It also questions unlimited consumption and the anthropocentrism found in environmental policies.

There are, however, some differences between this thesis and the Encyclical. For instance, rather than giving earth an identity in Creation that is independent of humanity, the Encyclical speaks of the earth as ‘essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone.’51 In addition, its discussion of rights speaks only in terms of human rights.52 There is some ambiguity in the Encyclical, however, as it describes the earth as ‘among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor,’53 and later refers to the ‘fundamental rights of the poor and underprivileged.’54

In summary, the Encyclical makes an important contribution in the public square to the debate on climate change. It also finds a place in the Mining CSG Exhibition as it encourages reflection on worldviews and dialogue across faith.

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49 Ibid., para 115.
50 Ibid., para 16.
51 Ibid., para 93.
52 Ibid., paras 30, 90, 93, 109, 44, 54, 57, 58, 85 and 237.
53 Ibid., para 2.
54 Ibid., 93.

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and secular boundaries. The contrary views expressed by some commentators are a critical part of that conversation. The description of Pope Francis and his advisers as ‘environmental populists and economic ideologues of a quasi-Marxist bent’, using language that is ‘vivid, almost hysterical,’ showing ‘profound intellectual ignorance’ and enunciating ‘a flawed view of economic progress,’ for example, generates a debate about the worldviews of both Pope Francis and his critics. Such criticisms provide an important de-facto acknowledgement of the influence of worldviews on public policy, and therefore the need to take them into account.

11.12 Concluding comments

In exploring the seminal question “What’s theology got to do with Coal Seam Gas?”, the thesis engages with complexity. In doing so, it interrogates the current policy approach that attempts to ‘tame’ the ‘wicked’ CSG problem by a de-facto appeal to anthropocentric utilitarianism.

The thesis also intentionally uses anthropomorphic language to represent Land, to expand ways of understanding Land, and add Land’s perspective to the CSG policy debate. This approach promotes consideration in that debate of humanity having a relationship with Land, rather than just treating Land as a commodity. Relationships, however, involve feelings, reciprocity, emotions and spirituality, factors that do not currently feature in the CSG policy debate. Further, reconceptualising Land’s status introduces issues of ecojustice into that debate.

Should such factors be admitted into the debate? At stake is the issue that can be characterised as the need to rebalance in the debate the language of the heart, the language of the soul and the (currently dominant) language of the mind. Central to finding the right balance is the need to acknowledge and reflect on worldviews that influence how Land is regarded in the public square.

A theological foundation for this rebalancing is provided by Matthew 24:37–39: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and

55 Paul Kelly, Editor-at-large, The Australian, June 24 2015
with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Further, loving God encompasses loving what belongs to God, which includes ‘the world and those who live in it’ (Psalm 24:1). So loving Land necessarily involves the heart and the soul, as well as the mind.

It also involves being a neighbour in helping Land to recover from injustice. Being a Good Samaritan, however, comes at a cost (Luke 10:35). Taking action with regard to the CSG industry may cost jobs and export earnings. Indeed the Prime Minister of Australia, in comments on a Federal Court decision to overturn the approval of a coalmine in Queensland on the grounds of inadequate consideration of environmental issues, stated

> If we get to the stage where the rules are such that projects like this can be endlessly frustrated, that's dangerous for our country and it's tragic for the wider world … While it's absolutely true that we want the highest environmental standards to apply to projects in Australia, and while it's absolutely true that people have a right to go to court, this is a $21 billion investment, it will create 10,000 jobs in Queensland and elsewhere in our country.⁵⁶

His statement has a familiar ring to it. 200 years ago, even to discuss ending the slave trade was seen as economic insanity.⁵⁷

The thesis takes a lead, however, from Segundo’s hermeneutic circle, which features ‘profound and enriching questions and suspicions about our current reality.’⁵⁸ This includes questioning what Pope Francis describes as ‘the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the working of society.’⁵⁹

In exploring the topic “How an Australian theology of land can inform the public debate surrounding the Coal Seam Gas industry”, the thesis adopts an interrogative approach. It does not seek to replicate the insights provided by

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⁵⁷ Metaxas, Amazing Grace; William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery, 118.
⁵⁸ Segundo, The Liberation of Theology, 9.
⁵⁹ Francis, On Care for Our Common Home, para 107.
the disciplines of commerce, economics, law, politics and science. Rather, it builds on them by addressing policy gaps being identified as a consequence of evolving attitudes to the land, the emergence of a post-secular society, and new theological insights. It thus welcomes Pope’s Francis’ timely call to all people, across all philosophical outlooks, to start a dialogue about how to respond to the environmental crisis.

