

## Acknowledgement

I start by acknowledging that we meet today on the lands of the Ngunnawal people and I pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

I extend my respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today; the resilience and wisdom of your culture is perhaps our nation's greatest treasure.

Let me also welcome former independent member for Indi Cathy McGowan – the pathfinder and inspiration to the community independents movement – and the former independent Senator for South Australia, Tim Storer.

I also acknowledge Meg Lees, the former leader of the Democrats, and a member of Climate 200's Advisory Council.

It's a great honour to stand here today... an opportunity like no other, as well as a challenge.

Speaking of which, a little later I will detail a challenge for the major parties on campaign funding — a challenge they can fix with the snap of their fingers as we approach this election.

## Opening

Australian politics is broken.

That's the problem.

That's why we're here today.

Australians are generally a positive people. Yet engaged Australians are deeply frustrated that we're not making progress on important issues.

We are frustrated that so often our government is found to be either lying or incompetent — sometimes both.

We have a government more interested in winning elections than advancing our nation.

A government that seeks power without purpose.

But first, let me give you three examples that are greatly frustrating engaged Australians.

Australians are frustrated about climate inaction,

they're frustrated about corruption in politics,

and they're frustrated about the treatment and safety of women.

## **On climate lies and inaction**

Let's start with climate change.

In February 2019, three months before the election, the Coalition's lack of climate policy was an embarrassment.

Desperate not to go to the election empty handed, the Coalition announced a \$3.4 billion dollar Climate Solutions Package.

\$3.4 billion dollars. Sounds impressive, doesn't it?

Well, \$1.4 billion of that had already allocated to Snowy 2.0, announced two years earlier. The remaining \$2 billion dollars was essentially Tony Abbott's Emissions Reduction Fund rebranded the Climate Solutions Fund.

Initially, the Government said it would invest that two billion dollars over ten years. \$200 million a year.

But when the budget was announced, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg stretched that decade to fifteen years, with only \$189 million allocated over four years.

In essence, three quarters of the annual spend evaporated in an instant.

Weeks later, in the heat of the campaign, the treasurer announced \$260 million dollars for a level crossing removal project.

Yes, a piece of pork barrelling received more funding than the Government's signature climate policy.

It gets worse.

Three years on and not a cent of the Climate Solutions Fund has been spent.

Yet, right now, our government is spending millions... something like \$7 million dollars this month on the "Positive Energy" greenwashing campaign, telling us that Australia is doing great on emissions reduction.

This is taxpayer funded election advertising disguised as information.

The truth? By the government's own numbers, real emissions have fallen by less than one per cent between 2013 and 2020.

And outside the electricity sector, under the Government's plan, emissions are flatlining, not falling, through to the end of the decade.

The Government's plan to reduce emissions is a joke that nobody finds funny.

Nor should they. It's consistent with the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef, and the 64,000 full-time jobs it supports, which is more than are employed in coal mining.

It's also consistent with increased frequency and intensity of bushfires, like those we saw in the Black Summer.

Many conservatives are aghast at this. We are abrogating our responsibility to conserve nature and passing a massive environmental debt to our children.

And what's more, we're missing in action on the biggest economic and business opportunity of the century.

Climate action means huge new industries – and this transformation definitely is a race.

We're not the only country endowed with abundant cheap, clean energy, and the minerals of the 21st century.

For example, few realise the role Australia plays in the electric vehicle revolution — more than half of the critical minerals in every Tesla zooming around the worlds' streets come from Australia.

But Australia makes just cents in the dollar on those minerals because our government ridiculed electric vehicles and sent our car manufacturers overseas.

We have failed to invest in mineral refining and battery cell production so most of the economic value of these *Australian* minerals is being captured overseas by countries with more long-sighted governments.

This time last year, BMW signed a [deal](#) for hundreds of millions of dollars with the United Arab Emirates to buy green aluminium.

That aluminium is produced with solar energy, and exactly the type of opportunity our government should be working to secure for Australia.

