Preface

In 2011 we published a study of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that focused on its adaptation over time to meet the changing situations and issues faced by its members. That project began as an attempt to understand the relationship between Australia and the OECD, and was funded under that title by the Australian Research Council. A number of articles on Australia and the OECD were produced, but that book sought to fill an obvious gap with a comprehensive account of the organisation itself.

We realised, however, that a full understanding of the OECD required a similarly full understanding of its members’ activities in relation to the organisation. Moreover, there were no studies of which we were aware that provided a detailed analysis of those activities, other than in relation to specific issues; indeed, detailed studies of how nation states engage with international organisations are few and far between. There were few studies of a comparative nature, examining, for example, government motives for taking up membership, the strategies they adopted, or not, to guide their work at the OECD, or how government attitudes to the organisation changed over time. Finally, there were no detailed historical studies of Australian activities in relation to the OECD, an area of particular interest to us, given that our academic base was in Australia. In addition, we were aware that Australia’s membership of the OECD was part of a long-established trend to the membership of international, intergovernmental organisations, one that had commenced with its membership of the League of Nations, the International Labour Organization and the Permanent Court of International Justice.

We had also become aware that, based on our archival work in the UK, USA and Australia, as well as that in Paris at the OECD archives, there was a wealth of material available on which to base a study of national activity relating to the organisation. Indeed, with rare exception, the archival records of almost every government department or agency that we investigated demonstrated a lengthy, if varying, involvement with one or more OECD committees. Hence, we decided to complete a book-length study of the history of Australia’s involvement with the OECD,
commencing with its slowly expanding involvement as a non-member observer at a number of committees in the early 1960s.

It was clear that such a work would require access not only to archival records but access to more current records so that we could trace the varying nature of Australia’s involvement over time. We have based what follows on archival records and both the current records of agencies participating in the OECD and those held by National Archives. We have also drawn on the insights provided by participants, including four successive Australian Ambassadors until research was completed in late 2014, as well as numerous other officials.

Our understanding of the OECD was assisted by off-the-record semi-structured interviews (sometimes more than once) with numerous people, whom we would like to thank. These include successive Australian Permanent Representatives to the OECD: Ian Forsyth, Veronique Ingram, Christopher Langman, and Christopher Barrett, as well as some of those who occupied the position in earlier days, notably Philip Flood, Ralph Hillman and Ted Evans.

Interviewees also include Kathy Laurent, for many years office manager and Assistant to the Ambassador at the OECD Delegation and who facilitated many appointments with delegation members, OECD Secretariat members and ambassadors of other Members (and her successor Natallia Kuchynskaya). Kathy was not only an immense help to us over successive visits, but also an informative interview subject, providing much depth on how the organisation of the Delegation had changed over the years. Among the members of the Delegation, we would especially like to thank: Patrick Blake, James Bullock, Tim Crowe, Matthew Flavel, Joanne Fredericksen, Deborah Fulton, Angela McGrath, Lyndal Manson, Rodney Muir, Margaret Pearce, Roland Pittar, Peter Waddell-Wood, Steve Unwin and James Wiblin.

An Australian in the Secretariat, John West (OECD Public Affairs) was of great assistance in providing information and facilitating interviews. Among the many members of the OECD Secretariat, past and present, that were kind enough to talk with us, we wish to thank all of them for sharing their insights. In particular we wish to thank: Angel Gurría (OECD Secretary-General), Rolf Alter, Sergio Arzeni, Ken Ash, Nicola Bonucci, Carolyn Ervin, Anthony Gooch, Jan de Geus, Lorens Lorentsen, Grace Perez-Navarro, Anthony Rottier, Janet West, John Dryden, Mario Pezzini, Michael Osborne, Michael Ryan, Nobuo Tanaka, Odile Sallard, Carlo Padoan, Stefan Tangerman, William Hynes, Sylvan Giguere, Donald Johnston (former OECD Secretary-General), Kumiharu Shigehara, David Henderson, Ron Gass, Barry McGaw, John Martin, Richard Carey, Alan Moran and Jean-Pierre Cotis. We would like to offer particularly
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We were also informed by interviews with a large number of Ambassadors of OECD Members, initially for our more general book on the OECD published in 2011, but their views have also informed the current volume. We therefore wish to thank Ambassadors Laurence Argimon-Pistre (European Commission); Fernando Ballestero (Spain); Joan Boer (Netherlands); Bruno Cabras (Italy); Sarah Dennis (New Zealand); Shin-ichi Kitajima (Japan); Tae-shin Kwon (Korea); David Lyscom (United Kingdom); Constance Morella (United States); Harald Neple (Norway); Steffen Smidt (Denmark); and Stephanie Lee (Deputy Permanent Representative, New Zealand).

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The research for this book was conducted under Special Access Arrangements under s56(2) of the Archives Act 1983, and access to more contemporary files still held by agencies under security clearance. (An exception was the Australian Taxation Office, from which we were unable to obtain consent.) In both cases, agencies have read and approved what we have written, but they by no means share all our views, but (especially with more contemporary material) we have necessarily agreed upon language that recognises in places the need for sensitivity to
ongoing relationships. The views expressed, of course, are our own, rather than those of the Australian Government and its agencies, or of the OECD.

At all times, we have owed an immense debt to Dr David Lee, Director, Historical Publications and Research Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for his assistance and his wise counsel, and Christine Schaeffer at the OECD desk at DFAT.

And finally, we thank our families for their support and understanding throughout what has proven to be more than a decade dominated by things OECD.

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