

Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility: Background Brief

17 October 2012

- Since June this year Robert Howell has joined his experience in ethical investment, earthcare and management from New Zealand with Howard Pender's 25 years of knowledge of ethical investment in Australia to propose this **new national organisation**.
- Called the Australian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR), it aims to promote ethical investment and, in particular, **shareholder engagement and advocacy with the aim that corporate activity assists humanity live more justly and within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems**.
- ACCR's work will entail education, research, engagement and advocacy and its **membership** will be open to individuals and organisations in Australia and New Zealand who share its values and aims.
- Currently around 5% or less of managed funds and sovereign wealth funds internationally can be said to promote justice and sustainability. The figure for Australasia is **less than 2%**.
- Robert and Howard have been inspired by the impressive results of the ICCR (Interfaith Centre on Corporate Responsibility in the US) which, despite its origins with religious organisations 40 years ago, now includes many secular but committed individuals, foundations, ethical fund managers and US state governments. It has assisted its members to establish dialogues with many hundreds of US companies each year. It also places roughly 200-300 shareholder resolutions a year on the agendas of US company AGMs. These often bring **changes in the behaviour of corporations** resulting in improved social justice and enhanced ecosystem functioning. The ICCR is a healthy and influential feature of US corporate democracy.
- They have also been inspired by the work of FairPensions in the UK which since 2005 has worked **building awareness of the power of savings and investments** among parliamentarians and the public. Like the ICCR they have also assisted members put resolutions at company AGM's;
- The **establishment group** for the ACCR includes Robert and Howard, as well as Elizabeth Cham who headed up Philanthropy Australia for 10 years, John McKinnon who has managed a fund management firm and worked for NGOs with an environmental and anti-poverty focus and Jill Sutton who has written in most genres concerning social justice issues.
- Supporters of the ACCR include **Molly Harriss Olson** who is the convenor of the National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development, **Clive Hamilton** who is Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Charles Sturt University, **Phillip Toyne** who was formerly Head of the Australian Conservation Foundation, **Jeanette Fitzsimons** who is a highly respected New Zealand politician and environmentalist, **Tim Costello** who has been the CEO of World Vision since 2004 and is listed by the National Trust as a "National Living Treasure" and **Richard Denniss**, Executive Director of The Australia Institute, one of Australia's most influential progressive think tanks.
- The **ACCR is well-advanced** in the process of legal registration, the finalisation of a business plan, and the establishment of networks and support.
- **Responsible citizens** read about global warming, reduced bio-diversity, excesses of nitrogen and phosphorous, disappearing water access and extreme weather conditions every day, and they are becoming more aware of the evidence that the widening gap between the rich and the poor is correlated with crime, ill-health, political instability and unhappiness.
- Citizens frequently report a sense of powerlessness in the face of these enormous challenges of inequality and climate change... but they could come to see their investment patterns as **the elephant in the room**. Many Australasian citizens and organisations these days have direct investments or are indirectly responsible for investments via banks or super funds. The **ACCR aims to lift awareness of this power in Australasia and to use it**.