Deloitte estimates that 250,000 jobs and a \$680 billion economic boost are ours for the taking if we truly embrace policies that rapidly take us to Net Zero.

It can benefit our economy every bit as much as the gold rushes did in the 19th century.

It's 38 years since Minister for Science Barry Jones first raised climate change on the floor of parliament.

And yet this government's climate policy is to shirk our responsibilities, lie about our progress, and close our eyes to the opportunities ahead.

They brandish lumps of coal in parliament and Australians have had a gutful.

People are fed up. Can you blame them?

## On integrity

Next to integrity. Where do I start?

Watergate — the sale of \$80 million dollars of water that doesn't exist to a Cayman Islands company established by a man who is now a minister.

Grassgate — an attempt to quietly delist an endangered grass species on that same minister's property.

We've seen trashing of the Freedom of Information system, as Independent Senator Rex Patrick has fought so hard to highlight.

We've seen the defunding the Australian National Audit Office, the organisation that has uncovered: The Leppington Triangle disgrace, Sports Rorts, Car Park Rorts and, just yesterday, the Safer Communities Fund Rorts,

But most of all, the failure to legislate a National Anti-Corruption Commission is yet another broken promise of a government full of broken promises.

## On gender equity and the safety of women

On the issue of gender equity and the safety of women, there's little I can add to what Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins said at this lectern just one week ago.

Let me simply reiterate that this is far from a culture where women can be assured of feeling safe at home, at work, and in the community.

As Ms Higgins put it so eloquently: "I didn't want his sympathy as a father. I wanted him to use his power as Prime Minister".

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins' key recommendation from her recent report — a positive obligation on employers to ensure a safe workplace for all women — should have been implemented last year, not kicked into the long grass.

## Women are angry

So here we are.

Women around the country are white hot with anger — they are furious that we have made so little progress over recent decades and that the current leadership treats women as a political problem to be managed.

You have to wonder whether the poor representation of women in this government isn't partly to blame for the culture we find ourselves in.

Just 20 per cent of coalition members in the lower house are women, down from 21 per cent a quarter of a century ago.

Ruth McGowan, one of Cathy McGowan's nine sisters, runs monthly boot-camps for women who have decided to run for Parliament.

Ruth tells me that since Ms Tame, Ms Higgins and so many others stepped forward early last year, demand for that training has surged.

Professional women are putting up their hands to stand as independents.

As Monique Ryan, Independent Candidate for Kooyong said recently, when a woman in her 50s sees a problem, she says to herself: "Just give it to me. I'll fix it!".

## Hacking at the branches

One of my favourite contemporary thinkers is Lawrence Lessig of Harvard Law School.

Lessig has dedicated much of the last decade to identifying and trying to fix structural flaws that threaten our fragile democracies.

He introduced me to the well-known line from Henry David Thoreau:

*There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil  
to one who is striking at the root.*

There are many ways we hack at the branches to bring about change.

You can write letters, or complain on social media.

You can join millions in signing petitions or marching in the streets.

You can meet regularly with your local member, as I did with Josh Frydenberg... I even joined his personal fundraising group... the Kooyong 200.

Some choose to join the parties and try for change from within.

Many donate to charities that advocate on their behalf.

## **Striking at the root**

But the sad reality is that, in many ways, we have been going backwards on climate, integrity, and the treatment of women.

We have a lower renewable energy target now than we had in 2010.

15 years ago, both major parties went to the election with a commitment to make polluters pay... unthinkable in 2022.

Just last month, Australia recorded its worst ever score in the annual Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

And in 2021, Australia dropped from 24th to 50th place on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.

Hacking at the branches isn't working. We need to strike at the root.

Striking at the root means getting people into parliament who are strong, independent, and ready to hold governments accountable.

## The game is rigged

Wouldn't it be great to have a parliament filled with better people!

The reason we don't is because we're rarely given any real choice.

That's because politics is a game where the winners write the rules.

The parties give themselves access to the voter roll with every voter's personal details.

They make themselves exempt from the Privacy Act so they can spam you.

