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The Contributor.

A journal of articles published by the
Policy Committee of the Liberal Party of Australia (WA Division)

Michaelia Cash | John Roskam | Sandra Brewer | Scott Stirling | Phil Twiss & Carlos Fortuna
Dean Smith | Matthew Ogilvie | Jeremy Buxton | Nick Goiran & Bianca Cobby
Peter Hudson | Fraser Wipp | Daniel Earl | Greg Ahern | Peter Stewart

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The purpose of this document is to stimulate public policy debate by providing individuals with an avenue to express their views on topics of interest or expertise.

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Editorial Team: Scott Stirling, Peter Hudson, Jeremy Buxton and Sherry Sufi.

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If Liberalism stands for anything ... it's for the passion to contribute to the nation, to be free, but to be contributors, to submit to the discipline of the mind instead of the ordinary, dull discipline of a regimented mass of people.

- Sir Robert Menzies

27th July 1962

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this special sixth edition of our policy journal marking its 10th anniversary. Since our first edition in June 2014, this publication has served as a vital platform for party members and experts to share ideas and shape party policy.

The political landscape has no doubt seen some significant shifts since our first publication, with the rise of social media and AI dramatically changing the way we engage with politics.

Yet our commitment to fostering a democratic space for diverse voices remains unwavering.

I am proud to say that this journal has not only sparked meaningful discussions but also helped identify and amplify talented voices.

A testament to this is Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, who authored a pivotal piece on Indigenous empowerment in our third edition in 2017 when she was an Alice Springs Councillor.

Last year, the entire country witnessed her lead role, alongside Warren Mundine, in ensuring Australia voted for unity at the referendum in October 2023.

This publication stands as a testament to the power of free thought and expression.

In light of the recent instability around the world, there couldn't be a better time to celebrate the freedoms and democracy we continue to enjoy in Australia.

We hope that this edition will continue to inspire readers as much as the previous five editions did.

As we come together to celebrate this milestone, we recommit to promoting robust yet respectful debate in our party.

Thanks for your ongoing support.

Feel free to reach out to our editorial team with any feedback or suggestions you might have.

Regards,

Dr Sherry Sufi

Policy Chairman

Liberal Party of Australia (WA Division)



Faith Communities: Crucial part of our nation

By Michaelia Cash

Australians This goes much deeper than worship, where members of religious groups gather for prayers, sermons and other rituals directly related to their various beliefs.

Faith cuts across every area of life. Faith communities are involved in all aspects of our society including education, charity and relief work, cultural events, celebrations and festivals, health and wellbeing initiatives, community outreach, aged care and interfaith dialogue, just to name a few.

This wide ranging and deep involvement in our community is why faith groups should be treated with dignity and respect when a government is altering laws that directly affect them.

Unfortunately, the Albanese Labor Government's approach to their proposed changes to religious discrimination laws has fallen way short of what should be expected.

The legislation is based on the report released in March from the Australian Law Reform Commission on religious schools and discrimination law. The draft legislation prepared by the government - but never released to the public - reflects the recommendations of that report.

Faith groups remain either confused because they've been left in the dark or unable to publicly discuss the controversial legislation. This really is no way for a government to treat such a significant issue.

Some faith groups have been given the opportunity to view limited parts of the legislation, or to undertake a limited 'page-turn' of the government's proposals - subject to time constraints and strict obligations that they do not discuss or distribute the proposed changes. Others have not been included in the Government's so-called consultation process and have looked to the Coalition to bring them up to date.

Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus provided the proposed legislation to me, with the proviso that I could discuss it with faith groups, but am not allowed to release it publicly.

This has led the farcical situation where the Opposition is being asked by stakeholders to brief them on government legislation that will affect them deeply.

I've spent almost two months meeting with faith leaders of most religions from across the country. I've been involved in round tables and also attended a number of "town hall" meetings at Christian schools.

In discussions with religious schools and faith leaders there are key issues that are being raised over and over again.

They have told us that the ability to maintain the ethos and values of religious schools is under constant attack from state and territory governments.

This is an important issue and why we will continue to stand up for faith communities.

Hundreds of thousands of Australian families choose to educate their children in faith-based schools. Those families do so, at least in part, because of the values of the school community, and their choices ought to be respected.

Under Queensland law, it may soon be unlawful for a Catholic school to express a preference for employing Catholics – let alone ensure teacher conduct aligns with the school's religious ethos.

What does this do to a school that is trying to build a community based on shared religious values, and to ensure that teachers model these values for students?

It is completely understandable why faith leaders across the board have identified protection from state and territory attacks as a key issue.

Another key issue is whether the law could be used to force religious leaders to change the way they explain their beliefs in places of worship.

Could religious vilification laws reach into the pulpit? Could a priest be sued for the way they explain church doctrines from the pulpit?

A third issue that keeps coming up is to what extent can a school ensure staff conduct and behaviours adhere to the school's ethos and mission?

This is an important issue for faith-based schools. Part of the Government's package would involve changes to existing protections in the Sex Discrimination Act. Faith leaders and religious schools are very concerned that these changes would strip away a school's ability to manage staff behaviour – even if the school is acting in good faith to preserve a school's religious mission and ethos.

A fourth issue that has been raised by faith leaders is a question about religious bodies corporate.

They have raised very good questions about the potential for bizarre and unintended outcomes. If a faith-based community outreach group is protected from discrimination as an unincorporated association, should it lose that protection if it decides to incorporate?

A fifth issue is the way that all these risks are magnified by the Government's Costs Protection Bill, which is currently before the Senate. This Bill would mean that in almost all cases schools would have to pay significant legal costs when cases are brought against them.

For these schools, every dollar that is spent fighting cases in court is a dollar not spent educating a child. Schools want to educate, not litigate.

Significant parts of this legislative package are new and have never previously been scrutinised by a Parliamentary inquiry.

There are significant questions whether proposed changes, would allow schools to build a community of faith.

From the feedback I've been getting from religious leaders and organisations the Government still has a lot of work to do before this Bill will receive their support.

I have made it very clear that the Coalition's guiding principle is that any legislative package brought forward by the Government must be one that takes religious people forwards, not backwards.

We will keep fighting for the rights of faith-based communities in this country.

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash is Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General, Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.



Freedom to say two plus two make four

By John Roskam

For too long, Australians committed to freedom have consoled themselves believing that while the condition of freedom in this country is desperate, it's not yet serious. As Liberals we must understand that to win the war for our culture we first must want to fight for that culture.

As governments embrace government censorship of our speech and opinions, and as the heritage that's created liberal democracy and the rule of law is obliterated, too many of us have shrugged our shoulders and uttered some variation of 'Oh well, it's always darkest before dawn,' or 'The tide will turn' or 'The pendulum will swing back.' But a pendulum swung from one side to the other never returns to its original position.

'Australians are suspicious of persons in authority, but towards impersonal authority they are very obedient.' Hirst argued government arrived here in 1788 fully formed, and whatever freedoms Australians once enjoyed were given to them, not won, and that because of our history, the state has been relatively benign. We, therefore, tend to assume the best, not the worst, of our rulers. The reality is that today in Australia, freedom is very much a niche interest.

We must appreciate that the institutions of education, the mainstream media, and civil society are all now unequivocally hostile to freedom. They cannot be renovated or 'recaptured'. The only alternative is to create new and alternative institutions. It's inconceivable, for example, that Australia's universities will tolerate, let alone embrace, genuine diversity of opinion - they are too far gone. There's no point attempting to 'reform' something irretrievably broken.

My colleague at the Institute of Public Affairs, Dr Bella d'Abrera has recently written of the National Curriculum,

What is currently being unleashed in classrooms across this country is about as far away from a traditional curriculum as you can possibly get. Rather, it is an anarcho-political manifesto which seeks to dismantle the entire edifice of the modern

state of Australia by undermining its values and institutions.

The progressive educationalists are using their considerable institutional power to bring forth and legitimise radical ideas such as the notion that Australia is a fundamentally racist country, and that all of its institutions are smokescreens for racial domination. It introduces children to the fiction of 'systemic racism', as well as the racist concept of 'whiteness' being problematic.

Australia's universities are no longer places of debate and discussion (if they ever were). A survey commissioned by the Institute of Public Affairs in 2019 of 500 domestic Australian university students found 31 per cent had been made to feel uncomfortable by a university teacher for expressing their opinion, and 59 per cent believed they have been prevented from voicing their opinion because of the actions of other students. Charles Handy put it this way:

We cannot wait for great visions from great people, for they are in short supply. It is up to us to light our own small fires in the darkness.

In a remarkable book first published in 1995, 'Private Truths, Public Lies - The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification', Timur Kuran explains how totalitarian regimes are sustained not only by terror and violence, but also a pervasive culture of mendacity. In Eastern Europe under communism,

individuals routinely applauded speakers they disliked, joined organisations whose mission they opposed, ostracised dissidents they admired, and followed orders they considered nonsensical, unjust, or inhuman, among other manifestations of consent and accommodation.

