

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS



POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY



POLICY FRAMING
STATEMENT

Contents

POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY	3
Electoral Reform	5

POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In previous generations the Government played a key role as an enabler of business, investment and development. It was a key foundation of politicians and political parties to engage in nation building enterprise and it was the role of the Public Service to give effect to the political direction of the political agenda of the Government of the day.

Today, a “party before country” culture rules the agenda of the major parties and in turn the Government of the day. As a result, our political system is failing to deliver government which truly serves the public interest. The pursuit of power, as the key objective of most political parties, creates a dysfunctional political culture. They are unable to genuinely govern in the public interest and direct the bureaucracy to effectively act in the public interest.

Bureaucracy has become an industry in itself and it has shifted from an enabling culture to a constraining and self-serving culture. In truth, the bureaucracy has endured an extended period of failed political leadership. In the absence of real leadership and an articulate bipartisan vision it has become self-serving and wilfully wasteful.

The Government and the bureaucracy demonstrate repeatedly that they have no real regard or sensitivity to the fact that they are operating the national “enterprise” with other people’s money. It is offensive that they wilfully use our (taxpayer’s) money to buy our support. In the absence of an understanding of how to build a broad based sustainable economy, they actually borrow money, effectively spending future Governments’ tax revenue and future taxpayers’ money, and spend it on frivolous short term initiatives to buy our support.

Today Government and the bureaucracy spend an inordinate amount of time and money justifying their existence generating manipulated numbers measuring performance. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is one such number measuring so called economic performance of the nation. In the early 1970s Government spending accounted for about twenty-seven percent of the nation’s GDP. Today Government spending accounted for approximately thirty-nine percent of the nation’s GDP.

Economists know that GDP is often artificially inflated in services based economies. Indeed responsible economists would use Gross National Income (GNI) as a far more relevant index of the performance or health of Australia’s economy. Sadly Australia’s GNI is consistently and increasingly negative.

The Government cites our transition to a service based economy as an essential evolution. The bureaucracy is now Australia’s largest proportion of the “service” industry.

In order to sustain the move to being a service based economy, the remainder of the economy has to be sufficiently large and productive to afford to support the service economy. At this time the Australian economy has been undermined to a point that it can’t support a burgeoning services sector and particularly one dominated by the public service.

Past, present and ongoing political incompetence means the majority of the service sector in Australia, (ie the government) is also the sector of our economy which is currently effectively unaccountable. The public service sector funds its deteriorating productivity by levying taxes and charges on the commercially and internationally accountable non-government sector in turn making them and the nation as a whole less globally competitive.

There is a clear conflict of interest at play between a short-sighted and aspiring public service sector and the genuine needs of the nation. For all intents and purposes the public service sector now acts

with impunity and in the absence of strong and competent Government the bureaucracy more or less runs the country and manipulates the Government to its own ends.

In mid-2015 the state and federal governments discussed budgetary constraints on service delivery which included the option to increase the Goods and Services Tax (GST). All levels of government complain that they do not have enough money to operate effectively. At no time was an increase in tax levies proposed based on a thorough or independent analysis of return the taxpayer could expect from an increase in taxes.

Meanwhile we hear of repeated examples of staggering government waste including recent independent analysis of the health system suggesting annual waste exceeds forty billion dollars a year. Government departments deploy a "spend it or lose it" practice to ensure they have spent their previous year's allocation completely to ensure they do not have the next year's budget reduced.

In the throes of the global financial crisis, the Rudd government implemented a fiscal policy focussed entirely on avoiding a technical recession by ensuring GDP did not experience negative growth for two consecutive financial quarters. This action drove our country into massive debt immediately, but it also put upward pressure on inflation, driving up interest rates and in turn inflating our currency.

The flow on impact of this decimated our global competitiveness and cruelled our mining, manufacturing, tourism and agricultural industries. The car industry was forced to shut down Australia car making because the overvalued dollar, at US\$1.10, made already overburdened Australian manufacturing unsustainable. Across all sectors that one single decision to chase a PR economic stimulus stunt based on short term hysteria has cost the nation hundreds of billions of dollars and caused the collapse of entire industries.

Today we have an ever increasing Government spend, both in terms of the amount of money and in terms of the proportion of the nation's economy. The bureaucracy is now so out of its depth, it is struggling just to feed itself at our expense. We can't afford it.

While business now has to deliver more to its customers for less, government is delivering less to the public at a very much greater cost. This unholy alliance of party before country politics and an impervious bureaucracy operate a system which;

Has allowed agriculture and manufacturing industry to be decimated in recent times by an over-inflated dollar caused by a mining boom which could never last – manufacturing industry now stands at 6.5% (down from 30%) of Australian GDP.

Has become controlled by the ever-expanding bureaucrat/self-interest-driven public service; yet less is spent on productivity-increasing infrastructure.

Has in just four decades transformed Australia from being a broadly based economy, to one that is now so narrowly based as to be unsustainable. Government debt is now again rapidly increasing, our currency has collapsed in value and the IMF has declared the Australian economy to be vulnerable.

Routinely manufactures policy and commits taxpayers' dollars on the basis of not much more than an ill-considered and generally ineffective media/PR driven programs that will not result in meaningful or sustainable reform – eg., the recent Turnbull 'violence against women' initiative.

