

# A switch in time

restoring respect to Australian politics

Mary Crooks Victorian Women's Trust

slippery little word, **respect** –  
easy to say, sounds good, harder to practise.

*Victorian*  
WOMEN'S  TRUST  
*making a difference*

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# **a switch in time**

## **restoring respect to Australian politics**

- switch, n.**
1. A mechanical, electrical, or electronic device for opening or closing a circuit or for diverting a current from one part of a circuit to another.
  2. A swift and usually sudden shift or change.

*Collins Concise English Dictionary, 1985.*



# Foreword

*Alan Jones' suggestion of taking this excuse for a woman out to sea in a boat, putting her in a sack with a few Besser blocks and dumping her overboard, is starting to look an appealing solution.*

Larry Pickering, cartoonist and writer, 26 June 2012.<sup>1</sup>

Besser blocks have long been renowned for creating a positive aesthetic around our homes and businesses. In Australia in 2012, they are associated with a suggestive, violent image about drowning our prime minister, who happens to be a woman.

This very public promotion of such a violent image is a troubling reflection of the overall state of our national political discourse. Over the past two years, we have watched with growing concern as three interrelated, negative forces have been unleashed – in large part triggered by people intent on tearing down a legitimate minority government which also happens to be led by the first woman to occupy the country's powerful top job.

In the first instance, important democratic principles are being disregarded by those who are opposed to the current minority government. Second, respect for women has also been pushed aside by gendered attacks directed at the prime minister since her election to office, suggesting we are not yet ready to give women and girls the recognition that is implied in a 'fair go' in public life. Third, rather than respecting the weight of scientific evidence that warns the planet is in peril, a range of sectional interests, parts of the media and a politically expedient campaign against carbon pricing have sought to discredit this body of authoritative science. In diminishing public confidence in the science, these elements have elevated their own narrow interests at the expense of the common good.

A little over a decade ago, the Victorian Women's Trust, which prizes its independence, created a highly successful initiative known as the Purple Sage Project. The Project was in response to a widespread and deep unease we sensed across the Victorian community as cavalier political behaviour rode roughshod over democratic principles and policies threatened community cohesion.

Actively supported by many women, and drawing on their great capacity to bring other women and men into the conversation, the Project provided thousands of people across the state with the opportunity to give voice, to identify issues of concern and to bring forward their ideas for the future.

In developing this new community initiative, *A Switch in Time*, and its call to action, we are motivated by our long-standing quest for gender equality, our interest in strengthening our democracy and our commitment to care for the earth.


We have spent the last twelve months in an intensive effort – compiling, reading and analysing a wide range of articles, published opinions and other media reports; listening to radio programs and talk back; watching the coverage of national politics on television; and following comment and opinion through social media.

We are placing this publication into the public arena with one aim in mind – to provide a commentary that assists women and men across the country to articulate their concerns about the negative currents affecting our political discourse; and in the expectation that they will resolve to challenge and re-direct things for the better.


Set aside the time to read it. It is the first time that such information has been drawn together for broad community digest. A couple of hours of reading are nothing when there is arguably a lot at stake.

Use *A Switch in Time* as a practical frame of reference to carry the conversation about the ways we can all play a role to lift the standard of our national politics; to protect and promote, rather than destroy, important community values of respect, accountability, fairness and tolerance; to confront the sexism and misogyny in our political discourse; to keep the focus on global science, climate change and other important policy issues; to challenge media 'group think'; and to reject vitriol and abuse as some kind of 'new normal'.

Draw upon its ideas, evidence and arguments in talk around the kitchen table, in workplaces and among friends; and use it as a spur for taking action that restores respect as a central value in our democratic politics.



**Mary Crooks AO**  
Executive Director Victorian Women's Trust



**Dur-e Dara OAM**  
Convenor Victorian Women's Trust

## acknowledgements

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**Democracy is a process,  
not a static condition.  
It is becoming,  
rather than being.  
It can be easily lost,  
but is never finally won.**

**William H. Hastie 1904-1976**

# introduction

## restoring respect to our politics

*The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment.* (Robert Hutchins, American educator and writer, 1899-1977.)

*He (Malcolm Turnbull) has watched with dismay as the political discourse has been 'dumbed down' in what he believes is a disastrous way. The political debate has not been very edifying, I must say. It has not been a great period of political discourse, the nastiness of it all...elements of the media have contributed to that and politicians have also.*<sup>1</sup>

Australians live in a robust and enduring representative democracy.

We are free to debate ideas and express dissenting views without being coerced, or in danger of being placed under house arrest or even worse. We can assemble in the streets and protest about issues without fear of violence. Any citizen may stand for office and we have the right to vote for people to represent us in all three levels of government – federal, state and local. We accept, maybe grudgingly, the responsibility of paying tax. We embrace the concept of a 'fair go' and have applied this over the decades in shaping our institutions, welfare systems and political discourse. Mostly, we see ourselves as standing for equality between people.

The idea of the common good appeals: we acknowledge that our shared responsibility as citizens in a democracy is to debate with tolerance, directly and through our elected representatives, the best means to create opportunities, regulations and services that meet the basic needs of the population and sustain the environment. There is a general understanding of the principle of the separation of powers, with government, the judiciary and the public service working independently as part of an integrated system.

We install governments in the expectation that each will serve its full term and act in accordance with its mandate to implement policies that advance the common good. We recognise the importance of our governments being transparent and accountable. At the same time, we see them as having a critical role in promoting fairness, social cohesion, economic prosperity and the protection of the most vulnerable. We assume that our print and electronic media seek to act impartially, adhering to their codes of practice by observing independence and truthfulness in reporting on policy and politics.

## Safeguarding democracy

A stable, robust, healthy democracy such as the one we have created in Australia does not of itself possess magical safeguards or protections. These lie with every one of us. As citizens, it is up to us to nourish and sustain our democracy and to this end we empower our elected representatives to maintain and extend what we see as necessary democratic standards. It is also up to us to be on the alert for the emergence of system 'faults' that require attention and threats that could result in the erosion and weakening of our democratic institutions and political culture.

**We need to be prepared to stand up and take action when we sense that a situation is developing which, unchecked, will lead to serious strains within our democracy.**

Nationally, we are now at such a point. Prepared to toss aside respect for democratic principles, sections of our politics, business community and media persist with the claim that the current minority government 'lacks legitimacy'. Almost every day, we hear and read of calls for a 'fresh' election. What is the basis for this, considering that our minority government is legitimate, is constitutionally valid and accords with the central provisions of our Westminster system? The fact that the current minority government was formed between a major party, a small number of Independent members of parliament and an Australian Greens Party member does not compromise its legitimacy. Constitutionally, these members have the same status as those who belong to the major parties.

The 'tear-down' mentality that attacks this legitimacy presents significant risks for our democracy. It undermines the pivotal Westminster principle, that a government is legitimate if it can command a majority in the lower house. The frequent calls for a new election override another key democratic principle, that a government should be able to serve a full term. If elections are called at any time and for any reason, government becomes unstable, with little appetite for boldness, reform and carrying through of the will of the people. Instability can make a government particularly vulnerable to the undue influence of powerful lobbies and vested interests.

## Gender-based attacks

At the same time as these attacks on the government, we are witnessing a gender-based undermining of a prime minister which reflects a lack of respect for her, the office she holds, and for women generally. That we have Julia Gillard as prime minister for the first time in our nation's history should be a cause for celebrating an important advance for women as well as for signposting a new level of political maturity in our democratic society.

**Levelling constructive criticism of government policies and decisions where it is deserved is one thing. Relentless, gendered attack such as has dogged the prime minister since her election is another.**

The 'tear-down' mentality towards the legitimate minority government, the gendered criticism of the prime minister and the disrespect shown for her office are aggressively promoted by sections of the Australian media in ways that reflect an unhealthy concentration of media ownership. We are told *ad nauseam* that the prime minister 'has no authority'; that her leadership is 'tainted' because she 'assassinated' Kevin Rudd; and that she has 'breached the trust of the public' by legislating for a carbon price, as if this is the first time that a leader's commitment has ever altered.

Hate and vitriol directed toward our prime minister are given undue airplay by radio presenters who deny any complicity. And in the absence of adequate constraints, social media is facilitating an unprecedented level of abusive language and misogynistic attitudes that fly in the face of personal accountability and a basic civility.

The sexism and misogyny directed at the current prime minister are not just about Julia Gillard – this deep prejudice reveals attitudes and beliefs about the role, capacity and place of all women and girls. It would seem that women are not *after all* political equals in Australian society. An even more disturbing aspect is that a great many of the attacks amount to ugly and violent abuse of a kind and level not previously seen in this country. And what does this abuse aim to achieve or contribute? Nothing – it is just ugly and violent.

## Eroding the ethos of the common good

Democracy works best when the common good is respected at all levels – governments focusing on policies and programs that assist wealth creation as well as enhancing fairness; opposition parties preparing viable policy alternatives; the media providing impartial and substantive analysis of issues; and a voting public that is well-informed and engaged.

This important political and social ethic is now under pressure, illustrated most vividly by the recent and deliberate hijacking of climate science, national policy and legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Australia and the rest of the world now confront a hugely challenging future in the face of climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse emissions as quickly as possible.

**Instead of working to people's best sides, and bringing Australians together around actions, policy and legislative responses, a cynical, multi-pronged fear campaign around carbon pricing has scorned authoritative climate science and, in so doing, created public confusion, mistrust and social division.**

The combined weight of these developments poses a real threat to our democratic culture. We can be better than this. We are better than this. Standing by watching, taking note and worrying achieves little. Indeed, passivity allows matters to worsen.

## Playing our part: a switch in time

We all have a key role to play in contesting and changing the tone, quality and focus of current political debate in all of its dimensions. We need to make the most of the information contained in *A Switch in Time* and do what we can to redirect negative, destructive undercurrents into a more productive, respectful and civil political discourse. And we should do this now, before it's too late.

For a start, we need to resist the de-stabilising of our minority government by challenging those who promote the idea that it has no legitimacy. Second, we need to 'out' the sexism and misogyny that are being directed towards the nation's first woman prime minister. Such attitudes are degrading of the person who is holding the top job and who is performing with skill and effective leadership under demanding political circumstances. Sexist insults also degrade the office of prime minister. And by extension, they degrade all women and girls in this country. Do we truly believe in a fair go? Are we signalling to the next generations of women and girls that, when push comes to shove, they really don't have a place in key power positions?

Third, we need to take on board here what climate science is saying about climate change and undertake positive actions that assist in the reduction of greenhouse emissions. The body of global climate science has demonstrated the need to act quickly on reducing emissions if we are to forge an environmental future that does the best for our children, their children and generations beyond. Yet the process of peer-reviewed science and the integrity this accords to scientific observations and conclusions is either downplayed or ignored. Rather than respecting the evidence from a significant global body of climate science and bringing informed and constructive responses to the environmental challenges we face, nationally and globally, vested interests, parts of the media and political opponents of the minority government have promoted fear and confusion in the Australian community.

The following sections of this publication build on all of these points.

**Section A** – highlights the lack of respect being shown to crucial democratic principles upon which our governments are formed.

**Section B** – identifies and outlines the various ways in which sexist assumptions and characterisations are prevailing in the assessment of the performance of the country's first woman prime minister, and what this means for women and girls.

**Section C** – focuses on the cornerstones that have been put in place to respond to the threat of dangerous climate change, and which have been pulled down by self-interest and political expediency.

**Section D** – spells out a range of actions that people can take to restore 'a respect agenda' that challenges and changes the current and destructive nature of our political discourse.

Throughout *A Switch in Time*, the focus is on drawing together evidence for you to consider. Look at the facts. Look at the questions. Come to your own answers. Crucially, if you share our unease and concern, work from a range of possible actions that are outlined in the final section, 'Throw the switch, redirect the current'. Read them all, decide what you think you can do...and go for it!

# ELECTION 2010

## Section A: respecting democratic principles



**AEC**

Australian Electoral Commission

Get the latest election results at  
[vtr.aec.gov.au](http://vtr.aec.gov.au)

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*What has really poisoned our political debate is that after no one won the last election, it was poseurs such as Tony Windsor and Oakeshott who got to decide the outcome. (Peter Costello, former Liberal Treasurer.) <sup>1</sup>*

*Westpac chief executive Gail Kelly has urged other business leaders to work constructively with Prime Minister Julia Gillard and put aside the combative approach that some have taken to her minority government...Ms Kelly blasted businesses that...were attempting to 'run an agenda through third parties or the media'. <sup>2</sup>*

*The (Australian) media again ignores the fact that the Australian economy is growing solidly, unemployment is anchored around 5%, the Budget will return to surplus in a couple of weeks, living standards are rising and all of this has been underpinned by the economic policy choices taken by this government, aided and abetted by the legacy of policy settings from previous Australian Governments'. (Stephen Koukoulas, economist.) <sup>3</sup>*

**Despite popular belief, minority government is not new in Australia.**

**Australia has had fourteen such governments since federation – minority governments led by prime ministers Barton, Deakin, Watson, Reid, Fisher, Scullin, Menzies, Fadden, Curtin and Gillard. <sup>4</sup>**

### **Coalition government is commonplace**

Our national political experience consists mainly of governments formed by coalition. So what is it about this time that is different?

In an article published in *The Age* earlier this year, academic Peter Christoff pointed out that for forty-four of the sixty-seven years since 1945 (two-thirds of the time in fact), Australia has been ruled by coalition governments, almost all of them conservative. He notes that while in some political cultures coalition-building has worked poorly and encouraged political instability and vote-buying, elsewhere, such as in Germany and the Netherlands, the result has been inclusive moderation and the enhanced legitimacy of policies expressing the views of a wider range of parties and groups. <sup>5</sup>



Inclusive moderation in Australia is not what we have seen since the electorate delivered a hung parliament two years ago.

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott set the tone in his election night address in 2010:

*What is clear from tonight is that the Labor Party has definitely lost its majority, and what it means is that the Government has lost its legitimacy. And I say that a Government which found it very hard to govern effectively with a majority of 17 seats will never be able to govern effectively in a minority.* <sup>6</sup>

From day one following this election, the Australian public has been presented with a narrative that emanates relentlessly from several quarters of politics, media and business – that the current minority government is illegitimate and, by definition, less capable than either a Liberal/National Coalition Government or a Labor Government governing in its own right.

This is mischief. It is disrespectful of democratic principles and it is wrong.

There are damaging consequences, *The Sunday Herald Sun* columnist David Penberthy observed recently:

*Judging from the emails I receive, and the comments which my colleagues moderate and edit on our opinion website, I'd say there has been a significant escalation in the ugliness. And the people who are angriest – and most unhinged – are the people who have got it into their heads that Australia is no longer a democracy.* <sup>7</sup>

**What matters is that a representative democratic government's formation conforms to accepted key principles and that it is stable, serves its term, manages the economy and implements a legislative program that is fair, reasonable and serves the common good.**

## **A majority on the floor of the lower house**

In the 2010 election, the electorate delivered a hung parliament – both the ALP and the Coalition emerged with seventy-two seats each in the lower house, the House of Representatives.

In such circumstances, under our system, governments are formed by the party that can command a majority on the floor of the lower house. Julia Gillard was able to negotiate the support required to reach the requisite seventy-six votes and form a new coalition government – made up of Labor members, three Independents and one member of the Australian Greens.

The nation witnessed two weeks of very public negotiation by all Independents with leaders of the ALP, the Liberal Party and the Greens. It was clear from the outset of these negotiations that all the Independents and the recently elected Member for Melbourne were acting in a reasoned manner, with integrity and thoughtfulness.

Independent MP Andrew Wilkie put it this way:

*I will support whichever party I am confident can deliver stable, competent and ethical government.* <sup>8</sup>

Skilful negotiation and compromise was the right and proper way to resolve the issue. The main aim of this group of members was to provide a stable government that could serve a full term; deliver a better deal for regional Australia; and bring about a more cohesive, less adversarial parliament.

Rather than being the subject of public scorn, these members deserve our respect for performing their onerous task as thoughtfully as they did.

**The outcome of these two weeks of negotiation was captured in a written agreement (Agreement for a Better Parliament) between the ALP, Independents and the member of the Australian Greens Party. It includes provisions for no-confidence if the government is not performing well. From this coalition of members and a negotiated agreement, a legitimate government was created. To insist otherwise is to contradict a core principle of a Westminster system of democratic government.**

## The new minority government seeks to enhance democratic culture

### AGREEMENT FOR A BETTER PARLIAMENT

The agreements between Gillard, the Independents and Australian Greens encompassed a broad range of matters including working relationships between the parties, reforms to parliamentary processes, the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office, and some specific policy agendas. The proposed procedural reforms sought to facilitate greater engagement by backbench MPs in parliamentary business. The outcome was generally referred to as a 'new paradigm' for the parliament. It was touted as facilitating a 'kinder, gentler' parliament, and responding to the public's wish for 'leaders who...concentrate on making this country a better place to live'.

The preamble to the Agreement for a Better Parliament (the Agreement) drawn up by Windsor and Oakeshott – the essence of which was largely reflected in agreements separately arrived at between the ALP and the Australian Greens and Wilkie – declared:

*This document is a combined effort to increase the authority and opportunities for participation for all MPs, regardless of their political party or their status of office. The principles behind this document are twofold; to confirm 150 local MPs (and by extension their communities) as the foundation blocks of our Australian system of democracy, and to increase the authority of the Parliament in its relationship with the Executive. For these improvements to work, it will take a commitment by all MPs to respect the cultural change that these changes bring.*

*While the community demands a 'feisty' and 'testing' parliamentary floor, there will be a need for recognition by all to allow more MPs to be involved in various roles and debates, to allow more community issues to be tested through private members voting, and to allow a Speaker (in particular) to rule with a firm hand as debate tests the boundaries of the Standing Orders on the floor. The Executive will also need to show a commitment to the cultural change that this moment brings, and will need to be more flexible, more consultative, and more engaged with all MPs if these new arrangements are to work.*

Key elements of the Agreement included:

- *a more independent role and status for the Speaker;*
- *tighter time limits for questions, answers and ministerial statements;*
- *better enforcement of 'relevance' in ministerial answers;*
- *more time allocated for debate on Matters of Public Importance;*
- *enhanced opportunities for private members to speak and make constituency statements; and*
- *more resources for parliament, including the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office.<sup>9</sup>*

## **Serving a full term**

The frequent calls for a fresh election – from Opposition MPs, media commentators, some business people, former MPs, lobbyists and sections of the voting public – deny another principle: democratically elected governments are expected to be allowed to serve their full term.