What might be the focus of such a dialogue? The thesis advocates inclusion of consideration of the Rights of Land. In discussing the tension between justice and the law, Derrida acknowledges the place of rights in the regulation of interactions between humans. For similar reasons, the thesis advocates engaging in a conversation about recognising the Rights of Land in legislation. Such a conversation would provide a constructive way to introduce into the public square consideration of worldviews that shape CSG policy.

Further, whilst engaging in this dialogue does not require acceptance in the Public Sphere of the theological narrative shaping the thesis, that narrative provides an imaginative apologetic for discussion within the Religious Sphere.

One step towards starting a conversation was taken at a conference in South Australia. Participants came from a range of different geographic contexts, traditions, social locations, walks of life, age groups and persuasions. Together they developed *The Serafino Declaration*. A copy is at Appendix 5. This Declaration includes reference to the Rights of Nature.

The thesis commenced with reflection on Havel’s call for a change in the sphere of the spirit and of human conscience, Klein’s advocacy of a re-imagined relationship with the planet, and Pope Francis’ appeal for a new dialogue about shaping the future of the planet. Based on this case study of CSG mining in Australia, the thesis concludes with the view that regarding Land as a beloved fellow traveller in the restless journey of the cosmos is an essential ingredient for this transformative initiative.


Chalson, P. "Earthing God in Liturgy: Spiritual Encounters of an Environmental Kind." Charles Sturt University, 2011.


———. "Land Says No!", 2013.


Lake, M. "Protestantism, the Land and the Colonisation of Australia, 1788 - 1850." Sydney University, 2008.


Myers, B. *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams.* 2012.


**Websites visited**


### APPENDIX 1

#### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACEDD</td>
<td>Australian Council of Environmental Deans and Directors (5.2)</td>
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<td>AELA</td>
<td>Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) (9.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AERA</td>
<td>Australian Energy Resource Assessment (5.2)</td>
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<td>ANZATS</td>
<td>Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (9.6.4)</td>
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<td>APPEA</td>
<td>Australian Petroleum Production &amp; Exploration Association (5.5)</td>
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<td>BREE</td>
<td>Bureau of Resources and Energy Economics (5.2)</td>
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<td>COAG</td>
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<td>CSG</td>
<td>Coal Seam Gas</td>
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<td>EDO</td>
<td>Environmental Defenders Office (6.3.7)</td>
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<td>EDR</td>
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<td>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 (6.3.1)</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
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<td>IESC</td>
<td>International Expert Scientific Committee (5.6.4)</td>
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<td>ISCAST</td>
<td>Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology (9.6.3)</td>
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<td>LNG</td>
<td>Liquefied Natural Gas (6.3.7)</td>
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<td>MLUF</td>
<td>Multiple Land Use Framework (6.3.7)</td>
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<td>National Council of Churches in Australia (2.4)</td>
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<td>QCA</td>
<td>Queensland Competition Authority (6.4.4)</td>
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<td>Standing Council on Energy and Resources (5.7)</td>
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<td>Sub-Economic Demonstrated Resources (5.2)</td>
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<td>Sustainable Planning Act (Qld) 2009 (6.4.8)</td>
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<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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<td>2P</td>
<td>proven and probable (5.2)</td>
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### APPENDIX 2