They exempt themselves from "truth in advertising" laws, so it's perfectly legal for them to lie to you.

Each member has access to more than \$750 thousand taxpayer dollars per term for what are euphemistically called "office and communication budgets", which are often used for campaigning.

On top of the taxpayer funded ad campaigns I referenced earlier, the majors receive huge donations from vested interests.

Politics is a multi-billion dollar game. Over the last decade the major parties have received and spent \$1.8 billion dollars. \$180 million dollars a year. Much of it from undisclosed sources.

In 2019 alone, the Coalition received \$65 million in undisclosed donations.

Josh Frydenberg's Kooyong 200 has received \$2.8 million in the last five years without disclosing a single donor.

Clive Palmer spent \$89 million alone in 2019, but, as he so clearly showed, money alone won't get you there... you need people-power too.

I wish it were possible for great candidates like Zoe Daniel, Dr Monique Ryan, Allegra Spender, Kylie Tink, and Dr Sophie Scamps to be elected with evidence-based policies and people power alone — as democracy should be.



But, if an independent citizen is brave enough to step forward and take on the major parties, even if they can raise a million dollars, they'll still likely be outspent 2-to-1 — as Zali Steggall was in 2019.

The political parties are goliaths and they have rigged the game.

## **Sometimes David wins**

Yet in David and Goliath battles, we know that David sometimes wins.

The communities of Indi, Warringah, Mayo, and Clark have set a shining example for others to follow.

## **Origins of the movement**

I wasn't there at the beginning.

I don't think anyone can say when the community independents movement started.

Was it last year when Cathy McGowan brought together 300 people from 72 electorates and trained them to replicate her success?

Was it when Helen Haines and Zali Steggall introduced their landmark anti-corruption and net-zero bills?

How about 2019 when Independents Kerryyn Phelps, Julia Banks, Tim Storer and other crossbenchers made their refugee medevac legislation a reality?

Or 2013 when the regional victorian electorate of Indi elected Cathy McGowan against the odds?

Was it in 2010 when Tony Windsor, Rob Oakeshott, and Andrew Wilkie helped get us ARENA and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation?

Or 1996 when Ted Mack won the seat of North Sydney?

Or should we go all the way back to the first decade of federation and suffragist Vida Goldstein.

Instrumental in winning women the vote for federal parliament in 1902, Vida stood for election five times as an independent because she thought party structures meant “selfish logrollers” got into parliament.

Unfortunately, Vida lost her 5 campaigns as an independent. I’d like to think that if she were campaigning today, this community independents movement would have her back and help her win.

## **The independents now**

This election, voters in over 20 electorates are being offered a new political choice. A viable option for breaking the political deadlock on critical issues — a community-backed independent candidate.

They are genuine community leaders, not career politicians.

The incumbent independents act as a backbone for the parliament. They introduce legislation too hot to handle by the conflicted majors, they provide a check on government overreach.

So often they are the conscience of parliament. Consider Andrew Wilkie’s focus on gambling reform... an area the major parties are too afraid to go near.

Just last week, it was Rebekha Sharkie’s amendment to the Sex Discrimination Act that secured five liberals to cross the floor to protect the rights of marginalised and vulnerable children.

While a party MP is answerable to their faction, their party, their donors and their branch before they can attend to their constituents, a community backed independent is answerable just to their community - no more, no less.

As Meg Lees said recently, in this decade, it is the independents who will “keep the bastards honest”.

Voters increasingly believe that the major parties no longer represent them — and they're leaving the major parties behind in droves.

At the last election, a quarter of the community did not vote for either major party.

Today I'd like to share two observations from our latest polling of nearly 9000 voters across 11 electorates where independents are running.

Firstly, Scott Morrison is on the nose wherever you look. His net approval ratings across these electorates is negative 11 points.

Secondly, it shows why: voters rank climate change as the number one voting issue in a significant majority of those electorates. Integrity in politics is usually second.

The incumbent MPs say they support climate action, as their constituents want, but they never vote for it when it really counts.

