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## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

# Assessing the Composition and Diversity of the Australian Interest Group System

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*Any democratic society requires mechanisms for citizens to have effective political voice. Clearly, political parties provide a key channel for expressing views and preferences. However, organised interests provide another important mechanism for such representation. A crucial question in this regard is whether the interest group system is capable of ensuring the representation of a variety of public and private interests. Resolving these debates requires data that map the terrain and also are attentive to organisational diversity. This article takes up this challenge through exploring the composition and diversity of the Australian system of organised interests, using a new data set based on the Directory of Australian Associations. This system-level approach delivers important insights into the nature of the Australian interest group system, as well as provides a framework for subsequent work interpreting and contextualising advocacy activities of particular groups, or lobbying dynamics in specific policy domains.*

**Key words:** *advocacy, interest groups, lobbying, democracy*

A foundation of any democratic society is the capacity for citizens to have political voice such that they can express views, preferences, and interests to political institutions and hold public officials to account. Although political voice is achieved through voting or joining and supporting political parties, the former is an irregular occurrence (once every 3 years in Australia) and there is some debate as to whether parties have lost their programmatic and participatory character (see Marsh 2006, but see Gauja 2015). Still, the consensus position for the Australian case is to see groups as ‘in the shadows’ of parties (Matthews and Warhurst 1993). Groups are accorded this secondary role owing to particular features of the Australian political system: specifically, its ad-

versarial two-party system, the alignment of parties with societal and economic interest, and the programmatic nature of parties. Yet, contemporary circumstances might be interpreted as eroding these conditions, and hence raise the relative importance of the group system. Key amongst these conditions is the trend for groups to increasingly take a bipartisan public stance (see also Abbott 1995). More broadly, the well-documented debate regarding the transformation of party political systems in Western democracies (such as increasing fragmentation of party landscapes and growing electoral volatility) and the apparent dissatisfaction with representative systems of government have also directed attention to the role of the interest groups as mechanisms of political voice (e.g. Klüver 2015; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014).

Against this backdrop, a crucial question is the potential of the interest group system to address these democratic challenges and whether it can ensure the representation of a

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variety of public and private interests. Although by no means the only measure, the composition of the group system is an important way to adjudicate on such questions. By definition, groups are collective, membership-based organisations, which leads to the presumption that they are able to offer clear opportunities for political engagement. As representation requires organisation, examining the shape of the interest group system enables us to assess the extent to which different interests, or segments of society, are able to make their voice heard. The assessment of the composition of organised interest 'systems' has been a central task for generations of scholars; a consistent finding being a numerical 'bias' towards business interests (see Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Schlozman et al. 2012; Walker 1991; see also Lowery et al. 2015).

Although there is a strong tradition of assessing the group system, predominantly in the United States (e.g. Bevan 2013; Grossmann 2012; Minkoff et al. 2008), but more recently also in European democracies (Berkhout and Lowery 2011; Binderkrantz et al. 2014; Fraussen and Beyers 2015; Klüver 2015; Wonka et al. 2010; for a recent overview, see Halpin and Jordan 2012), these types of questions have not been systematically addressed in an Australian context. There is, however, a rich tradition of Australian scholarship in this general area, with well-crafted reviews and convincing case studies of political representation (Sawer and Zappalà 2001), social movements and interest groups (Bell 2007; Marsh 1996; Mendes 2006; Warhurst 1994), commercial lobbying (Warhurst 2007), and think tanks (e.g. Hurley and Vromen 2015; Marsh 1994; Marsh and Stone 2004; t'Hart and Vromen 2008). Several efforts have also been made to enumerate the NGO or Third Sector (see Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996; Dalton and Lyons 2005; Maddison et al. 2004; Yates and Graycar 1983). The predominant research approach however has been to focus on developed and in-depth case studies of well-known groups; perhaps best exemplified by the valuable work on the transformation of the Business Council of Australia (Bell 2007), Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF,

Warhurst 1994), and Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS, Mendes 2006). Of course, if one looks to policy area specialists – say indigenous policy, farming, social or environmental policy, and so on – then there is a far greater quantum of work that eschews accumulating findings for group scholars in preference for a richer understanding of the specific development of advocacy in a given sector, and its implications for policymaking.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge is how we might build on this rich foundation in such a way as to say something more definitive about the scale and composition of the aggregate 'system'. The most visible part of the interest group universe – the groups that figure prominently in the media and often have been subject of case studies and broader scholarly interest – are likely to represent only a very narrow slice of the larger system and therefore conceal the size and diversity of organised interests in Australia. This article aims to advance and complement this literature in two ways. Firstly, we report on the construction and content of a data set that captures the breadth of the group system and thus enables a better sense of its scale and composition. We use these data to answer some fundamental questions such as how big is the system, and what is the balance among different types of interests? These questions relate to key topics in interest group research, such as representation and bias. Without some system-level data, these issues cannot be fully addressed. The second objective is to offer a basis from which to sample and thus place findings in their context. Our modest aims here are therefore very similar to Walker's objective when he engaged in a pioneering systematic study of the origins and maintenance of interest groups in America: 'in reporting a small number of facts about a large number groups', we also seek 'to create a general framework for interpretation that will bring new life to existing case studies by showing just what they are a case of' (1983: 391).

