



Australian  
National  
University

# ANU Community Meeting

Speech - Andrew Metcalfe

Tuesday 12 May 2026, 1pm

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Thank you, Peter.

As Peter said, my name is Andrew Metcalfe, and as of yesterday I am the acting Pro-Chancellor.

I have been an appointed Council member since mid-August last year.

For all of that time I have also been the Chair of the Special Governance Committee, established to oversee the inquiries into the matters raised in the Senate Committee hearings on 12 August 2025.

I'd like to take the opportunity today to do a few things.

**First**, to introduce myself properly to you.

**Second**, to update you about a number of Council membership developments.

**Third**, to provide you with a briefing about the work of the Special Governance Committee and Dr Thom's resultant report, and the decisions that Council made about it last Friday.

**And fourth**, and very importantly, to make a very clear statement about our Vice Chancellor, Professor Rebekah Brown and colleagues.

But right up front, can I assure you that the ongoing members of Council are very aware of the pain being felt by so many of our community, of so many people here today.

As a Council, we will hold ourselves to account for taking immediate and necessary action. This includes the actions from the Nixon working groups and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Our work will also be supported through the University executive and broader community, with regular reporting on progress.

## **But, first, a little about me**

As someone else once said, I come from Queensland, and I'm here to help!

I am a 37-year veteran of the Australian Public Service.

I was privileged to be a departmental secretary in three departments over a period of 12 years, having been appointed as a Secretary by Prime Ministers Howard, Rudd, Gillard, Morrison, and Albanese.

And along the way, I was sacked by one - Prime Minister Abbott.

I retired as the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in 2023, and am now proud to serve on a range of boards.

I am the Chair of the Gardiner Foundation, supporting the advancement of Victoria's dairy industry, and I am the National President of the Institute of Public Administration Australia.

I am the chair of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, set up in aftermath of the Port Arthur tragedy, and which seeks to keep children and young people free from violence and trauma wherever they live, learn and play.

I am also the ACT government's Public Sector Standards Commissioner, a part-time appointment.

And I am proud to be husband to Jenny, and the father to two adult children.

The author, LP Hartley, famously commenced his 1953 book, *The Go-Between*, with the words, "The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there".

And Toowoomba in Queensland, where I was born in 1959 and grew up in the '60s and '70s, was indeed a foreign country from today's world.

But notwithstanding all the innocence and happiness of my childhood, looking back at that other world, that foreign country, I can now see that there was great ignorance as well.

The Toowoomba that I grew up in had virtually no Indigenous Australians living in it, or, if there were, there were very few and not known to our family or friends.

That is mainly because the surviving Traditional Owners of the Toowoomba and Darling Downs areas - those who survived the introduction of illnesses, those who were not murdered - were forcibly relocated to other places in Queensland.

Now, colleagues, I don't know how many people have read the Uluru Statement From the Heart.

And I won't repeat all the words here, but I do want to just read the final sentence.

"We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future."

As an Australian who loves this country and is proud of my family's almost two centuries here, but one who grew up largely ignorant about the culture and civilisation and sovereignty over millennia of the First Australians who lived on this land, can I simply say how extraordinary that statement is.

The extraordinary offer to walk together for a better future.

There is still so much more for us all to do to make that happen, for it to become a reality.

And that leads me to why I am so privileged to join the ANU Council, given this university's unswerving commitment to be a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures are respected, celebrated and reflected through our research and education.

### **Council issues**

I mentioned earlier that I am the chair of three for-purpose not-for-profit boards. The boards are strong and cohesive, with diverse membership and very strong cultures of respect and positive actions.

I look forward to board meetings knowing that, collectively, we will listen to each other and learn from each other - and work hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for our organisations, our staff, and the people and communities we serve.

The ANU Council I joined as a member appointed by the Minister of Education last August sadly did not often display those virtues.

Indeed, amongst many other issues, there have been several leaks of highly confidential material that clearly related to individuals, and which have clearly and understandably caused great distress. I'll say more about that later.

I still can't really understand, much less explain, why this all happened.

It is very sad.

It has been a very difficult period.

It has greatly impacted many people, including, I am sure, everyone here today.

What we do know is that there were problems with governance and other matters, that had given rise to the TEQSA-Lynelle Briggs investigation, and then the Thom Investigation and also a review by the ANAO.

On a positive note, what I can say is that, over the last 8 months, I have observed exemplary behaviours and contributions from the elected members of the Council.

They have worked very constructively and respectfully throughout a very challenging and difficult period.

I applaud their service.

In my view, in a university where there are so many remarkable and eminent people, those elected Council members are true heroes.

So, let me know move to the issue of Council membership.

I'm sure that everyone here is aware that the former Chancellor, the Hon Julie Bishop, resigned on Thursday 7 May. The Council issued a statement about that last Friday morning.

As a result, the Pro-Chancellor, Dr Larry Marshall, has been appointed as the Acting Chancellor.

And yesterday, I was appointed by Council as acting Pro-Chancellor.

I will also act as Chancellor for any periods that Dr Marshall is overseas or otherwise unable, for any reason, to perform the duties of the office of Chancellor.

Also, in recent weeks and days, five other appointed Council members have resigned from the Council or indicated that they will resign imminently - Ms Alison Kitchen AM, the Hon Wayne Martin AC KC, Ms Tanya Hosch AM, Mr Rob Whitfield AM and Ms Padma Raman PSM.

I am able to say that Council has acknowledged their service, in what has been a particularly difficult governance situation, and wishes them well for the future.

