



**Roundtable Dialogue**

**“New frameworks for thinking about Australia's relationships with its neighbours in the 21st century”**

**Brief Biographical background of the participants  
and  
their pre-roundtable dot-points for consideration**

**Woodward Conference Centre,  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor Law Building University of Melbourne  
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## David Wilmoth

*Professor David Wilmoth is Pro Vice-Chancellor Group Governance at RMIT. He is a director and previous CEO of RMIT International University Vietnam, RMIT International and other companies and is a director of Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, a US-based NGO. He has worked in federal and state government and the private sector. An urban planner, he has initiated, contributed to and reviewed development projects in a number of countries in Australia's region. His current interests include university development in Vietnam and China, capacity-building for the urban sector in E Asia, starting road safety institutes in S Asia and communications technologies in developing cities.*

1. The global framework into which Australia's relations with its neighbours must fit is in need of reform at a much faster pace than is happening. It must reflect emerging strategic powers and seek a mandate on population better balanced with economic strength. This is not only a matter of the old post-war developed country victors giving way to developing regions, but within the western alliance is a challenge for multilateral rule-based behaviour to overcome raw power-based unilateralism and 'pre-emptive' actions.
2. Increasingly, strategic politics will involve resource and environmental contests, particularly in Australia's regions, and Australia's apparent population-resources imbalance (and population growth pressures) will conflict with views of occupying the continent sustainably.
3. Building networks of bilateral relationships in trade, aid, security and resources should not be discarded – many bilateral agreements in trade and aid can embody the principles for multilateral agreements that take a longer time. But in the long term there has to be a multilateral, global form of governance and Australia's good energies in this direction have been flagging to say the least, with trade agreements driven by politics and aid programs focused on local smaller-scale humanitarian projects rather than long-term capacity-building programs.
4. Only recently has a majority of the world's population become located in urban areas. Conventional means of managing cities, particularly the mega-cities of the developing world, are incapable of meeting the basic millennium development goals – e.g. reducing the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and achieving significant improvement in lives of slum dwellers. This reflects not only a lack of will and resources, but a lack of planning know-how in a tangled world of fragmented, privatised, non-compliant, unsustainable metropolitan growth in the region.
5. Of all modes of post-war international development assistance, capacity building has been least successful. Thousands of fly-in consultants, elaborately-designed projects and expensive solutions typically tied to donor countries have inadvertently undermined fledgling institutions, downplayed local knowledge and distorted development priorities. There is an opportunity for Australia to rethink fundamentally how development assistance can work better for the long-term capacity of partner countries.