In the first section of this article, we present our data and clarify how we identified and analysed the different forms of organised representation. Related work in the USA or Europe frequently utilises lobby register data or measures of lobbying activity in consultations or

committees to enumerate the population of organised interests, or relies on data from associational registers. As no equivalent ready-made data set concerning advocacy activity exists for the Australian case at the moment (nor for many other non-US countries), we utilise the Directory of Australian Associations (DoAA). As will become evident, we argue that the temptation to take directories ‘off the shelf’ and use them as simple proxies for group populations must be resisted. Instead, we outline the modifications, coding decisions, and conceptual distinctions, required to make this source work for the research community. After having clarified how we use the directory to provide an estimate of the Australian interest population, we provide an analysis of the size, composition, and diversity of the Australian interest group system. More specifically, we consider the balance between different organisational types (including resource levels) and the age and territorial dimension of the Australian interest group system. Subsequently, we analyse to what extent different substantive policy interests are represented by a variety of organisational types. In the conclusion, we highlight our key findings and suggest some promising avenues for further research.

### **The DOAA: An Estimate of the Australian Interest Group System**

An obvious challenge facing Australian scholars of interest groups is in finding some ready way to quantify the group system. In the United States, for instance, there are various institutional data sources – such as Lobby Disclosure data – that provide obvious places to start. No equivalent ready-made data set exists for the Australian case (nor for many other non-US cases). Thus, we decided to build our map utilising the DoAA.<sup>2</sup> The directory has been published since 1978. Its stated aim is to list comprehensively Australian associations for those professionally engaged in public affairs (including journalists, public servants, and political operatives). It describes itself as follows: ‘The Directory of Australian Associations is your access to every specialty interest group

in the country, including the non-profit sector’. The data we report here focus on the 2012 edition. According to its website, editorial staff are constantly engaged in searching for new groups updating the details of old ones and ensuring accuracy. Indeed, the publisher offers the directory in an online version, which ‘... provides access to daily updates and advanced search functionalities’, and puts its hardcopy version out biannually. That the directory is updated daily as editors continuously look for new groups, and the included associations are contacted by email three times a year to update their information (which was verified through telephone conversations with the current editor), is reassuring in terms of its comprehensiveness and the likelihood that details are accurate on an annual basis (as we report here).

As is now well established (see Nownes 2012), claims to provide *definitive* populations at either a national or international level are illusory. This is not simply because there is less agreement on how to define interest groups (and inconsistent application of agreed definitions), but that the sheer number of groups makes counting a more labour-intensive business. Thus, what we report here is best understood as a very good estimate for the Australian population. Importantly, its reliance on a professionally produced commercial directory means that any omissions are systematic. From our thorough investigation of the content of our database we can say that the data set will (i) have a lag between formation and entry in the directory, (ii) disproportionately undercount very new groups and groups with little or no policy engagement, and (iii) undercount local or regional groups. This is consistent with specialist findings from similar international work that suggests that well-known organisations and groups proximate to the national capital are disproportionately likely to be listed in these kinds of directories (see Johnson 2014: 168; see also Martin et al. 2006 and Walker et al. 2011: 1325–1329; for a more detailed discussion of work with a similar source in the US context).<sup>3</sup> On the reverse side, such a data set is highly unlikely to miss the most active, large, and policy-relevant groups organised at a national level. All of these issues are

important to be aware of. However, for our purposes, they are not critical. Our main goal is to have a well-compiled data set that is a good proxy (with limitations stated up-front and well understood) for the population at large, and hence a credible population from which to assess the scale and diversity of the Australian interest group system, and to sample from in future research.

The directory's focus on associations means that many entries will not meet our definition of interest group, which we conceptualise as collective membership organisations (individuals or institutions) that are substantively engaged in public policy (Jordan et al. 2004). Indeed on its website it claims to include a wide variety of associations, ranging from sport and recreational associations to cultural, social, ethnic, environmental, business, and professional associations. Thus, we took great care in implementing a systematic code-scheme to get us from the directory as published, to our estimate of the population of national interest groups.

The 2012 directory included 4102 individual entries. For 88 organisations, we could not find a website. As we did not find any recent references to these organisations on other websites, it seems highly likely that these groups have been disbanded. We subsequently selected out all non-national organisations, which amounted to 2353 or 59% of entries. We defined national entries as those organisations who claim to represent a nation-wide constituency. Organisations were considered national if their name contained references to 'national', 'Australia(n)', 'Aus', 'Commonwealth', 'federal', or 'federation'. For those organisations whose name did not provide information about their scale, we consulted their website, in particular the 'about', 'mission', and/or 'what we do' section. If these sections referred to 'Australia(n)' or 'national', the organisation was considered national in scope. If in doubt, the membership of the organisations was examined, and groups were considered as national if they have members in more than three states (which given Australia's geography seems a reasonable threshold). The remaining 1649 entries were considered national organisations but were not all interest groups. To address this, we coded all

national entries using a broad scheme to identify all types of organisations included in the directory.