The Acting Chancellor issued a statement about these changes earlier this morning.

The Council now has much to do to rectify what has gone wrong, and to help build a much better governance structure for the University.

In doing so, we will constructively, respectfully, and positively engage with everyone in the University community, with our regulators and accountability bodies, with the Minister and the Parliament.

### **The Special Governance Commission and Dr Thom's Report**

Let me now move to Vivienne Thom's report.

Can I ask everyone, when you have time and if you haven't done so already, to closely read the statement made by Council late Friday afternoon, it is located within the SGC page on the ANU website.

Let me call a spade a spade.

What happened last year was that an elected staff member of Council became so frustrated about the way the Council was operating, and so impacted by various behaviours and events, that she saw no alternative but to resign from the Council.

She then, very properly and as was her right, made various workplace complaints, including through the formal legislative public interest disclosure process.

Very sadly, these complaints were mishandled and were not properly considered or managed.

The staff member and others thus clearly saw no alternative but to go public about the situation, which they did so when appearing before a Parliamentary Committee.

This mishandling was considered so egregious by Dr Thom that she found it amounted to maladministration, and is disclosable conduct under the PID Act framework.

It impacted on both the staff member concerned, as well as others.

So, please let me give you some background.

The Council established the Special Governance Committee (SGC) to manage the University's response to matters raised at a hearing of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee on 12 August 2025.

The Council established the SGC to ensure the issues were considered appropriately, recognising that conflicts of interest prevented some Council members and ANU staff from being directly involved.

The Committee consists of myself as the Chair, Dr Christine Nixon AO APM, and the now acting Provost, Professor Joan Leach.

In fulfilling our Charter, the SGC always sought to act professionally, lawfully and in a trauma-informed way, and to progress its work in a timely manner.

We had the benefit of access to external legal advisers.

Russell Wilson, the ANU Deputy General Counsel and now Acting General Counsel was the sole senior ANU legal officer who assisted our work.

He had no involvement in any of the matters under review, and has performed with great professionalism and distinction.

The Committee has thanked Russell and commends him for his commitment to the best interests of the ANU. He is another ANU hero, in my eyes.

On 1 October 2025, the SGC appointed Dr Vivienne Thom AM to conduct an independent investigation under approved Terms of Reference and to exercise delegated functions under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013* (Cth) (PID Act).

Dr Thom provided her Investigation Report to the Interim Vice-Chancellor on 14 April 2026, in accordance with section 51 of the PID Act.

The Committee is grateful to Dr Thom for undertaking the investigation, noting her complete objectivity, independence, and deep experience in workplace inquiries involving very senior personnel.

Workplace disputes and behavioural inquiries are often complex and affect those involved in personal ways. Given the many personal issues involved, and the clear distress felt by many people about the issues, the Committee's task to give effect to its Charter was not one that the SGC members, Dr Thom or its advisers have enjoyed, and one that was certainly not relished.

This matter has progressed in the context of profoundly complex legal and governance issues, including the interaction of multiple statutory obligations, the fact that several senior ANU officials — including the former Chancellor, former Pro-Chancellor and former Vice-Chancellor — were subject to the investigation, and the existence of a number of other major, concurrent investigations.

Against that background, the SGC and Dr Thom sought to approach the task with fairness and objectivity, and with a commitment to act lawfully, establish what occurred, and do what is right.

The Committee and Council have every confidence that Dr Thom has rigorously considered the evidence available against the applicable standard of proof and has produced a robust and highly defensible findings pursuant to her Terms of Reference and the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth). Dr Thom's report and her findings and recommendations are hers alone. They have in no way been the subject of comments, editing, or change by the SGC.

The report considered a number of matters and made one finding of disclosable conduct in relation to the ANU. This finding related to the ANU procedures for managing complaints raised by or about members of the ANU Council.

The ANU takes this finding of maladministration extremely seriously and will work diligently to address the recommendations of Dr Thom.

In addition, the report made several adverse findings in relation to former Council members in respect of their conduct as Council members.

While these adverse findings did not rise to the threshold of disclosable conduct under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth), there was a recommendation that the Council consider whether some of the conduct breached obligations under the ANU Code of Conduct Policy.

The Council carefully considered this recommendation and notes no further action is required to be taken in circumstances where the former Council members have resigned from the ANU Council.

The Council noted that Dr Thom ensured procedural fairness was provided to all relevant parties in developing her findings.

Colleagues, the Thom report makes for very difficult and, at times, distressing reading.

It relates to very sensitive workplace relationships, and the impact of people's behaviours on others. It is appropriately regarded as confidential.

As you will have seen from the Council's statement, we recognise that the matters examined in the Report have been distressing for many members of our community.

We acknowledge the impact this has had on staff, students and the ANU Community.

We have committed to work to ensure that this situation never arises again.

I'm happy to take questions, and to provide further briefings about the report, on the understanding that I cannot go into confidential matters.

**Some words about the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brown; and others**

Council is aware of media reports into the conduct of Professor Rebekah Brown. The ANU Council does not agree with certain views as published in the Saturday Paper on 2 and 9 May 2026.

Council is very disappointed that media disclosures may have had an adverse impact on Professor Brown's reputation.

Council believes that Professor Brown has the integrity, motivation, skills and humanity to lead the University through this current period.

To be clear, the Council believes Professor Brown and has full confidence in her.

Colleagues, if time permits, I'm happy to take questions or to talk one-on-one after this event.

As I said at the outset, I am here, with you, to help.