

SENATE INSIGHT



SENATOR LYN ALLISON
LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS
PARLIAMENTARY NEWSLETTER

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Forget what you read about us being dead!

The Morgan Poll, out this month, has the Democrats on 5.5% for the Senate Australia-wide and 9% in SA. If we can build on this improvement since the last election, success is possible at the next.

I often wonder how Senator Andrew Murray copes with the long flights across the country to WA and Senator Natasha Stott Despoja manages raising a small child, on top of their onerous parliamentary and campaign loads. It will be sad to lose them when they move on after June 2008 and their knowledge and experience will be missed. However, it is also entirely understandable. In fact they (and I) will join Meg Lees and Vicki Bourne in being the only Democrats Senators to have served 12 or more years in our 30 year history. And Natasha and Andrew will leave a body of work to be proud of.

Even without the balance of power, this year we have delivered an extra

\$1.9 billion in Federal mental health spending, our sustained campaigns contributed to offshore migration Bill being pulled. We forced a conscience vote on RU486 and won, and have done this again on stem cell research (see pg 3 for other wins). No other contenders for balance of power can demonstrate such a record.

For the first time in 27 years, a government will have control of the Senate coming into an election. Our task is to alert Australians to the fact that democracy has been seriously undermined by this domination.

Workers' rights to be represented by unions are diminished and sacking ATSIIC without a replacement body has left Indigenous Australians without a voice.

The Government has been very active in propping up its own chances of re-election through relaxing cross media ownership laws to the delight of media moguls, lowering the bar for

anonymous political donations so there is no disclosure for under \$10,000, massively increasing funding for MP electioneering, disenfranchising young people who will have less time to enrol before election day and no doubt voters will soon be deluged with political advertising funded by a public purse flush with mining boom revenue.

But not everything is going well for Mr Howard. His stubborn position on climate change, more oil for food scandals, rising interest rates, divisive rhetoric on Australian values, trouble exiting Iraq and ham-fisted dealings with our Pacific neighbours are at last turning opinion about his willingness to govern for the public good.

I trust you will find Senate Insight useful.

SENATOR LYN ALLISON
LEADER, AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS

Climate change

The Prime Minister's latest knee-jerk response to climate change is a sign that his message to date that we should not be 'mesmerised' by the Stern Report and that emissions trading and a carbon levy would ruin the economy, is just not washing.

This newest taskforce on emissions trading will, by all accounts, be run by the big energy sector - coal and oil and, like the taskforces on uranium and nuclear power, will no doubt tell the PM what he wants to hear.

To say that China and India must be on board before Australia can agree to anything is plainly stupid.

TIME TO
COOL IT

A U S T R A L I A N TM
DEMOCRATS

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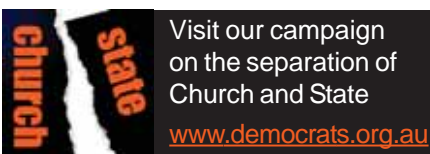
Unlike Australia, India and China have both signed on and accepted/ approved (legally the same as ratification) the Kyoto protocol. China also has a 15% renewable energy target. The US is the biggest emitter of all and there is no doubt that the Coalition pulled out of Kyoto rather than leave the US isolated.

It's well understood that emissions must be reduced by about 2% a year to achieve the necessary 60 per cent reduction by 2050 and that the time for action is now. Global emissions trading is not just an airy concept as the PM would have us believe, but a system that is already worth \$A40 billion.

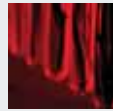
The Democrats Senate team has committed to be 'carbon neutral' from next year, reducing emissions by 30% and offsetting the rest by funding renewable energy and sequestration projects. This is anticipated to cost no more than \$180 a month each Senator. Reports on progress will be made quarterly to the Senate regularly on our website.

Chaplains

The divisive debate about religion and values took an expensive step with the promise of \$90m for 'approved' chaplains in schools. We said Mr Howard should demonstrate his interest in the welfare of the next generation by funding the support services that public schools most need. Those that choose to be secular ought to be entitled to the \$20,000 to spend on counsellors or youth workers.