To distinguish different types of organisation, we utilised a standard set of distinctions among citizen, professional, business, trade union, and institutional groups (see Table 1 for code scheme and descriptors). Two deviations are important to note. We retained and coded an additional type—hybrid citizen groups (see Minkoff 2002 for a more detailed examination of this 'hybrid' or 'service/advocacy' form). We have often found that, empirically, some groups straddle citizen and not-for-profit/service charity types. Although not a large category, these are often important players in political systems we have observed. Quite often large charities will come to take the view that the impact of their service-orientated work faces limits that can only be overcome through policy advocacy (see also Phillips and Goodwin 2014). In other words, 'the group comes to see the political advocacy of their "service users" interests as the logical progression of its services role' (Halpin 2010: 282). So here we denote hybrid groups as those that have very significant service missions, but also give considerable attention to political advocacy. Compared with citizen groups, these organisations generally have a much stronger service component, which has remained their main focus as they evolved from not-for-profit/service charity to a more hybrid group. Organisations such as Caritas, or St Vincent De Paul, are good examples of such groups; this category generally contains many organisations that focus on issues related to health and social welfare.

In addition, we made a conscious decision to police the distinction between service group and citizen group far more carefully than is standard in the field. Typically in the sub-field, any association that represents a set of 'citizens', 'identity' or 'public interest' perspective would be coded as a citizen group, almost irrespective of whether it actually has shaping public policy as a part of its mission. We take the view that this renders citizen group far too diverse a category as to be reasonably referred to as interest groups. Thus, we preserve the citizen group category for associations that are

**Table 1. DOAA 2012: Overview Organisational Types**

| <b>Organisational type</b>             | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Interest Groups</b>                 |                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Citizen group                          | Organise social groups and/or issue perspectives                                                                                                                       |
| Business association                   | Organise firms/businesses                                                                                                                                              |
| Trade union                            | Organise workers                                                                                                                                                       |
| Professional group                     | Organising individuals engaged in specific professional activity/trades irrespective of employer/sector and with the aim of developing the standards of the profession |
| Institutional group                    | Associations of public institutions, e.g. hospitals, schools, universities, local governments                                                                          |
| Hybrid group                           | Primary focus on provision services, yet substantial advocacy component                                                                                                |
| <b>Other organisations</b>             |                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Service group                          | Voluntary association with emphasis on service provision to clients                                                                                                    |
| Leisure Association                    | Voluntary association dedicated to supporting members' leisure pursuits, interests or hobbies                                                                          |
| Political party                        | An organisation that directly contests elections                                                                                                                       |
| Think tanks and research organisations | Organisations that engage in research activities and seek to shape public debate and/or public policy by providing policy ideas and recommendations                    |
| Institutions                           | Consultancies, firms, government agencies, training & educational institutes                                                                                           |

collective and have advocacy as a prominent part of their mission, and leave service groups for those associations (mostly charities) that tend to have service delivery as their primary aim. These organisations work to assist specific individuals, often by providing important services or advice, but do not see advocacy as a strong part of their mission. They may be visible on policy issues from time to time, which is not surprising because they often possess a lot of expertise about their client groups or their client groups often lack dedicated citizen groups to represent them politically. Furthermore, this category also includes foundations that mainly focus on research funding or primarily engage in specific projects, as well as development NGOs that provide services or relief in foreign countries, and religious organisations that are engaged in charity work.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the organisational types identified in the directory and a short description of their key features. As can be observed from the table, in addition to the group types discussed above, the directory also contains leisure groups, as well as a limited number of political parties, research organisations, and institutions. Following our definition, we conceive the following

organisational types as interest groups: citizen groups, business associations, trade unions, professional groups, institutional groups, and hybrids groups. All these associations are collective in nature, and also have an important advocacy component as part of their mission. These two conditions are generally not met for the other associations and institutions that are included in the directory. In what follows, we focus our attention almost exclusively on those organisations defined in Table 1 as interest groups. We only include discussion of 'other organisations' where we wish to highlight the fact that specific social constituencies who have very few citizen groups to represent them tend to be the subject of attention from a relatively large number of service groups.

### **The Composition and Diversity of the Australian Interest Group System**

The fundamental task of this article is to generate a map of the Australian interest group system. Estimates are hard to find, but several books over the years offer figures of at least 150 groups in Canberra (Fitzgerald 2006; Sekules 1991). As is evident, from the



**Table 2. Australian National Interest Groups Dataset, by Type**

| Type                 | n     | %     | Staff (median) | Foundation (median) |
|----------------------|-------|-------|----------------|---------------------|
| Business association | 495   | 40.6  | 2              | 1979                |
| Professional group   | 397   | 32.6  | 1.5            | 1971                |
| Citizen group        | 218   | 17.9  | 2              | 1980                |
| Hybrid group         | 58    | 4.8   | 8              | 1981                |
| Trade union          | 26    | 2.1   | 16             | 1950                |
| Institutional group  | 25    | 2.0   | 5.5            | 1991                |
| Total                | 1,219 | 100.0 |                |                     |

Source: Australian National Interest Groups Dataset

perspective of 2012, this is a substantial underestimation. As indicated in Table 2, the directory contains more than 1200 national interest groups. In the first part of this section, we will focus our attention on the balance between different group types, as well as the age of these organisations and where they are headquartered. Subsequently, we will examine the extent to which different sets of economic and citizen interests utilise different forms of interest group organisation to engage in policy advocacy. We link our findings in this regard to broader debates on interest group bias and inequality.