According to the Westminster system, a fresh election is brought on when the government no longer enjoys the confidence on the floor of the lower house. They are not brought on because some aggrieved people and/or influential lobby groups want one.

It is instructive to recall that the majority of Australians opposed the invasion of Iraq under the Howard Liberal/National Party Coalition. Although protests were strong, a fresh election was not called for.

Traditionally, Australians have accepted this principle. It should be no different in relation to a minority government, provided the government maintains the confidence of the house.

## **The separation of powers**

The separation of powers – with government, the judiciary and the public service being independent parts of an integrated system – is there for good reason: as a check against corruption, cronyism, undue influence over democratic institutions and abuse of citizens' rights and trust.

The role of government within this system must be to deliver a budget that enables the country to operate and remain secure; collect revenues; introduce new and amended legislation. It must not impose its will on the other two parts of the system.

The public service role is to implement and evaluate the policies of government and it must do so by providing independent, frank and fearless advice and not limit its advice to that which government wants to hear.

Similarly, the justice system must be able to operate with complete independence and be allowed to interpret law without political interference. New laws must be able to be contested through the courts. Judges must operate with total independence at all times. Every citizen must have equal access to this judicial system. Contestation must be able to be taken through a series of courts and eventually to the High Court of Australia. Rulings by the justices of the High Court are final and binding upon all governments and all citizens.

In the current political climate, with the heat generated around the narrow margin that defines the government of the day, two recent controversies reveal a troubling move away from this crucial principle of the separation of powers.

The long-running case of the Member for Dobell, Mr Craig Thompson MP, has seen various accusations across the chamber, despite the fact that allegations about his behaviour prior to becoming an MP are being dealt with through formal inquiry and possible legal process outside of the parliament. In the second matter, the newly-appointed Speaker of the House, Mr Peter Slipper MP, is also the subject of allegations. Once again, these are now being tested by formal processes beyond the parliament.

Sensing an opportunity to whittle away at the minority government's slim margin, the Opposition parties have waged a relentless and personal attack directed at these two parliamentarians. At the same time, some government ministers have been prepared to make public statements while the Slipper matters are under consideration. Both sides of politics are prepared to engage in expediency and brutal tactics at the expense of observing the principle of the separation of powers.



– front page headline  
*The Herald Sun*, 1 May 2012

‘A wide range of our top business leaders...’  
Exactly how many are we talking about?

‘Most wanted to be quoted “off the record”’. Surely all worthwhile debate and reliable data must be attributed?

CEO, Manufacturing Australia, lobby group opposed to carbon price. Warburton is also chair of Tony Abbott’s Business Advisory Council.

Graham Kraehe is Chairman Bluescope Steel, and opposed to carbon pricing.

‘Unemployment is as much as 5 percent. Core inflation is a bit above 2 percent. The formal system is sound.’  
Glenn Stevens, Governor Reserve Bank  
8 June 2012

‘New?’ There have been 14 minority governments in Australian political history.

**A wide range of Australia’s top business leaders have joined to demand a federal election now.**

Most wanted to be quoted “**off the record**”.

Confronting government can be personally damaging and costly to their business.

But two were prepared to take the courageous step of being quoted in name. Both were former directors of the Reserve Bank. **Dick Warburton**, the chairman of companies like Citigroup Australia and the Westfield Retail Trust, said “things are hopeless. The only way to get clear air is an election”.

He said that the Labor Party was in disarray, and indeed the whole Parliament was also damagingly in disarray.

He was joined by leading company director **Graham Kraehe**, who said that the **Australian economy was being damaged by a lack of consumer confidence, business confidence and overseas investment confidence**, despite the positive impact of the resources boom.

This negative sentiment was magnified by the difficulties of minority Government, which was **new** to Australia. And it would be best for the economy “if an election was called now”, Kraehe said. This would enable the people to give a “decisive mandate to one party or the other”.

– TERRY McCRANN

Their comments were echoed **by other business leaders**, off the record, all calling for an election to give the country a fresh start.

The comments included:

**“A lack of decisive government is holding the country back.”**

The line that’s been crossed was a “breakdown in government integrity and community patience”.

**The people in business I speak to are either calling for an election, or “tuning out, just waiting for it to happen”.** “We don’t want another spectacle of a leadership challenge; and **the independents just add to the total mess.**”

And just for good measure, the whole carbon tax was disastrous.

There was a common call **across business**, for it to be deferred until at least 2015. Some leaders emphasised that their call for an election was not party-politically driven, nor even a comment on Gillard’s policies.

Simply that **a minority Government was utterly dysfunctional** and the only way to cut through to get decisive leadership was an immediate election.

‘...other business leaders’.  
Again, not named.

So, we should have elections every time some are aggrieved and have a public forum to make the call?

Independents are simply non-party members, constitutionally valid and elected to serve their constituencies like every other member.

‘..across business’.  
Another unsubstantiated claim.

More than 300 pieces of legislation passed by the minority Government.



## **The legislative program of the minority government**

**Since the minority government was formed in late 2010, it has got on with the job. In the two years since, our national parliament has passed over 300 pieces of new and amended legislation.**

If Australian citizens were randomly asked to identify legislative reforms of the current minority government, it is doubtful that many would come up with more than one or two. Yet the extensive enacted legislation is highly significant, with important implications for different parts of society and our common good – carbon pricing, mineral resources rent tax, parental leave for mothers, parental leave for fathers, truck driver safety, improved health care, aged care, a National Disability Insurance Scheme, extended provisions of the *Disability Act 2006* to cover mental illness, and so on.

Rather than media reporting and analysis of these legislative reforms, they have been buried under the weight of stories that better accommodate the 24-hour news cycle – the constant search for controversy, the periodic bouts of leadership speculation (fed mainly by unnamed sources), the Thompson affair, issues surrounding the Speaker of the House and the introduction of a ‘Great Big New Tax’ (aka the carbon pricing package). All of this suits nicely the oppositional forces which are intent on discrediting the minority government for their own ends.

The line adopted in much of the media is that ‘people have stopped listening’ to the government or that the government is poor at communicating these reforms.

We would put it differently.

Major news outlets are piping pretty much the same tune. Rigour and impartiality are difficult to find. Preoccupied with the quick grab and the sensational, large sections of the mainstream media are failing to provide substantive analysis of the impressive policy achievements of the minority government.

**What we are being fed is a public narrative that is nothing short of ‘group think’, at odds with authoritative assessments of the economy and the delivery of the minority government’s legislative program. Unless this ‘group think’ is resisted, it is difficult for the voting public to discern the truth of the matter.**

## Over 300 pieces of legislation: here are just 20 for starters...

### ***Clean Energy Act 2011***

Created a market-based carbon-pricing package to assist Australia's transition to a low-carbon economy, including household assistance measures.

### ***Clean Energy (Household Assistance Amendment) Act 2011***

Brought about higher payments to pensioners, veterans, self-funded retirees and families, assistance to aged-care residents, and new assistance to these people through the Essential Medical Equipment Payment, the Low Income Supplement and the Single Income Family Supplement.

### ***Clean Energy (Tax Laws Amendments) Act 2011***

Brought in tax cuts to assist low and middle income families, by tripling the tax-free threshold from \$6 000 to \$18 200 in 2012-13 and adjusting the first two marginal tax rates.

### ***Minerals Resource Rent Tax (Imposition – Customs) Act 2012***

Introduced a minerals resource rent tax on miners from 1 July 2012, taxing above the normal profits made by miners that are reasonably attributable to the resources, at a rate of 30 per cent. This ensures that the Australian community receives an adequate return for its taxable resources, having regard to the inherent value and non-renewable nature of the resources.

### ***Budget Papers 2012-13: National Disability Insurance Scheme***

\$1 billion over four years committed to the first stage of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), to be established in up to four locations from 2013-14.

### ***Paid Parental Leave Act 2010***

Provided up to 18 weeks of government-funded Parental Leave Pay at the National Minimum Wage for eligible parents of children born or adopted from 1 January 2011.

### ***Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Act 2012***

Extended the Paid Parental Leave Scheme to certain working fathers and partners so that they can receive two weeks' Dad and Partner Pay at the rate of the National Minimum Wage.

### ***Fair Work Amendment (Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry) Act 2012***

Extended the operation of most of the provisions of the Act to contract outworkers in textiles, clothing and footwear industries; enabled outworkers to recover unpaid amounts up the supply chain; enabled an outwork code of practice; and extended specific right of entry rules to sweatshop premises.

### ***Road Safety Remuneration Act 2012***

Promoted safety and fairness in the road transport industry by ensuring that road transport drivers do not have remuneration-related incentives and pressures to work in an unsafe manner. Ensures road transport drivers are paid for their work, develops enforceable standards throughout the road transport industry supply chain and facilitates access to dispute-resolution procedures for remuneration and related conditions for road transport drivers.

### ***Budget Papers 2012-13***

Increases to the number of Home Care packages by nearly 40 000 to nearly 100 000 over the next five years and \$500m to provide dental services for people on public dental waiting lists, to reduce waiting times and provide more dentists.

### ***Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011 & Trademarks Amendment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Act 2011***

By 1 December 2012, tobacco products sold in Australia will be in plain brown packaging with no logos, branding or promotional text; this is aimed at decreasing the attractiveness of tobacco products.

### ***Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Amendment Act 2012***

The guarantee no longer needs to be provided from 70 to 75 years of age. Incremental increases will see the superannuation guarantee move from 9 per cent to reach 12 per cent in the 2019-20 financial year.

### ***Budget Papers 2012 -13***

Small business instant asset write off threshold increased to \$6 500 and the first \$5 000 for car purchase.

### ***National Broadband Network Companies Act 2011***

Provided a regulatory framework for National Broadband Network (NBN) corporations that promotes long-term interests of consumers, including ensuring the NBN remains in commonwealth ownership until parliamentary process declares it suitable for sale, and provided a framework for restrictions on private ownership.

### ***Fairer Private Health Insurance Incentives Act 2012***

Reduced the amount of private health insurance rebate available to high income eligible taxpayers.

### ***Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (Schoolkids Bonus Budget Measures) Act 2012***

Delivered new assistance to families to help with the costs of their child's education, replacing the education tax refund paid through the taxation system. About 1.3 million families will receive \$410 for each primary and \$820 for each high school child to help meet their education expenses.

### ***Australian Human Rights Commission Amendment (National Children's Commissioner) Act 2012***

Established a National Children's Commissioner to promote discussion, awareness, respect and exercising of human rights of children in Australia.

### ***National Health and Hospital Network Act 2011***

Established the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care to promote, support and encourage health care safety and quality.

### ***Work Health and Safety Act 2011***

Establishment of a balanced and nationally consistent framework to secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces.

### ***Personally Controlled Electronic Health Records Act 2012***

Established a voluntary national system for provision of access to health information for consumers of health care, to improve availability and quality of health information, coordination of care and to reduce adverse events.<sup>10</sup>

# You be the judge

## Media ‘group think’

*Simply that minority government (is) utterly dysfunctional, and the only way to cut through to get decisive leadership (is) an immediate election.*

Terry McCrann, *The Herald Sun*, 1 May 2012.

*But then we don't have a leader...There (is) one big thing needed to restore confidence...A federal election now.*

Terry McCrann, *The Herald Sun*, 14 June 2012.

*The Prime Minister's emphatic 71-31 win may not completely bury the egomaniacal Mr Rudd, but it does at least give Ms Gillard the chance to stabilise her dysfunctional government and start showing that she is aware of the significant policy challenges that our nation faces. That won't be an easy task for Ms Gillard, who has lost the faith of the Australian electorate since her ruthless removal of Mr Rudd in June 2010.*

*The Australian Financial Review*, 28 February 2012.

*(The 2012 Budget) joins a list formed since this government of inconvenience was hammered together with the help of independent malcontents and a single Green two dysfunctional years ago.*

Piers Akerman, *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 2012.

*The coalition moved to censure the prime minister over 'a government that is paralysed by dysfunction and division and is now incapable of addressing the daily challenges facing the Australian people'.*

AAP, *The Weekly Times*, 17 February 2012.

## The Governor, Reserve Bank

*According to data published this week by the Australian Statistician, real GDP rose by over 4 per cent over the past year. The outcome includes the recovery from the effects of flooding a year ago, so the underlying pace of growth is probably not quite that fast, but it is quite respectable – something close to trend. Core inflation is a bit above 2 per cent.*

***The financial system is sound. Our government is one among only a small number rated AAA, with manageable debt. We have received a truly enormous boost in national income courtesy of the high terms of trade.***

***This, in turn, has engendered one of the biggest resource investment upswings in our history, which will see business capital spending rise by another 2 percentage points of GDP over 2012/13, to reach a 50-year high...Yet the nature of public discussion is unrelentingly gloomy, and this has intensified over the past six months.***

*Even before the recent turn of events in Europe and their effects on global markets, we were grimly determined to see our glass as half empty. Numerous foreign visitors to the Reserve Bank have remarked on the surprising extent of this pessimism. Each time I travel abroad I am struck by the difference between the perceptions held by foreigners about Australia and what I read in the newspapers at home.*

Glenn Stevens, Governor, Reserve Bank. <sup>11</sup>

## **Future rule: anything goes?**

There is no perfect model of government. But the principles of the Westminster system of democratic government have served our country well; along with such others as Canada, the UK and New Zealand, we are its beneficiaries.

*Democracy is a process, not a static condition. It is becoming, rather than being. It can be easily lost, but is never finally won.* (William H. Hastie, 1904-1976.)<sup>12</sup>

**It is dangerous terrain when we conveniently or cynically ignore the rock-solid conventions by which our representative governments are formed.**

It is irresponsible to attack the democratic basis of a minority government just because it suits the interests of some to do so. Doing so signals to a public, and to younger generations of voters in particular, that ‘anything goes’.

This aspect needs to be kept in mind in light of the findings from a recent survey by the Lowy Institute. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of respondents believed it does not matter what kind of government we have; 37 per cent said that in some circumstances non-democratic rule can be best. Only 39 per cent of Australians aged 18-29 said democracy is better than other forms of government.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth pausing and thinking about this for a moment, especially in relation to the countless numbers of men and women who have built and sustained our democratic foundations over the past several generations. Right now, many Australians feel diffident about democracy, and think that we might be better served by something less.

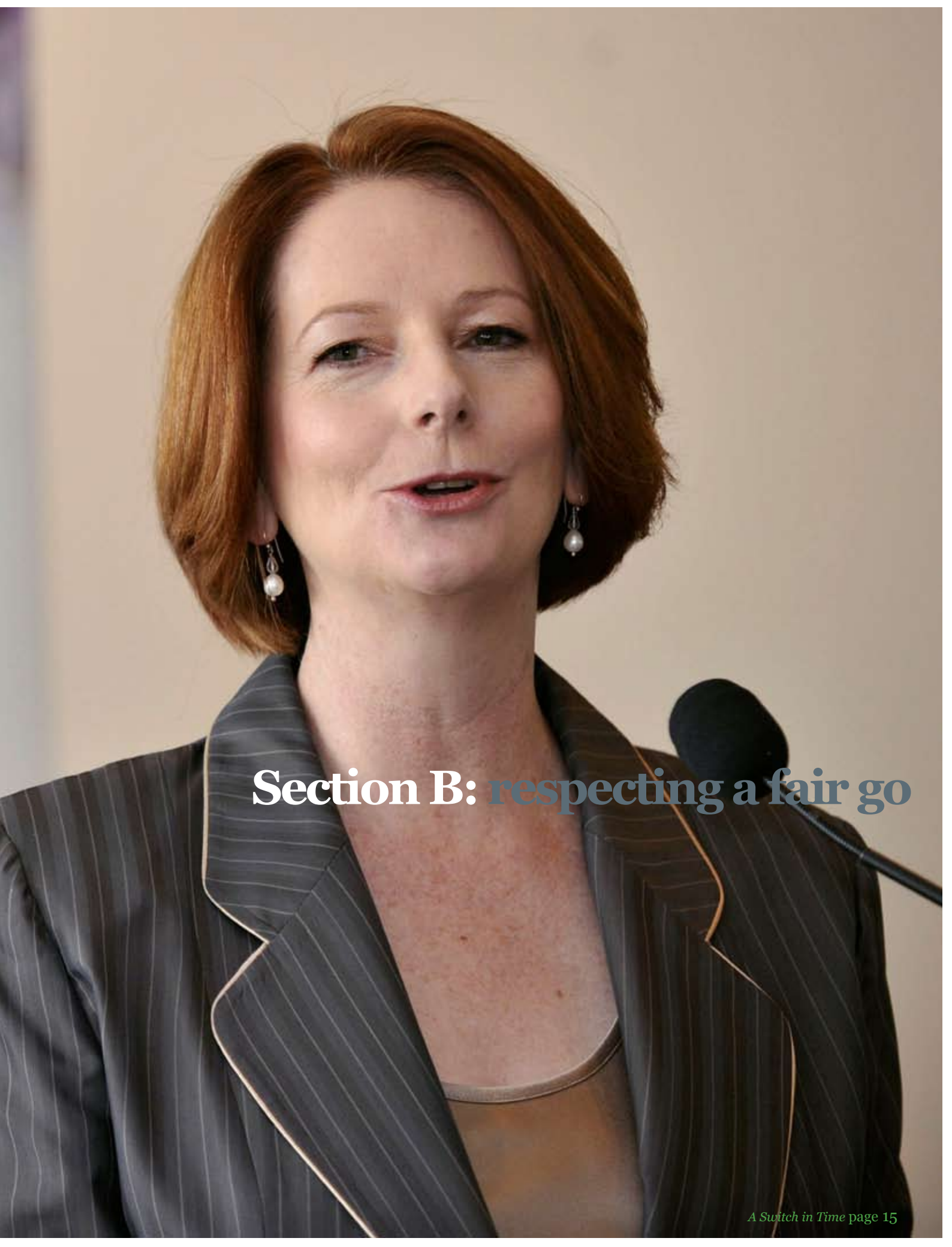
The responsibility for maintaining the robustness and relative appeal of our democratic system does not rest with parliamentarians alone. It’s true that they have a pivotal role in upholding democratic principles, debating with force and clarity, focusing on the national interest and behaving according to accepted standards of community decency. But every one of us has to take some responsibility too – accepting our social obligations to one another as citizens; constructively focusing on policies that enhance the common good; being engaged and active in our national political discourse rather than being intent on destructiveness from the sidelines, venting spleen, and doing nothing.