'The lie,' wrote Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the early 1970s, 'has been incorporated into the state system as the vital link holding everything together, with billions of tiny fasteners, several dozen to each man.' He then asked rhetorically, 'What does it mean, not to lie?' It means 'not saying what you don't think, and that includes not whispering, not opening your mouth, not raising your hand, not casting your vote, not feigning a smile, not lending your presence, not standing up, and not cheering.'

In 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' Orwell makes a compelling statement about the power of the individual to hold true to themselves. For Big Brother, the 'heresy of heresies was common sense'. Winston asks himself 'If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable - what then?' But then he realises:

They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's centre. With the feeling that he was speaking to O'Brien, and also that he was setting forth an important axiom, he wrote:

Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.

John Roskam is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Australian Way of Life at the Institute of Public Affairs.



To me the Liberal Party of Australia has always been the custodian of both the conservative and classical Liberal traditions in the Australian polity. That is its special strength. It does best when it demonstrates that duality.

It should be wary of those individuals or groups who parade the view that only one of those two philosophical thought streams represents 'true' Australian Liberalism.

- John Howard



Cost of Labor's Obsessions

By Sandra Brewer

My five-year-old niece is taking an interest in my new role as a political candidate. She's trying to ascertain what my new job would be, should I be fortunate to be elected as the Member for Cottesloe in March 2025. Her mum has said the closest idea she has come to understand is that "Aunty Sandra will tell her what to do". God forbid.

The concept of what MP's and governments should do is worth a moment of thought.

Should their role be to command and control – as my niece imagines – by picking winners or banning unpopular enterprises? To develop policy that benefits only some businesses that meet special criteria but not others? To put people through an ordeal simply to meet the government's own rules and regulations?

Or should governments simply prioritise providing efficient services to the community and try to make our lives easier and better? I think so.

After seven years of the McGowan and Cook governments in Western Australia, we have sufficient evidence to determine providing efficient services to the community is not Labor's priority.

Every time this Labor government has come up with a policy solution to streamline or fast track an activity of government, you can be sure it's because of their failure to provide efficient services in the first place.

The first prime example is Western Power service levels. Western Power has been criticised for failing to deliver power connections to projects in the state – including critical residential sites in the middle of a housing crisis, commercial projects and industrial facilities. According to a local builder, for a simple two-lot subdivision in Perth's western suburbs, the wait for a simple green-dome power connection was nine months. News articles report stories of childcare centres, industrial facilities and hospitality venues waiting upwards of a year to get power upgrades.

But have no fear – Labor has a policy solution! Fast Track Power Connection Measures were quickly announced following all the bad headlines. The media release boasted “The Cook Government has slashed even more red tape in a bid to increase Western Australia’s housing supply with a raft of initiatives to accelerate the installation of new power connections for residential subdivisions”. Some might say that’s a very high level of spin on the situation.

The special treatment available in the Fast Track pathway is limited to a small proportion of applicants in the residential land property development sector. For other businesses, like factories, childcare centres or food outlets, they may still be reliant on diesel generators.

The second example is the failure of environmental approvals to meet the standard of efficient service provision by government. In an unusually candid admission, the government’s own media release stated ‘...a short, sharp review of environmental approvals, commissioned by the Cook Government in October... found approvals processes have become overly complex, time-consuming, and costly - holding back economic development without any benefit to the environment.’

The appropriate policy response would be to redesign almost every aspect of service delivery by the Department of Water, Environment Regulation (DWER). Fortunately for long-suffering applicants, this was recommended by the review authors and accepted.

While admitting incompetence and in anticipation of a program of months - if not years - to turn around the environmental approvals process, the government then announced a New Coordinator General role to fast-track priority approvals across government. Additionally, the Environment Minister gave himself the power to direct the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to assess a project of State significance within a specified timeframe. Once again, these bespoke fast-track or call-in powers only apply to applicants deemed worthy of special treatment.

Every day, Western Australians deal with government departments that do not prioritise providing efficient services to the community to make our lives easier and better.

Labor’s obsession and focus is on Metronet and road projects. Nothing else seems to matter.

Consider the everyday experience of someone trying to process a licence change with the Department of Transport’s Driver and Vehicle Services. It is one of the most basic services of government, yet we hear reports of queues around the block for the privilege of

getting a ticket to join yet another queue. You know it’s bad when the homepage of the website includes the warning “If you need to visit, check the queues at our DVS centre locations.”

For families who have been through the experience of assisting a young person to get their P plates, it’s an ordeal that can require days off work and long-distance travel to far-flung testing locations. According to the Department in 2023, the pass rate percentage has slumped to an all-time low in the past two years at a 35 per cent pass average, and at a cost of \$113.70 to per test for the Practical Driving Assessment. In a cost-of-living crisis, it’s an enormous imposition on families.

Again, it’s a case of this Labor government not providing efficient services to the community to make our lives easier and better.

Limited space in The Contributor does not permit an examination of Labor’s failure to deliver efficient services in health, community safety and education, but likely there are many more examples where our lives are not easier or better.

On the Australian Public Service Academy website under the heading Delivering Great Policy, a bureaucrat states that “A policy is like a solution to a problem”. Of course, many of the problems needing policy solutions in Western Australia are of Labor’s making, caused by their failure to deliver efficient services. It’s a layered cake of policy making, all adding to inefficiency and complexity.

So, the next time you hear a new policy announcement designed to streamline or fast track a government process, recognise they are code words that really mean ‘we’ve failed to provide efficient services to the community’.

When my little niece is old enough to understand, I’ll explain to her that the best governments are the ones that have a priority to deliver efficient services that make her life easier and better.

Sandra Brewer is the Liberal Candidate for Cottesloe.

“

I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

-Evelyn Beatrice Hall



Policy Development: Design Thinking Methodology

By Scott Stirling

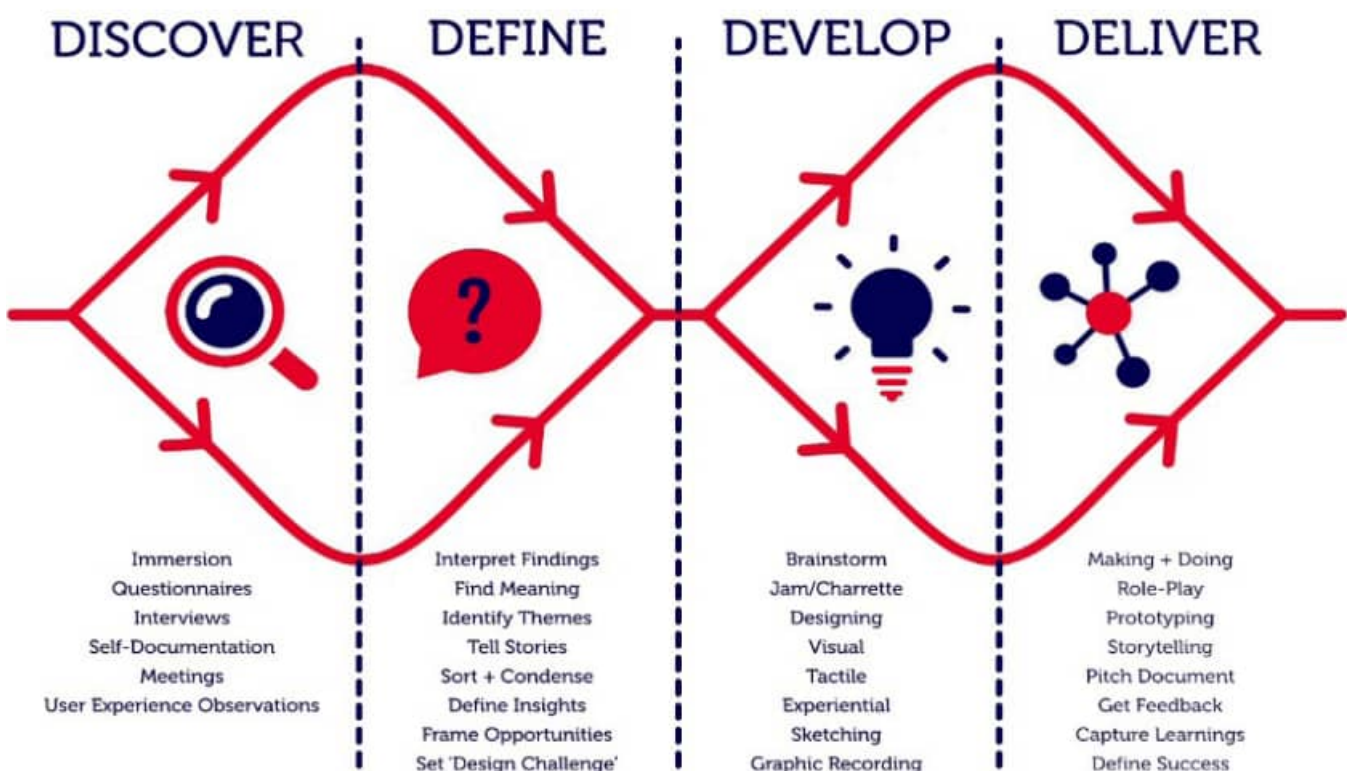
At the 2021 election the lay party came to the conclusion that the development of policy should not be the exclusive domain of the Parliamentary Wing.