The first obvious feature of these data is the overwhelming numerical dominance of economic interests. If we just include business and professional groups together, they account for 73% of the entire national system. We know that numerical dominance is not, in and of itself, a proxy for power. Indeed, it has been argued that the preponderance of business groups can be interpreted as a sign of a lack of unity, and hence of power (see Jordan and Halpin 2012). Having only one single group to represent an economic sector could be a sign of strength, as this group ‘would be able to unite all firms in the entire sector, and it would, therefore, be able to speak with a single voice for the entire domain and could credibly threaten policy-makers with economic pressures from that sector’ (Kluever in Lowery et al. 2015: 1220). Yet, viewed from a straightforwardly pluralist perspective, it does give some sense of the skewed nature of the voices organised in our political system, as groups organised on an economic or vocational basis are clearly more

numerous. Related to questions of power are those of resources. Our data include a measure of the number of staff each group has, and Table 2 provides an average by group type.<sup>4</sup> What is immediately obvious is that business, professional, and citizen groups have the lowest staffing levels in the system. Although the low numbers of these groups may be surprising to some, they reflect findings in other countries. In the context of the United States, for instance, Schlozman notes that most interest groups ‘do not conform to a stereotype of the well-heeled operation with resources to burn’, as ‘a majority involve one or two in-house lobbyists or the services of a single outside firm’ (2012: 35). One caveat here is that these staffing numbers do not differentiate between policy staff and general staff: this means that inflated figures for hybrid groups may derive from their non-political activities (e.g. service delivery). That being said, the data do provide some sense that there is substantial capacity in the trade union and hybrid sectors of the group system. This indicates the limitations of only considering the sheer number of groups in a sector. For instance, although the proportion of labour unions in group systems is generally very low in most countries, they often demonstrate high levels of political activity and enjoy considerable political prominence (e.g. Binderkrantz et al. 2014: 14; Fraussen and Beyers 2015: 17; Schlozman et al. 2012: 588). This observation also resonates with recent findings on third-party campaigning and issue-advertising in Australia, which requires deep organisational pockets (Orr and Gauja 2014). Although corporations dominate this field of advocacy, they do not

**Table 3. Location of Headquarter (National Interest Groups)**

| State              | Freq. | Percent | Cum. % |
|--------------------|-------|---------|--------|
| New South Wales    | 443   | 36.3    | 36.3   |
| Victoria           | 383   | 31.4    | 67.7   |
| ACT                | 189   | 15.5    | 83.2   |
| Queensland         | 121   | 9.9     | 93.1   |
| South Australia    | 55    | 4.5     | 97.6   |
| Western Australia  | 17    | 1.4     | 99.0   |
| Tasmania           | 9     | 0.8     | 99.8   |
| Northern Territory | 2     | 0.2     | 100.0  |
| Total              | 1,219 | 100     |        |

Source: Australian National Interest Groups Dataset

monopolise it, as also labour unions frequently engage in large-scale issue-advertisements, and more recently new online groups such as GetUp! have employed this resource-intensive tactic as well. When considering political expenditures between 2006 and 2011, Orr and Gauja note that ‘the union sector has actually led political expenditure over the last five years – more than doubling the aggregate expenditure of the second-largest spender, the mineral resource industry’ (2014: 82).