**Coal Seam Gas policy developments**

**Overview of significant events**

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<th>EVENT</th>
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<td>QLD CSG Water Management Policy</td>
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<td>NWC: Position Statement on Coal Seam Gas and Water</td>
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<td>NTN Report on Hydraulic Fracturing in CSG</td>
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<td>Inquiry into CSG announced</td>
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<td>Worsley Parsons report on Greenhouse Gas Emissions</td>
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<td>Senate report on the impact of CSG mining on the management of the Murray Darling Basin</td>
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<td>National Partnership Agreement on CSG and Large Coal Mining Development</td>
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<td>NSW Environment Protection Authority established</td>
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<td>NSW Legislative Committee Report on CSG</td>
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<td>Interim underground water impact report (Surat basin)</td>
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<td>ACEDD Report on CSG</td>
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<td>Southern Cross University Fugitive Emissions Report</td>
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<td>QLD Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment established</td>
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<td>IESC Information Guidelines on CSG and large coal mining Developments impacting on water</td>
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<td>NSW Office of Coal Seam Gas established</td>
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<td>Report on Tara CSG Health Risks</td>
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<td>SCER publication of MLUF and National Harmonised Regulatory Framework</td>
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<td>Department of Industry, etc, Discussion Paper on CSG Fugitive Emissions</td>
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<td>NSW Chief Scientist &amp; Engineer Initial Report on CSG</td>
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<td>WA Inquiry in hydraulic fracturing</td>
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<td>NSW protects key farmlands and homes</td>
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<td>NSW imposes hold on CSG activities in Sydney water catchment area</td>
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<td>VIC Gas Market Taskforce Paper open for consultation</td>
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<td>QLD Report on Inquiry into protection of prime agricultural land</td>
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<td>Department of Industry, Issues Paper on Energy Policy</td>
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<td>Department of Agriculture Issues Paper on Agriculture</td>
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<td>Department of Environment Emissions Reduction Fund Green Paper</td>
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<td>NSW freezes Petroleum Exploration Licence Applications</td>
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<td>NSW Land Access Agreement</td>
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<td>NSW Chief Scientist Report on CSG risks</td>
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<td>NSW Chief Scientist Report on cumulative impacts on Sydney Water Catchment area</td>
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<td>CSIRO report on fugitive emissions</td>
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<td>QLD Regional Planning and Interests Act</td>
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<td>QLD Planning and Development Bill</td>
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<td>NSW new water monitoring arrangements</td>
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<td>Amended QLD Mineral Energy and Resource Bill</td>
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<td>NSW Petroleum Exploration Licence Applications frozen for another twelve months</td>
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<td>NSW Chief Scientist&amp; Engineer Final Report on CSG</td>
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<td>Energy Green paper released for final comment</td>
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<td>Agriculture Green Paper released for final comment</td>
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<td>Emissions Reduction Fund established</td>
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<td>NSW Gas Plan</td>
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APPENDIX 3

Submission by C Dalton on Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper, March 2014

Synopsis

In 1992 the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth, States and Territories signed a statement on national environmental policy that included four principles that should “inform policy making and program implementation”. This Submission puts the case for the White Paper on Agricultural Competitiveness to demonstrate how its recommendations on agricultural policy for the 21st century are informed by these principles. It advocates that this assessment should also address how the land can benefit from ecologically sustainable agricultural development, noting that State environment laws include the objects of “improving the total quality of life”, “promoting a better environment” and “enhancing the quality of the environment”.

The agricultural industry is inextricably linked with the environment, as is the energy sector. Healthy futures are forecast for both sectors if they respond effectively to the challenges they face, but they compete against each other for finite natural resources such as water and land. This draws attention to the significance of environmental factors in responding to the foreshadowed market opportunities and in securing the benefits of resource development for Australia.

The Coal Seam Gas (CSG) industry provides a relevant case study of the complex policy issues surrounding the emergence of a technologically advanced resource industry. Its introduction has been accompanied by significant community disquiet and conflict, well before its full economic potential has been realised. Environmental issues feature strongly in these concerns. Given the scope for competition between the CSG and agricultural sectors, and the growth potential of both, the White Paper could usefully review the relationship between the operation of competitive markets and meeting environmental policy objectives across two important industry sectors.

In doing so, this Submission suggests that the White Paper should take into account evolving values and attitudes to the land that have emerged since the days of our rural pioneers. This could be through giving the land a discrete identity, recognising its intrinsic value and speaking in terms of a relationship with the land, rather than objectifying the land. It suggests the precautionary principle be expanded to require the exercise of caution if an ecologically sustainable development cannot be shown to deliver net benefits to the environment. This will provide a robust platform upon which to build 21st century policies.
Selected excerpts
(Paragraph numbers referenced)

Reflection on worldviews
1. Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.
5  Human beings frequently seem “to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption.”
6  Creation is harmed “where everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves alone.”
9. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust in our planet.
69. We are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes … “we can speak of the priority of being over that of useful.”
89. God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement.
106  It is the false notion that “an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural or der can be easily absorbed.”
139. When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it.