What followed was the single most influential leap forward in the process of involving more people in policy making. Sub-committees reached out to people who would not have normally participated, and hundreds joined the cause.

This was incredibly cathartic, as it enabled people who had felt that their voices were not being heard to suddenly be right in the thick of a new way to develop policy. Naturally as we have come through the electoral cycle, we have had people drop away, and the policy discussions with the Parliamentary Wing have started to heat up. Themes have emerged and the large sub-committees have given way to a smaller set of working groups that are in direct contact with Shadow Ministers.

This experiment yielded excellent results, revealing a natural cycle of soliciting public views, identifying themes, and prototyping responses. But politics as is much a fight over what the question is as it has been over the solution.

I have come to the conclusion that the Design Thinking methodology, popularised by the d.school at Stanford University, may have specific application to our policy development process. In adopting a formal process that has its roots in best-practice we will give people inside and outside of the Party confidence that, win or lose, we will follow a methodical process of first determining what we believe the problem is, and then our solutions to it.



The methodology employs a 'double diamond' process, consisting of two phases: the first to define the problem, and the second to create solutions.

Two types of process occur in each of the 'diamonds' – the first is a **divergent** phase, where you must suspend judgement and collect as much data as you can. This can take the form of interviews, questionnaires, surveys, meetings, observations and in the case of our Party, analysis of news coverage and election results.

What follows is then a **convergent** process, where you begin to bring back that judgement or critical thinking to interpret your findings, identify key themes, developed stories and personas that exemplify your key customers and ultimately, redefine the problem. Employing personas would allow for better understanding of diverse voter views, and what policies would resonate with key segments.

The second diamond the asks you to take that redefined problem and again suspend judgement, in order to develop, brainstorm, sketch, and experiment with solutions that could solve for the problem you arrived at after the first diamond. Mass ideas is the name of this game. Then for a second time you round the corner, bring back your critical thinking and start prototyping, testing, delivering iterations of the solution and get micro-feedback loops going to refine the prototype until you have something you think will work.

I contend that the next leap forward in the professionalising of our policy development is a structure like that described above. Our starting point would be the post-election review, a process we already do that seeks out mass data and information to formulate some understanding of what worked and what didn't. In the policy development context, this would be the equivalent of the sub-committees and member surveys we've done in the past, but on steroids.

Those sub-committees would then round that initial corner and start interpreting the data, looking for themes, and starting to build a view of not only what the various problems or policies we could be solving are, but also who our customers really are in the context of these critical issues. The delivery of reports by the sub-committees to Party HQ would be the closest equivalent here, however we are starting to get into uncharted territory from here.

About halfway through the electoral cycle we would then arrive at a redefined problem. We would have amassed data and done thematic analysis and we would now better understand the problem. It is important to stress that finding the 'problem' is not finding what went 'wrong' at the election, but rather finding the challenge that needs solving from a policy development perspective.

Small working groups would then set about brainstorming and experimenting with Shadow Cabinet on solutions, and then tactically begin to test those ideas in the lead up to the election. It is into this milieu that our new candidates would be thrown, rather than the empty abyss of the present.

More important than the outcomes would be the certainty around the process, around both when and where you could contribute, and the tactical realities of choosing which policies will solve the problem, and when and how to announce them.

Applying Design Thinking principles offers a structured, innovative approach to enhancing our policy development process, meriting deeper exploration.

Scotty Stirling is the President of Burt Division and a Member of the Policy Committee.



Safeguarding Sovereignty: Nuclear Submarines in WA

By Phil Twiss and Carlos Fortuna

In the past few years, we have witnessed a whirlwind of strategic realignment, uncertainty, and disruption.

In 2020, the federal government's Defense Strategic Update (DSU) underscored significant shifts in the global strategic landscape, compelling Australia to fortify itself against the specter of high-intensity conflict. The subsequent withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a pivotal moment followed swiftly by Australia's decision to pivot away from the conventional Attack Class submarine program in favor of the promised nuclear-powered fleet, made possible by the historic AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

While celebrated as a decisive political victory by many, including the authors of this essay, the transition from conventional to nuclear powered submarines brings with it a level of preparedness unparalleled in Australian history. For Western Australia, this undertaking represents both a monumental opportunity and challenge alike.

In this essay, we delve into a number of the essential considerations that the Western Australian state government must address in concert with its federal and local government counterparts. The strategic security of Australia and the safe, sustainable stewardship of nuclear energy systems powering the new Australian submarines hinges upon these efforts.

At the core of this endeavour lie myriad questions, from the mundane to the mesmerising yet all in crucial need of answers. These inquiries span a breadth of issues, including the formulation of state and local government policies necessary to craft revised, purpose-fit regulations supportive of new construction endeavors for housing, civil infrastructure, and industrial facilities. They extend to considerations around the construction of nuclear-safe facilities and the imperative of ensuring environmental stewardship in critical areas such as Cockburn Sound, Garden Island, Point Peron, and

Shoalwater Bay. Importantly, against the backdrop of today's energy landscape, questions arise around the stewardship of nuclear-powered submarines and what this means for broader discussions surrounding nuclear power generation in Australia.

Public License to Operate

While the home basing and maintenance of US built Virginia & AUKUS class nuclear powered submarines in Western Australia may appear a forgone conclusion, we must not underestimate what may be termed the "Public License to Operate." Engaging local communities is paramount to garnering support and addressing apprehensions surrounding nuclear-powered submarines. Moreover, one cannot underestimate the opposition that will inevitably arise from certain quarters. It is vital that state and local councils, in cooperation with federal authorities, conduct transparent decision-making processes that incorporate public input and dialogue while articulating the broader benefits of the program. Communities must be afforded genuine opportunities to voice concerns and feel vested in deployment strategies within their environs.

Nuclear energy is an emotive subject with inevitable safety concerns, usually emphasised by memories of incidents such as Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and Fukushima. While no major nuclear-powered submarine accidents have occurred to date, the transition still demands meticulous attention to regulatory measures. Rigorous safety protocols, overseen by an independent nuclear regulatory authority, are paramount to engender public trust.

Transparency and accountability must be integral to its mandate, ensuring public confidence in the regulatory process.

Regulatory Frameworks at Federal, State, and Local Levels

The integration of nuclear-powered submarines into Australia's regulatory environment, spanning federal, state, and local jurisdictions, poses unique challenges. Federal agencies like the Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Regulator and the Australian Submarine Agency will spearhead deployment & regulatory efforts with state and local governments not typically accustomed to cooperating at such a level. Local councils, guided by federal directives, must enact zoning ordinances and land use regulations conducive to safe submarine operations while addressing local concerns and infrastructure requirements.

Environmental and Health Considerations

The introduction of nuclear-powered submarines into Western Australia necessitates new and heightened environmental and health considerations. State environmental agencies, working closely with federal

partners and Defense, must evaluate potential impacts on public health and local ecosystems. Their mandate will include ensuring compliance with stringent regulations, monitoring radiation levels, and devising mitigation strategies to safeguard environmental and public health interests amidst the strategic defense landscape. State and local health departments must adapt to play a crucial role in emergency preparedness and response capabilities, collaborating with federal agencies to address any health-related risks or incidents stemming from submarine operations.

Emergency Planning and Preparedness

Nuclear-powered submarine emergencies pose unique challenges that would compel state and local governments and agencies to cooperate with federal counterparts and naval authorities in unprecedented ways. Coordinated efforts to develop comprehensive response plans, conduct regular drills, establish communication protocols, and define evacuation and medical procedures are vital to ensure management of issues. A key challenge lies in defining and aligning critical roles and responsibilities across government tiers accustomed to independent operation.

Conclusion

Australia's strategic imperatives and commitment to a nuclear-powered submarine fleet mean that the die is cast for Western Australia's future as a nuclear state. The action is now upon Western Australian governments to ensure the successful integration of AUKUS submarines into the state's ecosystem. While the opportunities are immense, the challenges are equally so. The importance of securing a public license to operate and fostering collaboration across government tiers cannot be overstated.

By partnering with federal agencies, Western Australia's state and local governments can safeguard Australia's sovereignty and national security interests while charting a brighter future for the state.

Phil Twiss is a current Western Australian Legislative Council Candidate, Vice President of the Liberal Party of Australia (WA Division) and has served in both the Royal Australian Navy and Army Reserve.

Carlos Fortuna is a United States Navy veteran with service on nuclear powered vessels and has extensive experience in defence program management and engineering. He currently serving on the board of VESPIIA and as a committee member of AIDN WA.