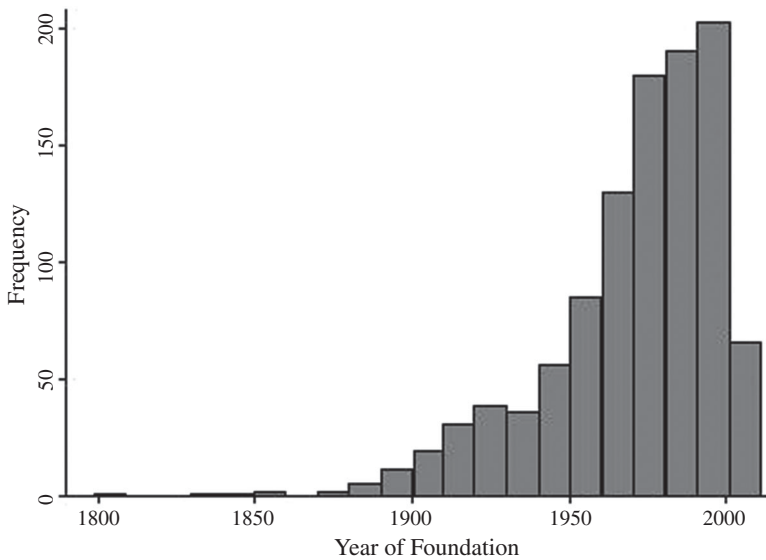
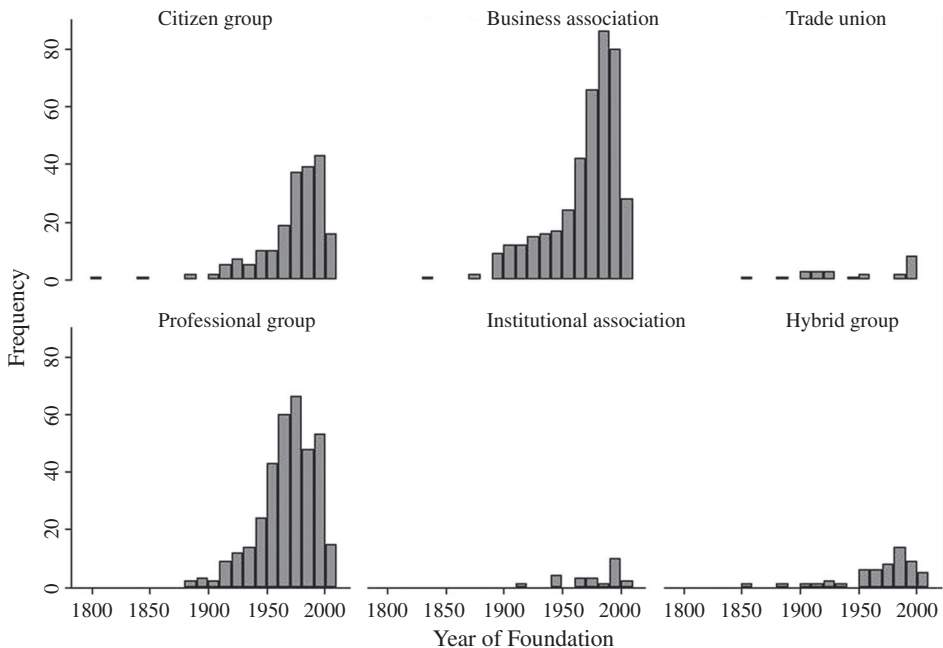
As one might expect, given the age of Australia’s national system of government, most groups are relatively young. Trade unions are on average much older than other categories. What this table cannot reveal is the level of churn and amalgamation that has gone on over time. As Jordan et al. (2012) rightly note when tracking the evolution of interest group populations in the United States and United Kingdom, a stable number does not equal a stable population (see also Anderson et al. 2004). In the case of trade unions, we know from other work that there has been a strong process of amalgamation over decades, which means that although those still standing are old, they have swallowed up many of their contemporaries (Levesque and Murray 2010). These numbers, in sum, can obscure the fluid nature of the group system. Figure 1 takes a closer look at the establishment dates of all national interest groups in the 2012 directory.<sup>5</sup> At first glance, it shows that the bulk of the current national group population was established in the post-war period. As we will come to in a moment, this does seem

to accord with both the international norm that advocacy as a form of political organisations took off – was institutionalised – during this period. But it also matches with the Australian context whereby the federalization (or centralization) of policy commenced during post war reconstruction efforts, which accelerated in the 1970/80s as the nationalization of policy debate commenced apace. Over time, this trend only intensified, as the Commonwealth became more involved in areas of state jurisdiction and processes of harmonization and coordination decreased local autonomy (Fenna 2012: 590). This process might reasonably be assumed to have stimulated societal and economic interests to establish associations that are national in scale.

Another interesting facet of the establishment story is variations by group type. Figure 2 presents the above information, but disaggregated by group type. It shows that the business and professional groups seem to make up the largest proportion of the new groups in the post-war period. Based on our dataset, the establishment of national professional associations peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, while especially the 1980s and 1990s were marked by a high number of new business associations being established. The growing desire of different vocations to seek professional status, the governmental imperative to increasingly regulate the economy, and the overall growth in the size and complexity of the Australian economy are all likely drivers of this pattern. Untangling their contribution is difficult, and certainly not possible from the data we have assembled here. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that whereas we see an increase in the founding of citizen groups from the 1970s, the growth of trade union, institutional, and hybrid groups is a much more incremental affair. Although only providing a broad brush picture, these patterns of mobilization are quite similar to those observed in other developed countries (see Halpin and Jordan 2012 for an overview).

If we reflect on the territorial dimensions of organising interests, there is a strong expectation that federal systems leave their own imprint in the structure of group systems (see Boatright 2011; Coleman and Grant 1985).



**Figure 1. Year of Foundation (National Pressure Groups Included in the 2012 Directory).****Figure 2. Year of Foundation, Group Type.**

In the Australian case, it has been reported that most national associations developed from roots in the states (Abbott 2005). While there are numerous studies on business and labour

unions, there is little by way of systematic assessment of the impact on representation of the changing nature of the Australian federation. We can start to address this using the data

we have to hand. There is a strong tradition within the US literature to treat the location of a group's headquarters in the national capital as a measure of the importance of national politics to a given group (Minkoff et al. 2008; Schlozman et al. 2012). Our data in Table 3 shows that only 15.5 percent of national groups are headquartered in Canberra, while 36 percent and 31 percent of national groups have their main office in respectively New South Wales and Victoria. Perhaps, then, estimates of groups in Canberra of several hundred are accurate if one literally means, *located* in Canberra. As has been reported elsewhere (Johnson 2014), the proportion of groups headquartered in the national capital is similar to that of other federated systems such as Canada (reporting 17.5 percent), yet relatively low compared to the United Kingdom, where almost a third of all associations are headquartered in London.