In the first instance, the claims of illegitimacy attached to the current minority government should be contested vigorously by Australians everywhere. So too should the calls for an early election. And the performance of the minority government should be judged on the merits of its policies and legislative record.

**Unless we do so, the implication is that ‘anything goes’. The danger is that Australians will embrace a move to some sort of new, and as yet unknown, regimen. Is this really what we want?**



**Sexism and misogyny offer no benefit to our advancement as a society. Distortions in power relations become further entrenched. Active discrimination is made easier.**



**Section B: respecting a fair go**

*A view is held, and sometimes expressed...that **wives** of Prime Ministers are more highly regarded and widely loved than Prime Ministers themselves, both during and after their terms of office.* (Gough Whitlam.)<sup>1</sup>

To put it simply – we are not used to having a woman in the nation's top job.

Since Julia Gillard was sworn in as the first female prime minister of Australia on 24 June 2010, she has been subjected to a widespread and negative campaign that reflects a deep unease in many that the present prime minister is a woman.

### **Novelty value?**

Rather than applauding this development as a sign of our evolving political maturity, Gillard is castigated and vilified, often because of her gender. Typically, this is defended as a justifiable reaction to her individual political performance, personal style and presentation. But in reality it is more than this. Any woman, at this point in time and occupying high office in this country, is likely to be subjected to the same onslaught.

The outcomes are not pretty. As with racism, sexism and misogyny in Australian politics make a lot of us uncomfortable. These attitudes reflect badly on our society, both at home and abroad. It was to be hoped that we were better than widespread loathing and toxic viciousness based on a person's gender. We assumed (naively in retrospect) that talent and capacity will be acknowledged and respected, whoever possesses these qualities. At this stage in our history, we did not expect to see bias, deep-seated gendered prejudice and disrespect from men and women expressed towards a PM who happens to be female. Surely the land of the fair go means just that – that the women who have the political skill to reach high office will be treated the same way as men?

To date, there has been little informed debate as to whether much of the negative commentary about Prime Minister Gillard is sexist. Allegations of sexism are batted away with superficial defences – 'political correctness gone mad' or 'it can't be sexist because women are saying things too', or 'she shouldn't be treated softly just because she's a woman'. We also know only too well that women across the political divide can join in the unedifying pursuit of sexist put-downs:

*In June 2008 (Liberal Sophie Mirabella) made a reference to Gillard's childlessness – saying that Gillard wouldn't be needing Rudd's 'taxpayer-funded nanny' – but was outraged the next day when the then Labor MP Belinda Neal, on the receiving end of a remark by Mirabella about being a 'man-hater', muttered in parliament that the pregnant Mirabella's 'evil thoughts' would make her child a 'demon'.*<sup>2</sup>

In public life, it is a given that prime ministers and other high-office holders will always be subject to a close and constant level of scrutiny, media reporting and analysis. It goes with the turf. If, however, sexist attitudes are threaded

through media reporting, a public scaling up of sexism and misogyny is likely to occur within the broader community. With this in mind, it is worth taking a moment to reflect a little more deeply on the question of sex, gender and unconscious bias.

### **Sex, gender and unconscious bias**

Born either female or male, we enter the world with an intricate combination of biology and genetics that 'stamp' some personality traits and physical characteristics onto our lives. Gender, however, is less biological and more social. It is about the way we are socialised and live our lives.

*Ask a fish what water is and you'll get no answer. Even if fish were capable of speech, they would likely have no explanation for the element they swim in every minute of every day of their lives. Water simply is. Fish take it for granted.*<sup>3</sup>

So it is with gender. From birth, and through complex, cultural and social processes, we learn how to dress, behave, talk, relate to others, take on roles, and use personal and political power. All this time, and usually blissfully unaware, we absorb influences and deep-seated assumptions, values and beliefs about what it means to be boys and men, girls and women.

This sustained, unnoticed socialisation defines what girls and boys should do – rather than what they can do. With these expectations so engrained in our thinking, they define what is 'normal'.<sup>4</sup>

In this way, we tend to take gender for granted, not seeing it at work in the same way as the fish does not see water. And because the role played by gender usually goes unexamined, we can find ourselves subject to 'unconscious bias' – when gender expectations bubble up from our unconscious and act overtly to reinforce an existing (often inequitable) order of things.

All the time, we make assessments of people that reflect assumptions and prejudices which lie below the surface. Judgements about gender are no different. A stay-at-home dad is likely to be met with some bemusement by those who take for granted that this is what women do. A male nurse will have to earn the respect of female and male patients who are so used to women doing the job. A female CEO in the corporate world where there are so few women in senior positions will be watched keenly by those wary of the 'intruder.'

***We all have prejudices. It takes more than clarity to overcome them. It takes courage.***<sup>5</sup>

A female prime minister, the first in generations of masculine politics, shakes up the 'natural' order in all sorts of ways, both negatively and positively. Whether we are sexist in our assessment of her depends on our preparedness to check these deeper-seated gender assumptions and prejudices, bring them to the surface, and line them up with our rational selves and other values.

## Controlling for unconscious bias

*The world of classical music...was very recently the preserve of white men. Women, it was believed, simply could not play like men. They didn't have the strength, the attitude, or the resilience for certain kinds of pieces.*

Their lips were different. Their lungs were less powerful. Their hands were smaller. That did not seem like prejudice.

*It seemed like a fact, because when conductors and music directors and maestros held auditions, the men always seemed to sound better than the women. No one paid much attention to how auditions were held, because it was an article of faith that one of the things that made a music expert a music expert was that he could listen to music played under any circumstances and gauge, instantly and objectively, the quality of the performance.*

*But over the past few decades, the classical music world has undergone a revolution...Many musicians thought that conductors were abusing their power and playing favourites. They wanted the audition process to be formalised...*

Screens were erected between the committee and the auditioner, and if the person auditioning cleared his or her throat or made any kind of identifiable sound – if they were wearing heels, for example, and stepped on a part of the floor that wasn't carpeted – they were ushered out and given a new number. And as these rules were put in place around the country, an extraordinary thing happened: orchestras began to hire women.

In the past thirty years, since screens became commonplace, the number of women in the top US orchestras has increased five-fold.

*We are often careless with our powers of rapid cognition... Taking (these) seriously means we have to acknowledge the subtle influences that can alter or undermine or bias the products of our unconscious...And what did orchestras do when confronted with their prejudice? They solved the problem...The fact that there are now women playing for symphony orchestras is not a trivial change.*

*It matters because it has opened up a world of possibility for a group that had been locked out of opportunity. It also matters because by fixing the first impression at the heart of the audition – by judging purely on the basis of ability – orchestras now hire better musicians, and better musicians make better music.<sup>6</sup>*

## Sexism and misogyny

Sexism is not a difficult concept to grasp. It occurs when individuals are demeaned by prejudice, discrimination, vilification, or comparison because of their sex and gender. Sexism is negative and always demeaning. Men as well as women can come in for sexist commentary and attack.

**Sexism reflects assumptions that usually remain hidden and unacknowledged in our unconscious and these can emerge in any place in society – the school playground, the classroom, a workplace, in sporting pursuits – and in public life.**

Such assumptions are usually covert and expressed in subtle ways – through the choice of words and phrases, tone, gesture, rhetoric and body language. Often flippant, they are not necessarily delivered with a nasty or negative intent. More generally, however, and as a reflection of unequal power relations between men and women, it is women and girls who are more likely to be subjected to sexist comment. When this sexism is sourced by a deep-seated loathing of the female gender (misogyny), the outcomes are malevolent and destructive.

The fact that there is now debate and discussion about sexism and Prime Minister Gillard is easily explained – the novelty of a woman in the top job has exposed seams of sexist attitudes and prejudice that would not otherwise been exposed had a man continued the unbroken line of male prime ministers. This is not unique to Australia. As the accompanying examples show, American women including Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi and Sarah Palin were all subjected to sexist commentary when they achieved or sought high office.

These attitudes and prejudice are different from the grand Australian tradition of poking fun at our ‘pollies’. We are used to television news that captures the suburban ordinariness of a male prime minister running in tracksuit pants in the Australian colours of green and gold. Public comments are made about the sartorial splendour of a male prime minister wearing expensive suits, suggesting he is a bit of a ‘spiv’. Cartoons take the ‘mickey’ out of a male Opposition leader who chooses to emphasise his ageless, alpha maleness by wearing ‘budgie smugglers’.

What is important is that depictions such as these are not sexist. They highlight some personality characteristics but they are not demeaning the subject’s maleness and, crucially, they do not translate to negative judgements of their political skill, political authority and capability. Indeed, rather than diminish public perceptions of strengths or capacity, the outcome can sometimes be an increase in popularity.

In the current experience, Australia’s first female prime minister is subjected to comment and representation that is sexist while at the same time she is judged more harshly on her political performance and record than male counterparts.

The prime minister’s performance is assessed by references and criteria that are heavily gendered. Her ‘deliberate barrenness’ is said to disqualify her on some public policy matters because she is not a parent; her ascendancy to a leadership position is depicted as ‘deceit’ (whereas for men it would be seen as a ‘triumph’ of one over the other) and her demeanour whilst talking with the US President is described as ‘girlish’ and ‘flirtatious’.

These sorts of gendered, sexist comments are simply not made about men.

**Sexism and misogyny offer no benefit to our advancement as a society. Distortions in power relations become further entrenched. Active discrimination is made easier.**

Sexist and misogynistic attitudes are already a driver of high and unacceptable rates of violence towards women and girls. One in five Australian women has identified at least one experience of physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner since the age of fifteen.<sup>7</sup> Women make up two-thirds of family violence victims.<sup>8</sup> Over ninety per cent of rape victims are women.<sup>9</sup> Close to a fifth of women in workplaces have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

We need to reduce this level of violent abuse, not worsen it. At the same time, we should be encouraging greater equality between men and women for all of the attendant benefits this brings – a larger pool of talent and experience; a way of sustaining our economic prosperity; and an enhancement of the common good.

**Fran Kelly (ABC presenter):** *John Howard was criticised for being 'Little Johnny', Billy McMahon for having big ears, Paul Keating for being arrogant, wearing Italian suits...*

**(Former Democrat Leader) Cheryl Kernot:** *These are more superficial things, though, aren't they? Some of the things about Julia like the 'deliberately barren', the chattering about her domestic arrangements, I think they are at a deeper level and I think the ongoing political discourse is at a slightly deeper level than John Howard's eyebrows or Paul Keating's bald spot or Italian suits.*

*There's a level that's nasty and innate. And we have given permission for that to flourish. And we need to take that permission back, and we need to accord some respect.*

**(Former NSW Liberal Leader) Kerry Chikarovski:** *I think what happens is, with the whole being a female, is that there is an undercurrent in all of that that says she's not up to the job because she is a female...Is the job of Prime Minister so tough, that you really need to be a bloke to do it, and a woman can't handle the pressure – I think that is the subtext...every time she makes a decision that is criticised as being wrong, the subtext of all the debate is, it's because she's a woman and she can't handle the pressure.*

ABC Radio program: 'Sexism in Politics', 7 February 2012. <sup>11</sup>

## Seams of sexism USA style

*When [Clinton] comes on television,  
I involuntarily cross my legs.*

Tucker Carlson, Microsoft National Broadcasting Company.

*Obama is just creaming Hillary. You know, all these primaries. And Hillary says it's not fair, because they're being held in February, and February is Black History Month... And unfortunately for Hillary, there's no White Bitch Month.*

Comedian Penn Jillette, Webcast

*(Hillary Clinton) she's the stereotypical bitch. You know what I mean? She's that stereotypical nagging -- [screeching]. And she (Hillary Clinton) had that tone of voice, where she just sounds like... I can't listen to it because it sounds like -- it sounds like my wife saying, 'Take out the garbage'.*

Chris Matthews, MSNBC

*Top 10 highlights now of Sarah Palin's trip to New York. Number 2: Bought makeup at Bloomingdale's to update her 'shutty flight attendant' look.*

David Letterman

**I hate Nancy Pelosi. I HATE PELOSI. SHE IS AN EVIL WOMAN WHO HAS GOTTEN RICH ON INSIDER TRADING AND GETTING CONGRESS TO GIVE HER LOUSY HUSBAND MONEY. SHE SHOULD BE HUNG.**

From the Facebook page: 'I hate Nancy Pelosi'

*Clinton and former vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro: 'f--king whores'.*

Air America – radio host Randi Rhodes

*Now let me tell you something about Sarah Palin man, she's good masturbation material. The glasses and all that? Great masturbation material.*

Tracey Morgan ('30 Rock' actor)

*The other night a mate of mine (we'll just call him Merkel) admitted he finds Sarah Palin sexy. In the middle of being reprimanded, deadly serious, he went on to say, 'Well, who else is there on that circuit?'*

*Oh, Angela Merkel I 'spose, dirty b--ch, I'd f--k her man'.*

*Eleven for the Merkin Molecule.*

Joe Ego, Don't Start Me Off blog, 'Angela Merkel'

## **A long tradition of masculine politics**

For more than a century of Australian federal politics, men have occupied all positions of political authority. Up until recently, in an unbroken line, all prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, opposition leaders and governors-general have been men.

We have become accepting of this tradition, but not because there's a rule book that decrees it to be so.

Not surprisingly, the experience as voters over many generations is one where political power is equated with maleness – as leaders, high office holders and lawmakers.

This has become the norm, the 'natural' order of things.



**1891** *Whatever a woman does or is, she is criticised. The most innocuous qualities could be twisted to*

*show her in a bad light...if she is vivacious and enjoys social life she is a 'flirt' or a 'gadabout'; if she is quiet and of a more serious turn of mind she is 'withdrawn' or 'stupid'. Through such sneers in conversation, writings, jokes and cartoons, contempt for women was handed down from one generation to the next...It was time...for some systematic analysis of this constant crusade of the newspapers here in Sydney and all over the civilised world...habitual belittlement leads women to mistrust themselves and silently tolerate jests against womankind.*

Louisa Lawson. <sup>16</sup>

**1900** *I have no doubt that the homes of some of these women who are the advocates of woman suffrage are in a very miserable state. The type of women who frequent this Chamber when the Woman Suffrage Bill is being discussed is enough to terrify anyone. We only have to look at them – and my word! What a good thing it is that we are not related to any of them.*

Male parliamentarian, South Australian Parliament, 1900. <sup>17</sup>

**1921** *When Australia's first female was elected to the Western Australian Parliament, The Age cautioned against more women entering politics. In an editorial, the august newspaper declared: Were political office to become...the latest craze of fashion, there would be many dreary and neglected homes throughout the country sacrificed on the altar of political ambition.* <sup>18</sup>

**1943**

*Dame Enid Lyons became the first woman elected to the federal House of Representatives. She had lost her husband in 1939. She later wrote that juggling work and home duties, organising her large family (she had twelve children), coping with their childhood illnesses and medical problems, liaising with their teachers, keeping herself well-dressed (photographers delighted in taking pictures whenever she appeared), fulfilling social duties in her constituency, without the support of her husband, were extremely tiring.*



*Her heartfelt cry touches a nerve in women today:*

*I would sometimes look at the men about me and envy them for having wives. Were there any of those politicians, I would ask myself, who even washed their own socks? <sup>19</sup>*

**1983** *Barrie Unsworth, Secretary of the NSW Labor Council, announced support for the Miss Australia Quest at an official gathering. When the women delegates began hissing and jeering, he snapped back at us: 'Miss Australia wouldn't face much competition from you lot if she came down here'.* <sup>20</sup>

**1993** *'Women only wanted to be shearers for the sex', said Ernie Ecob, secretary of the Australian Workers' Union. He later became president of the NSW Labor Council. (His comment gave rise to the annual Ernie Awards).*

**1995** *A Silver Ernie award was made in 1995 to Martin Ferguson, then president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, now Labor Minister for Resources, Energy and Tourism, for calling women unionists campaigning for paid maternity leave 'hairy legged femocrats'.*

**1997** *A Gold Ernie award went to Michael Knight, NSW Minister for the Olympics, for his explanation as to why there were originally no women on the board of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games: 'Appointments are made on merit, not sex'.* <sup>21</sup>

**2011** *Two federal male politicians were reprimanded for making a cat call when women parliamentarians were speaking. Liberal Senator David Bushby made a 'meow' noise toward Senator Penny Wong during a Senate committee hearing; and Labor's Joel Fitzgibbon (Chief Whip) made a cat call towards deputy Liberal leader Julie Bishop during a parliamentary session.* <sup>22</sup>

Early challenges to this 'natural order' were resisted from the very time women were accorded the right to vote in Australia and when some even dared to stand as candidates for election.

Our long tradition of male-only political leaders means that generations of voters, male and female, have unconsciously absorbed male voices, their male suits, views and appearance. We are used to hearing men making the comments on policy and government. We are used to seeing men contesting the leadership positions and beating one another in ballots. In the hurly burly of political life, we all watch their ambitious plays, their use of personal and parliamentary power. Ambition is accepted. The way they wield power is the reality. We shrug at their foibles, their appearance at a strip club and their other larrikin ways.

**We are steeped in, and utterly familiar with, the maleness of our politics. It is unremarkable in the true sense of the word.**

**Except when the unbroken line is broken. Then it becomes remarkable.**

We have never previously heard a female voice in the top job, have never seen a female prime minister striding to the podium at a press conference, have never seen an Australian woman addressing the US Congress and greeting the American President.

We are not used to seeing a female prime minister walking through a shopping mall, not used to photos of her in a hard hat on a factory visit, not used to a woman deciding to contest and take a leadership position away from a man.

And we react, men and women, in all sorts of ways. Many are delighted by her trail-blazing as well as upset by the focus on everything except her capacity. Others, men and women, are tetchy, patronising her and finding all sorts of overt and covert ways to pull her down.

