



4 May 2023

A tribute to China Matters board director Allan Gyngell from Linda Jakobson

In the many tributes written about Allan Gyngell over the past two days, he has been hailed as a brilliant mind and an outstanding Australian who made an enormous contribution to his country's foreign policy. Many have also noted his wit, his charm, and his unassuming way in which he made his arguments as well as how generously he gave his time to one and all.

I most certainly benefited from Allan's wisdom. He was instrumental to my understanding of how Australia approaches foreign policy long before he became a board director of China Matters. I knew little about Australia's international outlook when I first met him in his ONA office on 7 April 2011, only my fourth day in Australia as the Lowy Institute's East Asia Program Director. From that day on, Allan took me under his wing and from him, alongside Stephen FitzGerald and Dick Woolcott, I learned much of what I know about Australian foreign policy.

When China Matters was founded in 2014 Allan first assumed the role of Chair of the Advisory Council. In November 2015 he became a board director; and from then on Allan was a constant and invaluable advisor to the entire board.

Allan was my sparring partner and immensely inspiring. He not only wrote his own analysis, but he regularly prodded me to write – especially lessons to be learned from Finland's experience of living in the shadow of a huge authoritarian neighbour. In the heyday of China Matters – i.e., during the years that our work was perceived as valuable in Canberra – Allan and I would brainstorm on a weekly basis. When the Morrison Government deemed China Matters persona non grata and cut our funding, Allan and I were on the phone just as often, contemplating ways to ensure an independent voice on China issues remains alive in Australia.

Allan's deliberations about Australia's relationship with China and the way in which China Matters could best support informed policy-making were based on two key convictions: first, the need for public servants' and political leaders' to deepen their understanding of the drivers of Beijing's policies and what is actually happening in China; and second, the need to cultivate a diversity of evidence-based views in Australia on how to interpret China and its actions.

Allan was so much more than just a brilliant mind. He was one of the most decent human beings I have known. His unique humility is reflected in the philosophical way he approached the sudden end of his life: In the email Allan wrote to China Matters Chair Kevin McCann and me the day after he had received the diagnosis, he noted: "I have had a happy and rich life. My death, when it comes may be sad, but it will never be described as tragic."

Vale, my dear friend. You will be deeply missed.

Linda Jakobson