Why is there this difference? One could relate this to the ambiguous nature of Canberra. Still, although the national capital has often been presented as a 'somewhat distant site in Australia's political geography – a perhaps remote home to the vagaries of the Australian Public Service, and of other of the formal institutions of federal politics', it is increasingly considered a place 'of crucial face-to-face communicative interaction between lobbyists, elected representatives and their advisors, as well as Commonwealth bureaucrats' (Beer 2009: 197–198). The nature of the political system, more precisely the legacy of federalism, might therefore provide a more convincing explanation (see also Johnson 2014: 174s; for a more general discussion of the role of political systems in shaping associational forms, see Clemens 1997 and Skocpol et al. 2000). Many current national groups are federated themselves, as predecessor state-based associations came together to organise their interests nationally. Far fewer decided to abandon existing state bodies in favour of a direct membership national body. As these national bodies were established, and the Commonwealth government expanded and policy became centralised nationally, several associations moved headquarters to Canberra. Yet, various prominent organisations are still headquartered in other states, such as the ACTU, BCA,

and ACF (Warhurst 2014: 263). Curiously, relations between state and national associations have been largely unexplored, as has the way they evolved as the nature of Australian federalism has changed (Kellow and Simms 2013: 43). On the latter point, we can see some evidence of change. In this regard the case of the NFF is cautionary. The ongoing financial and political crisis of the past two decades eventually forced the abandonment of a federated model and a switch to a more unitary structure (see [www.streamlinestrength.com.au/](http://www.streamlinestrength.com.au/), accessed 24 August 2015). Anecdotal evidence suggests many business groups struggle with the paradox that the finances and members are in the states, but the policy action is at the federal level.

What about the relative numerical dominance of different industry or social sectors in the interest group system? Using our data, we can examine the type of substantive interests that are represented by our population of national interest groups. There is a longstanding finding of business dominance within group systems, and we have no reason to expect differently for the Australian case. More broadly, there is the related finding that even among 'citizen' groups, there are a disproportionately high number of groups for privileged communities (Strolovich 2007).

First, we focus on the diversity among groups with an economic or vocational orientation, including business groups, professional associations, institutional groups, and labour unions. The issue of assessing interest diversity – and the related question of bias – is a difficult one. To a large extent this is simply because it is both hard to assess what non-biased looks like but also because it is hard to know which categories one should apply to assess diversity (for a more detailed discussion, see Lowery and Gray 2004). On the latter score, the use of ISIC codes provides a standard way to code the industries that specific groups seek to organise or represent. ISIC refers to International Standard Industrial Classification, a scheme developed by the United Nations to classify economic activities, which more recently has also been applied to classify interest groups into sectors (e.g. Berkhout et al. 2015; Hanegraaff

et al. 2011). Sometimes, groups will straddle economic categories, by for instance focusing on ‘manufacturing’ and ‘transportation and storage’. In these situations, which apply to about 12% of our groups with an economic or vocational orientation, cases have been assigned two ISIC-codes (or in a few rare cases three), and thus figure more than once in the table below (for a similar approach, see Schlozman et al. 2012).

Table 4 reports the way in which interests in a particular sector tend to organise themselves. Put another way, we ask to what extent are the different group types available to a given economic constituency – business associations, institutional groups, professional associations, and/or labor unions – utilised as vehicles to organise and advocate interests? The findings demonstrate that in most industry sectors, interests tend to be organised through standard business associations. Yet, there are also a few sectors in which professional associations are a more dominant organisational form, most notably the health, educational, and scientific/technical industry. Although labor unions can be found in several sectors, they currently appear to have a particularly strong presence in the public sector.

Although business groups and professional groups can be meaningfully classified into different economic sectors, ISIC codes are not well suited to characterizing constituencies that pertain to social issues or identities, as they have difficulties to capture the considerable diversity within citizen groups. For associations of citizens, we will therefore utilise a code-scheme that highlights social categories, and which has been used to good effect in authoritative US work to assess the organisational diversity of citizen groups (Schlozman et al. 2012). For cases that combine multiple categories (such as groups focused on ‘age’ (issues relating to younger/elderly people) and ‘disabled and health advocacy’), we took a similar approach as we did for economic interests, and coded them in both categories (a situation which applies to 28% of groups organising citizens; compared with business groups they are thus much more likely to combine categories).<sup>6</sup>

Table 5 reports the results of this coding effort. Before proceeding to examine results, it is important to note that we deliberately report data for *both* interest groups (citizen and hybrid categories) and other organisations (service and leisure categories). As will become evident, we do this to highlight the point that, for some social interests, the absence of dedicated advocacy groups (i.e. citizen groups) is often accompanied with a larger number of non-advocacy service related organisations (i.e. service groups).