WINS



Stem cells

A long term campaigner on the appropriate use of stem cells for scientific purposes, Senator Stott Despoja introduced a private bill, co-signed by Labor Senator Ruth Webber, to implement the recommendations of the Lockhart Scientific Report. Liberal Senator Kay Patterson introduced her similar bill which was given precedence by the Government and allowed a conscience vote. At the time of writing it had narrowly passed the Senate and will now go to the House of Reps. The research techniques contained in this bill, such as Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer, have the potential to lead to treatments for a range of conditions. The bill maintains a prohibition on human reproductive cloning, on allowing an embryo to develop outside the body of a woman for more than 14 days; and, on altering the genome of a human cell in such a way that the alteration is heritable.

Gynaecological cancer

Senator Allison initiated the Senate inquiry into gynaecological cancer, delivering recommendations that were supported by all parties. Senator Allison referred a petition of 5,000 signatures to the Community Affairs Committee which then conducted a roundtable discussion on the basis of which it was decided to proceed to a full inquiry. Far too many women die of ovarian and other gynaecological cancers for want of effective testing, awareness by women and their

GPs of the symptoms and multi-disciplinary treatment.

Stolen wages committee

Senator Bartlett initiated a Senate inquiry into Stolen Wages. Dr Ros Kidd, an expert in this field, estimated that wages, savings and entitlements not paid to Indigenous peoples were worth over \$500m for the state of Queensland alone. If Aboriginal people had been given the wages they earned, many of them would have been in a much better position to pursue opportunities like home ownership years ago. This inquiry will also help to fully identify the nature and scale of injustice that has occurred over the years across the States and Territories. For more information on the inquiry go to www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/stolen_wages. For more information about the Democrats stolen wages campaign go to www.andrewbartlett.com/faq.php?id=4&category=4

Genetic privacy

Natasha Stott Despoja had a win when the bill protecting genetic privacy in Federal law for the first time passed the Senate on Thursday. Natasha had spent more than eight years lobbying for this protection, including via a private Senators' bill and similar amendments when the Privacy Act was first established in 2000.



SENATE WRAP UP

Since end June the Senate has sat for just 7 weeks and dealt with 95 bills. We opposed 13 bills, most of them major, after our 'fairness and balance' amendments were knocked back.

Media Diversity

The media reform package passed thanks to the guillotine and Family First stepping in to give his support where Barnaby Joyce said 'no'. 156 amendments were given less than 3 hours debate and all of ours were lost, including those trying to strengthen protections of competition and democracy. The concentration of media power commenced well before the Governor General's ink was dry leaving our democracy and diversity the poorer.

Electoral Integrity Bill

In June the Senate passed the controversial and blatantly Coalition-friendly Electoral Integrity Bill. The cost of nominating as a Federal candidate has leapt from \$350 to \$500 for HoR and from \$700 to \$1,000 for the Senate - supported by Labor and Family First.

The Democrats argued that this was a barrier to participating in the democratic process and that there was no evidence that this change was necessary. If we stand 150 lower house candidates and three on all Senate tickets at the next election it will cost \$99,000.

Perhaps worse, it reverses Australia's proud history of leading the world on enfranchisement with the early closure of rolls locking an estimated 80,000 people out of the

vote. All Democrats amendments were defeated.

Fuel Tax Bill

In June the Government and Labor joined to reduce excise on diesel making offroad use of biodiesel uncompetitive.

Occupational health and Safety

This bill reduces union involvement in health and safety procedures. Again our amendments to improve transparency and integrity in the new process were lost.

Sexual identity and Discrimination

The Democrats private bill to amend the Marriage Act to allow for recognition of same-sex marriages and same-sex civil unions was 'talked out' by the Government and Opposition saying although they supported the intent of the bill they would do so differently! We also moved amendments to various Health, Superannuation and Tax Bills to end discrimination for same-sex couples - all defeated.

ASIO Bill

The Democrats did not support the latest ASIO bill and a 2nd reading amendment condemning both the bill's untenable 10 year sunset clause and the legislation's fundamental infringement of civil rights was lost. The Democrats

were the only ones to indicate their opposition to the legislation, with Bob Brown stating he supported it.