*....(on) hearing that her cunning plan to stay in power by appointing someone from the Opposition as Speaker may have come disastrously unstuck, Cruella de Gillard decided to blame the Opposition for having him there in the first place. (Former Senator Amanda Vanstone speaking about the Australian Prime Minister.)*<sup>23</sup>

Unless we all consciously check our biases (or remain blinkered by them,) gendered expectations and prejudices can get in the way of an objective assessment of the prime minister's capacity and performance.

Instead of focusing squarely on her policy achievements, comments about her dress are more likely to gain the exposure. Instead of noting her composure and grace under pressure, let alone the size of her decisive win over Kevin Rudd in February 2012, it is said she 'lacks credibility'. Instead of conceding her skill as a negotiator in complex situations, such as in her negotiations surrounding the formation of the minority government, she is described as lacking competence and as

'weak' and 'vulnerable'. Things are written about her that would simply not be applied to any man – such as the state of the fruit bowl in her kitchen, her single status, or why she might not have had children.

*In July 2010, immediately after Julia Gillard became Labor leader and Prime Minister and under the banner headline of An unmarried PM's not ideal, The Daily Telegraph reported on its Perfect PM online poll of more than 12,700 voters which asked whether it mattered whether a prime minister was single. According to the poll results, a whopping 34.1 per cent said he or she should be wed.*<sup>24</sup>

One could argue over the use of the word 'whopping' in that the clear majority had no issue about the marital status of a female PM. The significance, however, is that the tabloid paper even chose to conduct such a poll.

*It was revealed yesterday that Ms Waterhouse had written a blog that Ms Gillard needed to improve her style, including her hair and dress sense. After seeing a photo of Ms Gillard at Minami Sanriku (the Japanese town that disappeared after being caught in the path of the March 2011 tsunami) Ms Waterhouse wrote: 'She desperately needs a makeover. It wasn't the carnage behind that gave me the horrors, but the woman standing in front of it. Can't our leaders be stylish? With popularity waning she needs every card up her sleeve.'*

*When asked about Ms Waterhouse's comments, Ms Gillard said: 'These were moving events and I don't want any collateral debate to distract from that.'*<sup>25</sup>

## Want to play ‘Where’s Wally’?

In 112 years of national political leadership, can you spot the two women?

**Prime Ministers** John Christian Watson • George Houston Reid • Alfred Deakin • Andrew Fisher • Joseph Cook • Andrew Fisher • William Morris Hughes • Stanley Melbourne Bruce • James Henry Scullin • Joseph Aloysius Lyons • Earle Christmas Grafton Page • Robert Gordon Menzies • Arthur William Fadden • John Joseph Ambrose Curtin • Francis Michael Forde • Joseph Benedict Chifley • Robert Gordon Menzies • Harold Edward Holt • John McEwan • John Grey Gorton • William McMahon • Edward Gough Whitlam • John Malcolm Fraser • Robert James Lee Hawke • Paul John Keating • John Winston Howard • Kevin Michael Rudd • Julia Eileen Gillard **Deputy Prime Ministers** Sir John McEwan • John Douglas Anthony • Lance Herbert Barnard • James Ford Cairns • Frank Crean • John Douglas Anthony • Lionel Frost Bowen • Paul John Keating • Brian Leslie Howe • Kim Christian Beazley • Timothy Andrew Fischer • John Duncan Anderson • Mark Anthony James Vaile • Julia Eileen Gillard **Opposition Leaders** George Reid • Chris Watson • George Reid • Joseph Cook • Andrew Fisher • Alfred Deakin • Joseph Cook • Frank Tudor • Matthew Charlton • James Scullin • John Latham • Joseph Lyons • James Scullin • John Curtin • Arthur Fadden • Robert Menzies • Ben Chifley • Herbert Vere Evatt • Arthur Calwell • Gough Whitlam • Billy Snedden • Malcolm Fraser • Gough Whitlam • Bill Hayden • Bob Hawke • Andrew Peacock • John Howard • Andrew Peacock • John Hewson • John Howard • Kim Beazley • Simon Crean • Mark Latham • Kim Beazley • Kevin Rudd • Brendan Nelson • Malcolm Turnbull • Tony Abbott **Governors-General** John Adrian Louis Hope 7th Earl of Hopetoun • Hallam Tennyson 2nd Baron Tennyson • Henry Northcote 1st Baron Northcote • William Ward 2nd Earl of Dudley • Thomas Denman 3rd Baron Denman • Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson • Henry Forster 1st Baron Forster • John Baird 1st Baron Stonehaven • Sir Isaac Alfred Isaacs • Brig. Gen. Alexander-Hore Ruthven 1st Baron Gowrie • H.R.H. Prince Henry Duke of Gloucester • Sir William John McKell • Field Marshal Sir William Joseph Slim • William Morrison 1st Viscount Dunrossil • William Sydney 1st Viscount De L’Isle • Richard Gardiner Casey • Sir Paul Meernaa Caedwalla Hasluck • Sir John Kerr • Sir Zelman Cowen • Sir Ninian Stephen • William George Hayden • Sir William Deane • Right Rev. Dr Peter Hollingworth • Maj. Gen. Michael Jeffery • Quentin Bryce AC.<sup>26</sup>

## The measure of authority?

We learn to associate authority with maleness. Our experience is shaped by long and established traditions – men have been the army generals, naval commanders, business leaders, bishops and rabbis, football coaches, school principals and prime ministers. Deep and subconscious gender assumptions as to what constitutes strength, bravery, heroic actions and commanding leadership have been lacing their way through our social imagination for centuries.

As women achieve a greater measure of equality, and play increasing roles in public life, our assumptions about leadership and authority need to take better account of these new realities rather than remaining limited and heavily gendered. Consider the covert gender undercurrent about 'authority' in the following media comments:

***Her authority has been in decline since she succeeded Kevin Rudd as prime minister in June 2010.***  
(Gerard Henderson, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 2012.)

***Carr is one of the most electorally successful Labor politicians in modern Australia. His addition to the Gillard Government...would have been a sign that someone of great accomplishment was willing to invest in it...But the way the episode played out (sic) has once more undermined Gillard's credibility, competence and authority.***  
(Greg Sheridan, *The Australian*, 1 March 2012.)

***Julia Gillard's calamitous attempt (sic) to recruit Bob Carr to her cabinet...has demonstrated a complete lack of authority...The events of the past few days have exposed the Prime Minister as lacking any authority or political judgement.***  
(Simon Benson, *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 2012.)

***Let's just step back from the razzle dazzle here... What has the Prime Minister done? Brought a man (Bob Carr) to Canberra with clarion communication skill and natural authority. Someone who will attract focus and attention away from her. Someone with whom she will now be constantly compared.***  
(Katherine Murphy, *The Age*, 2 March 2012.)

***Gillard is acting on an instinct that crumbling internal authority necessitates a decisive show of authority. John Howard could have pulled this off, and did frequently enough when necessity called, because his identity and authority were secure. But Gillard doesn't seem to nail these epic moments.***  
(Katherine Murphy, *The Age*, 30 April 2012.)

**To say that someone 'lacks authority' is a potent and seriously undermining claim. So we need to be careful here with the evidence.**

**On the evidence**, it can't be said that Julia Gillard lacks authority in the Labor caucus – in February 2012 she won one of the most decisive ballots in fifty years, 71-31. **On the evidence**, it can't be said that she lacks the authority that comes with high order negotiation skills – she successfully negotiated the support of enough parliamentary members to form government when her counterpart Tony Abbott was unable to do so. **On the evidence**, it can't be said that she lacks the authority implicit in her ability to oversee a complex minority government and parliament – over 300 pieces of important legislation have been passed by both houses in the space of just two years. **On the evidence**, it can't be said that she lacks personal authority and strength – she withstands relentless attack from an expedient opposition, ceaseless undermining of her position from Rudd supporters, widespread bias across the mainstream media and unrestrained vitriol from radio shock jocks and tabloid commentators.

**What then is the particular form of authority she so lacks? And what is the nature of the evidence to support this claim?**

## Never let a really newsworthy story get in the way of a gender blind spot...



On Friday 2 March 2012, the very same day that former NSW Premier Bob Carr became the new foreign minister, *The Age* newspaper carries a major piece on its main opinion page by senior journalist Michelle Grattan. Under the huge headline, 'Gillard's discordant Carr alarm', the strapline reads: *The botched attempt to woo the former NSW premier to Canberra has damaged the PM's credibility.*

The article begins with the following assessment by Grattan: *This week has shown the practical limits to Gillard exercising that power. She has talked tough but been exposed as weak...While the Carr affair hits Gillard's authority, the worst damage is to her credibility – her perennial vulnerability.*



Within hours of the publication of this piece, Prime Minister Gillard announces the appointment of Bob Carr. Not to be outdone, Grattan provides an online account of this news conference at 2.17 pm: *Carr gave Gillard a lesson in leadership panache. His easy rolling approach contrasted with her edginess. But then, it's been a draining week for Gillard, despite her big victory over Kevin Rudd...with Carr safely in the Senate, she doesn't have to worry about his arrival generating leadership speculation. If he were in the lower house, it would have been another matter.*



The next day, 3 March, Grattan keeps up this perverse criticism of the prime minister: *(Carr's) relaxed style was in marked contrast to her more uptight approach. He's one of those politicians who carries authority.*

To install a former premier as the new foreign affairs minister is a significant political outcome. What might the former NSW premier bring to the portfolio? Apparently this question is of no interest to this senior political commentator. Instead of commenting on the challenges the new foreign minister and the prime minister can expect to face – Papua New Guinea, China, the Middle East, Afghanistan and the US relationship – the solitary message to the public, conveyed through a prism of endless leadership speculation, is that Gillard the woman is vulnerable.

## Leadership ballots: done and dusted?

You would think, from the passion and fervour generated in various political, media and business quarters, that Julia Gillard's victory in the Labor caucus on 24 June 2010 was the most dastardly grab for power in federal political history.

Consistently described as having 'seized' power by 'knifing' or 'assassinating' Kevin Rudd, she is seen as having traitorously removed a first-term prime minister, as if this is some shocking, unprecedented manoeuvre. Her leadership is said to be 'tainted'. Even more curious is that this kind of language continues to be repeated long after the replacement.

Here is *The Age* persisting with the particular leadership line in an editorial, two years later, choosing even to draw on a word used by the Opposition Leader to emphasise its position:

*Labor never recovered its standing after Ms Gillard ousted Kevin Rudd shortly before the 2010 election. To use a word favoured by Mr Abbott, her leadership was tainted from that day.* <sup>27</sup>

Let's distance ourselves from this media and public chatter for a moment and refresh our collective memory of leadership challenges and leadership change over the past fifty years.

The facts are as follows:

- Federal politics has witnessed at least twenty-six leadership ballots within the Coalition and Labor parties during this period. That's a federal leadership contest, on average, every two years.
- With one recent exception, all of these contests have been between men.
- Many of these ballots resulted in close margins, which suggests that feelings at the time were running high.
- Three male prime ministers have been deposed – Robert Menzies in 1941, John Gorton in 1971 and Bob Hawke in 1991.
- Prime Minister Gillard's victory over Kevin Rudd in February 2012 by a reported margin of 71-31 votes is one of the most decisive in over these five decades.

Considering these several dozen 'man-on-man' contests in our federal politics, it is ironic and significant that Julia Gillard is portrayed negatively for taking the leadership from Kevin Rudd while Peter Costello was criticised *for not* taking the leadership from John Howard:

*John Howard has privately expressed surprise at the fact that Costello never challenged him for the top job. There's a view in Liberal circles that Howard – the consummate Sydney political brawler – was so disdainful of Costello's lack of ticker in the end that he simply decided not to get out of his way and hand him the job on a plate.* <sup>28</sup>

Leadership challenge and change is obviously a fundamental part of the hurly burly of politics – or should we make that the hurly burly of men doing politics? For when a woman is involved, the *analysis* of the game seems to change.

## Leadership tensions and dust-ups that usually settle down quickly

- 1966** Harold Holt succeeds Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies on his retirement in 1966.
- 1967** After Harold Holt's death in 1967, heir apparent William McMahon withdraws from leadership contest because of Country Party leader John McEwen's opposition. John McEwen is appointed acting prime minister.
- 1967** Arthur Calwell resigns as Labor Party leader. Deputy Gough Whitlam defeats Jim Cairns in ballot for leadership.
- 1968** Gough Whitlam resigns as Labor leader, then narrowly defeats Jim Cairns in leadership ballot.
- 1968** Senator John Gorton defeats Paul Hasluck for leadership of Liberal Party and replaces John McEwen as prime minister.
- 1969** William McMahon and David Fairbairn challenge Prime Minister John Gorton. John Gorton wins.
- 1971** Prime Minister John Gorton relinquishes leadership after a tied motion of confidence. William McMahon elected leader and becomes prime minister.
- 1972** William McMahon resigns. Billy Snedden wins leadership ballot against Malcolm Fraser and Andrew Peacock.
- 1974** Malcolm Fraser challenges Billy Snedden. Malcolm Fraser narrowly loses.
- 1975** Malcolm Fraser successfully challenges Billy Snedden for leadership of Liberal Party.
- 1976** Gough Whitlam defeats Lionel Bowen in Labor leadership ballot, after Labor's election loss.
- 1977** Gough Whitlam wins mid-term leadership ballot against Bill Hayden.
- 1977** Gough Whitlam resigns. Bill Hayden defeats Lionel Bowen.
- 1982** Andrew Peacock unsuccessfully challenges Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser.
- 1982** Bill Hayden wins leadership ballot against Bob Hawke.
- 1983** Bill Hayden resigns. Bob Hawke elected unopposed as leader of Labor Party.
- 1983** Malcolm Fraser resigns after election defeat. Andrew Peacock defeats John Howard for leadership of Liberal Party and Opposition.
- 1985** Andrew Peacock unsuccessfully seeks to remove Deputy John Howard. Andrew Peacock resigns and John Howard elected Leader of Liberal Party.
- 1989** Andrew Peacock launches leadership challenge against John Howard. Andrew Peacock wins.
- 1990** Andrew Peacock resigns after election loss and John Hewson defeats Peter Reith for leadership of Liberal Party.
- 1991** Paul Keating challenges Prime Minister Bob Hawke in June. He loses and resigns as treasurer and deputy leader.
- 1991** Paul Keating challenges Prime Minister Bob Hawke in December. Paul Keating wins and becomes prime minister.
- 1993** John Howard and Bruce Reid contest John Hewson's leadership after the 1993 election loss. John Hewson wins.
- 1994** John Hewson calls leadership ballot but loses to Alexander Downer.
- 1995** Alexander Downer resigns and John Howard elected unopposed as Liberal leader.
- 1996** Paul Keating resigns after election defeat and Kim Beazley elected unopposed as Labor leader.
- 2001** Kim Beasley resigns after election loss and Simon Crean elected unopposed as Labor leader.
- 2003** Simon Crean calls a leadership spill in June and wins against Kim Beasley.
- 2003** Simon Crean resigns in November, Kim Beazley and Mark Latham contest the leadership. Mark Latham wins.
- 2005** Mark Latham resigns after election loss. Kim Beazley elected unopposed as Labor leader.
- 2006** Kevin Rudd challenges Kim Beazley. Kevin Rudd wins Labor leadership.
- 2007** Brendan Nelson and Malcolm Turnbull contest the Liberal Opposition leadership. Brendan Nelson wins.
- 2008** Malcolm Turnbull challenges Brendan Nelson and wins.
- 2009** Tony Abbott challenges Malcolm Turnbull and wins.
- 2010** Labor Deputy Leader Julia Gillard challenges Prime Minister Rudd. He chooses not to contest a ballot and steps down as Labor Party leader and prime minister on the morning of the ballot.
- 2012** Kevin Rudd challenges Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Julia Gillard wins. 29

## Enter the assassin!

This analysis changed as soon as Julia Gillard became leader and prime minister in June 2010.

Previously seen as a loyal deputy, she was now portrayed relentlessly and damagingly as 'tainted', 'treacherous' and 'deceitful' for the way she 'assassinated' Kevin Rudd. In the time since, she has come in for sustained and negative treatment about her taking on the leadership of her party. This continues, month after month, year after year – a sentence here, a headline comment there.

It seems that parts of the media cannot remove the image of her alleged treachery from their minds.

*Certainly the manner in which she came in has caused her difficulties, people don't expect women to do those things, which is kind of bizarre when you think about it, because Paul Keating knifed Bob Hawke, Bob Hawke knifed Bill Hayden, it's kind of the way of Australian politics. It's on both sides and I accept it's on both sides...but women for some reason when they do it, cop an enormous level of abuse, and I know this personally.* <sup>30</sup>

*If Bill Shorten had moved Kevin Rudd on, we wouldn't still be talking about it the way we are today.* <sup>31</sup>

It is worth noting that this same kind of trenchant and lingering criticism was not made when Bob Hawke was beaten by Paul Keating, or when John Hewson beat John Howard and was later beaten by Alexander Downer. Although these leadership challenges and 'knifings' were viewed at the time as robust contests, they were simply not talked about year after year after year.

In recent memory, we should reflect on whether Malcolm Turnbull and Joe Hockey were cast as the victims of a 'knifing' by Tony Abbott. Has the voting public been reminded constantly over the past three years of the opposition leader Tony Abbott's win in 2009 over Malcolm Turnbull? Is the slender margin of just one vote seen as undermining Mr Abbott's legitimacy or authority? The short answer is no.

**It is though a new dawn rises after men do the political blood-letting. Everything settles down and the new leader gets on with the job.**

But there is more to this persistent negative media campaign about Gillard's leadership than the application of a gender-based double standard.

In July 2010, a few weeks after being elected unopposed by the Labor caucus, Prime Minister Gillard appeared at the National Press Club. Laurie Oakes, senior member of the press gallery, put it to her that there had been a deal done with Kevin Rudd on a leadership handover – and that she had reneged on the deal the same night.

Gillard refused to speak publicly about what she deemed a confidential discussion with Rudd. This was very damaging for Gillard, as illustrated in such headlines as 'Dirty washing makes it hard to stay clean':

*Julia Gillard wants Australians to see her as a calm, measured, consensual leader, not an easy image to portray when you've taken the top job by brutally knifing a serving prime minister on the eve of an election.* <sup>32</sup>

The absence of an alternative detailed response was grist for the frenzied media mill. A media-fashioned public narrative started to take shape. In subsequent treatments, Gillard was portrayed as the ruthless 'assassin' of an innocent, first-term prime minister who deserved better. This media response only served to reinforce sections of an aggrieved public who believed, mistakenly, that they had voted for Rudd as prime minister.

