

Malcolm Fraser's involvement with CEDA dates back to his time as 22nd Prime Minister of Australia from 1975 to 1983. He shares his views on the role of think-tanks in the policy process, and CEDA's influence in early discussions of economic development and immigration in Australia. Today he sees CEDA's role as to "help sort out the confusion" around the big issues of the time such as climate change and immigration. And, among the numerous requests for speeches he received as PM, one from CEDA was always worth considering.

Malcolm Fraser AC CH



The Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser AC CH was Prime Minister of Australia from 1975 to 1983.

He was elected to Parliament in 1955 during the Menzies Government. He served first as

Minister for Army and later as Minister for Defence, and Education and Science.

He became Prime Minister on 11 November 1975. He resigned from Parliament following the 1983 election after nearly 28 years as the Member for Wannon.

From 1989, Mr Fraser played a key role in bringing an end to apartheid in South Africa as co-chairman of the Commonwealth appointed Committee of Eminent Persons. He was founding Chairman of CARE Australia from 1987 to December 2001, and also served as President of CARE International.

His books include *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs with Margaret Simons* (2010) and *Common Ground – Issues that should bind and not divide us* (2003).

Malcolm Fraser is a member of CEDA's Board of Governors.

Think-tanks...

Think-tanks are an important part of a country's institutional framework. Genuine think-tanks, as opposed to proselytising bodies designed to pursue a certain line, play a useful and constructive role. Governments certainly don't possess all wisdom, the public service doesn't possess all wisdom, and very often policies and ideas need to be tested quite widely before they're finally adopted. Think tanks generally can have a constructive role in that process.

They help to formulate new ideas, new policies, tackle new problems, or find better ways of responding to old issues. Times change, circumstances change, and the political philosophy changes from time to time. The role of independent think tanks – well based, properly researched – provides a constructive source of information and advice for governments, but also for the public at large. Their role in public education is important.

The value of CEDA...

CEDA has always played a constructive role in relation to economic development. Governments have taken note of its views, its publications. CEDA papers help inform the public on important issues.

CEDA has prepared very thoughtful papers on many aspects of Australian development. I would like to see them attract a great many Australians. A website that

can be challenging and informative often attracts attention – maybe more so than newspapers – because in today’s world they are so predictable. If you want opinion, where do you go for it?

Immigration and economic development...

Without the Migration Program initiated by Calwell and supported by the Parliament as a whole, the development of Australia would not have been possible. We needed more people and to build the resources and strength of this nation rapidly, but with financial prudence. That also meant we needed to develop a tolerant nation. People came from many different places. It’s made an overwhelming contribution to the whole of Australia. Not just in physical terms, but in cultural terms, artistic terms – helping to broaden Australian life.

A body in politics that knows where it’s going, knows what it wants to do, a civil society in support is enormously important. It helps to achieve bipartisanship.

CEDA is part of that society, of course. And it’s terribly important that it continues to be.

For the last ten or 15 years, the argument about border protection has been politicised. There is a strong national need for a bipartisan policy. There’s a role for society to say, “We need a bipartisan policy on this issue in the interest of Australian development”. CEDA can play that role without being political.

“CEDA has always played a constructive role in relation to economic development.”

A role for “sorting out confusion”...

When it comes to global warming, for example, there are the people who deny the reality, as I believe, and then people who take that a step further and accept global warming but deny human activity contributes.

Some of the evidence used by the global warming lobby has been demonstrated to be not well based. Some of the scientific claims, although a very minor part, have been shown to be incorrect. The views of the Academy of Sciences of Australia, of America, of Canada, of Britain, and the European academies – are all those scientists wrong? Are they all self-serving? If CEDA is prepared to say, “Our judgement is this and it’s made on the evidence,” it would be enormously helpful. Its role is to help sort out the confusion.

We need very good, solid people judging the evidence. People who can look at the facts and consider the views of the people who have undertaken the research.

There are great issues out there which desperately need organisations like CEDA to enter the fray; not just leave it to politicians, or somebody overseas, but to make a judgement and back that judgement with advocacy and with public education.

Political implications are no reason to avoid policy issues.

First impressions...

Communications with CEDA were relatively close during my time in politics. But CEDA’s time of greatest influence was during my earlier years in politics. In those days economic development was taken seriously, building a nation was taken seriously, and the immigration program had been launched after the second world war. All the political parties knew how important that was to Australia and refused to play politics with race or religion. There was a self-restraint. CEDA played a significant role in helping to create the climate in which governments could say, “We are a small country, we’ve got to build our resources, we’ve got to invest in the future”. That message was very relevant to CEDA.

In those early years CEDA’s role was absolutely critical to giving Australia a sense of direction, a sense of purpose. CEDA is a great organisation today, but I would like to see it have more bite. Be more adventurous, more outspoken. Develop good ideas and then advance those ideas to have a greater influence. Explore new avenues of communication. Be bolder in expressing ideas. That might mean running the risk of losing some support. But some principles have to be fought for, even if there’s a potential cost.