Balance Crucial in Divisive Debate

By Dean Smith

It's the time of the year when the subject of Australia's national day, and the date on which we celebrate it, fills the airwaves and column inches.

For a couple of weeks it dominates media, political and, more recently, commercial conversations.

The decision by Woolworths and Aldi, among others, not to sell Australia Day-themed material this year at least partly on ideological grounds is the latest example of elements of corporate Australia being unwilling to stay in their own lane and has rightly drawn criticism.

We now expect a debate to arise as each January 26 approaches.

But those of us who are genuinely proud of our country, enjoying its triumphs and mindful of its tribulations, should not accept the efforts of those sowing hypocrisy where there should be honesty, and division where there should be unity.

So, as we near this Australia Day, let's ensure the discussion is characterised by some balance and common sense, too.

First, surely we can all agree there should be a national day on which we celebrate

Australia and the part each of us plays in it – and this should be known as Australia Day.

Second, we should be clear about what we are acknowledging on Australia Day.

We celebrate our diversity, our respect for each other and the individual dignity every Australian is entitled to.

We honour the liberty of expression that allows free debate, the equality given to every person before the law, and reiterate our trust and respect for the institutions ensuring our democracy.



All this is wrapped in a spirit of gratitude, fairness and tolerance.

Third, let's recognise all our history – the good and the bad.

We are blessed with a rich Indigenous heritage.

We are a nation that has built a trusted national identity that is the envy of the world.

We have fought for freedom over tyranny in global conflicts and opened our doors to millions looking to build a new life in safety.

We can absolutely enjoy all that is good about our country, while also remembering past wrongs and committing ourselves to constant improvement.

And we can do this in the knowledge that Australia's historical ledger has more pluses than minuses.

Finally, we must be clear about the date.

Australia Day marks January 26, 1788, and while this represents understandable and valid sensitivities for some parts of the Australian community, it can also be viewed as a lens through which we better appreciate the experiences of First Nations Australians over the past 236 years.

I'd argue that what is required is not a change of date, but an increased level of maturity and understanding – especially from our parliamentarians.

There are those, led from the front by Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, working to deliberately erode confidence in our national day by failing to provide real leadership. Anthony Albanese could learn a thing or two from the political playbooks of former prime ministers Paul Keating and John Howard on this.

When confronted by efforts in the 1990s to destroy Anzac Day and change the Australian national flag, these leaders acted decisively.

As a result, Australians are today comforted by the fact both Anzac Day and the Australian national flag are protected by law.

Paul Keating enshrined Anzac Day in legislation in 1995 and John Howard in 1998 ensured the national flag could only be changed by a vote of all electors.

Debates about these symbols are now muted because people know they must make a substantive case for change, rather than simply disrupting from the sidelines.

Australia Day is every bit as significant and deserves the same certainty and protection.

It's something to think about as the noise once again begins to rage.

In the meantime, I have no doubt many will celebrate Australia Day 2024 with enthusiasm – and they are the Australians Anthony Albanese and corporate Australia should be paying attention to.

Senator Dean Smith is the Shadow Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury.



How do you tell a communist? Well, it's someone who reads Marx and Lenin. And how do you tell an anti-Communist? It's someone who understands Marx and Lenin.

- Ronald Reagan



Rethinking Indigenous Policy

By Matthew Ogilvie

Last year's "Voice" debate brought into sharp focus the difference between Labor's ideology and liberal philosophy. Liberalism embraces a few big ideas and lets the ideas' natural power improve society from the ground up. Labor's approach is to promote myriad small solutions from the top down, applying them with a paternalist mindset that tries to bend nature to fit Labor's ideology. This mindset led to the fatally flawed "Voice," which was a national top-down solution to issues that are fundamentally local.

Without a doubt, the situation of many Indigenous people is miserable. Yet there is again a clear difference between approaches. Labor ideology sees the problem in terms of resource distribution and government control – both accompanied by a large resource-hungry public service. The true liberal sees the answer in the embrace of freedom and liberty. I am reminded of the insight of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen. His research on poverty and famine showed that famine is not caused by a lack of resources. Instead, Sen's work revealed that famine has never occurred where there has been a representative democracy and a free press. Freedom and liberty, it seems, have consequences! Analogously, we can ask if Indigenous people need more resources allocated from above, or if they need their freedoms and dignity respected.

Yet Labor governments (and Liberal ones that don't think through the issues) have taken top-down approaches and treated Indigenous affairs as an issue of resources, rather than freedom and liberty. The result, as Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price observed, is that despite billions being spent on Indigenous people, the violence and despair afflicting them are not getting better.

To give a concrete example of such failure, the town of Roebourne has seen government spending of over \$68,000, per year, per Indigenous person. But those huge amounts of money allocated by paternalistic governments based far away have achieved nothing. The situation of Roebourne's Indigenous people has continued to get worse.

The failure of “The Voice” and many other paternalistic approaches to Indigenous people should challenge us to radically change our policy thinking. Instead of top-down paternalism and centralised decisions being made in Canberra and Perth, we should devolve power and decision-making to local communities. To state what should be obvious, we should treat Indigenous people as responsible adults in charge of their own destinies.

As an example, we can compare the alcohol bans imposed during the Northern Territory Intervention and the local initiatives taken in Fitzroy Crossing. While the Northern Territory Intervention was well-intentioned, its restrictions on alcohol failed due to its “top-down” approach to local issues. As Indigenous Affairs Minister Scullion acknowledged,

I think it would have been far better to do some of the same things with the full compliance of the community rather than the community having the sense that it was imposed on us.

The efforts of local people in Fitzroy Crossing were far more successful. After a community-based initiative to restrict the sale of takeaway alcohol, hospital presentations from alcohol-related injuries fell from 85% to below 20%. At the same time, domestic violence incidents caused by alcohol also fell by 43%.

Local leader June Oscar made clear why the Fitzroy Crossing approach worked. Instead of accepting a paternalistic, top-down approach from outside the community, local Indigenous people were engaged as active partners with government and other stakeholders. Such an approach would serve as a good example for those seeking solutions to the current situation in Alice Springs. Unfortunately, though, too many people are relying on “answers from above,” and Canberra is responding with its typical banal pronouncements and incompetence.

The prominence last year of Indigenous leaders such as Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price and Warren Mundine helped Australians to realise that Indigenous people don’t need a ‘Voice.’ They already have strong voices. What they really need is a government that respects their dignity and equality and respects them as responsible citizens who can take control of their own destinies and contribute to the greater good of our nation.

In short, we should abandon the paternalistic, public service-heavy approach that has never achieved anything positive for Indigenous people. Instead, let’s just embrace simple, but significant, principles: of liberty, freedom, the rule of law, political and legal equality. After all, after that equality was affirmed in the 1960s under a Liberal government, it was not

long before Australia had its first Indigenous Senator, followed by its first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives, Minister for Indigenous People, and Head of Government. It’s no accident that they were all Liberals, and rose to their high offices without the aid of quotas or other unnatural measures.

In short, let’s overturn the common top-down approach to Indigenous affairs, and instead embrace a genuinely liberal approach that treats Indigenous people with the respect and dignity they deserve as responsible equals.

Professor Matthew Ogilvie is a State Council Delegate for Moore Division, a Federal Council Delegate and Member of the Policy Committee.



Record of Referenda and Plebiscites

By Jeremy Buxton

Referendums held in each of the six Australian colonies created the Commonwealth of Australia in the years between 1898 and 1900. They were an integral part of the Federation story and made Australia the first part of the British Empire to adopt referendums for constitutional validation and subsequent alteration.

- In contrast Canada gained Dominion status in 1867 through an Act of the British Parliament and New Zealand became a Dominion in 1907 by a simple Proclamation of the British Government.
- Australians in 1898-1900 were not simply asked to vote on the principle of federation – they were voting to approve a detailed Bill containing every clause of the new Constitution.

Western Australia was the ‘laggard’ in being the last colony to vote (in 1900) but contrary to legend we were not a notably ‘reluctant’ State. Nor did the Eastern Goldfields simply outvote the rest of WA.

- The referendum of 1900 gave a strong vote of 69.5% for federation with the only heavy No votes coming from mainly rural electorates. In what were voluntary polls, WA led the other five colonies with a voter turnout of 67.1%.
- Federation was overwhelmingly supported in South Australia (79.5%), Victoria (94.0%) and Tasmania (94.4%).
- However, New South Wales voting 56.5% and Queensland with 55.4% for Federation were the comparatively reluctant colonies.
- Of three State capitals, the Perth metropolitan area voted 60.1% for Federation whereas Sydney voted 50.2% No and Brisbane was 64.0% No. It was the electors of rural/regional NSW and of northern Queensland that voted these colonies into the federation. *[A good trick quiz question?]*

It was a core provision of the new Commonwealth Constitution that it could only be amended by referendums, with a double majority of the popular vote and at least four of six States. Accordingly, between 1906 and 2023 there have been 45 amendment proposals put at 20 separate electoral events.