Just four months after this National Press Club Lunch, Laurie Oakes published his book *On the Record: Politics, Politicians and Power*. It was launched in November 2010 by Therese Rein, wife of Kevin Rudd. In the acknowledgements, Oakes indicates that he wrote some pieces especially for the book. One of these, 'The Fall of Rudd', dated September 2010, is particularly revealing.

Twenty pages of detail provide a powerful commentary about Rudd's serious deficiencies and lack of capacity to lead the government with any effectiveness. When the crunch came, says Oakes, Rudd found himself virtually without allies. 'No-one would lift a phone for him', he claims. Rudd had failed to build a support base over the previous four years and there were substantial issues of temperament and behaviour.

According to Oakes:

*Rudd's core problem is a lack of empathy. He has, they say, no natural feel, no instinct, for relating to people and communicating with them...Colleagues were fed up with his manner, and his cavalier and often rude treatment of those he dealt with...One way or another, Rudd had alienated a large swathe of the parliamentary party and almost all of cabinet. And he seemed to be getting worse.* <sup>33</sup>

## Failing to report the full story

Oakes also outlines the attempt by Deputy Leader Gillard to reach an agreement with her boss.

Eventually an agreement of sorts was reached aimed at avoiding a ballot. Rudd would be given a few more weeks to turn the situation around, and if he failed he would stand aside voluntarily. <sup>34</sup>

Not long after, however, an agitated (Anthony) Albanese threw open the door and told them (Rudd and Gillard) to 'stop this meeting! While you're sitting here talking, the party's in meltdown.' As Oakes notes:

*What had happened while she and Rudd were talking could not be reversed...When she returned to Rudd's office she told him she intended to challenge after all. 'You've just reneged on an agreement you made a quarter of an hour ago,' Rudd said. Yes, Gillard replied, she had. <sup>35</sup>*

Oakes writes about Gillard's behaviour on the leadership issue:

*Gillard had been slow to give the assassination (Oakes' choice of word) her blessing. Friends say she was despondent about the government's worsening situation, but – almost to the end – her view was that a leadership challenge was not the answer...She tried, for a while at least, to alter the course of the government without resorting to regicide... 'Let me tell you something about Gillard,' says a Labor operative who watched the decline and fall of Rudd from the inside. 'She tried everything possible to put the show back together. She was holding Kevin's hand.'*

For a while it certainly seemed, even to some Rudd staffers, that the deputy PM was trying to help him. <sup>36</sup>

These excerpts provide unambiguous testimony of the state of chaos that had been created by Rudd; the serious deficiencies of his leadership; his almost complete lack of internal support; as well as evidence that his deputy was working hard to salvage the situation while the caucus was in meltdown.

**This is hardly the work of a woman ruthlessly plotting to seize power or acting on the dictates of a small group of plotters.**

The significance of Oakes' account is three-fold.

First, it was published only a few months after the leadership change, and came from someone regarded as a senior and experienced member of the press gallery. By rights, a twenty-page critique of Rudd's capacity and behaviour as prime minister ought to have been a valuable reference point to enable others in the media to fathom what had gone wrong with his leadership and what had transpired during the leadership meltdown.

Second, it showed that the story Oakes broke at the July National Press Club Lunch was a limited version of events in comparison with the further important dimensions he included just a few months later in his book – namely that Julia Gillard had been working hard to resolve the situation; and that the agreement she had reached with Rudd was no longer seen as tenable by the caucus itself.

Third, and even more importantly, Oakes' account gives lie to the subsequent labelling of Gillard as a devious plotter who had traitorously deposed or 'assassinated' a leader for no reason other than to fuel her ambition.

Hindsight is a great source of vision. Clearly, Gillard's mistake (and the party at large) was not to level with everyone as to what had gone seriously wrong with Rudd's leadership; and not to demonstrate to the public that the caucus was overwhelmingly supportive of the need for the change.

Leaving aside this reticence, there are some important questions here.

Why did media outlets continue running the line that Rudd was a popular prime minister replaced by Gillard when there was sufficient evidence available to them soon after the leadership change that testified to his ineffectual leadership of the government?

Oakes' testimony suggests a different dimension to Gillard's ascendancy of the leadership. Why do these same media outlets persist to this day with descriptions of her alleged 'treachery' when the basis to Oakes' damaging questioning at the Press Club was shown to be limited almost two years ago? Did they not bother to read their distinguished peer's published account in order to better equip themselves with the facts?

*As the deputy prime minister, Gillard was the media's pet larrikin: the red hair, the quick wit, the warm amiability in social situations and the love of the AFL. Even Alan Jones chortled at her quips in radio interviews as if she were some harmless and endearing wag. But when Gillard deposed Rudd, thereby displaying more ticker than Beazley and Costello combined, overnight she transformed into a witch. Since then her remarkable achievement in holding a minority government together has been portrayed as the work of a devious fixer. <sup>37</sup>*

The past two years of unceasing criticism of Gillard, and her role in the leadership change in June 2010, may well be suggesting some deep, subliminal prejudices at play – women politicians should not contest a powerful leadership position; a woman politician who commands the numbers as the men do is untrustworthy, ambitious (bad!) and ruthless (malevolent); the male politician deposed by a woman is a victim of ruthless treachery; and a woman's exercise of power is best confined to being a minister or a deputy.

## Promises, promises

In a similar vein, and judging by the sustained and negative personal criticism of her, the introduction of a carbon price by Prime Minister Gillard represents the greatest political breach of public trust on record. She is depicted by commentators as a perpetrator without precedent. This must be so, for there is scant reference to other changed promises, pledges and policy positions by previous national leaders.

The political storybook presents a different picture. A cursory look at the record reminds us that federal politics is full of examples where trust has been breached, where pledges have been broken, and where politicians have altered their priorities when circumstances changed and different political responses were called for. Politics, after all, is the art of the possible.

The following is a brief outline of some major issues of untruth, changed commitments and broken promises by dominant Australian male politicians over the years. Mostly, these are drawn from *The Australian* newspaper website: [www.theaustralian.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.com.au) <sup>38</sup>



**Robert Menzies on troops to Vietnam:** In April 1965, then PM Menzies told parliament the US had requested Australia's support for the Vietnam war when in fact Menzies had volunteered support. *The Australian's* editorial said: "The Menzies government has made a reckless decision on Vietnam which this nation may live to regret." <sup>39</sup>



**Bob Hawke's pledge to end child poverty:** "We set ourselves this first goal – by 1990 no Australian child will be living in poverty," Hawke said at his 1987 election campaign launch. Children continue to live in poverty.

**The Kirribilli Agreement:** In 1988, Bob Hawke promised to hand over the prime ministership to Paul Keating after the 1990 election. The secret undertaking

occurred at Kirribilli House. Hawke reneged on the agreement, prompting Keating to resign as treasurer and challenge for the prime ministership. <sup>40</sup>



**Paul Keating's L-A-W tax cuts pledge:** Prior to the 1993 election, Keating promised two rounds of income tax cuts, legislating them to prove they would become "L-A-W law". The law was later repealed so the money could be put into superannuation. <sup>41</sup>



**John Howard's 1996 no new taxes promise:** 7.30 Report anchor Kerry O'Brien asked Howard in February 1996: "OK. The pledge of no new taxes, no increase in existing taxes for the life of the next parliament. So for the next three years, not even a one cent increase on cigarettes or beer or wine or petrol, no other indirect tax increase, no tax increase of any kind?"

John Howard: "That promise is quite explicit." By September 2002 Howard's Government had introduced legislation for 130 new taxes or levies, including the gun buyback levy in 1996.

**The Howard-Costello leadership:** In 2006 former Liberal minister Ian McLachlan revealed he had witnessed a meeting 12 years earlier in which John Howard had agreed to hand Peter Costello the leadership of the Liberal Party after the 2001 election. McLachlan said he had kept a note – secured in his wallet for years – of the undertaking. Disclosure of the deal delivered Costello a disastrous blow and Howard fatefully decided to stay on as prime minister for as long as the Liberal Party wanted him.

**John Howard's "never, ever" GST pledge:** Asked in 1995 if he'd left the door open for a GST, Howard said: "Never ever. It's dead. It was killed by voters at the last election". <sup>42</sup>



**Kevin Rudd’s pledge to introduce an emission trading scheme:** Rudd campaigned on climate change in 2007, branding it “the greatest moral challenge of our time”. He pledged to introduce his carbon pollution reduction scheme by 2011. He shelved the plan in April 2010, putting it off for at least three years. 43



**Tony Abbott reneged on his promise not to propose any new taxes.** Opposition Leader Tony Abbott was asked on the ABC’s 7.30 Report (17 May 2010) about his promise that year not to propose any new taxes. One month later, Mr Abbott reneged by announcing a levy to fund paid parental leave. Mr Abbott said, ‘I know politicians (will) be judged on everything they say, but sometimes, in the heat of

discussion, you go a little bit further than you would if it was an absolute calm, considered, prepared, scripted remark, which is one of the reasons why the statements that need to be taken as gospel truth are those carefully prepared scripted remarks’. 44, 45



**Julia Gillard’s no carbon tax pledge:** In a 2010 election-eve interview, Gillard told *The Australian*: “I rule out a carbon tax.” And she told the Ten Network on August 16, 2010: “There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.” The Opposition is now accusing her of breaking that promise with her announcement of a carbon price from July 1 next year. 46

This brief look at the political storybook shows significant examples of Australian federal leaders being loose with the truth or altering policy priorities or responding to what they perceived as different political and economic circumstances. The full record shows many more.

As Cheryl Kernot observes:

*Politicians have to earn respect. I don’t see anything that Julia Gillard has done, in a public way, in the office of prime minister, that has caused her to be an object of scorn and disrespect. John Howard broke promises. He then categorized them as ‘core’ and ‘non-core’. 47*

So what explains the heat, the vitriol, the accusation that Julia Gillard plays fast and loose with the truth and the ‘liar’ tag which attaches to the current prime minister?

This is not an argument about whether she was true to a pre-election position regarding the introduction of a carbon price. It is about a double standard. Don Watson alludes to this in the following commentary on her leadership:

*To be fair, Gillard is not the first Prime Minister to struggle in the first 12 months of office, and she has had more against her than any of the others. Less well known than Hawke, Keating, Howard and even Rudd were when they ascended, she has also had to contend with the facts of a hung parliament and being a woman in the role. Every day has been a struggle for legitimacy. All this, plus hostile tabloid press and radio, and an outrageously unprincipled and unchecked opponent; her most bitter enemies have to concede she wants for nothing in resilience and steel. Of course she has made some of her own problems and given the public reason to doubt her honesty. But there never was a successful politician who did not have avowals to live down and embarrassments to hide. 48*

Did breakfast presenters and radio talk-back hosts face off with prime ministers such as Bob Hawke, Paul Keating, John Howard and leaders such as Peter Costello and call them liars to their faces? Were they berated by Alan Jones for arriving a few minutes late for a radio interview as was Prime Minister Gillard? If not, why is this behaviour meted out only to her? What’s the difference? Why the double standard?

**Many people see through the double standard. At both intuitive and rational levels, and despite a barrage of negativity surrounding Julia Gillard through the media, they sense and see an unfair underlying story unfolding in the treatment of the prime minister.**

## **A disconnect with the media narrative**

***It felt something like blasphemy.***

*A declaration as risky, difficult and defining as an admission to church-going, or loving a book you wouldn't be caught dead reading on a train but have secretly downloaded on your e-reader. Just three simple words, setting off a little explosion of shock within the collected school-gate psyche. "I adore Julia." Dead silence. The perpetrator added, emboldened, "I'm coming out." Another mum piped up, "I adore her, too." They looked at each other, amazed; it was like stumbling across some secret society of disparate females expressing deeply unfashionable, unspoken sentiments. Why? I ventured. "Because if I had a dinner party she'd be the one who'd stay back and help me do the dishes at the end." Unlocked, the mum added, "We're all scared of saying we love her – in front of men, especially. It's like saying you're a feminist."*

***Among certain women there's a jarring disconnect between what they're thinking and the narrative they're being fed that is "Julia". What they see: a woman getting things done. In a man's world. Quietly, differently, effectively. Amid the great roar of vitriol, and not flinching. They think it's extraordinary. Because usually, as women, we flinch. It's just too hard. We bleat our vulnerability. Gabble too much about our personal lives and the toll it's taking, make excuses, give up, bow out. She doesn't play the victim, just keeps on going, audaciously blindsiding the media now and then – Peter Slipper, Bob Carr – and for these women it's becoming an exhilarating sport to witness. "She's such a strong role model for our daughters," said one of them.***

***She's doing her job with a mental toughness reminiscent of John Howard: no matter what's thrown at them they keep on at it, with focus and tenacity and a quietly effective steeliness. She's gone through the intense media vitriol that many women in the public eye – daring to do something beyond the confines of what's expected of them – endure.***

*The rite of passage: that predictable process of tearing down. I went through it with my novel *The Bride Stripped Bare*. It's extraordinarily lonely within the eye of the storm; you feel a loss of control over the personal narrative of your life – that no matter how many times you try explaining what you're doing, no one wants to listen. They prefer their own, sparkier, more destructive narrative. It makes a better story. Opinion's hardened into fact, gossip and downright lies become news and the overwhelming feeling is that they want to break you, make you go away, be silent, stop. You're like a fox hounded by a gaggle of fevered pack dogs who've scented blood. The singer Lana Del Rey recently went through that depressingly familiar hammering; she cancelled her Oz tour following relentless criticism of her looks, talent, voice – and reinvention of her image. Yet male performers don't?*

*Julia Gillard doesn't crack. "She's being held up to unrealistic standards of perfection when no one's perfect, and when many male politicians seem to have their flaws regularly on display," said a mum. "The tear-down Julia game is a big distraction from what she's actually doing." Professional women don't just have to be good to get somewhere -- they've got to be so damned good. There was something of the ex-lawyer in her after Kevin Rudd declared his hand; a passionate articulateness, a fire in her belly coupled with a reasoned, quietly angry determination; dare I say something of an Atticus Finch in her demeanour. But you'd be hard-pressed to find that perception in a media who set her up as ineffectual and untrustworthy, and constantly seek tension, dissent, drama and spark in a relentless 24-hour news cycle. That disconnect between what these women are being told by headline makers and what they're perceiving is what's prompting school-gate outbursts. It's a fascinating story of one particular Australian woman and the affronted psyche of a nation, and it's still unfolding.*

## **Free-wheeling abuse: all care, no responsibility**

There are clear signs that our political discourse has developed a nasty edge. This is not just about a further decline in respect, civility of language, brutal tactics and personal invective being adopted by the parties inside our parliamentary chambers. This is about a growing dimension across the broader community also. A persistent thread is sexist, misogynistic and extreme. Patrick Baume, group communications manager for Media Monitors, puts it this way:

*Talkback radio is becoming increasingly aggressive and politically polarised. My impression from five years of (listening to) talkback is there does seem to be more violent words being used...(The hosts) will say something like: 'We have to politically beat them up'. But it's not framed as actual violence. They will immediately say, 'Of course, I don't mean literally'.<sup>50</sup>*

**Declining standards inside the parliament send subliminal messages to people outside, and through their choice of language, addresses by politicians to demonstrators serve to ramp up loathing and vitriol.**

Cheryl Kernot: *I think I have never heard anything so demeaning and disrespectful as that bloke who came out of the public gallery and called her a 'lying scrag'. I've seen a lot but my jaw hit the ground that day.*<sup>51</sup>

Parliamentarians are not the only ones inadvertently giving permission to the expression of violent abuse. It has become commonplace for radio presenters to not screen out deeply prejudiced and abusive listener comments. They also indulge the abuse by using disparaging and violent phrases. When challenged, however, they claim these are metaphors. Occasionally public outrage makes them sufficiently contrite to issue a statement of regret.

**Everyone in a position of public office or having a public profile has a responsibility not to fan the flames that could cause harm or incite abusive behaviour.**

When violent words or phrases or images are used in these ways, it is simplistic justification to claim that one is speaking metaphorically. The initial statement is the one that does the harm and the damage. Listeners who themselves speak angrily and with vitriol are unlikely to make a distinction between metaphor and what they hear. Their main interest is that their prejudice has been affirmed. The justificatory afterthought or apology tends to be lost.



Alan Jones in 2GB Studio  
(Photographer: Jim Rice, Fairfax Syndication)

Commenting on Prime Minister Gillard's intention to introduce a carbon price, Alan Jones says the legislation will be her 'death warrant'. He also predicts independent MP Rob Oakeshott will be 'bashed up' at the next election, 'metaphorically speaking'. 52



Grahame Morris  
(Photographer: Andrew Meares, Fairfax Syndication)

Prominent political lobbyist and former chief of staff to John Howard, Grahame Morris, appeared on a Sky News panel discussion in April 2012 and suggested, in a reference to Prime Minister Gillard, that 'they ought to be kicking her to death'.

Morris's comment sparked a Twitter furor. Program host David Speers later tweeted that he had spoken with Morris after the Twitter eruption and that Morris had apologised for his 'inappropriate' comment. 55



Opposition Leader Tony Abbott addressing a No carbon tax rally with Bronwyn Bishop MP and Sophie Mirabella MP. (Photographer: Andrew Meares, Fairfax Syndication)

When Opposition Leader Tony Abbott stood in front of placards bearing offensive messages about the prime minister, his staff said they had no power to remove the signs as they did not organise the event. This is disingenuous. Mr Abbott could have refused to speak unless the signs were removed. He did say he regretted that some protestors went 'over the top' with the messages on their banners, adding 'But let's not get too precious about it'. 53

During Question Time in Federal Parliament, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott moved a motion to suspend standing orders, declaring that the March Queensland election would be 'a referendum on political leaders who don't tell the truth...on political leaders without honour or principle...The voters of Queensland, they won't miss...this Prime Minister and this Leader of the House have got targets on their foreheads'.