Wicked problems
50. To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized.
63. Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must be also shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality.
111. Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.
“Environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces.”

In this [technological and economic development] context, talk of sustainable growth usually becomes a way of distracting attention and offering excuses. It absorbs the language and values of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy, and the social and environmental responsibility of businesses often gets reduced to a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures.

Public theology in a post-secular society

I am well aware that in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant, and consequently dismiss as irrational the rich contribution which religions can make to an integral ecology and the full development of humanity. Others view religions simply as a subculture to be tolerated. Nonetheless, science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both.

This Encyclical welcomes dialogue with everyone so that together we can seek paths of liberation,

Voice of Land

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her … This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail”.

These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years.

For the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice.

Justice and the law

Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.

The establishment of a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems has become indispensable; otherwise, the new power structures based on the techno-economic paradigm may overwhelm not only our politics but also freedom and justice.
APPENDIX 5

The Serafino Declaration

Rediscovering the spiritual in God’s creation

13 March 2015

CONTEXT

We came together at the Serafino conference centre in McLaren Vale, South Australia, from 10 to 13 March 2015 to explore the theme of “rediscovering the spiritual in God’s creation”. We came from different geographic contexts, traditions, social locations, walks of life, age groups and persuasions but with a common concern over various forms of ecological destruction and the intuition that this is not only a scientific, technological or economic issue but also a moral and indeed a spiritual one.

The aim of the conference was not to seek consensus, but to survey the landscape with a view to intentional responsible action. On that journey together, we were all challenged to recognise our own worldviews and to widen our horizons to encompass the enormity of the transcendence and immanence of God’s presence in all creation:

- We recognised and explored the rich insights arising from the diverse perspectives on the spiritual in creation;
- We investigated the challenges arising out of these insights;
- We experienced our interconnectedness with the natural world in the distinctive Christian and Indigenous context; and
- We identified common concerns with regard to our treatment of the natural world.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

We need to acknowledge that we approach the common conference theme in rather different ways:

- Some of us see “country” as embedded within the spirit world and are concerned about the destruction of ancestral land, seeing ourselves as deeply interconnected with the land, part of nature, and, where necessary, called to act as custodians of the land.
- Others of us are concerned about the destructive legacy of the Christian tradition and especially the dualisms that it has legitimised, especially between spirit and matter, soul and body, heaven and earth. We recognise that we are called to live in communion with nature, not over or above it. We then long to discern the spiritual in the material, the presence of God in every part of nature, animate and inanimate.
- Some of us treasure the rich heritage of the Christian confession of faith in the triune God and seek to explain how the presence of this God may indeed be experienced in and through nature.
- Others of us would agree but then wonder about natural disasters and examine our trust in God’s sovereignty and providential care amidst and despite such disasters.
- Yet others stand in awe over the evolutionary history of the universe and of life and earth. We wonder about the significance of the emergence of sentient life, consciousness and symbolic forms of communication. We
sense that the spiritual emerges from the material and that this may help us to see ourselves as embedded in a divine milieu.

- Some of us see ourselves as standing alongside scientists, analysts, philosophers and poets, seeking to make sense of the world around us. We look for wider horizons to interpret the world and what is wrong in the world, and find that by learning to name the world (through Christian worship) as God’s beloved creation and the earth as God’s own household.
- Others of us find such household imagery attractive in speaking about the earth as being home to trillions of creatures great and small, but are deeply concerned about the tension between human communities that seek to isolate themselves from the community of all living beings through numerous cultural prohibitions.
- Some of us observe the ways of wisdom embedded in nature, in living creatures and in the cosmic order of things – and discern in that a profound mystery, indeed God’s very presence.
- Others find in such wisdom open windows to encounter the Divine Spirit at work in the world – also in the drama of the interaction between humans and other species, involving not only conflict, but also altruism and an entangled sense of justice.