Has not only destroyed lives in the bush and 'burbs' of Australia, it has destroyed career opportunities for our children and future generations – careers in accounting, IT, HR, engineering, production/logistics, marketing; and that decimation is accelerating.

While governments change politically, very little else does. No matter who has been in power over the last forty years, the above directions have been supported by policies of both sides.

Australia's non-government sector, can no longer 'carry' and afford such grossly unproductive governments, instrumentalities and processes. It is essential that the government is held to independent and commercial accountability for both its internal administration and in terms of its external deliverables.

There is an old saying in business that "the fish rots from the head". The meaning behind this is that the culture of any organisation emanates from the top down through the organisation. In order to fix the problems in our Government there needs to be cultural change in the politics of nation.

The problems we face as a nation are fixable, but they require different thinking and a will to deliver and enforce meaningful accountability of both the Government and the Public Service. The bureaucracy must be managed and assessed in line with world's best commercial practice at all levels.

The Australian Democrats have enshrined an electorate/nation first culture in its constitution. It operates with an understanding that influencing political agendas of the incumbent major parties can only be achieved by bringing independent commercially oriented scrutiny onto the thinking and decisions of government. Establishing a principle driven organisation this way is the first step in fixing the public service.

The processes that can deliver operational reform of the bureaucracy and will form the basis of The Australian Democrats policy around the public service include:

Developing and implementing Issues Analysis Based Strategic Plans in all Governments, Government Department and Service Units

Measure and report publicly, the social and commercial cost/benefit of each government regulation imposed on residents and businesses.

Measure and report publicly, the customer satisfaction in each transaction delivered by all government executives/officers, delivering all services to residents and businesses; whether the service is delivered directly to a resident or business, or delivered to another government executive/officer, who in turn delivers the service to residents or businesses.

Make senior government officers liable for their actions in a manner similar to that of company directors and senior executives in respect of their performance of their roles.

While many people would quickly assume that the problem is too big to fix and that these processes will add to bureaucracy, the opposite outcome will ultimately be delivered. These processes conducted properly deliver more accountability and objective measurement of the performance of any institution, government or private sector, which applies them. You can't effectively manage what you do not measure.

Eradicating government inefficiency and unproductive regulation will save both government and non-government sectors billions, and dramatically change government so much, it will be unrecognisable from its current form.

Electoral Reform

Australia's democracy was founded on the notion that the community should be able to elect the best person to represent their interests in the Parliament.

The constitutional aspiration for our democracy is not being delivered by our electoral system.

Politics in Australia is dominated by a small number of political parties. The electoral system structurally reinforces this dominance. There is a structural failure to ensure or support effective political competition thereby undermining democracy.

The dominance of the major parties in particular sees politicians adhere to party policies and party loyalties ahead of the electorate they are truly supposed to represent. This is how they guarantee preselection.

The result of this dominance by a small number of parties has led to an electoral system that, in effect, causes the community to elect the parties' representative to the parliament rather than their own representatives.

We have seen a bastardisation of the electoral system by a political culture that is engaged in collusion and genuinely anti-competitive behaviour that would be prosecuted in the commercial world without question. This has resulted in the emergence of political class in Australia, a ruling elite in what is supposed to be a class-less society.

The preferential voting system is being openly manipulated through collusion between parties and individuals. This is particularly evident in the results of Upper House contests in several jurisdictions where parties control how preferences flow without transparency or the voter's knowledge. This would be prosecuted in the commercial world.

Our democracy is in crisis as elections outcomes are increasingly influenced by the funds that flow to them as opposed to a genuine contest of ideas and issues within an electorate. Similarly, vested interests are channelling significant resources into the major parties that are likely to form government to effectively "buy" influence.

Lax rules around truth in advertising see superficial campaigns that look good in the media with little or no genuine policy detail. Electoral rules have failed to keep up with technology and continue to be abused by an increasingly unethical political culture.

It doesn't matter if political parties and their campaigns are backed by, union, big business, or by foreign or domestic oligarchs. Any significant flow of funds by anyone or thing with vested interests to one or more parties ultimately distorts the political process.

It is essential that any financial support is transparent. Further to this it is becoming more important now to limit the amount of money that can be deployed by any candidate or party in an election

Overlaying the problems with false or misleading advertising, party preselection processes and lack of transparency around political funding, there are significant issues with polling day culture.

Pre-polling procedures are farcical as people commence voting in some instances before any announcement of policy or campaign priorities by any candidate or party. This clearly undermines the notion that voters should, or should even be able to, consider any candidate on their merits.

Pre-polling should be a legitimate process that enables people who are genuinely unable to vote on election day to participate in a poll. Pre-polling should not commence before the end of the campaign advertising window.

The presence of party or candidate representatives attempting to influence voters at polling booths is increasingly uncomfortable. It has become somewhat farcical as people run the gauntlet at polling sites while political agents swoop on them like seagulls on a chip and try to force political

propaganda into their hand. Furthermore, this method of influencing voters clearly favours large parties with an ability to mobilise a large number of booth workers.

Voting is a personal decision and people should be allowed to vote in private without interference of any kind.

Candidates should only be able to provide printed voting materials to voters via single table provided and maintained by the AEC at polling. There should be no direct interaction between voters and candidates or their agents to influence the voters' intention at polling sites.

The purpose of these reforms is to improve genuine competition that an election can and should deliver. It is essential to the democracy that voters in every seat have a genuine choice and that the election process safeguards the integrity of the election process to which our constitution aspired.