Mr Abbott later said he was sorry for using this phrase: 'Mr Speaker...I said something across the table which I shouldn't have...I used a metaphor that I regret and I withdraw, and I apologise'. 54

A prime minister must always strive to maintain the dignity of the office that he or she holds. The public expects this no less and when there are transgressions, they deservedly come in for sustained and widespread criticism. One only has to recall the public's response when Prime Minister Hawke, on hearing a negative comment from an elderly man in a shopping centre, dismissed him as a 'silly old bugger'; when Prime Minister Keating, walking through an Adelaide mall, asked a young demonstrator 'Why don't you get a job?'; when Prime Minister Howard, addressing a national reconciliation forum, began using language that was so hostile towards Indigenous people that the audience, as one, turned their backs to him.

Against this backdrop, and in the current circumstances, Prime Minister Gillard cannot defend or retaliate because of the dignity attached to the Office. The mild, self-deprecating and composed responses she has made regarding matters of gender have led immediately to her being denounced as 'playing the sexist card'.

The level of public nastiness is greater and more pervasive across social media. Usually cloaked by anonymity, the sexism and misogyny expressed here is particularly revealing and deeply offensive to women and decent men.

The worldwide explosion in access to and use of the internet and social media – Facebook, SMS, comment blogs and twitter – has meant unprecedented opportunities for social and personal connection, widening networks, showcasing talents and putting opinions and comments on the public record. For the first time ever, it is now possible for anyone with anything to say to reach a vast audience, irrespective of the quality or accuracy of the comment, and with little if any constraint.

Our democratic culture can be further enhanced by new communication technologies – people can participate in expression, discussion and debate like never before. Much of this can occur with great speed in bringing pressure to bear on the political process. All sorts of information can be put before the public. Specialist, independent media sites can also augment quality journalism. The outcome is that a new and positive level of activism is emerging with campaigns that connect people to causes aligned with their values and desire to play a part in social change.

But democratic culture can be eroded by the unchecked abuse facilitated by web pages and social media. Opinion becomes privileged above evidence. Information that is untrue can be used wilfully, disseminated widely and not be subject to any contestation or verification. People are defamed, slandered and bullied without opportunity for redress.

Unlike traditional media which require a name and address to register views, in the world of social media, identity is likely to be subsumed. Anonymity is commonly permitted or disguised by a user name. The lack of a person's true identity serves as a great cover for people to put expressions of hatred and violent abuse about in the world without challenge, an issue neatly captured by academic Brett Hutchins:

*You see a sort of...vortex of prejudice where one person will open the gate and then a number feel they can indulge their personal prejudices.*<sup>56</sup>

The gender-based denigration of Prime Minister Gillard – along with a great deal of misogyny – would simply not be given licence in any other public forum.

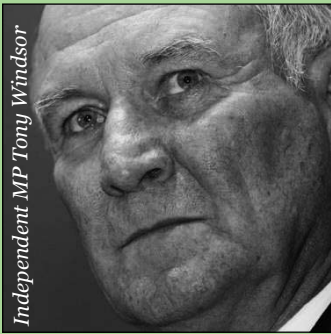
As a society, it is in our collective interest to make the most and the best use of social media – aiming to gain all the positive benefits we can from its application. To date, however, we have not yet had in Australia sufficient serious and far-reaching mainstream discussion about the 'rules of engagement' necessary to protect important aspects of our civil society and democratic culture; to set some effective checks and balances against gender-based, violent and extreme abuse; and to strengthen the avenues for people to seek redress when they are defamed and harmed by personal attacks.

Until this discussion takes place, we send some dangerous messages to the next generations of voters. Political and gender-based abuse is normal. We can indulge in abusive behaviour as much as we would like and without constraint. We are not personally responsible for our actions.

Some parts of the world have begun to focus on practical solutions. In 2012, the European Union's Executive Commission launched a public consultation around 'a clean and open internet' with a view to coming up with a set of clearer guidelines on the taking down of content by online providers. It is expected to report later in 2012. We need to start playing catch up.

Talkback radio comments have been abusive towards Gillard, but the online environment is much more offensive. The comments opposite are just a taste – the tip of a very large iceberg. The relative anonymity of the internet allows for unfettered abuse and vilification.

**Warning: the page opposite contains offensive language. We have chosen to modify various offensive words. Be aware that this sensibility is completely lacking in the original format.**



## Walking a fine line on inciting violence

*Revealing that he had received multiple death threats, Windsor drew parallels to the January shooting of congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Arizona. Since that shooting, which killed six people and badly wounded Giffords, debate has raged in the US over whether the unhinged gunman had been whipped up to violence by extreme rhetoric in the media. Pima County sheriff Clarence chastised those who 'try to inflame the public 24 hours a day' with 'vitriolic rhetoric...about hatred, mistrust, paranoia of how government operates'. Windsor (said) he believed Australia needed to 'be careful we don't...go down the American road. We've got a great democracy here; we can argue...without killing each other. I think we saw instances in America recently where people were incited by various professional media people to hideous acts.'*

...

*The threats to Windsor are not death threats, and to suggest that the shooting in the US has any similarities with what's happening here is stupid.*

Steve Price, MTR programming director & breakfast show host.

...

*Caller Chris says that if it were any other country but Australia, Gillard 'would be lynched and hanging from a pole in the centre of the...' Before he can complete the image, (2UE's) Michael Smith cuts off the call. 57*

Julia C--ing Gillard and Bob (I prefer boys bottoms) Brown are turning Oz into a c--t-forsaken place. Un-elected, unpopular and a c--t full of carbon tax. Could someone please return this c--t to sender... Wales that is. The UK is f--ked so they send us this red-headed c--t to f--k up the convicts...Please p--ss this c--t off. Anonymous.  
<http://www.is.a.cunt.org/2001/08/julia.gillard.html>

Just another liberal/marxist jew fellating c--t who has nothing but poison to offer the white race.  
June 25th, 2010 <http://www.vnnforum.com/showthread.php?t=112611>

RebelView: a female leader is the sign of a diseased nation. The men who founded America, although descended from the English, knew the queens of England were foolish c--ts who did nothing, just like all females. For this reason they made sure to exclude women from all matters of politics, as it should be.  
June 23rd, 2010 (<http://www.vnnforum.com/showthread.php?t=112611>)

F--k off julia gillard you bloody night whore...which is more humanely disgusting...Gillard's head? or the sound of her nasal leso accent?  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/fuck-off-julia-gillard/131708803516603#!/pages/fuck-off-julia-gillard/131708803516603>

RED-HEADED BUBBLE-ARSED, BEAK-NOSED EMU-WITCH If I was living overseas, I'd be laughing with everyone else at Australia with its red-headed, bubble-arsed, beak-nosed emu-witch (or should that be Liar-Bird) of a PM that was not even democratically elected, instead of waking up everyday the miserable news that this stubborn strumpet plans to continue governing against the interests of this fantastic country and the will of the Australian people for another diabolical two years. Bring on an election. I f--king hate Julia Gillard you red headed dumb bitch!  
<http://amplicate.com/hate/julia-gillard?>

WTF is it saying? I hope she has one of those accidents that cause you to speak in a foreign accent or language. Perhaps then we will understand her spastic, palsied attempts at English.  
<http://amplicate.com/hate/julia-gillard?>

Feminist Prime Minister Julia Gillard\* Dies....while walking down the street one day and is tragically hit by an environmentally-friendly hybrid electric truck. (\*insert Harriet Harman of Nancy Pelosi or Hillary Clinton etc. if you wish)  
<http://antimisydry.com/fun-humor/feminist-prime-minister-julia-gillard-dies-35514.htm#axzzluFUHuFhY>

I can't stand the sight of the ugly fat f--ken - I can't stand the sit of the ugly fat f--ken troll with the big dif. She is working for the banker elites and if Brown wasn't such a homo she'd be sucking his dick. The pair of them need the electric chair for treason. Every time the evil wretch gets on tv I feel like smashing it. She has no support and no authority to do any of the s--t she has been doing and the fat f--ken slapper knows it. She just wants to force the carbon tax through as she knows she is well and truly outta here come election. She will pocket a shit load of dough from her banker mates for the trouble. I can't stand the huge bubble-arsed, needle nosed, shit lickin sheep rooting welsh corgi bitch.  
<http://amplicate.com/hate/julia-gillard?>

F--K OFF GILLARD! YOU LOUSY LYING PIECE OF S--T! A TRUE DISGRACE TO WOMEN, AUSTRALIANS, FAMILIES, AUSTRALIANS & AUSTRALIA! F--KING WEASEL SHE IS! AN ABSOLUTE ASSHOLE OF A WOMAN! INSTEAD OF BEING AN EXAMPLE OF FAIRNESS, STABILITY AND STRENGTH, SHE'S WORSE THAN ANY MALE POLITICIAN IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY! REVOTE! REVOTE!  
<http://amplicate.com/hate/julia-gillard?>

## A fair go for women and girls

Sexism is never confined to the one person who is subjected to offensive terms, insults and demeaning characterisation. When Prime Minister Gillard is criticised in gendered terms (rather than criticism about her policies and decisions as a leader), most women are likely to feel it and wince, because they know, at base, the treatment extends to their shared status as women. Writer and commentator, Jane Caro, recognises this broader implication:

*My current fear is that the message being sent by the level of vitriol surrounding Gillard's flawed leadership (but tell me whose wasn't flawed) is being heard by Australian women and girls loud and clear.*

*And the message is: 'Don't aspire to high office, sweetheart, because we'll flay you alive.'*<sup>58</sup>

This is a response felt by many Australian women and girls. But it is not limited to women.

Most men don't care for and don't engage in sexist abuse. When a female PM is treated with sexist put-downs, they will sense that this is what their daughters, or mothers, nieces, friends or respected work colleagues could well encounter should they seek positions of public office and/or break new ground in business, corporate or community spheres.

As a nation, we have made great strides in achieving a society where all members, men and women, are given opportunities to experience the full range of benefits that flow from gender equality – respect, tolerance, increased safety, mutuality, inclusiveness, full participation, cultural depth and breadth as well as enhanced economic prosperity.

Kerry Chikarovski: *You are entitled to criticise the prime minister whether she's male or female, you know. I still despair of the fact that you pick up the papers and we still see articles about the clothes she wears, the haircut she's now had. I mean, honest to God, aren't we over all that stuff?'*<sup>59</sup>

**The test of our political maturity is the degree to which, into the future, we can shift the focus from sexist characterisations about the fact that it is a woman who is carrying out the nation's top job to the way the job is being done and the personal, professional and political qualities on display.**



## We'd like you to meet a young woman who part of this country o

**Jess grew up on the family farm near Dubbo, in western New South Wales. She attended the local secondary college, excelling in her schoolwork, as well as in drama, sport and debating.**

After secondary school, Jess moved to Sydney to undertake a university degree in business. The transition was hard at first. She missed her family and the farm, but started to carve out a new life in the city. She continued with sport, playing basketball in a local team close to her shared house.

She took a gap year after finishing her course, travelling with friends throughout south-east Asia. A year later, Jess started work with a city accounting firm. She quickly won the respect of her managers and workmates for her intelligence, hard work, her ability to operate well in a team as well as her sense of fun.

Making friends easily, Jess enjoyed a full social life as well as being in a relationship with Dave, a young man she had met at work. Within three years, she was promoted to a more senior role at her work (within her firm). She was also recently appointed to the board of a community organisation where she had previously been a volunteer.

# JESS

## ‘Jess’ – a cameo of could be from any fours...

As Jess moves through life, reaching new levels of personal and professional achievement, you would clearly want her to be respected for all her positive qualities – her intelligence, hard work, skills, personal warmth, compassion for others and her love of family and friends.

So here’s a question for all the people who know Jess – her grandparents, her father and mother, uncles, aunts, cousins, schoolmates, teachers, university lecturers, team mates, fellow board members and her friends:

**How would you feel if the Jess you know and respect was described instead in the following way?**

***Deliberately barren.***

(Senator Bill Heffernan, *Bulletin* magazine, May 2007.)

***I’m over this lying cow.***

(Alan Jones, 2GB, 28 February 2011.)

***The woman’s off her tree and quite frankly they should put her...in a chaff bag and take her as far out to sea as they can and tell her to swim home.***

(Alan Jones, 2GB, 6 July 2011.)

***A menopausal monster.***

(Caller to broadcaster Chris Smith, 2GB, 14 July 2011.)

***Does she go down to the chemist to buy her tampons or does the taxpayer pay for these as well?***

(Caller to broadcaster Alan Jones, 2GB, 2 February 2011.)

***The vitriolic, bitter, lying, condescending façade...***

(Broadcaster Ray Hadley, 2GB, 11 July 2011.)

***You’ve got a big arse...just get on with it.***

(Germaine Greer, ABC TV program ‘Q&A’, 19 March 2012.)

***Her bizarre fawning, giggling and breathlessness in (Obama’s) presence made her seem weak, even girlish.***

(Andrew Bolt, columnist, *The Herald Sun*, 23 November 2011.)

***‘The basic facts are ‘you can put lipstick on a dishonest whore but she is still a dishonest whore’.***

(posted by anon, VEXNEWS blog, 24 February 2012.)



**The contributions and deliberations of these thousands of scientists... have produced strong consensus – global temperatures are rising as a consequence of excessive levels of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere.**

The background image is a blurred photograph of a park or promenade. On the left, several tall palm trees are visible. In the foreground, a person is carrying a child. In the middle ground, a person in a bright green shirt is walking. The overall scene is out of focus, creating a sense of movement and a public space.

## Section C: **respecting the common good**

*We all have to deal with global warming, whether we like it or not, and some people have been resisting this conclusion for a long time. In fact, some people have been attacking not just the message, but the messenger.*

*Ever since scientists first began to explain the evidence that our climate was warming – and that human activities were probably to blame – people have been questioning the data, doubting the evidence, and attacking the scientists who collect and explain it.*

Naomi Oreskes and Erik.M.Conway. <sup>1</sup>

*A difference between civilisation and anarchy is above all the capacity of a society to find a basis for efficient collective action when it is necessary to solve a problem of great consequence.*

Professor Ross Garnaut. <sup>2</sup>

A democratic society is well placed to nourish the common good. As a result, we are more likely to possess a collective capacity to face challenges, such as we now confront with climate change.

Right now, however, this capacity is in question, illustrated vividly by the climate change debate and response in Australia. Respect for the common good seems to be the last thing in the minds of powerful lobbyists, climate deniers and those who have conducted a fear campaign against carbon pricing that has squandered public goodwill and support for taking action on climate change.

In five years, we have moved from a point of strong community support for action and policies that aim to reduce emissions to a point where many Australians are confused, angry, disengaged and deeply polarised over the climate change issue. How did this extraordinary change come about and in such a short space of time? Has it harmed the common good? What might it mean for our collective capacity to take action on behalf of generations to come?

In trying to formulate answers, we need first to step back and examine the four cornerstones that have been put in place to assist Australians to deal with climate change at home and abroad: the scientific evidence; international treaty arrangements; a public policy framework; and carbon price legislation.

## **Scientific consensus and international treaty arrangements**

The body of authoritative science around climate change has been growing over several decades and was reflected in the formation in 1988 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Created by the UN Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Association, the IPCC provides the world with a clear scientific view of the current state of knowledge of climate change and its potential impacts.

The IPCC currently has one hundred and ninety-five countries as members. Thousands of scientists from around the world contribute to its work on a voluntary basis, reviewing and challenging their peers. Since its formation, this leading international scientific body has produced four assessments of the emerging science – in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007 (for this last report it was awarded the Nobel Prize). <sup>3</sup>

**The contributions and deliberations of these thousands of scientists, through the IPCC, have produced strong consensus – global temperatures are rising as a consequence of excessive levels of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere.**

Moreover, the high concentrations of these gases have been produced mainly by human activities in the past two hundred years. Unless emissions are moderated, and quickly, the predictions are that many nations will suffer greatly. Australia will not be in any way immune and is likely to experience deleterious impacts, particularly in terms of water availability, agricultural production, coastal erosion and extinction of species.

The strong consensual position of these scientists is underpinned by increasingly sophisticated forms of scientific measurement, a fact noted by Karl Braganza, manager of the climate monitoring section, Bureau of Meteorology:

*The climate of Earth is now a closely monitored thing; from instruments in space, in the deep ocean, in the atmosphere and across the surface of both land and sea. It's now practically certain that increasing greenhouse gases have already warmed the climate system. That continued rapid increases in greenhouse gases will cause rapid future warming is irrefutable.* <sup>4</sup>

The enormity of this scientific evidence has heightened the need for concerted action around the globe. Recognising that the planet faces an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to most living things, including humans and their societies, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) came into being in 1992 as the key international treaty to reduce global warming and cope with the consequences of climate change.

By 1995, recognising that the existing emission reduction provisions were inadequate, countries adopted the Kyoto Protocol. The subsequent complex international negotiations (including Copenhagen 2009; Cancun 2010; and Durban 2011) reflect a global community acting co-operatively to bring about large cuts to emissions as quickly as possible.

So, we have the first cornerstone in place – the *scientific knowledge*. An overwhelming body of global climate science tells us that there is a deepening climate change crisis which will grant no nation on earth any immunity. And we also have the second – an *international treaty*. Under the UNFCCC, close to two hundred countries are now working to reduce emissions with the agreed aim of holding global temperature increases to below two degrees Celsius.

### **A solid public policy framework emerges**

In Australia, two recent reviews represent the pivotal work upon which to establish sound public policy that has guided the response to the threat of climate change. Both have been headed by Professor Ross Garnaut AO, BA, Ph.D – Professorial Fellow in Economics at the University of Melbourne, Distinguished Professor of Economics at the Australian National University and a former Australian Ambassador to China.

The first Review was commissioned by the commonwealth, state and territory governments in April 2007 at the request of the then Opposition Labor Leader Kevin Rudd. Its brief was to carry out an independent study of the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy.

After months of expert analysis, consultation and writing, the Garnaut Climate Change Review released its Final Report in September 2008. The Review accepted the central conclusion of the body of global science about the effects of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere on temperature, and about the effects of temperature changes on climate and physical earth. It formed the view that the mainstream science was, ‘on the balance of probabilities, right’.<sup>5</sup>

The Review compared the costs and benefits of Australia taking action and concluded it was in our national interest to do our fair share in mitigating climate change. It recommended medium to longer term policies to improve the prospects for sustainable prosperity.

