

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 18th May 2021

***HiveMind* – new exhibition launch creates a new buzz around democracy in Canberra ahead of World Bee Day**

Canberra's latest exhibition, *HiveMind: Honeybees, Democracy and Me*, launched at MOAD today, Tuesday 18th May 2021, and is set to sweeten your day.

HiveMind is a quirky look at a little-known history of Australia's federal parliaments - a delightful story of passion, serendipity and bees. The Exhibition, opening just in time for World Bee Day on the 20th of May, features a hand-made 'democratic hive' collaborative art installation and invites and challenges visitors to explore what we can learn about our modern system of democracy from honeybees through objects and stories of beekeeping at Parliament House – both old and new.

"Bees provide a template for democracy, the 'sweetspot' of collective decision making," said MoAD's Director, Daryl Karp. "They are nature's example of democracy in action, and we hope to take visitors to the real heart of what democracy is in a way that, hopefully, surprises and inspires," she said.

HiveMind: Honeybees, Democracy and Me explores the entertaining beginnings of beekeeping at Old Parliament House in the late 1970s, to a new age of beekeeping and democracy at Australia's Parliament House today.

The exhibition is a light, playful look at the history of honeybees on the grounds of the nation's decision-making house and what bees' collective decision making can teach us about hitting the sweet spot of democracy. *HiveMind* features hexagonal panels from the collaborative art piece forming a honeycomb on the walls, beekeeping artefacts kindly provided by the Yates family and Mr Farrell, and imagery of Parliament's beekeeping history from archives.

Australia was one of the first countries in the world to allow beekeeping on Parliament House grounds, and this exhibition uncovers and tells the story through the eyes of William Yates MP who sought permission to keep bees at Old Parliament House.

"The Yates family is delighted that the role of bees and beekeeping and their connection to our democracy is being celebrated," said Peter Yates AM, son of William Yates MP. "The fact that our father, William Yates, was determined to bring his joy of beekeeping to Parliament House is a wonderful reminder of his passion, humour and approach to problem solving," he said.

The stories were brought to life in a panel discussion at the exhibition launch on Tuesday 18th May. Walkley-winning journalist, presenter and commentator, Jan Fran led the panel with William Yates' son, Peter Yates AM, and current Head Beekeeper of Parliament, Cormac Farrell, at MoAD.

"We often think of democracy and voting as a uniquely human process, but honeybees don't just use democratic processes, they specifically use this for some of their critical life-or-death decisions," said Cormac.

"Their system of 'first past the post' voting is an example of how democracy doesn't just extend back to ancient Greece - it has probably existed since the time of the dinosaurs," he continued.

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Extracts from *HiveMind* Exhibition Companion

By Alex McDermott

“Honeybees? Democracy?”

Honeybees model a sort of ideal template of what makes a fully flourishing democracy.

Over millions of years they have evolved practices to arrive at good collective choices. Their collective wisdom is generated not from the top down but through diverse viewpoints.

Likewise, human democracies embed similar practices when it comes to making big and important decisions.

These practices involve all of us – as an engaged citizenry, as a general public – involving themselves in the public conversation.

It also involves key institutions, like Parliament, where our representatives debate, decide and action key decisions.

In *HiveMind: Honeybees, Democracy & Me* we unpack these ideas.

We do this with honeybees, and the body of scholarship built up across decades by Thomas Seeley. Professor in Biology in the Neurobiology and Behaviour Department at Cornell University, and author of *Honeybee Democracy* [2010], Seeley’s work provides the detailed thinking to sustain the ‘democratic practices’ connection between humans and honeybees.”

Exhibition Background

William Yates MP

When Victorian Liberal backbencher William Yates asked Speaker of the House, Billy Snedden, if he could keep bees on Parliament Grounds on April 1st 1976, the Speaker thought it was an April Fool’s joke and granted permission to play along with the joke. But Yates was not joking and brought his bees to the Capital and Australia became one of the first countries in the world to allow beekeeping on the grounds of its national parliament. “The Yates family is delighted that the role of bees and beekeeping and their connection to our democracy is being celebrated,” said Peter Yates AM, son of William Yates. “The fact that our father, William Yates, was determined to bring his joy of beekeeping to Parliament House is a wonderful reminder of his passion, humour and approach to problem solving,” he continued.

Canberra local **Cormac Farrell** re-established the tradition of beekeeping at Australia’s home of Parliament (APH) in 2017 following a parliamentary report on the plight of honeybees in an effort to increase awareness of this cause and educate parliament on the industries that rely on bees. Honey from these hives now appear as gifts for visiting dignitaries and groups.

The HiveMind Art Installation started as a collaborative art piece constructed by members of the public during the Enlighten Festival in March 2020. Members of the public could write words of

advice or life lessons on hexagonal panels to become part of a honeycomb puzzle. These public submissions will be displayed in the HiveMind: Honeybees, Democracy and Me exhibition as part of a honeycomb covering the walls of MoAD. The exhibition then leads to Your Faithfully, an interactive activity inspiring the public to write a letter to their local MP that MoAD will send to the addressee.

HiveMind: Honeybees, Democracy and Me will be open for from 18 May 2021, this is a free, nonticketed exhibition.

About MoAD

The Museum of Australian Democracy celebrates Australia's proud history as a democratic nation and actively promotes the participation of its citizens in determining its future. MoAD is a museum not just of objects but of ideas. In our iconic heritage building, we tell the story of Australia's journey to becoming one of the world's most vibrant and multicultural democratic nations. MoAD is a place where stories, conversations and narratives from myriad perspectives can be heard and discussed. MoAD is open 9am to 5pm daily. For more information, please visit moadoph.gov.au.

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Images are available via [Dropbox](#).