If we consider citizen groups at an aggregate level (without considering differences across organisational types), we notice that the three social categories that attract most interest mobilization are ‘disabled and health advocacy’, ‘recreational’, and ‘public interest’, the latter encompassing a mixture of groups focused on the environment, animals, consumer rights, civil liberties, and international issues. Unsurprisingly, we find that leisure groups are most active on issues related to recreation, arts, and culture. The comparison among citizen, service, and hybrid groups, however, yields some more interesting and relevant insights. Recall, the main distinction among these groups is that whereas citizen and service groups respectively consider political voice and the provision services as their core business, hybrid groups seek to achieve both objectives. In that sense, a social sector that relies to a large extent on service groups might encounter substantial difficulties in making its voice heard in the political sphere. If we consider the social categories represented here, the sector ‘social welfare or the poor’ is exactly in this situation, as service and hybrid groups compose more than 75% of the organisations who focus on these issues. We see a similar yet less decisive picture for age-related groups, organisations that focus on issues that concern older or younger persons. By contrast, the gender-related groups in our data set are strongly advocacy-oriented, with 83% of organisations being advocacy groups. The public interest group category displays a similar pattern, although to a lesser extent.

As discussed above, there are choices in terms of whether the group system ought

**Table 4. Interest Diversity of Economic Groups (Business Associations, Trade Unions, Professional Groups and Institutional Groups)**

| ISIC industry classification                                         | Business | Union | Professional | Institutional | Total      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| Agriculture, forestry and fishing                                    | 95.1%    | 0.7%  | 4.2%         | 0.0%          | 100% (142) |
| Human health and social work activities                              | 11.3%    | 1.5%  | 76.7%        | 10.5%         | 100% (133) |
| Arts, entertainment and recreation                                   | 49.2%    | 2.5%  | 47.5%        | 0.8%          | 100% (120) |
| Professional, scientific and technical activities                    | 17.9%    | 0.0%  | 82.1%        | 0.0%          | 100% (117) |
| Manufacturing                                                        | 87.4%    | 2.1%  | 10.5%        | 0.0%          | 100% (95)  |
| Education                                                            | 3.1%     | 4.7%  | 78.1%        | 14.1%         | 100% (64)  |
| Other service activities                                             | 75.0%    | 8.9%  | 14.3%        | 1.8%          | 100% (56)  |
| Information and communication                                        | 77.4%    | 1.9%  | 20.7%        | 0.0%          | 100% (53)  |
| Transportation and storage                                           | 67.3%    | 7.7%  | 25.0%        | 0.0%          | 100% (52)  |
| Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles | 93.3%    | 0.0%  | 6.7%         | 0.0%          | 100% (45)  |
| Financial and insurance activities                                   | 42.9%    | 2.4%  | 54.7%        | 0.0%          | 100% (42)  |
| Administrative and support service activities                        | 47.5%    | 0.0%  | 52.5%        | 0.0%          | 100% (40)  |
| Construction                                                         | 61.3%    | 9.7%  | 29.0%        | 0.0%          | 100% (31)  |

Source: Australian National Interest Groups Dataset

NB: We report data for those ISIC codes with 20 or more cases.

**Table 5. Interest diversity of Associations of Citizens (Citizen Groups, Service Groups, Hybrid Groups and Leisure Groups)**

| Social category                              | Citizen | Hybrid | Service | Leisure | N           |
|----------------------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------------|
| disabled and health advocacy                 | 41.0%   | 16.2%  | 39.3%   | 3.5%    | 100 % (173) |
| recreational                                 | 12.9%   | 0.7%   | 3.8%    | 82.6%   | 100 % (132) |
| public interest                              | 58.7%   | 12.9%  | 11.0%   | 17.4%   | 100 % (109) |
| minorities, religious and nationality groups | 40.7%   | 7.0%   | 23.2%   | 29.1%   | 100 % (86)  |
| groups for social welfare or the poor        | 21.0%   | 14.8%  | 64.2%   | 0.0%    | 100 % (81)  |
| age                                          | 30.8%   | 12.8%  | 46.1%   | 10.3%   | 100 % (78)  |
| arts or cultural                             | 19.2%   | 8.5%   | 2.1%    | 70.2%   | 100 % (47)  |
| gender-specific                              | 76.9%   | 2.5%   | 10.3%   | 10.3%   | 100 % (39)  |

Source: Australian National Interest Groups Dataset (+ Service and Leisure Associations)

NB: We report data for those social categories with 20 or more cases.

to include only associations with policy advocacy as an explicit aim, or whether it should expand to also capture those who may potentially be involved in policy activity (but for which it is not an explicit rationale, such as service groups). Jordan et al. (2012) call this a distinction between ‘national and comprehensive’ and ‘national and policy-active’. They explain that taking a comprehensive approach has advantages because for nationally orientated groups, the potential for ‘spillover’ into politics is quite high. The table above il-

lustrates the implications for the conclusions we draw in terms of representation depending on whether we count service groups as interest groups or not. For instance, we find that social welfare clients and the poor are predominantly organised by service groups, with very few actual interest groups. This resonates with findings in the United States, where Minkoff et al. noted that ‘poverty/social justice organizations are disproportionately represented in both the non-membership and organizational network cluster’ (2008: 543). As a result,

advocacy for these constituencies is likely to be a by-product of the more service-oriented work of charities, rather than result of efforts from a sizeable dedicated set of interest groups (for a more detailed account on how service-based groups increasingly experience a need to engage in policy advocacy, see Phillips and Goodwin 2014). As such, these sets of interests are in principle much more vulnerable to the changing patterns of state tolerance for organisations that combine service delivery with policy advocacy (see Onyx et al. 2010; see also Butcher 2015 for an overview of recent development in state – third sector relations in Australia).