- Eight of the 20 referendum events (with a total of 21

proposals) were held in conjunction with Federal elections, the last being in 1984. The remainder (with 24 proposals) were held separately.

- Of these 45 referendums, only eight were carried.

These eight successful amendments to the constitution succeeded because they were less contentious and enjoyed substantial bipartisanship. Tweaking Senate terms (1906); Federal takeover of State debts (1910); establishing the Loan Council (1928); validating Social Service payments (1946); removing discriminatory references to Aboriginal Australians (1967); allowing Territory electors to vote in referendums; ensuring that Senate vacancies stayed with the same political party; and mandating the retirement of High Court judges at 70 (all 1977).

- All but one of these (State Debts, carried 5:1) were carried with majorities in all six States, with decisive popular votes ranging from 54.4% (1946) to 90.8% (1967).
- Referendums either win easily, fail narrowly, or fail decisively. In no instance has a referendum passed narrowly with 4:2 among the States and with a small popular majority.

Of the 37 rejected referendum proposals, only five achieved a popular majority yet failed to gain a majority of States: in 1937, 1946 (two) 1977 and 1984. The other 32 proposals were rejected by a majority of voters, some narrowly but with 12 failing to win in a single State.

- Of the nine referendums held since 1984, eight were rejected in every State.
- Allowing Territory electors to vote in referendums after 1977 has counted towards the popular vote but does not affect the double majority requirement.

ALP Governments have put forward 25 proposals, with only one being carried. This was the Social Services referendum that succeeded at the 1946 election because it was not actively opposed by the Liberal Party and because it largely validated existing payments. However, at the same election (where the ALP was re-elected) the Coalition Opposition opposed two other referendum proposals for greater control of Marketing and of Industrial Relations, both being narrowly defeated.

- All ALP proposals, together with some from the conservative side, have directly or indirectly sought to further the reach of the Federal Parliament or its agencies and Australian voters have sensibly rejected them.
- The Fisher Labor Government (1910-13) put forward eight proposals notably seeking federal control of corporations, industrial relations, and railways: the record number of six referendums in 1913 were each defeated 3:3 in the States with No votes of just over 50.0%.
- Both the Chifley and Whitlam ALP Governments

sought control of rents, prices, and incomes in 1948 and in 1973. These proposals were strongly defeated in all States.

Between 1973 and 1988 there were 16 proposals put forward at five referendums, but all were lost apart from the three uncontroversial proposals of the Fraser Government in 1977.

There were no fewer than four failed attempts to ensure simultaneous House and Senate elections (1974, 1977, 1984 and 1988).

- Subsequently after 1988 Governments have been more wary in spending “political capital” on referendums. The Howard Government put forward (but did not campaign for) the failed Republic and Preamble proposals in 1999. Then came the Voice in 2023.
- The Voice referendum gained what was the 10th lowest Yes vote (60.1% No).
- The most unpopular referendums were the four proposed in 1988 [*Parliamentary Terms, Fair Elections, (recognition of) Local Government, Rights and Freedoms*] with No votes ranging from 62.4% to 69.2%. The Hawke Government and its successors got the message.

Western Australia since 1948 has voted No in all but one of 19 failed referendums. The sole exception was the 1951 proposal of the Menzies Government to ban the Communist Party; WA voted 55.1% Yes.

- However, Western Australia had voted Yes in 14 of the 18 referendums that were defeated between 1910 and 1946. WA voters were surprisingly willing to grant more power to the Federal Government, possible factors being underlying discontent with the operation of the federal system, and a strong Goldfields ALP vote.
- Queensland referendum voters followed a similar trajectory, and also became far more protective of the Constitution after 1948. Tasmania has the most consistent No-voting record over more than a century.

Referendums have less significance at State level because the Constitution of Western Australia, contained in two Acts of Parliament, can generally be amended by overall majority votes in both Houses of State Parliament, without the need for a popular vote.

- Since legislation was passed in 1978, referendums would however need to be held should a Government seek to abolish, dilute, or diminish the size of either House of Parliament or to abolish the office of Governor.
- *After 45 years these provisions have never been tested – the Court Government in 1978 was reacting to threats from an extreme and inept Opposition.*

The 11 referendums authorised by the WA Parliament between 1911 and 2009 have generally been plebiscites

allowing electors to decide social issues, notably liquor regulation up to 1950, and daylight saving after 1975. Electors could pass judgement on essentially simple propositions within their daily experience, and Governments could avoid offending interest groups such as the anti-alcohol lobbies of a century ago.

In 1911 and 1921 electors were asked to decide on local options for liquor licencing and in both referendums, they voted in effect to maintain the status quo. In 1925 and 1950 Western Australians were asked if they favoured prohibition, voting 65.1% No in 1925 and an even more decisive 73.6% No in 1950.

In 1974 the Court Coalition Government initiated a trial of daylight saving, followed by a referendum in March 1975, having opposed a move by the previous ALP Government to introduce it unilaterally. Daylight saving was rejected by 53.7% of electors.

- Two further trials followed by referendums were held by ALP Governments in 1984 and 1992, with respective No majorities of 54.4% and 53.1%.
- Finally in 2009 after a three-year trial a 4th referendum gave a No majority of 54.6%.
- *Daylight saving would now seem to be "not only dead but damned". The afternoon heat and dark early mornings of late summer in WA are the obvious reason.*

At the 2005 State election the Gallop ALP Government put forward a referendum on extended shopping hours that was rejected by 58.7% of electors – purely a distraction from a threatened anti-government campaign by small retailers.

The most significant referendums endorsed by the WA Parliament (apart from Federation in 1900) were two held in conjunction with the 1933 State election: secession from the Australian Commonwealth or alternatively a new Constitutional Convention. Western Australians voted 66.2% in favour of secession and 57.9% against a Convention.

- However, at the same time these voters threw out the Coalition Government who supported secession, in favour of the ALP who largely opposed it, guaranteeing a State Government that would let secession fail. It was a classic protest vote in the depth of the Great Depression.
- *A comparable modern scenario would be a Federal poll where electors supported a radical Voice referendum while giving Pauline Hanson a big majority in a simultaneous election.*

The Federal Parliament has also held plebiscites, often described as referendums. They are not subject to a requirement to gain a majority of States and indeed are not binding on the Parliament.

- In October 1916 Australians were asked to extend the power of military conscription to include overseas

service in WWI, but after a bitter campaign voted 51.6% No.

- In December 1917, after Prime Minister Hughes had left Labor, and had combined with the Liberals to win a landslide election for the new Nationalist Party, conscription was again submitted to the voters and was rejected with a 53.8% No vote.
- In both plebiscites Western Australia had the strongest pro-conscription vote, 69.7% in 1916 and 64.4% in 1917.

In 2017 in a voluntary postal ballot 61.6% voted in favour of gay marriage, with a participation rate of 79.5%. This was conducted as an ABS survey as the ALP and Greens in the Senate had blocked an electoral plebiscite, due to their reluctance to see gay marriage established under a Coalition government. Western Australians voted 63.7% Yes.

The liberal/conservative consensus of the 1890s, endorsed by the voters, bequeathed Australia a sound federal Constitution. Successive generations of electors have rejected the efforts of meddling Governments, notably Labor, to use referendums to undermine the Constitution. Only a small number of practical reforms have been approved.

Western Australians, after an inconsistent voting record in the first half of the Twentieth Century, have become reliably sceptical of Constitutional change. At State level we have used referendums to protest to Canberra, to safeguard drinking rights and to avoid changing the clocks.

Based on a talk to the Nedlands Rotary Club 7/3/24.

Jeremy Buxton is Chairman of the Selection Committee and Deputy Chair of the Policy Committee.



Worst Law in WA's Statute Book

By Nick Goiran and Bianca Cobby

As Liberals we often talk about repealing bad laws, but if we were to pause and contemplate Western Australia's statute book (the collection of all WA's laws) – what would we say is the worst of the worst?

In this short article, we ask you to consider section 3B of the Coroner's Act 1996 (WA). For us this is the darkest provision on our statute book.

This law states that the death of a Western Australian child born alive after an abortion is no longer a reportable death. This provision, which the WA Labor Government proclaimed into law on 27 March 2024, is a betrayal of the very values and principles that not only encompass our Party's core beliefs, but also define a civilised society.

It is trite but true that West Aussies have strong views as to whether abortions should occur and under what circumstances. They also may have strong views about how best to assert the existing duty to provide medical care and treatment to a baby born alive after an abortion. While debates about these issues will continue long beyond our generation, that is not what section 3B is about. In short, this provision ensures that the WA State Coroner is no longer to be notified about the death of a person which, if not for the preceding abortion procedure, would otherwise be a reportable death.