We therefore adopt different points of departure in reflecting about the material and the spiritual, God and the world, church and society, religion and ecology. We seek ways of overcoming thought patterns that have trapped us in the past but we do so in different ways. We therefore organise our emerging insights in various ways and sense the need to respect each other in this regard.

Nevertheless, we have a common concern over ecological destruction and find sources of inspiration in the deepest roots of our traditions and forms of spirituality to sustain us in our efforts towards custodianship of the land / earthkeeping / creation care. This provides us, in different locations, with a sense of joy and resilience to confront the overwhelming challenges of our times, even as we acknowledge that much good work is already happening with regard to ecological action.

**CHALLENGES**

We are challenged and therefore feel free to challenge others to consider the following points summarising a range of the diverse core insights and calls to action that emerged from participants and speakers:

- **The Healing of Earth**: mindful that humans, driven by greed and hubris, have ignored the spiritual nature of planet Earth and committed crimes against God’s creation leading to abuses such as the extinction of species, the pollution of the atmosphere and the melting of massive ice-caps, we were challenged to revive our consciousness of the sacredness of our planet and make the healing of our environment a primary mission.
- **The Narrative of Landscape**: because the Indigenous peoples of our land have long read the landscape of country as a spiritual narrative depicting the mysterious work of the Creator Spirit in forming and transforming the landscape, we were challenged to recognise the precedent of Aboriginal peoples as custodians of country with an acute sense of responsibility for maintaining its integrity.
• The Spirituality of Country: recognising that the Aboriginal custodians of this land have long experienced the spirituality of this land as country and identified themselves as one with the land, we were challenged to acknowledge that the churches have undervalued this spiritual consciousness and should now work towards reconciliation.

• God’s Presence in Creation: because God is immediately present in all creatures, through the Word, and in the Spirit, enabling all entities to exist and interact within one interrelated world, we were challenged to celebrate and experience God’s presence at the heart of creation.

• Christ in Creation: in the light of the biblical tradition that in the cosmic Christ the whole fullness of God’s redemptive presence dwells bodily in all things, reconciling, healing and restoring all creation (Col. 2.9), we were challenged to discern the bodily presence of Christ in all communities of nature, from the nano-cosmos of our bodies to the macro-cosmos of the universe.

• The Spirit in Creation: given the presence of the Spirit whose work in creation has been made apparent to us in our encounters with living creatures on Earth, we were challenged to experience the Spirit guiding us to relate to fellow creatures as participants with us in a cosmic theo-drama grounded in places to which we belong.

• Wisdom in Creation: in learning that the scientists of the ancient Wisdom School discerned innate Wisdom to be a natural force—the primordial blueprint for all creation (Prov. 8), the impulse governing the laws of nature (Job 28) and the driving character of each living thing (e.g., Prov. 6.6) – we were challenged to experience innate Wisdom as a cosmic spiritual reality, as Job once did (Job 42.2-5), by exploring the domains, the laws and forces of nature.

• Disasters in Nature: faced with the idea that, in a world that God pronounced good, natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and famines contribute to making a fertile world according to the cosmic blueprint of the universe, we were challenged to prepare for such natural disasters by enabling communities to build resilience against them and by removing unjust disparities in the use of Earth’s resources.

• The Rights of Nature: if God’s creation is a cosmos of intrinsic worth and spiritual beauty, a cosmos to be respected rather than exploited, revered rather than raped, then we were challenged to respect all domains of nature and recognise their intrinsic rights as valued components of the cosmos, whether they be galaxies or gardens, coral reefs or rainforests.

• The Consciousness of Earth Beings: faced with the possibility that we are Earth beings emerging from planet Earth with a consciousness of an evolutionary process that contributes to an understanding of our identity, we were challenged to accept our identity as Earth beings and to celebrate Earth as our source and our home within an interconnected community of life and kin.

• An Emerging Horizon of Hope: invited to recognise that the world around us is God’s household (oikos) and liturgically enabled to discern what lies beyond our immediate horizon, we were challenged to reconsider ways of looking at the world around us that legitimise current constellations of power and to express the hope that a different world is possible.

“We are alive as much as we keep the Earth alive.”