## **Conclusion**

This article started from the assumption that the more-nuanced and more-detailed study of interest groups in Australia will profit from a good sense of the broader universe. To this end, we have provided a data set that mapped the size of the Australian interest group system and demonstrated levels of organisational and policy diversity. In the short term, our work fills a gap that every national context needs to address, namely a reliable source from which to sample groups. This data set can be used to identify particular group types, or organisations that focus on a particular sector or issue, and subsequently examine the organisational differences between these groups, or their varying levels of political engagement. Beyond this, the article sets out a baseline from which future developments related to the mobilisation of interests and lobbying activities of particular groups might be interpreted and assessed.

More substantively, our article provides an assessment of the extent to which interest groups fulfil democratic aspirations, and ensure the representation of a variety of social and economic interests. It highlights good reasons for scholars not to limit their attention to the ‘usual suspects’ or ‘old bulls’, such as well-known economic peak organizations, or social movements, when examining patterns of advocacy. There also is a clear need to look beyond groups based in Canberra, as they only

represent a very small proportion of all interests that are organised at a national scale. Although we found that business and professional associations are much more numerous, as is the case in most other developed countries, we also observed considerable organisational capacity in the trade union and hybrid sectors of the Australian interest group system. At the same time, there is reason for concern about the lack of voices for less-privileged and resourceful groups in society. Our results indicate that these constituencies often strongly rely on hybrid and service groups for representation; organisations who face the difficult challenge of combining the provision of services with advocacy work. Although this latter aspect of their activities is at times politically contested, excluding these groups from the political scene is likely to diminish the exposure of policymakers to voices of less-advantaged groups in society.

An important limitation of our study concerns our focus on national groups. In the context of contemporary debates over the development of the Australian federation, the work we have done here surely warrants further development at the state level. Work on the United States provides a sense of how productive this may be, with a very rich research agenda being based on charting the comparative ebbs and flow of state-level interest group populations (see Gray and Lowery 1996). A related promising avenue for further research involves how groups organise in federal or multi-layered systems (e.g. Constantelos 2010; Fraussen and Beyers 2015; Keating and Wilson 2014). How do individual groups align their internal structure to the policy demands of a federal system, and what do the patterns of competition and cooperation between national and state level groups look like? Finally, to gain more insight into the composition and diversity of national interest group systems, more comparative work in this area seems imperative. So far, most cross-country comparisons have focused on lobbying strategies (e.g. Dur and Mateo 2013; Tresch and Fisher 2015) rather than system-level differences (for noteworthy exceptions, see the Comparative National Associations Project (Johnson 2014); as well

ongoing comparative European projects on comparing interest group populations (e.g. Berkhout 2014). Although this is by no means an easy task, as it presents considerable theoretical and empirical challenges, the investment is essential to facilitate a more comparative approach.

## Endnotes

1. For instance, in the case of the indigenous movement see Sanders (2003); for the health sector see Chapman and Wakefield (2001); on the Australian women's movement, see Maddison and Sawyer (2013, <http://cass.anu.edu.au/research/research-projects/mawm/>).

2. We wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr Erik Johnson, and his Comparative Associations Project (CAP, <http://associationsproject.org>), in providing an electronic copy of the raw directory entries from which we then created our Australian National Interest Groups Dataset. For the definitive summary of this study of comparative associational populations, see Johnson (2014).

3. Walker et al. (2011) for instance highlight that 'in spite of the serious concerns we have addressed about the source's comprehensiveness and potential biases, the (US) Encyclopedia of Associations is widely recognised as the most inclusive census of national nonprofit associations. As a result, it has been used widely by researchers of various segments as well as the entire national nonprofit organisational landscape, and much of what we know about that landscape depends on the source. We have compiled a list of more than 150 refereed journal articles that utilise information drawn from one or more editions of the source. And, in many of those research reports, those knowledgeable about their own small segments of the associational world the source attempts to chronicle provide testimonials about its utility and comprehensiveness of coverage' (1328–1329).

4. As the 2012 directory did not include staff figures for all associations, where possible we complemented data in the directory with infor-

mation from the current (online) version of the directory, as well as information on the websites of the associations.

5. As has been discussed elsewhere, analysing the development of populations retrospectively from a single point source is problematic (Jordan et al. 2012: 152–155). This is because directories only supply data on groups that survive. Thus, we know the establishment dates of groups that survived for inclusion in the 2012 edition, but we miss all those groups that did not make it. In addition, there is a lag for entry into commercial directories of around 4 years (Bevan et al. 2013), which means that 2012 estimates likely reflect the associational picture of some time earlier.

6. The cases that are coded into multiple categories mainly involve combinations of more than one 'section code' (ISIC) or (social) categories that are listed in the included tables. A very small number of cases ( $n = 3$  and  $n = 6$ , respectively) involve combinations of more than one sub-section or sub-category (differences *within* the same section code or social category).

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