Trent Zimmerman sat on the parliamentary committee that reviewed Zali Steggall's Climate Bill. He didn't even have the stomach to support it being debated in parliament, let alone vote for it.

Voters are becoming aware that their representatives vote with coal-loving climate science deniers, like Barnaby Joyce, nearly every single time.

They talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

In response, we're seeing the greatest wave of independent campaigns in Australia's history.

Kylea Tink in North Sydney, Allegra Spender in Wentworth, Zoe Daniel in Goldstein, Dr Monique Ryan in Kooyong, Dr Sophie Scamps in Mackellar, Jo Dyer in Boothby, Kate Chaney in Curtin, David Pocock and Kim Rubenstein here in the ACT, Georgia Steele in Hughes, Hannah Beth Luke in Page, Kate Hook in Calare, and Nicolette Boele in Bradfield, just to name a few.

These candidates don't need to go into politics to be successful; they are already successful.

They are business owners, doctors, lawyers, journalists and athletes. They're in it for the right reasons.

Polling shows that many of them are moving into extremely competitive positions.

## **Leaving behind the party machine**

Many people are having a hard time wrapping their heads around the community independents movement. They cannot see it through anything other than a party lens.

The movement is nothing like a party... there is no hierarchy, no leader, no head office. No coordinated policy platforms.

There are the "Voices of" groups in more than 70 electorates.

Cathy McGowan said recently that nobody knows the true depth or breadth of the movement. It's growing quickly both above and below the surface.

Viable campaigns are popping up in many of them, and it's estimated that there are currently 10 thousand highly engaged volunteers.

There's the great work of former Press Gallery journalist Margo Kingston, with her "No Fibs" website and her relentless commitment to covering campaigns from the grass roots up.

It's a spontaneous, autonomous and entirely individual set of responses across the country to community dissatisfaction with 'politics as usual'.

Many of the campaigns informally swap notes on who has the best deals on t-shirt printing, or how to run a fundraising event, or what a volunteer code of conduct looks like. For the campaigns, this information is open source.

If they don't know, they often ask Climate 200, or Cathy McGowan's Community Independents Project, and we put them in contact with experts.

The party machines are formidable beasts. They're set up to perform all the roles needed to get a candidate elected.

But, just as technology and new business models have disrupted so many industries, including the media, campaigning is changing.

The community independents are disaggregating the services required to run a campaign.

Community campaigns are organising using digital tools like, Zoom, Slack, Nationbuilder, and social media.

They don't need a party structure — over 400 people joined Kylea Tinks launch on zoom. How many Labor or Liberal party electorate launches attract as many enthusiastic supporters?

If you don't have a party behind you, one of the toughest challenges is fundraising.

This is Climate 200's contribution to this complex tapestry.

Climate 200 levels the playing field so that community-backed independents can have a fighting chance against the party machines. We are 8000 donors and growing who chip in together to back candidates who share common values.

Our values are simple... not a policy platform... deliberately not specific:

- a science-based response to climate change;
- ending corruption in politics; and
- real progress on gender equity and women's safety.

Climate 200 is not a party in any way.

We don't start the campaigns. We don't choose the candidates. We don't dictate their policies.

We don't speak for any independent candidate. They speak for themselves.

We simply give them a leg up with funding and support.

It's as if each community campaign is building a racing car.

They are all different shapes and sizes, but there are some similarities. They all have an engine, four wheels, seats. Most have a radio... Some cars are even the same colour, because frankly there aren't many colours left to choose from. What Climate 200 seeks to do is strap on a turbo, or an extra battery pack, onto them.

If a campaign wants to work with us and we want to work with them, we can make the cars go faster.

We'll never come close to matching the major party fundraising machines.

But together we have raised well over \$7 million dollars so far.

Last weekend we received our 10,000th donation from a community of over 8,000 donors from a broad cross-section of Australian society.

This is a significant sum, but it pales into comparison to the party machines.

Our donors come from all walks of life and from every single electorate.

They are pensioners, retirees, teachers, nurses, doctors, tradies, and farmers.