One may wish to engage in ethical debates about why a baby, and not a fetus, has legal personhood and can therefore be a victim of murder. However, at present, this is where the law stands. A child inside the womb cannot be a victim of murder under our statute book. A child outside of the womb can. This is confirmed via section 269 of WA's Criminal Code which codifies the "born alive" doctrine. That doctrine was explained in *R v Hutty* as follows:

Murder can only be committed on a person who is in being, and legally a person is not in being until he or she is fully born in a living state. A baby is fully and completely born when it is completely delivered

from the body of its mother and it has a separate and independent existence in the sense that it does not derive its power of living from its mother. It is not material that the child may still be attached to its mother by the umbilical cord: that does not prevent it from having a separate existence. But it is required, before the child can be the victim of murder or of manslaughter or of infanticide, that the child should have an existence separate from and independent of its mother, and that occurs when the child is fully extruded from the mother's body and is living by virtue of the functioning of its own organs.

Further, it has been confirmed that a pre-viable child born alive may be a victim of murder, even if they are doomed and will not survive for any length of time, provided the child merely lives for a moment. This begs the question: why is it that a child in WA who has met the criteria for legal personhood can be denied the right to have the circumstances surrounding their death investigated? A coronial investigation, such as that conducted in 1999/2000 by the Coroner's Court in the Northern Territory into the death of infant Jessica Jane, can produce findings with a view to preventing future deaths. However, this will no longer be possible in Western Australia, and distressingly similar deaths will continue to occur in the future.

¹ R v Hutty [1953] VLR 338, 339 (Barry J).

² R v Senior (1832) 1 Mood 347; 168 ER 1298; R v West (1848) 2 C & K 784; 175 ER 329, 330; Iby (2005) 63 NSWLR 278, 286–7; Barrett (2010) 108 SASR 568, 579 (White J), 591–2 (Peek J).

Shockingly, in an extraordinary admission by the Labor Government during the debate on the *Abortion Legislation Reform Bill 2023*, it was revealed that Western Australia would now become the only State in the country which prevented the death of a child from being reported to the coroner. In other words, we are the only State which expressly prevents the deaths of all children from being properly investigated.

At its core, Section 3B violates the most basic human rights—the right to life and the right to dignity. It denies Western Australian babies the recognition and protection they deserve under the law and perpetuates a culture of dehumanisation and indifference that has no place in a just and compassionate society. By relegating these deceased Western Australian children to the shadows, this provision denies them the dignity of acknowledgment and the opportunity for some justice.

Our Party's "Our Beliefs" statement articulates a commitment to the innate worth of the individual; in respect for human dignity, the rule of law and justice, and giving all citizens equal rights under the law. Yet, section 3B of the Coroner's Act stands in direct contradiction to these values. As Liberals, it is our duty to confront this darkness head-on. Section 3B of the Coroner's Act must be repealed. It is darkness shrouded in darkness. Anything less would be a betrayal of our core values.

Hon Nick Goiran MLC is a former civil litigation lawyer, former Shadow Attorney General and 15-year veteran of the Parliament of Western Australia whose passion is child protection.

Mrs Bianca Cobby LLB was admitted as a barrister and solicitor in Western Australia in 2018 and was a State Liberal candidate in 2017 and 2021. She is passionate about research, education and public policy development on social, economic, health and cultural issues affecting women.

³ Western Australia, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 19 September 2023, 15 (Goiran and Ellery).

⁴ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, opened for signature 16 December 1966, 999 UNTS 171 (entered into force 23 March 1976) art 6.

⁵ 'Our Beliefs', Liberal Party of Western Australia (Web Page) < <https://www.waliberal.org.au/our-beliefs/> >.



Time running out to deliver AUKUS

By Peter Hudson

By 2027 our community will host more than 2,000 US & UK sailors, their families and a rotating fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. Rockingham being situated next door to Garden Island, the Kwinana Industrial Area and the Henderson Marine Complex, it seems inevitable that the delivery of AUKUS will introduce numerous challenges, questions and opportunities to the South West metropolitan community and Western Australia more broadly.

AUKUS is more than a deal for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines; and more than a renewal of the alliance of strategic interests of the common Australian, American, and British values of the rules-based order and democratic freedoms - it is fundamentally about safeguarding peace in our region by guaranteeing our national sovereignty for decades to come.

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. It's a principle that Australia has had to embrace, even during times of peace, due to multiple factors affecting our region, including the military rise of China. Deputy PM Richard Marles has even gone as far as to say that we are living through "the most challenging set of strategic circumstances since World War Two."

Indeed, it was General Vegetius Rensus in the ancient Roman era that thrust upon us the Latin phrase 'Si vis pacem, para bellum.' If you want peace, prepare for war. To be clear, nobody in the public square is entertaining the notion that Australia should willingly enter into any 'hot' conflict, however we are already witnessing the impacts (both real and perceived) of 'grey zone' military tactics being executed by our adversaries to target Australia.

Whilst various threat actors are of concern to Defence and Australia's security agencies, the emerging state power rivalling (albeit superseding enormously) Australia is the People's Republic of China. Once held out as our nation's greatest friend and trading partner, the military rise of China under President Xi Jin Ping proves just how rapid and complex the shift in modern

geo-politics has become – reinforcing the need for the AUKUS agreement.

The Australian government has condemned “unacceptable” and “unprofessional” actions recently perpetrated by China, also a major detractor of the AUKUS agreement, including injuries caused to RAN divers by Chinese SONAR pings, targeting of RAAF aircraft with blinding lasers and constant cyber, malware and espionage attacks on both ADF, private sector and citizens & consumers assets.

So, what does an increasingly aggressive China, nuclear-powered submarines and a tri-lateral security pact have to do with Rockingham? Aside from the obvious, it’s a fact that the community in that area and its surrounds is about to grow significantly, in terms of the strategic importance to WA and the rest of Australia, shining a spotlight on the best features of the region, but also those most lacking.

Take infrastructure for example, not only does AUKUS bring with it future projects like the Henderson Drydock, Garden Island Highway and maritime upgrades (both Naval and commercial) in Cockburn Sound, but it also has the potential to finally push well-overdue infrastructure projects into action. Just think of what the community could do with the influx of attention, use of the area; and associated funding that will flow in from AUKUS. Better roads & construction, community facilities, investment in amenities are all ideas that are frequently talked about but rarely actioned.

At a time when the public perceive the ‘political elite’ as never having been more out of touch with mainstream expectations; and not listening to (or importantly, acting on) the needs & wants of the public, it is more important than ever to bring the electorate on the journey of developing communities in preparation for a nation building program such as AUKUS.

The opportunities associated with AUKUS present a once in a generation chance for local communities and the private sector, but that means working with a government that is bold, visionary and ambitious for our state and our country to unlock that potential - to deliver AUKUS and its associated projects.

But time is running out.

Local Governments from Albany to Geraldton are ready to get to work, but they need leadership from government at both the state and federal level - radio silent on AUKUS – having been consumed for the last two years with the failed Voice referendum, lengthy defence reviews and reacting to whichever partisan issue appears on the front page of certain newspapers.

Rockingham and its surrounds are rapidly losing time to prepare for AUKUS; and the importance of that proving our commitment to our allies in the AUKUS pact cannot be overstated. Government cannot afford to sit on its hands and ignore the needs for investment in Rockingham and the South West, to do so would be to fumble the most important defence acquisition & alliance in Australia’s history and the most significant loss of opportunity that the community has seen in recent history.

Peter Hudson is the President of Brand Division and a Member of the Policy Committee.



*Nothing is more wonderful than the art of
being free, but nothing is harder to learn how
to use than freedom.*

- Alexis de Tocqueville



On Housing and Immigration

By Fraser Wipp

WA has the fastest growing population of all Australian states and territories. It is also continuously bearing the brunt of inflation, lower living standards and a relentless squeeze on infrastructure, public services, and its housing market. WA faces a housing shortfall that, if not adequately addressed, will be disastrous for its immediate future. Suppliers need to be given breathing space to begin catching up with such rapacious demand.

While approvals for housing developments ballooned during COVID, only a fraction were completed. It is increasingly difficult for construction firms to operate in Perth, with soaring material costs amid global supply chain issues, runaway inflation, and labor shortages. Porter Davis Homes faced liquidation last year, and hundreds more smaller firms have suffered the same fate recently. If skilled migration is required to fill critical skills shortages in bricklaying, tiling, plumbing, and carpentry, this should be counterbalanced with increased stringency regarding other visa sub-classes. While those qualifying for 'Skills in Demand' visas can improve overall capacity, temporary jobs are not a substitute for long-term public and private investment in trade colleges and other apprenticeship pathways.

2022-23 saw the highest net migration rates since federation, with the housing shortfall, strained infrastructure, and increased community tensions to show for it. Slashing student visas is not a long-term solution to these problems, and there are diplomatic barriers which also prevent this strategy from being more effective. Indian international students were made exempt from some of student visa restrictions introduced in late 2023 by the federal government and were afforded a longer post-study period than other overseas counterparts. This occurred due to the terms of the comprehensive free trade agreement Australia and India signed in 2022, and the more recent Australia-India Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement from 2023, of which uncapped student visas were made a non-negotiable element.

