

Vale Peter McCawley

by Ian Anderson

24 July 2023



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Australia – and the Asia-Pacific region more broadly – has just lost one of its most gifted development economists. Dr Peter McCawley, AM, died peacefully in Canberra, Australia, on 18 July, having had cancer for some time.

A person is obviously much more than their CV, but Peter's CV is worth noting. Even just reading the first six items in his CV – all written in Peter's characteristic short, sharp, clear style – tells us he was a person committed to international development and policymaking at the most senior levels, right from the beginning. His CV starts:

1972-1974	Lecturer, Faculty of Economics, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta
1974-1975	Economic Adviser to (then) Mr Bill Hayden, MP, Minister for Social Security and later Treasurer of Australia
1976-1985	Research Fellow (1976-80) and Senior Research Fellow and Head, Indonesia Project (1981-85), Dept of Economics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University
1986-1991	Deputy Director General, AIDAB; (1) Policy Planning and Management Division (1986-89); (2) Community, Commercial and International Programs Division (1989-91)
1991	Economic Adviser to Mr John Kerin, MP, Treasurer of Australia
1992-1996	Executive Director, Asian Development Bank, Manila (representing Australia, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Solomon Is., and Tuvalu)

And that is just a truncated version. Peter's CV also includes being Dean of the Asian Development Bank Institute in Tokyo; a visiting fellow in the Arndt-Corden Economics Division at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific; a member of the Jackson Committee on the Review of the Australian Overseas Aid Program; economic adviser to the Indonesian Planning Agency, Bappenas; an adjunct professor at the University of Queensland; and a member of the board of The Asia Foundation. And so on.

He published seven books, including a history of the first 50 years of the Asian Development Bank which was translated into both Japanese and Chinese. Several of his economic books were written or co-authored in Bahasa Indonesia. He published over 30 articles in newspapers on development issues, and over 30 book reviews. He published 63 articles in journals and books, often in Bahasa Indonesia.

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The articles covered a wide range of topics, all with brisk, concise titles. To name just a few: “The price of electricity” in the Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies; “Aid and poverty: how Australia’s aid program helps the poor”; and “Forty years of Australian-Indonesian relations: what have we learned?”

But Peter was much more than a bureaucrat or academic author. He was a bridge-builder between Australia and the countries in our region. To illustrate, he once **drew up a table** on how rich countries and developing countries can view the same development challenge from almost totally different perspectives – on environmental challenges, for example, the “green and blue” agenda of deforestation often being of primary concern to rich countries, the “brown” agenda of power generation often of primary concern to developing countries.

Peter was passionate about poverty reduction, seeing it as the central goal of development, but one that could only be tackled in poor countries by broad-based growth. His was a perspective borne of his economic training, his first-hand experience, and his enormous empathy. It is a perspective that is all too rare today among multilateral and bilateral donors.

Peter was generous with his time and knowledge. He was respectful of, and interested in, cultural diversity. He was mischievous and witty when encountering the pompous. He was a lover of Shakespeare. And a hater of long sentences.

He will be missed.

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Ian Anderson is an associate at the Development Policy Centre. He has a PhD from the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University; over 25 years of experience at AusAID; and since 2011 has been an independent economics consultant.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/vale-peter-mccawley-20230724/>