**The conclusion was that a broad-based market approach that priced carbon will best preserve Australia’s prosperity in making the transition to a low-carbon future.**

An update of this Review was commissioned by the Gillard Government in 2010. Further months of extensive research, expert studies, consultation and review followed. A series

of papers was released between February and March 2011 addressing further climate science evidence and predicted and expected impacts, emissions trends, international progress on climate change mitigation, carbon pricing, innovation, technology, land and the electricity sector.

The Final Report of the Garnaut Review was presented to the Federal Government in May 2011. It acknowledged that since the earlier review, climate change science had been subjected to intense scrutiny and had ‘come through with its credibility intact’. The Review noted that, in general, the body of new data and analysis was ‘confirming that outcomes will be nearer the midpoints or closer to the negative end of what had earlier been identified as the range of possibilities for human-induced climate change’.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the prospect of dangerous climate change had become more marked.

The Review concluded that we faced an historic choice between a market-based approach that put a price on carbon with a regulatory framework, or direct action. Ultimately, it affirmed the approach adopted in the 2008 Review – a three-year fixed carbon price followed by a carbon trading scheme with a floating price. Garnaut argued that:

*This is Australia’s best path towards full and effective participation in humanity’s efforts to reduce the danger of climate change without damaging Australia’s prosperity...The introduction in 2012 of an emissions trading scheme with a fixed price on carbon for three years and then a floating price incorporating the targets that are appropriate at the time would give us good prospects of doing our fair share at moderate cost...and will be important but not disruptive events in the structural evolution of the Australian economy.*<sup>7</sup>

One distinct advantage of a market-based carbon price approach, said the Review, was that it would raise considerable revenues from the issuing of permits; and that this revenue could be used to buffer the transition to a low-carbon economy. Efficiency and equity objectives would be well served by allocating much of the revenue to reducing personal income tax rates on households at the lower end of the income distribution and making adjustments to indexation arrangements for pensions and benefits.<sup>8</sup>

So, we have a third cornerstone in place – *sound public policy*. The two Garnaut reviews form the basis for creating a policy framework and legislative program to guide the national interest. While these do not constitute the entire policy load carried out over the past three years in particular, they nonetheless remain the central component.

## National political focus sharpens

This public policy framework was being built at a time when community support was also strongly supportive of the need for a concerted action response on climate change.

Prime Minister Howard took an emissions reduction policy to the 2007 election. At the same time, Opposition Labor Leader Kevin Rudd proclaimed that ‘climate change was the great moral and economic challenge of our time’ and made this the centrepiece of his election strategy. Both agreed that Australia should reduce emissions by 5 per cent in 2020 from 2000 levels, whatever the rest of the world was doing, as our contribution to keeping hopes alive for a strong international agreement.

After winning the 2007 federal election, the new Rudd Government signed the Kyoto Protocol and proceeded to design a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), issuing a Green Paper for discussion and comment, followed by a White Paper in December 2008. The government announced legislation for the CPRS which was to take effect in July 2010. It was twice rejected by the parliament, providing a double dissolution trigger.

The Liberal Opposition Leader, Malcolm Turnbull, had been supportive of this direction. In November 2009, however, Tony Abbott resigned from the shadow cabinet in protest against the party leader’s support for the government’s scheme. Following a spill motion, he defeated Turnbull by one vote, 42 to 41.

Six months later, in April 2010, rather than call a double dissolution, Prime Minister Rudd deferred the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. There was a sharp and negative community reaction to this deferral, illustrated starkly in subsequent opinion polling.

The Deputy Labor Leader, Julia Gillard, replaced Kevin Rudd in June 2010. She made a pre-election commitment not to introduce a carbon tax. She also announced a Citizens’ Assembly to help build national consensus around policy and action to address climate change, a proposal that was poorly received across the broader community.

The voters in the 2010 election delivered a hung parliament. Prime Minister Gillard was able to successfully negotiate the formation of a government with the support of the Australian Greens and three Independents. One of the first actions of the new government was the establishment of a Multi-Party Committee to help shape the government’s climate change policy and to consider a range of ways to introduce a carbon price.

Chaired by the prime minister, the committee’s other parliamentary members included Greg Combet, Wayne Swan, Independent Tony Windsor, and senators Bob Brown and Christine Milne. It had four other members from outside

of the parliament – Professor Ross Garnaut, Professor Will Steffan, a climate scientist, Ms Patricia Faulkner of KPMG, and Mr Rod Sims, Chairman of the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.<sup>9</sup> The coalition was invited to supply two members to the Multi-Party Committee, an invitation turned down by Liberal Leader Tony Abbott.

Following the work of this Committee, the Clean Energy Bill was introduced to the Australian Parliament in 2011, and approved by the House of Representatives in October and the Senate in the following month. The legislation contained a number of key measures designed to reduce carbon emissions and limit global warming. Central, however, was the price placed on carbon as a financial incentive for large emitters to reduce their carbon emissions, a mechanism that was to take effect from 1 July 2012.

Some five hundred businesses whose emissions are large are now required to buy a permit to cover these emissions. Fixed initially at \$23 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent, the price will rise by 2.5 per cent in 2013 and 2014. From 2015 onward, the market will set the price as Australia moves to an emissions trading scheme in which permits can be traded.<sup>10</sup>

The proposed move to a low carbon economy is to be assisted by a range of complementary measures, including a new Climate Change Authority that will provide independent advice on future targets; incentives to invest in energy efficiency and cleaner technologies; increased energy efficiency at the household level; and incentives for farmers to carry out carbon storage activity on their land.

And now we have a fourth cornerstone in place – the *legislation*. All the policy in the world amounts to nothing unless our parliamentarians are able to translate it into a legislative program that sets the new rules that will kick-start the move to a low-carbon economy.

By mid-2012, after years of deliberation, policy development and political trade-off, Australia had established these crucial cornerstones – the *scientific knowledge*, an *international treaty process*, a *public policy framework*, and *carbon price legislation*. Cemented together, these would normally constitute a strong foundation from which Australians could be confident of meeting our international treaty targets, fine-tuning the range of policy measures to serve the national interest, bringing people together in the face of a real threat to our environment and collective well-being, and paying our fair share as a member of the global community.

Counter-intuitively, however, we now have a problem of a different kind, and one that is largely of our own making as a nation. Instead of coming together and accepting shared national goals that position our country to deal with the threat of dangerous climate change, we have become a deeply polarised community, in which many are increasingly

dismissive of the body of authoritative climate science, disinclined to take action on climate change, and not all that keen to shoulder any community and global responsibility. Sections of the community are hostile to Prime Minister Gillard (and her government) despite her success in introducing historic carbon pricing legislation when others before her were not inclined or able to deliver.

The push by the Opposition, some business interests and sections of the media to force an election and change government has become the end game, rather than the need to respond positively to the threat of climate change. The efforts of Rudd supporters to avenge his failed leadership have become an internal end game, rather than the need to support initial, important national legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We are now at a cross-road. Many Australians are weighed down by anger, negativity, and many are despairing. Potentially, this social division may well compromise our future collective efforts while other nations are getting on with the task.

## **A public under siege**

The Lowy Institute has been carrying out polls on climate change since 2005.

According to the first two polls, in 2005 and 2006, Australians thought climate change was the number one foreign policy issue. By 2008, this had slipped to fifth priority; a year later it was seventh on the list; and by 2010-12 it was ninth in a list of twelve priorities. Despite the fact that the scientific data suggest the problem is more acute than ever, climate change is now seen as less of a problem and more people are turned off the idea of national action being taken.

As the new and historic carbon price regime took effect in mid-2012, a further Lowy Institute poll found considerable opposition to it. Sixty-three per cent were opposed to the legislation; 45 per cent were strongly against it; 33 per cent did not feel it was strong enough; 57 per cent were in favour of the Coalition Government removing it at the next election. Over a third (38 per cent) were strongly in favour of its repeal; of these 58 per cent were men and 36 per cent were women.<sup>11</sup>

## **What has happened?**

The popular explanation is that two factors explain this dramatic falling away of community support to take action in the face of a threat: the deferral of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme by Prime Minister Rudd and the current prime minister's 2010 pre-election commitment not to introduce a carbon 'tax'.

Both these actions tell part of the story, but they are only two chapters in at least a five-part saga.

Public policy expert Professor Garnaut is acutely aware of the struggle between sectional or vested interests and the national interest. In his updated Review, Garnaut observed that as clear as the case was for carbon pricing, the political basis for such policy had weakened since his first Review three years earlier. Realistically, he observed that conflicts between vested interests and the national interest will always be a part of the political fabric and there are periods when special interests have the strongest hold on policy and others in which policy making is strongly grounded in the national interest.

## **The idea and formulation of a carbon price package has underscored this struggle between sectional interests and the national interest, and the Australian public has been under siege ever since.**

There are many on the warpath trying to take the public hostage – the fossil-fuel lobby; think tanks such as the Institute of Public Affairs (whose science policy adviser, Emeritus Fellow Bob Carter, is paid a monthly retainer by the American-based Heartland Institute which seeks to cast doubt on the science of climate change);<sup>12</sup> and new lobby groups such as Manufacturing Australia, which was established in 2011 and lobbies vigorously against the introduction of the carbon package.

Asked on the ABC's 'Lateline' (October 2011) why such a lobby group was formed, CEO Dick Warburton, who is Chairman of Tony Abbott's Business Advisory Council, replied:

*Just to keep the whole pressure on this that at some stage – who knows what might happen in the next month, two months, six months, nine months whatever. Could be a change of Labor leader, there could be a change of government. And so we believe that the least we can do is just to keep the pressure on that.*<sup>13</sup>

The views of climate deniers are promoted specifically to muddy the waters, mirroring the process by which the tobacco lobby deliberately manufactured doubt about the causal relationship between smoking and lung cancer. The body of global science on climate change is called into question using the perverse logic that a handful of self-styled commentators has got the science right while thousands of scientists and agencies around the globe connected to the IPCC are wrong. Some of our country's climate scientists are now routinely barraged with hate mail, violent abuse and threats.

Professor Garnaut has reason to know about the power play of sectional interests in a more direct and personal way. His track record as one of Australia's most distinguished economists and outstanding public policy professional was not enough to save him from being slandered by British hereditary peer Lord Monckton, who described him as an 'eco-fascist'.

In June 2011, during a PowerPoint presentation in the US, Lord Monckton went on to claim that Garnaut had a 'fascist' point of view and expected people to 'accept authority without question'. 'Heil Hitler, on we go,' said Lord Monckton, pointing to an image of a Nazi swastika.<sup>14</sup>

One week later, Monckton was listed to speak at the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies in Perth.

Parts of the mainstream media have also played a role in confusing the picture and contributing to the state of siege.

In the first instance, climate science deniers have been provided with an over-sized platform to spruik their views. In large part, this has grown out of a failure by the media to grasp the very process by which scientific facts and knowledge come about. Scientific data and evidence are hard won. They gain integrity through a mandatory peer review process in which ideas, data and methods are screened out if they fail to meet the scrutiny and judgement of other scientists working in the same field.

**Climate science deniers and media commentators who proclaim a superior grasp of the science have a luxury in common – none of their research and writing is subject to the rigour and validation of a formal peer-review process.**

Securing opposing views is a part of journalism. But giving equal time is not a substitute for the reliability of evidence and fact. Instead of respecting the integrity of peer-reviewed science, media outlets have interpreted 'balance' as a question of giving equal time to the views of a climate scientist *and* climate sceptic.

When the views of those whose opinions have not been subjected to any external, rigorous and independent process are accorded the same intellectual status as the conclusions of peer-reviewed scientists these opinions are in fact given more standing than they deserve – and a public's confidence as to what is the truth of the matter is eroded. Academic Stephan Lewandowsky captures this neatly:

*Balancing science with 'scepticism' is akin to designing a moon mission by balancing the expert judgement of astronomers with the opinions of the tabloid horoscope.*<sup>15</sup>

Parts of the mainstream media have played a further unhelpful role in the siege of the public by showing little appetite for the weighty problems and debate that come with climate change mitigation – even though we are talking about issues that are profoundly complex and vital to our own future and that of generations to come. A *Sunday Age* editorial put this with a degree of candour not present across much of the media:

*Substantive debates about ideas and policy in Australian politics are almost entirely absent – the media can take its share of the blame for that...*<sup>16</sup>

There have been cogent treatments of the proposed carbon pricing policy, including that of *The Age* writer, Tim Colebatch:

*The (carbon price is) a decentralised, democratic way to reduce emissions: we choose how to do it, in ways that preserve profits and living standards. Treasury and the Productivity Commission had been nudging the Howard government to do it for years. They were right, and had Howard responded in time, it might have been as uncontroversial here as it was in Europe or New Zealand.*<sup>17</sup>

But these have been thin on the ground. Apart from this lack of substantive analysis to assist public understanding of carbon pricing, there has been a largely negative agenda run through the mainstream media. This is mirrored by the findings of the research team at the Centre for Independent Journalism, University of Technology, Sydney, which studied the carbon price issue by examining the editorials, opinion pieces, news stories and feature articles appearing in ten newspapers over six months, between February and July 2011.

News Ltd's coverage was out of all proportion – 82 per cent of items were negative about the carbon price. The most negative were published by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun*. The Fairfax group's coverage was different, although negative coverage (56 per cent) still outweighed positive (44 per cent).<sup>18</sup>

But the most damaging of all in placing the Australian public under siege has been the relentless two-year campaign against the carbon price by Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

**The catch-cry of a 'Great Big New Tax' has so far been politically effective for him and his party, but it has come at great cost otherwise, particularly in shifting people's attention from the message of climate science, a point well made by writer and commentator, Don Watson:**

*The people are sovereign, (Abbott) says. To hell with the sovereignty of scientific facts: popular opinion will determine if the earth is warming and what to do about it – just as it determined the answer to polio and the movement of the planets.*<sup>19</sup>

The fear campaign around the carbon price package has wilfully ignored the urgency of climate science as well as made a series of unsubstantiated claims about the impact of a carbon price on people's livelihoods and households. It has exploited people's fear of change and, in the process, lowered their expectation of what they can do to play a part in climate change mitigation.

*A lie can travel around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.* (Mark Twain.)

## **The peer review process: independent and rigorous scrutiny...**

A group of scientists completes an important phase of their study. They submit their work to a highly influential international scientific journal.

Such journals send all submitted manuscripts to reviewers who are expert in the particular field of study, and can provide an independent and unbiased opinion on the quality and significance of the work. There are strict rules governing the choice of reviewers – they must not have professional, personal or financial affiliations with any manuscript authors, they must not disclose their identity to the authors, and they are not rewarded financially or in any other way for their contribution. Indeed the editors responsible for recruiting reviewers must uphold the reputation and credibility of their journal by ensuring that these guidelines are followed.

The rigorous review process means that readers of reputable scientific journals can be confident that the evidence and conclusions in each paper have been properly scrutinised. Scientific journals ensure that each publication presents sufficient detail of the methodology and data so that other researchers would be able to repeat the experiments to see whether they obtain the same data.

This peer-review process also ensures that scientists do not make unsubstantiated claims about their work.

The process allows an ongoing interchange between scientists that is subject to independent scrutiny and validation, and there are checks and balances that minimise acceptance or rejection of a paper based solely on the bias of editors or reviewers.

**How breathtakingly reckless is this campaign when the body of global science is now sounding an even more ominous warning about the rate of climate change and its consequences for the planet?**

This ceaseless negativity has made many Australians retreat to an insular position, dismissive of the global body of authoritative science and disinterested in taking action in their households and communities – despite the fact that it would take very little change in household behaviour to offset increased costs associated with the introduction of a carbon price. *The Age* writer Tim Colebatch pinpoints this energy efficiency argument:

*The beauty of this tax is that you can avoid it, by using less electricity and gas. Of all the options to cut emissions, it pushes us towards making our use of energy more efficient. There are many ways to do this: turning the thermostat down a degree or so, or the aircon up; replacing energy guzzlers such as plasma TVs or halogen lights with energy efficient alternatives; just turning switches off. You pay that \$5 a week only if you do nothing to adapt.*<sup>20</sup>

The irony of this fear campaign, created for no other purpose than to seek and destroy the minority government, is that the coalition parties would normally be expected to support a market-based approach to climate policy and economic reform. Instead, they have opted for a direct action program to reduce emissions. Their program has yet to be costed in terms of impacts and the public, already under siege, has limited knowledge of it.

The further irony is that as the carbon price regime takes effect, and businesses start to work within the new set of rules, they now have to deal with the uncertainty created by a coalition leader pledging ‘in blood’ that he will repeal the carbon price package should the coalition parties win at the next election.

**How breathtakingly reckless is this campaign when the body of global science is now sounding an even more ominous warning about the rate of climate change and its consequences for the planet?**

### **Harming the common good**

*I think the denigration of science is a real threat. If scientists are mocked and derided, then soon we will have the total triumph of ‘know nothing’.* (Malcolm Turnbull MP.)<sup>21</sup>

The total triumph of ‘know nothing’ can only harm the common good.

In the space of just five years, a huge reservoir of goodwill and confidence in government’s ability to act in the national interest and take correct actions to mitigate climate change has been squandered. Some of this loss of faith can be traced directly to the deferral of a CPRS by the Rudd Government, and to the negative publicity around Prime Minister Gillard’s support for carbon pricing as a policy initiative of the minority government.

Mostly, however, the situation can be attributed to the combined forces of compliant sections of the media lacking quality leadership; a strategy by special interests to lobby against a carbon price and, in so doing, discredit the body

of climate science; and a nakedly politically expedient campaign by Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

These are a great source of harm.

**What does it say about us as a society if we allow the science of climate change to be discredited and shunned?**

**What does it say about us as a society when scientists and other professionals who spend their lifetime in the service of the broader community become the targets of violent abuse and death threats?**

**What does it say about us as a society when we reduce our interest in the planet’s health to the price of a few dollars here and there?**

In the medium term, and until some greater unity among Australians is forged, Australia’s national leaders will have to continue the complex climate change negotiations around our international treaty obligations mindful that the Australian public is now divided – in part fearful, snarling, cynical and disengaged and in part despairing, frustrated and let down.

But this is not the only harm. Apart from the fact that it is a denial of the important nation-building work of science generally, the negativity and campaigning against the carbon price is a recipe for wider social division and disconnection.