In practice, this will mean more long-term migrants competing for rentals with other migrants and Australian citizens. Like the housing and rental market writ large, the supply is a drop in the ocean when compared with the demand for student accommodation. For every bed provided, twenty or more students in the same boat will still have to look elsewhere, paying more for rent, depleting disposable incomes and curbing consumer spending habits that could otherwise have stimulated genuine economic growth.

Recent reforms to the student visa system were designed to prevent a slew of issues including 'ghost college' rorts and barring education agents from holding ownership stakes in education providers. While these reforms reduced visa applications and grants in the short-term, more attention should be paid to the student housing shortfall affecting both legitimate international students already studying here and Australian citizens increasingly opting for similar arrangements.

UniLodge has overseen development of one high-density purpose-built student accommodation hub in the CBD, intended for completion by 2026 to help account for the ECU campus relocation, while UWA is proposing another hub for Nedlands. The ECU relocation alone will move an 8000-student campus into the CBD. Any future urban planning reforms by the liberal party should be designed to encourage more cost-effective development projects on a smaller scale and incentivise more local and interstate investments in similar lodgings. This would improve affordability and accessibility for students and prevent international students from being forced into competition with Australian citizens and each other for the same dwindling rental vacancies.

Switzerland's coalition government have called for a referendum to ensure its population does not exceed 10 million people through to 2050. This may yield successful results for the Swiss government, but it is unlikely to fit the Australian national context. The last thing the country wants or needs is another costly and divisive referendum. That money should be better spent on actively resolving the crisis within the housing market and immigration system.

'Big Australia' advocacy tends to place the cart before the horse, as constantly increasing immigration will not fix the underlying structural and cultural problems it is often sold as a catch-all solution for. If it is designed to fill skills shortages, then they should have filled substantially in recent years, and if mass migration is needed to reverse the common post-industrial affliction of low birth rates and aging populations, then the 2022-23 birthrate should have surged past 2021's lockdown birthrate, but this is not the case.

Incentivising migration during a period of limited capacity for housing and infrastructure is dangerous, divisive, and invites a future backlash against migrants themselves. Above all else, it is unsustainable. A united front on policy and messaging must be articulated regarding these two interrelated issues. During the upcoming state and federal election cycle, the Liberal Party has a golden opportunity to demonstrate to the Australian people that it is the only party that is now truly capable of developing and implementing sensible, sustainable immigration and housing policy reforms.

Fraser Wipp is the President of Brand Young Liberals.



Addressing Birth Crisis: Tax Relief for Parents

By Daniel Earl

Australians are not having enough children. Australia's tax and welfare policy framework apply a set of individualistic, rather than family-based, assumptions that effectively punish families where a partner has chosen to stay at home to primarily care for children.

The average number of children a woman can expect to have in her lifetime, the 'total fertility rate' (TFR), currently sits at 1.63 in Australia. The TFR needs to be at 2.10 to allow for 'population replacement'. It has been below this level in Australia since 1976. The median age has risen from 27 in 1971 to 38 in 2021, the dependency ratio (the ratio of workers to retirees) is deteriorating, and according to modelling by demographer Stephen J Shaw, without immigration, Australia's population will crash by 19% in 3 generations.

Instead of energy and vitality, an old Australia will deliver policy inertia and slow (or negative) economic growth.

Immigration cannot fix the birth problem

Migrants to Australia are typically from the middle to upper social strata of their respective societies. As a result, they have few children. Indian-born women in Australia had a fertility rate of 1.54 children per woman in 2022, with Chinese-born at 0.96, compared to Australian-born women at 1.70.

The lower fertility rate of migrants reflects the recent collapse of birth rates across Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The impact of this is seen in Sydney's diverse western suburbs, where fertility rates have fallen, since 2008, by 21% in Parramatta, nearly 20% in Sydney's inner south-west (Bankstown, Canterbury, Punchbowl etc) and 30% in Ryde. The City of Canning in Perth, home to large and growing Chinese and Indian communities, is no exception, the fertility rate falling from 1.70 in 2012 to 1.41 in 2022.

Outliers to the global fertility rate collapse

As demographers Malcolm and Susan Collins routinely point out, “prosperity induced fertility decline” has been uneven in its impact. Orthodox Jews, and white Evangelical Christians in the United States have been surprisingly resistant to it. Israel boasted a TFR of 2.89 in 2022, and the fertility rate of non-Hispanic white women now exceeds black women in 11 states in the US (mainly in the South), despite ongoing economic disparities.

Australian women living in the white working class outer suburban regions of Brisbane and Perth, including areas such as Ipswich, Logan, Mandurah and Rockingham, have fertility rates that vary between 1.85 to 2.15, with many at ‘replacement level’.

The Australian fertility divide

In the US, there is a stark difference between childbearing in ‘liberal’ areas versus the heartland. There is evidence of this in Australia too. The mean TFR of the top 10 Australian Federal electorates that voted ‘yes’ in the Voice to parliament referendum, have a collective TFR of 1.15, versus 2.05 to the top 10 that voted ‘no’. When mapped against all 151 electorates, the correlation of fertility rate to Voice ‘yes’ vote is -0.804. While causation isn’t being suggested here (education levels and housing costs are big factors), there is a clear link between low fertility rates and individualistic and socially liberal attitudes.

However, conversely, there are critical demographic cohorts in Australia that are still prepared to have at least 2 or more children and make sacrifices to their personal circumstances to do so. This is typically those living in places with lower full-time female workforce participation and those living outside of the core of major urban centres. Rather than punish this reliably fecund cohort, the tax settings of Australia need to encourage them to have more children, not less.

The problem is that the system does the opposite.

How Australian policy makers fail

If generous childcare subsidies and paid parental leave were the solution to lower fertility rates, hyper-progressive Scandinavia would be leading the pack. In 2023, women in Finland had a TFR of 1.26, with rates of 1.40 in Denmark, 1.49 in Norway and 1.45 in Sweden. In comparison, the TFR for women in South Dakota, Nebraska, Alaska, Utah, Louisiana and Texas all sat between 1.84 and 2.00; all are US states where there is little to no maternity leave available and virtually no subsidised childcare, but where income taxes are much lower.

Social democracies clearly haven’t cracked the code.

Australian policy makers ignore these inconvenient facts, using absurdly expensive child-care subsidies (costing taxpayers \$12.7 billion annually) and overly generous parental leave payments that are only accessible if both parents meet a ‘work test’. Policy makers figure (wrongly) that parents can be bribed into simultaneously working and rearing children.

Further, to compensate families generally, a family of 3 children under 12, can qualify for Family Tax Benefit A with a family income less than \$134,515. For Family Tax Benefit B, a family income must be below \$112,578 regardless of the number of children. These tax rebates are explained through a labyrinth of Service WA webpages that few normal people would comprehend. Most families would simply tick the relevant boxes at tax time and hope for the best.

How income splitting works

Conceptually, income splitting, is where a sole breadwinner can split his/her income between spouses, reducing their taxable income. This is demonstrated below using the ATO’s 2022-23 simple income tax calculator (does not include Medicare levy):

Taxable income of sole family breadwinner	Simple tax payable (current individualist model)	Tax payable if ‘split’ between spouses (family model)
\$75,000	\$14,842	\$7,334
\$100,000	\$22,967	\$13,434
\$125,000	\$31,317	\$24,809
\$150,000	\$40,567	\$29,684

The ‘family model’ would deliver a lower tax liability than the current ‘individualist’ model used by the ATO. Ultimately, the difference reveals an ideological problem with the current tax system: it treats parents strictly as individuals, not as a jointly married couple that share resources. Few families operate their budgets in an individualistic manner. When raising children and managing a household budget, a dollar earned by either partner is ‘family income’ and pooled.

Have tax breaks worked elsewhere?

Panic over crashing birth numbers is setting in worldwide, and many governments are pulling all levers available, including generous tax breaks to families with children. However, only a select few have reversed the ‘lowest low’ fertility rate death spiral that occurs once a nation heads below a TFR of 1.20.

In 2003, South Korea’s TFR stood at 1.19, the Czech Republic’s at 1.18. By 2021 South Korea’s fell to 0.81 whereas the Czech Republic’s had increased to 1.83. Given South Korea has a higher GDP per capita (at \$34,000 USD) to the Czech Republic (\$29,000 USD), natalist policies mean little if there are deeper cultural

problems. The Hungarians, despite being demonstrably poorer than its western neighbours and experiencing emigration of the young, still managed to increase their TFR from 1.27 in 2003 to 1.59 in 2021. In Hungary, families with 4 or more children are effectively exempt from paying income tax.