A third of our donors are from regional and rural electorates.

Ben Jowett is one. He's a 55-year-old electrical fitter from a small rural town in New South Wales. He's a proud Navy Veteran and a member of the local RFS.

He has been donating \$15 dollars a month because he wants climate action and a national anti-corruption commission.

Me personally: I have contributed less than three per cent of Climate 200's total funding so far.

To confuse Climate 200 with me, or to mischaracterise the movement as eastern suburbs trust fund kids, as a Liberal Senator recently claimed, is to totally misunderstand what's going on here.

More than 800 Climate 200 donors responded to the Senator, setting her straight.

Climate 200's thousands of donors are here to give this historic wave of independents the best shot at entering the fortress that is our federal parliament.

All else remaining equal, if just three more pro-climate, pro-integrity, pro-gender equity independents are elected, they would be able to hold the party machines accountable and deliver progress on these issues.

But it won't be power without purpose... it'll be, as Zali Steggall calls it, the power of balance.

## **Already winning**

With three months to the election, the independents are already having a massive impact.

For the first time in a long time the Liberal government is having to fight for communities they've long taken for granted.

Communities who care deeply about climate change. The rights of gay and trans kids. ABC funding. Or oil and gas rigs off Sydney's beaches.

In many ways, the independents are already winning.

## A quick word on disclosure

I mentioned a challenge to the major parties a little earlier.

Well, here it is:

There's a lot of noise around electoral donation disclosure at the moment.

Climate 200 goes above and beyond the legal donation disclosure requirements, encouraging all of our donors, large and small, to disclose their names on our website.

We're pleased that thousands do, with the list updated weekly.

This is something that neither major party comes close to doing.

However, given the Treasurer has been known to personally call donors listed on our website, some have chosen simply to comply with their legal disclosure requirements, as is their right.

We have long advocated root and branch reform of electoral funding laws — lower disclosure thresholds and real time disclosure — but the major parties have repeatedly blocked attempts by independents and others to legislate these reforms.

So here is Climate 200's challenge:

If the major parties agree to reduce the donation disclosure threshold to a thousand dollars and require real-time disclosure, Climate 200 will congratulate them and immediately follow suit for all donations received from that point on.

We have taken the first step with our voluntary disclosure.

Now let's see a real commitment to reform and see it implemented in time for this election.



## Carpe Diem!

There is nothing so wrong with our parliament that we can't fix it with the right people.

We bemoan the takeover of parliament by careerists who started in student politics, worked as staffers and have never held a real job.

We lament that accomplished Australians rarely step up and run for Parliament.

Well here are the independents – the real Australians you asked for.

Like most Australians, these candidates aren't warriors of "the left" or "right". They speak from the heart of their communities about issues that really matter.

To those in the Press Gallery, enjoy the fact that the independents aren't media trained — that their instinct is to give a considered, honest answers, not pivot to someone else's talking points.

To the rest of Australia – get behind these incredible candidates. Back them.

These new independents are working for change, not their careers.

For the next few months, let's spend a little less time hacking at the branches, and let's strike at the root of our weakened democracy.

Join this incredible new wave. Let yourself feel the sense of political optimism for the first time in a long time.

One of our supporters described it to me as a feeling of 'active hope' — instead of sitting at home complaining about lying politicians or corrupted media, there's a job for everybody in this movement.

Politics is too important to be left to politicians!

If you live in an electorate with a community independent, and you're able, volunteer your time and donate to the campaign.

Hang a campaign sign on your front fence or in your apartment window. Talk to your neighbours. If you don't already, donate to these candidates or Climate 200 — don't sit this one out.

We are so lucky to live in Australia, to be here with so much potential and opportunity at our fingertips.

Let's fix our democracy by getting more ordinary, honest people in there, more women, more people with life experiences formed outside the halls of politics.

We've lost a decade on climate action... on integrity... on gender equity.

But this next election will be a chance for voters to press the reset button on Australia's broken politics.

Change is within reach.

We have, at most, 94 days to grab it!