People who are moved to anger and contempt about a carbon abatement policy are probably more likely to disengage not just from this policy reform but also from a wide range of ideas and other debates on domestic policies, such as the adoption of a National Disability Insurance Scheme to provide greater well-being for Australians who live with a disability; a change in the funding formula for public education; or further reforms in aged care provision.

The aggressive lobbying and debate around the carbon price package is interwoven with the assault on the legitimacy of the minority government and the fierce, often gendered, attempt to bring down Julia Gillard as prime minister and leader of her party. We are now, in the words of media professionals, Peter Lewis and Jackie Woods:

*In the hapless situation where ‘Australians (watch) fights between politicians they don’t trust on news media they don’t trust, feeding the cynicism of a battle-weary public’.*<sup>22</sup>

The upshot is that our political discourse is now dominated by negative and charged attacks, where free-flowing, and often violent, abuse squeezes out the possibilities of rational and respectful disagreement. More broadly, strong traditions of important community values of respect, tolerance, fairness and democracy are being eroded.

Now is the time to start some repair work. Time to throw the switch and re-direct the current in the interests of the common good.



**The most common  
way people give up  
their power is by  
thinking they don't  
have any.**

(Alice Walker, Pulitzer prize-winning novelist and poet)

A large crowd of people is gathered for a protest in front of a classical building. Many individuals are holding signs with environmental and political messages. The scene is captured in a dark, monochromatic style.

**Section D:**  
**throw the switch, re-direct the current**

Carbon  
Costs -  
Polluters  
must  
pay!

**Change**  
AGENCY

**icare**  
CLEAN ENERGY  
cut pollution, create jobs

**WE PAY NOW**

**icare**  
CLEAN ENERGY  
ABOUT

But now, says the Once-ler,  
Now that you're here,  
The word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear.  
**UNLESS someone like you  
Cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better.  
It's not.**

(Dr Seuss, *The Lorax*, first published in 1971 by Random House.)

## 1. Carry the respect agenda through important conversations

Every one of us is powerful. We are capable of extensive influence if we put our minds to it. We have reach into multiple networks – our families, circle of friends, workplaces, faith communities, sports clubs, book clubs, educational institutions, neighbourhoods, local communities and social media. We can all use these as a possible means of progressing debate and change.

- ▶ **Read the whole document, *A Switch in Time*. Encourage others to read it. Use the information in it to challenge the negative public narrative that has swirled around the minority government, and Julia Gillard, since day one.**
- ▶ **Have the courageous conversations – the minority government is a legitimate government; a capable female prime minister is subject to a fierce and gendered attack; the waters have been deliberately muddied around climate science by people intent on destroying the minority government and its carbon price legislation; the reporting by large sections of our media is obviously skewed; we should not be accepting vitriol and abuse as a part of our political discourse and way of life.**

Between us all, we can bring thousands of people into conversation, all over the country and in all sorts of places. Keep the conversation respectful, never personal, never abusive, and always focused on evidence and facts.

- ▶ **Help get this document out and about the nation. Make copies of this document and distribute it as far and wide as you can. Set a target to put it in the hands of at least ten others. It can also be downloaded from the website of the Victorian Women's Trust – [www.vwt.org.au](http://www.vwt.org.au) Forward the link to all your personal and professional contacts and networks and urge them to spread the word too.**
- ▶ **Talk it over with your friends, family, colleagues and workmates. Discuss its contents at mealtimes with your family or over lunch at work. Gather a group together around your kitchen table or local coffee place and enjoy some serious dialogue on these matters. Each of the distinct sections of the document could be printed and used as stand-alone discussion starters.**

## 2. Respecting democratic principles

*Democracy suffers when there are deep levels of disaffection with politicians and political processes. This malaise will not be remedied by bad-mouthing politicians. A more respectful and honest relationship between our elected representatives and ourselves will only exist when both are prepared to make this come about. (Purple Sage Project, Victorian Women's Trust, 2000, p. 28.)*

*The citizen can bring our political and governmental institutions back to life, make them responsive and accountable, and keep them honest. No one else can. (John W. Gardner, American educator and political reformer.)*

The relationship between the one hundred and fifty Federal MPs and by extension their communities is the foundation block of our national system of democracy – not tabloid owners or other powerful interest groups or individuals. But for this relationship to work properly, MPs and their constituents need to engage with one another constructively and respectfully.

You are entitled to contact your parliamentarians on any matter you wish. When you do so, always observe a basic decency. Be prepared to put your name and address on correspondence; it shows you accept personal responsibility for what you say. Anonymity is sometimes required by people as a protection against further harm or because the content is extremely sensitive. But anonymity attached to angry, violent and offensive abuse is different – it is a refusal to accept personal responsibility and accountability.

- ▶ **Email/or write to your MPs urging them to adopt a zero tolerance policy on abuse and violent abuse.** Urge them to place a policy statement on their websites which states that the principle of free speech is not a licence to make offensive, abusive and anonymous commentary; that such commentary will not be accorded any weight; and that ideas and feedback need always to be couched in constructive and respectful terms with name and address supplied.
- ▶ **Email/write to your local MPs in defence of the democratic principles** that led to the formation of the current minority government. Be prepared to challenge them if necessary, as well as people in the broader community, around the idea that this government is somehow illegitimate and that it should not be allowed to go full term.
- ▶ **Email your own MPs in the House of Representatives and the Senate and urge them to respect the Agreement for a Better Parliament; and to play their part in bringing about the much-needed cultural change.** Let them know that you expect, of necessity, that they contribute to the parliamentary debates with intelligence and sophistication rather than adopting the language and behaviour of the 'bear pit'. The Australian Parliament website is the best place to start for all relevant contact details: <http://www.aph.gov.au>
- ▶ **Email/or write to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate about civility and respect.** Let them know that you expect, and indeed, demand that they rule with a firm hand at all times, especially when language and behaviour is disrespecting of the person, disparaging of gender and unacceptably vitriolic.
- ▶ **Email/or write to the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate and commend them for their leadership** when you hear or see them enforcing discipline in the parliament and curbing unacceptable behaviour.
- ▶ **Don't hesitate to explore ways to work with MPs on common causes.** Once-off letters or emails can have some effect, but there are other ways of connecting with your elected representatives.

### 3. Respecting a fair go

*her (Julia Gillard's) way is a reflection of reality rather than just of the author's lack of imagination and insight...It's easy to make life unbearable for a woman trying to get a difficult job done.*

*It is very, very easy. Which is why we're doing it.*

(Ben Pobjie, 23 April 2012.)<sup>1</sup>

It is undoubtedly historic to have a woman as a prime minister – for the first time in one hundred and twelve years of Australian federal politics. It signals to the world at large that women can, and should, play active roles in the government of their country; and that women and girls can aspire to high office.

This is not saying that women in high office should be immune from criticism or judgements of performance. But it is not fair to apply different standards here from what would be levelled at a male in the top job.

Judgements should be based on decision-making, policy formulation, legislative program and actions in the national interest. This assessment of performance should apply to all politicians, uniformly, regardless of his or her political allegiance.

- ▶ **Email/write to the prime minister. Rather than accepting what the tabloids and other media are saying, when you know in your own mind that Prime Minister Gillard is actually doing a good job, commend her; and make sure you send a copy to your local members.**
- ▶ **Email/write to the prime minister when you disagree with a policy position being advocated by her and her government; and make sure you send a copy to your local members.**
- ▶ **Email/write to take issue with media reporting when you believe that it is judging Julia Gillard's performance as prime minister by standards different from those that would usually apply to men in the position. Send a copy to the editor-in-chief or station manager.**
- ▶ **Email/write or telephone a radio or television station if you hear abusive and sexist commentary regarding the prime minister or women in public life. Consider making a formal complaint (refer to the section below, Holding our media to account).**

*Can a democracy sustain itself when almost half its citizens are prepared to entertain another mode of government? When they can't seem to appreciate the self-evident virtue of democracy compared with authoritarian tyranny? The problem may go beyond the brutal politics of a hung parliament. **Maybe it is because we are losing our very ability to talk about a common good.***

(Tim Soutphommasane, *The Age*, 18 June 2012.)<sup>2</sup>

Generations of Australians have understood the idea of our shared obligations; helping to build equality and social cohesion; respecting the law; tolerating dissenting views; sharing achievements and economic benefits; and working towards nationally agreed goals. We don't have to look far for practical examples – our national health insurance system, industrial laws and regulations, equal rights before the courts, a strong system of compulsory public education, and provision for the aged and other vulnerable members of our society.

Previous generations have also managed to come together in the face of threats or when new and major policy directions have been called for.

- ▶ **Stay with, and respect, the body of climate science. Seek and build your information only from credible sources. Keep abreast of existing and further reports from authoritative global agencies such as:**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change  
([www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch))

CSIRO ([www.csiro.au](http://www.csiro.au))

Australian Bureau of Meteorology  
([www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au))

The Climate Institute  
([www.climateinstitute.org.au](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au))

The New Scientist ([www.newscientist.com](http://www.newscientist.com))

The Garnaut Reviews  
([www.garnautreview.org.au](http://www.garnautreview.org.au))

ClimateWorks Australia  
([www.climateworksaustralia.com](http://www.climateworksaustralia.com))

## 4. Respecting the common good

**In the run-up to the next federal election, look closely at the policies and platforms of the parties and candidates, the issues that are being addressed, and the viability of proposals being presented to the electorate. Focus on the substance of policies as well as track records. Adopt the all-important criterion 'Is it in the best interests of the community?' in evaluating policies of presenting candidates.**

Trust your own judgement – consciously set aside skewed and negative media commentary that is not a dispassionate and fair account of policies and performance.

- ▶ **Check the websites of parties and candidates for their policy pronouncements.**
- ▶ **Email/write to the candidates in your seat. Ask them to provide policy detail.**
- ▶ **Get together a small working group in your own community to arrange local forums and request the candidates in your seat to attend these events to discuss policy issues.**
- ▶ **Consider registering with key parliamentarians your interest in particular policy areas, such as climate change or the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Any constituent can register a policy interest with a specific minister and shadow minister. Go to their websites to register, and you will then receive notification of media releases and speeches which enable you to monitor developments in this interest area.**

## 5. Holding our media to account

*Newspapers are not...giving proper weight and applying public interest standards to the way the news of the day is judged and displayed. And as traditional news-gathering fades in relevance, many journalists are being driven away from the basics towards cowboy behaviour.*

(Barrie Cassidy, 9 March 2012.) 3

*All of us who professionally use the mass media are the shapers of society. We can vulgarise that society. We can brutalize it. Or we can help lift it onto a higher level.*

(William Bernbach, American advertising executive, 1911-1982.)

The high concentration of media ownership in Australia already poses a huge problem in terms of diversity of news and information and the possibility of concentrated bias. New South Wales and Victoria are the only states where the Fairfax press is an alternative to News Limited. Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory only have News Limited papers. Western Australia has a paper owned by Seven West Media. The other is a News Limited paper. Fairfax operates *The Australian Financial Review*, while *The Australian* is owned by News Limited.

Media concentration, however, is no reason for us to accept demonstrated bias and a lowering of journalistic standards.

As well as newspapers and television, web pages and social media are powerful channels of communications. While there are many sites where comments are moderated with sensible protocols in place, there are, nonetheless, too many examples of unrestricted violent abuse and sexist attack.

This is not about the heavy hand of censorship. It is about having mature discussion and debate, exploring different options around codes of practice, community protocols, forms of moderation and avenues for legal redress when women and men are vilified.

► **Seek out sources of quality journalism – print and/or online. Suspend your judgement about what you hear only in the 24-hour news cycle. Wait instead until you have read from a considered, credible, and preferably independent, source.**

► **Consider subscribing to independent media sites such as:**

**The Conversation**

**([www.theconversation.edu.au](http://www.theconversation.edu.au))**

**The Drum**

**([www.abc.net.au/news/thedrum](http://www.abc.net.au/news/thedrum))**

**Crikey ([www.crikey.com.au](http://www.crikey.com.au))**

**The Monthly ([www.themonthly.com.au](http://www.themonthly.com.au))**

**New Matilda ([www.newmatilda.com](http://www.newmatilda.com))**

► **Try to maintain a rational voice in your contributions across social media, without lowering basic standards of decency. Don't hesitate to report offensive material. Contact a moderator (if there is one!) and lodge a complaint against abusive, violent or sexist commentary.**

► **Speak up to your friends and acquaintances over social media. If a friend or acquaintance posts or 'likes' something sexist or offensive, let them know why it is inappropriate and that you don't condone it.**

- ▶ **The Victorian Women’s Trust will proceed to carry out – in partnership with other organisations – research that reviews past and recent judgements of regulatory authorities on the question of online gender vilification and violent abuse, as well as assess the adequacy of existing legislation, codes of practice and defamation law.**
- ▶ **Don’t hesitate to make a formal complaint to the media.** There are various existing guides to making a complaint to the media. One of the clearest and most detailed is the fact sheet that was developed for the Canterbury-Bankstown Community Harmony Round Table, a project of the NSW Government managed by the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW.

There is an edited version of this fact sheet overleaf.

Go to particular radio and television stations in your state or territory for contact details. The full fact sheet can be found at: [www.crc.nsw.gov.au/media\\_releases/archive/documents/making\\_a\\_complaint](http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/media_releases/archive/documents/making_a_complaint)

# Making a formal complaint to the media

*The way in which the media presents a community, a locality or an individual can have a huge impact on community harmony. The power of the press and the news media generally cannot be underestimated in their ability to both inform and inflame public opinion.*

*However we all have the power to complain or voice our concerns about the way things are reported. If we are offended, or think the reporting of a situation is not fair or balanced, we need to express our concerns to the relevant authorities. In this way, according to the saying, one voice can be very loud.*

*The more strongly people raise their objections the more likely it is that the media can be made accountable for how they present the news and how they discuss important subjects. This guide also applies to all media including foreign language and ethnic media produced in Australia.*

*Remember media organisations are very powerful and well-resourced. We should not be daunted by that fact. A single complaint or even a campaign of complaint may not appear initially to have an impact, but if the level of complaint reaches the point where it could threaten ratings or potential income it does have impact.*

*The media is part of the community and likes to be seen as socially responsible. So sometimes they can be persuaded to demonstrate that responsibility by rejecting certain forms of reporting or discussion and creating instead a special program or special edition to turn round public opinion in a good and positive way. Readers, viewers or listeners can sometimes achieve that kind of result with persistence.*

*To have your voice heard by a newspaper or magazine editor or by a current affairs television producer may require no more than a simple phone call politely expressing your objection to a particular approach.*

*However to complain about more serious breaches or to ensure you have a greater impact with a complaint, you may need to write a letter or make an official complaint to the relevant bodies.*

## Codes of Practice and Statement of Principles

Commercial television and radio both have Codes of Practice which provide guidelines for meeting community standards. Print media have a Statement of Principles developed by the Australian Press Council and these principles are used when considering complaints.

A complaint will be more effective if direct references are included on how the relevant Code or Principle has been breached.

## Important links

### Commercial Television Code of Practice

[http://www.freetvaust.com.au/Content\\_Common/pg-Code-of-Practice.seo](http://www.freetvaust.com.au/Content_Common/pg-Code-of-Practice.seo)

### Commercial Radio Code of Practice

[http://commercialradio.com.au/index.cfm?page\\_id=1170](http://commercialradio.com.au/index.cfm?page_id=1170) and then scroll down the page and click on the link Commercial Radio Code of Practice September 2004 pdf.

### Print Media Statement of Principles

<http://www.presscouncil.org.au/psite/complaints/sop.html>

### The Australia Communication and Media

**Authority** is responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, the internet, radio communications and telecommunications. (<http://www.acma.gov.au>).

## What are the steps to making a complaint according to specific outlets?

### Television and radio complaints

Complaints about the content of programs on commercial television and radio and ABC and SBS services should be made directly, in writing, to the station concerned. You should provide details of time and date of broadcast, as well as the nature of the complaint and how you think the broadcasting code of conduct has been breached. Keep a photocopy of your signed letter.

If the complaint does not receive an answer within sixty days, or if you are unhappy with the answer provided, you may direct the complaint to the Australian Communications and Media Authority. If you do this, you must include signed copies of all correspondence between you and the station.

### Print media complaints

The investigation of complaints against print media should be directed in the first instance to the editor or other representative of the publication concerned.

If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction you may then write to the Australian Press Council which is an industry body responsible for ensuring the print media acts responsibly and ethically. Go to: [www.presscouncil.org.au](http://www.presscouncil.org.au)

Other actions that will support the complaint:

1. Letters to the editor of the newspaper/publication concerned.
2. Getting on air on the radio talkback programs.
3. Encouraging colleagues to inundate that particular program to ensure that at least one person gets on air and to lessen the opportunity for the broadcaster to cut off anyone discussing your topic.
4. Writing to your local politician about your complaint.
5. Holding a local community forum to gain support for your complaint and inviting relevant media personnel from various outlets (depending on the article and the severity of the issue).
6. Contacting 'Media Watch' on ABC TV ([www.abc.net.au/mediawatch](http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch)).
7. Writing to the advertisers and sponsors of programs to make them aware of the offensive content of programs they are sponsoring.

### What steps do you take in making a complaint? A general guide.

1. Name the time, date, place, program and media outlet of the story you wish to complain about.
2. Don't delay. Most outlets have time limits on accepting complaints and the longer you delay the more likely it is that you will never do it.
3. Be precise and use as much detail as you can about the item you are objecting about. General statements like 'it's offensive reporting' may make it difficult for the outlet to pin down precisely what the complaint is about.
4. Most media outlets have complaints procedures in place within their organisation which are usually based on codes of practice or editorial policy. These in turn are based on legislation or codes of conduct for media reporting.
5. Be constructive, firm and persistent. Some outlets may take a long time to respond or may even ignore your complaint, especially if it's not constructive or precise.
6. Don't hesitate to follow up until you get the response you need.

If you do not receive a response within a set period of time (usually 60 days) or if you are unsatisfied with the response you have received you can take it to the relevant governing body – Australia Communication and Media Authority for Commercial Television and Radio (<http://www.acma.gov.au>) or the Australian Press Council for Print Media (<http://www.presscouncil.org.au>).

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