The stumbling block of progressivism

Promoting 'equity' between the sexes, through subsidised childcare and paid parental leave, is a 'social good' that is seen by social progressives as an end in itself, and therefore worth the cost, regardless of impact. The non-ideological reality on the ground is that most mothers and fathers typically just want to spend more time building bonds with their children, especially in the tender early years before they attend school. It is usually only possible for one parent to be able to achieve this goal by leaving the workforce, and this is typically the mother. Feminist obsessions over the 'motherhood penalty' should be weighed against the reality that few mothers lament having insufficient time at the office compared to a lack of time with their children. Yet Australian families, especially mothers, that make the decision to prioritise children over work, face a substantial cut to their family's income and no commensurate tax relief for the sole breadwinner.

The rewards of an income splitting policy

Parents should be rewarded for raising their children themselves, rather than relying on subsidised childcare. The Federal Government should actively seek to improve the personal economic circumstances of the most naturally 'natalist' Australians; the ones most likely to start a family, or add more children to their brood. Tax relief through income splitting, is an easy way to do this.

In addition to being the most effective at increasing fertility rates, breadwinner families should be politically targeted by the Liberal Party. These voters often live in lower socio-economic areas that historically vote Labor, but are becoming increasingly competitive for political conservatives. This is in stark contrast to the more 'equity'-concerned, but increasingly childless, voters who live in inner city areas.

Income splitting therefore needs to be part of the Federal Liberal Party policy platform, both for political gain and to address Australia's birth crisis.

Daniel Earl is a Procurement Specialist and Demographic Enthusiast.

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*Capitalism works better than it sounds, while
socialism sounds better than it works.*

- Richard Nixon



What our Founders can teach Future Leaders

By Greg Ahern

Without those colonial leaders who led the various meetings throughout the 1890s that led to six colonies coming together to form the Commonwealth of Australia, we would not now be living in the greatest county on the planet.

So, I invite you all to ask the question; where are the leaders of today who have the same dreams and passions for our great nation, who can look at what we need to do now to review how we are governed and have frank and open debates on making Australia even better?

We have so many issues worthy of bi-partisan debate that no one seems to want to tackle as it could possibly be detrimental to future election outcomes. So how can we as intelligent people with an interest in politics create an environment where views can be heard and discussed in a tolerant and pragmatic way in the interests of improving our existing systems? Let me preface this discussion with my personal viewpoint on what I would love members of the Liberal Party to aspire to be.

We could be the voice for the aspirational middleclass fellow Australians who are often referred to as the silent majority. Silent because they simply don't have any interest in spending their spare time volunteering within a political party or are apathetic or ignorant as to how the political process operates, but would still vote for change if presented with a common-sense argument that passes the "Pub Test."

So, the obvious issues that have been canvassed in recent years are the republic issue and a **simple** inclusion in the preamble of our constitution to recognise aboriginal ancestry. I will await with great interest how these debates progress over ensuing years. But why stop there?

What about:

- Should voting in state and federal elections be compulsory?
- Should federal parliamentary terms be 4 years fixed the same as state parliaments? (simple amendment to a few key paragraphs in the constitution).
- With a population of only 26 million, are we over governed with our 3 levels of government? If you believe we are, what could we replace the current system with?
- I fear that our (Liberals) belief in federalism masks a common-sense approach to removing bureaucratic waste by centralising services like education and health. Numerous attempts at reducing duplication of the public service in so many areas between state and federal governments have not achieved anything. Should we simply have a system where whoever funds the service manages the service and takes 100% of the political risk if they are not managed properly? Is this worth debating?
- Has the Commonwealth grants Commission gone beyond its “use by date” after 90 years of existence? Given that the concept of Horizontal Fiscal Equalisation between the states is usually over-ridden by pure political decisions depending upon the timing of state elections, could this task be taken over by say the productivity commission and save us all from the ridiculous overkill of economic modelling that determines how the GST is currently allocated?

I’m just scratching the surface with the above examples that are often put to one side by politicians and their minders of all persuasions by simply saying “We have more pressing issues to focus on at the moment!”

What I am asking you all to think about, is how can we, as spokespeople for the silent majority, encourage debate on such nation changing issues?

What if we included as a regular part of the federal election process, a series of questions to the electorate, where it was compulsory to provide simple yes/no responses to simple questions on the type of issues discussed above. These questions could derive from political pressure put on the government from media outlets that have debated the issues over a period of time. Alternatively they could come from a series of national conferences similar in nature to those town hall meetings carried out back in the 1890’s (or its modern equivalent).

The results of these “plebiscites” could be announced to the population and then the media would put the appropriate pressure on our political class if an issue received enough majority support that they would have little choice but to progress the electorates views through the legislative process or any required constitutional amendments.

So I bring you back to my question at the start of this opinion piece; where are the political champions of the 21st Century with the ability to replicate those from our colonial past and carry on with this proposal?

Greg Ahern is a Member of the Policy Committee.

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Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.

- Winston Churchill



Hinderance or Benefit

By Peter Stewart

Those born between 1946 to 1965 are known as the baby boomers.

Post the end of WW2 the world's population grew significantly with new families being formed. It can be argued that much of the wrongs and good things of our present society has come from this generation who are now entering or have already retired.

This generation became the catalyst of growth in materialism and demand for improved standard of living resulting in individualism and breaking down of past traditions including organised religion and radical criticism of any establishment of authority.

This ushered in the Peace movement in the 60's and much was expressed in a new type of music and the way people dressed.

It is easy to criticise this freedom and peace movement by the earlier baby boomers. But this same generation has brought many positive attributes to our society. As this generation matured and became educated and started their own families and businesses they learned good life lessons. They also turned and learned from their parents and grandparents what their generations valued and were important to them.

So, this generation of Baby boomers became the drivers, leaders, and contributors to our society we have today.

Helping their families

By being the nucleus of family support, they currently save present taxpayers and the nation billions on aged care funding, babysitting and childcare costs.

They provide financial support as needed by helping their adult children. Helping the elderly with their paperwork with aged care, Centrelink/DVA, NDIS, banking and more. They help with medical appointments, transporting when required and help young couples staying home why the save for a deposit to buy their first home.

John Howard once said, "Family is the best form of social security for the nation and basis of a stable society."

Local communities

Babyboomers after 40 years of more working life and paying taxes have generally accumulated some personal wealth and many are self-funded retirees not needing any or very little aged pension. Those who don't have the financial means are supported by the taxpayer funded age pension.

Living in their communities they support their local small businesses and help their local economies to prosper. They help by volunteering to maintaining great local amenities, resourcing local charities, churches, neighbourhood watch and sustaining their local environment.

Having a balance of different generation cohorts in a community creates a vibrant and safe place to live, raise a family, work, and retire.

So, who wins elections?

The one that has the greatest number of effective activists and leaders. Babyboomers are often leaders in their neighbourhood, communities, and families. Growth and branch membership is often inspired by babyboomers to young people and friends to become involve in local politics.

Political activities

So how can babyboomers continue to help the Liberal Party and its political movement in the local branches and in our state and federal electorates?

By maintaining their experience, knowledge and continued active part of the Blue Army of the Liberal Party. All this will help us Liberals to become better campaign ready.

Many grew up in the wonderful Menzies time as children and they saw how a good government can lift up everyone's quality of life. They as young Liberals campaigned in the Liberal Governments era of Holt, Gorton McMahon, and then under Labor's Whitlam dark period. As Adults they campaigned during the golden era of the Frazer, Hawke, Keating and Howard years. Many mostly continued their volunteering work in the volatile era of the Labor Rudd/Gillard/Rudd, and Liberal era of Abbott, Turnbull, and Morrison years.

Now the nation is being governed by a worse federal government than Whitlam. Babyboomers despair what further damage could be done to Australia and individual lives if this extreme socialist left leaning Labor Albanese Government was returned to power at the 2025 election.

So, what can these babyboomers who have volunteering in their DNA offer the Liberal Party today?

They are experience campaigners in door knocking, letter dropping, putting up corflutes, preparing logistics, prepoll rosters, managing volunteers, local intelligence gathering, engagement with the local community and connections with friends.

In addition to these tasks, they can be fabulous mentors to young and new Liberals, campaign committees, campaign budgeting experience, knowing good fundraising sources, helping with organising, supporting, and promoting functions and events.

Some are keen to help with Polling Booths preparation and logistics, taking on the duties of booth captains and scrutineers. Many less physically mobile babyboomers still want to help by handing out HTV cards for a few hours on election days and prepoll.

The valuable resource of volunteers in the Liberal Party needs to include babyboomers. They should still hold executive positions at all State Division, Federal Divisions, and local Branches. Their wide experience can be hugely beneficial as preselection of quality delegates to ensure the Liberals endorse great pollical candidates for the Liberal Party that the electors can relate too and will vote for.

Peter Stewart is the President of Perth Foothills Branch and Vice President of Swan Division.

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Email policy.committee@waliberal.org.au to find out more.



If the freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.

- George Washington