Justice and the Tax Base in the 21st Century

Wednesday 2 April – Friday 4 April 2025

Level 10 Woodward Centre, Melbourne Law School, 185 Pelham Street Carlton VIC 3053, https://law.unimelb.edu.au/centres/mccl/research/research-programs/taxation-law-and-policy/justice-and-the-tax-base-in-the-21st-century

The 20th century saw the rise of tax systems in developed countries, including Australia, that were capable of financing expansive social expenditures and redistributing market resources. In the 21st century, these tax systems face increasing challenges. Conference papers will assess the justice of the tax bases of income, consumption and wealth that were developed in the last century, in the face of significant challenges today. The **progressive income tax** was a mainstay of tax systems, capable of both raising revenue and achieving redistribution. The redistributive capacity of the income tax has been undermined by reducing tax rates and hollowing out of the base through policy change and tax minimisation. The **Value-Added Tax** (VAT) or **Goods and Services Tax** (GST) became the dominant form of consumption tax at the end of the century. While capable of raising significant revenue, its regressivity nearly always results in exclusions to the base and rate variations that hamper its expansion. **Wealth taxation** has never raised significant revenue and today it is sporadic and in decline, whether the aim is to capture accrued financial wealth, land value or inheritance of assets. Yet growing and unequal wealth holdings demand new tax solutions.

DAY 1	**WEDNESDAY 2 APRIL (AFTERNOON)**	
11.30am	Arrival; light lunch and coffee available	
12.15pm	**Welcome:** Dean Professor Michelle Foster opens the conference **Introduction:** Professor Miranda Stewart	
Session 1 Equality and Tax (Chair: Miranda Stewart)		
12.30pm	Professor Alex Raskolnikov	Formal Equality and the Tax Structure
1.10pm	*Discussant Miranda Stewart and Q&A*	
Session 2 Distributive Justice and the Tax Base (Chair: Yvette Lind)		
2.00pm	Associate Professor Kathryn James	The inadequate treatment of taxation in accounts of distributive justice
2.30pm	Professor Patrick Emerton	Is there a principled argument for the taxation of consumption?
3.00pm	*Discussant Liam Murphy and Q&A*	
3.30pm	Afternoon tea	
Session 3 Equity, Efficiency and Tax in Australia (Chair: Ana Gamarra Rondinel)		
4.00pm	Professor Roger Wilkins	Long-Term Inequality Trends in Australia: Evidence, Explanations and International Context
4.30pm	Professor Rick Krever	Tax and Redistribution in Australia: Why is the Gini Still in the Bottle?
5.00pm	Associate Professor Jason Nassios	Rethinking Tax Efficiency: Beyond Point Estimates to Systemic Reform
5.30pm	*Discussant Kerrie Sadiq and Q&A*	
6.00pm-9.00pm	***From 6pm: Conference Drinks and Dinner, Level 10 Woodward Centre***	

DAY 2	**THURSDAY 3 APRIL**	
PUBLIC EVENT: THE HON DR ANDREW LEIGH MP – Melbourne Law School Theatre G08 **Session 4 Centre Stage: Tax Reform for Middle Australia (Chair: Miranda Stewart)**		
9.00am	Vice-Chancellor Professor Emma Johnstone AO	Introductory remarks
9.10am	Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP	Unrigging the Game: How Multinational Tax Reform Boosts Competition
9.40am	*Discussant Miranda Stewart and Q&A*	
10.00am	**Morning tea**	
CONFERENCE DAY 2 – LEVEL 10, WOODWARD CENTRE **Session 5 Taxing multinationals in the global digital economy (Chair: Jason Nassios)**		
10.30am	Professor Kerrie Sadiq	Taxing Multinationals in the Extractives Industry: Formulary Apportionment for Developing Nations
11.00am	Associate Professor Yan Xu & Professor Michael Walpole	Digital Taxation Challenges: Simplified Solutions and Structural Inequality
11.30am	*Discussant Rick Krever and Q&A*	
Session 6 Taxing consumption: Issues and Challenges (Chair: Laura Seelkopf)		
12.00pm	Dr Harry Cossar-Gilbert	Can the Consumption Base and the Australian GST Limit the Wealth of the Top 1%?
12.30pm	Dr Stefanie Geringer	The Quest for Redistribution and Justice in the Context of the VAT or GST
1.00pm	*Discussant Rebecca Millar and Q&A*	
1.30pm	**Lunch**	
Session 7 Taxing income: Issues and Challenges (Chair: Kerrie Sadiq)		
2.30pm	Prof Emeritus Richard Vann	Stop bad-mouthing the income tax!
3.00pm	Dr Arezou Zaresani	Elasticity of Taxable Income and Adjustment Costs: High-Income Taxpayers' Bunching Behavior
3.30pm	Associate Professor John Minas & Associate Professor Sonali Walpola	Justice and the Australian Income Tax Base: Taxing Capital Gains and Trusts
4.00pm	*Discussant Graeme Cooper and Q&A*	
4.30pm	**BREAK**	
5.30 - 7.15pm ***MLS Room G08***	**PUBLIC EVENT: Five experts pitch five ideas for fair taxation (hybrid event)** **Chair:** Miranda Stewart The experts: Professors Ingrid Robeynes (Online); Liam Murphy; Laura Seelkopf; Alex Raskolnikov; Miranda Fleischer The community sector panel: Peter Davidson (ACOSS), Mark Zirnsak (TJN), Josie Lee (Oxfam), Rachel Ball (Reichstein), Emma Dawson (Per Capita) **Q&A:** Facilitated by Kathryn James	
7.15pm	***End of Day 2; Informal dinner for speakers***	