Renewable Electricity Bill

The Democrats moved more unsuccessful amendments to increase the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target to 20% by 2020.

Immigration

Senator Bartlett introduced his ninth and tenth bills to undo the Government's tightening of the Migration Act since Tampa. They would i) end the 45 day rule which unfairly prejudices the chances of refugees from gaining permanent protection if they have not lodged a claim for protection within 45 days, and ii) remove the unfair provision which prevents people on TPVs who have been convicted of certain legal offences from being eligible to receive a permanent protection visa when their TPV expires.

Senate Committees

The Government 'restructure' of the Senate committee system came into effect on 11 September, abolishing the references committees giving themselves the majority on the remaining committees and chairing them all.

Bills are now being referred to committees for inquiry with ridiculously short reporting times. The Medibank Private sale bill report is required by end November although the Government says it won't be sold until 2008 and a 400-page bill that waters down the Environment Protection, Biodiversity Conservation & Heritage Act, has been given only 5 weeks to report.

Public Good

Justice and Freedom

Sustainable Australia

Truth and Accountability

CAMPAIGNS



Senate Watch

In June 2005 the Prime Minister promised to use his Senate majority "...soberly, wisely and sensibly. We won't use it capriciously or wantonly or indiscriminately, and I make that solemn promise on your behalf to all of the Australian people."

We are keeping a watch on Mr Howard's misuse of his Senate majority and will update the statistics on a regular basis. You can also have your say by filling out our online poll about the Senate. For more information about this campaign go to

www.democrats.org.au/senate_watch



Say No to Nuclear Industry

The Howard Government intends to massively expand uranium mining and sell it to China. It also wants uranium enrichment, nuclear power and a global nuclear waste dump in Australia. To find out more about why nuclear is not the answer visit our website. Our 'say no to an expanded nuclear industry' postcards can be ordered via the website. You can sign our 'say no to an expanded nuclear industry' petition at www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/nuclear_industry/petition.htm or download a hard copy and get your friends and neighbours to sign it.



Indigenous Disadvantage

The extent of Indigenous inequality and disadvantage in Australia at a time of record prosperity is a national disgrace.

The Democrats are committed to playing our part in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and between Indigenous and 'mainstream' communities.

Senator Bartlett has been travelling around Queensland and New South Wales meeting with indigenous groups and communities to listen to what they have to say. Our 'Open your eyes' postcard can be ordered via the website. Receive regular updates on the campaign and Senator Bartlett's work. Send an email to

indigenous@democrats.org.au



Separation Church and State

In the last 10 years the line between religion and government in Australia has become more blurred. Conservative religious organisations appear more influential in the major political parties and are investing their considerable resources in electing their own candidates. Federal ministers have reacted with divisive arguments to debates over euthanasia, abortion, gay marriage and Christian values.

Have Australians become more religious or is it just their politicians? Do Australians wish to see religion having more say in government and, if so what this mean for democracy? The Democrats have released a discussion paper to foster a debate on the role of religion in politics and the separation of church and state. For a copy of the paper go to www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/separation_of_church_and_state/



Peace in the Middle East

Senator Allison visited Lebanon in early October to meet with political leaders and to see first hand the devastation as a result of the war with Israel. The Democrats deplore the Australian Government's silence as hundreds of Lebanese non-combatants, mainly children, were killed and maimed by Israeli bombs and gun fire in a disproportionate response to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers and the subsequent conflict with Hezbollah. To read a copy of Senator Allison's report from Lebanon go to

www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/lebanon/



Young Democrats

The future of Australia as a vibrant and inclusive democracy depends on establishing active participation in the whole community, particularly among young people. The group has the objective of engaging young people in democratic institutions and processes. We believe that participation in democracy should extend beyond simply casting a vote. Young people must help to set the agenda. It's your chance to get involved and set the agenda for the future www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/young_democrats/

Also see our campaigns on Climate Change, Poverty in Australia, Renewable Energy, How to stop the next war, Pregnancy Counselling, and Strength in Diversity.

www.democrats.org.au