DAY 3	**FRIDAY 4 APRIL**	
8.30am	**Arrival; coffee (Level 10 Woodward Centre)**	
CONFERENCE DAY 3 – LEVEL 10 WOODWARD CENTRE **Session 8 Dimensions of Tax Inequality and Justice (Chair: Kathryn James)**		
9.00am	Professor Laura Seelkopf	A global history of national taxation
9.40am	Professor Miranda Fleischer	Equality of Opportunity, Social Mobility and Taxation
10.20am	*Discussant Alex Raskolnikov and Q&A*	
10.45am	**Morning tea**	
Session 9 Taxing Wealth: Why and How (Chair: Rebecca Millar)		
11.15am	Professor Liam Murphy	Wealth, Welfare, and Bequests
11.55am	Ms Monica Hope	The Reciprocity Case for Progressive Wealth Taxation
12.25pm	Dr David Gwilym Blunt	Philanthropy, Domination, and Tax Justice
12.55pm	*Discussant Miranda Fleischer and Q&A*	
1.30pm	**Lunch**	
Session 10 Taxing Wealth: Issues and Challenges (Chair: Guyonne Kalb)		
2.15pm	Professor Miranda Stewart and Dr Melek Cigdem-Bayram	Decomposing wealth inequality trends and causes in Australia
2.45pm	Dr Joe Collins	Fair's fair: examining the role of land, rent and wealth in Australia's housing affordability crisis
3.15pm	Associate Professor Dan Halliday	Stamp Duties versus Land Taxes: Dilemmas of Distributive Justice and Home Ownership
3.45pm	*Discussant Roger Wilkins and Q&A*	
4.15pm **4.30pm close**	**Final remarks: Miranda Stewart and Kathryn James** **CLOSE OF CONFERENCE**	

FUNDING SUPPORT

This event is funded by the Australian Research Council with support from New York University School of Law, The University of Melbourne and The University of San Diego.

Project summary – Can and Should we reform the Goods and Services Tax? (DE190100346)
The 5-year project seeks to explain and address the slow pace of GST reform since its introduction in Australia in 2000. The project contends that part of this reform stagnation results from conventional support for the GST (or Value Added Tax (VAT)) often assuming the goodness of the GST and therefore assuming that it *should* play a greater role in revenue generation without sufficient regard to whether the GST *can* play a greater role and what a real GST would have to look like in reality to do so. This project reverses the order of things and proposes that we cannot know whether the GST should play a greater role in revenue generation before we know whether it can. The project contends that a proper review of the threats to the GST, and solutions, requires conducting both a technical analysis and an institutional capacity analysis. This requires assessing whether the technical solutions can be effectively realised by the relevant tax policy-making institutions that write (parliament), implement (the bureaucracy) and interpret (the courts) tax laws, as well as how these issues impact upon and are impacted by federal-state relations. This project will examine what a real GST that could survive the institutional processes of Australian policy-making would look like. It will then ask rather than assume - should such a GST be adopted? It asks the should question in relation to a properly analysed GST that is real (or realisable) and not merely good (or idealised). Whether such a *real* GST is normatively desirable will be assessed by applying theories of economic justice (eg Rawls, Cohen, Nozick).

Project summary – Sharing the Wealth (DP210100924)
This project aims to address fundamental problems of injustice in taxation emerging in the transition to a slow growth economy in Australia and globally. The project applies interdisciplinary approaches to generate new knowledge that aims to update frameworks for justice in taxation, refreshing out-dated 20th century ethical and legal approaches. Collaborative legal and philosophy analysis by leading scholars in Australia and the United States will respond to contemporary conditions of slow growth, wage stagnation, wealth inequality, population aging and longevity. Project outcomes will include tax reform proposals to benefit policy makers and enrich public debate on tax justice for 21st century economic and fiscal conditions.