

SENATE insider



A publication from Lyn Allison, leader of the Australian Democrats and a senator for Victoria



Democrats senator Andrew Bartlett says the Government's Northern Territory intervention is a 'knee-jerk solution'.

Nuclear debate most Australians don't want

It started in about 1997 when the Howard Government said there would be no barriers to uranium mines. Jabiluka in the heart of Kakadu got the go ahead but was subsequently stopped by Indigenous owners, the Democrats-initiated inquiry and community pressure.

Beverly and Honeymoon underground acid leach mines went ahead and, more recently, Roxby Downs was given the tick for a four-fold expansion. Now we seem to be heading down the nuclear path with even greater haste.

Do Australians really want uranium enrichment here with its nasty depleted uranium waste? Do they want 25 nuclear power reactors dotted around the coastline?

We are all relieved that the Prime Minister did a backflip and is now giving people a vote on having one in their area but he will be long

gone by the time the decision is made.

Should we be sending uranium to 'rogue state' India when it won't sign the nuke weapons test ban or the non-proliferation treaty? The Democrats don't think so.

In fact we are very worried about the huge stockpile of high-level radioactive waste already generated around the world for which there is no long-term solution, and we say the world, with 27,000 nuclear weapons, is too dangerously close to nuclear warfare to be giving weapons states more uranium.

The UK, the US and likely China and Russia are developing even more sophisticated nuclear weapons systems and Australia ought to be insisting on disarmament, as we did back in 1996 with the Canberra Commission.

Nuclear madness should be an election issue. Maybe it's the reason Mr Howard is doing so badly in the polls. We hope so.

Sexualisation of kids in media 'sickening'

We're forcing our children to become sexual beings before they're ready. Media and advertising agencies are turning kids, particularly young girls, into sexual commodities — and the effect is devastating.

Federal Minister for Communications Helen Coonan has heeded the Democrats call for a parliamentary inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children in the media.

Party leader Lyn Allison said the growing use by advertisers of pre-pubescent models and sexualised images aimed at the youth market had caused children to be obsessed with their body images.

We're pushing children into being sexual beings much younger than they are ready. "We're talking about children at the age of nine worrying whether they look sexy or not. It's really quite disturbing," she said.

Indigenous groups say 'back off'

Is the Howard Government genuinely concerned about Indigenous children? The Democrats certainly are, but we suspect the Government is running another agenda.

Removing Native Title, the permit system and CDEP — the work-for-the-dole scheme that is the backbone of services in remote communities — was not necessary to make children safe from child abuse.

This is a jack-boot approach that most Indigenous groups say won't work in the long term. Solving these sorts of problems takes time, money, services and the involvement of the people concerned.

As we all know, you can't force an alcoholic to stop drinking by just taking grog away. They need detox and rehab and a lot of support to overcome their addiction.

Likewise you can't take benefits away because children might not be going to school. In the Northern Territory, the government funds average attendance in Indigenous communities, meaning that if they all turn up the classroom is very crowded indeed.

Some schools in remote Indigenous communities are passable but most don't have anything like the resources provided in non-Indigenous communities and even in quite large communities there is often no secondary school.

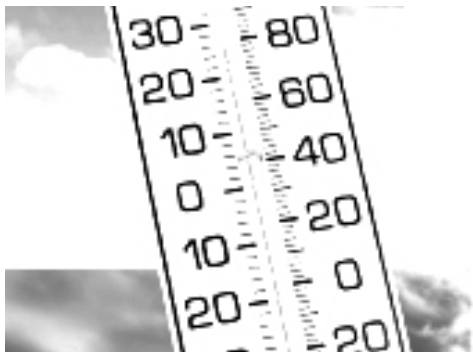
The Democrats say fix these problems before taking away people's entitlements.



Keen to help us?

If you like what we do, why not give us a hand? We would love your support during this year's election campaign. Call us:

9416 1880



Energy efficiency

Lyn Allison

Introducing an energy efficiency target and setting up a trading market which rewards energy efficient businesses and consumers is a necessary ingredient in any suite of global warming solutions.

It's not about putting on a jumper instead of the heater or sitting in the dark.

With "white" energy efficiency trading, those who invest in efficiency are rewarded with a tradeable certificate — one for every megawatt hour saved

Picture this. You decide to buy a fridge and look for one with a seven-star energy efficiency rating. It is not only discounted but saves \$50 a year in running costs and stops half a tonne of carbon going into the atmosphere every year compared to the standard 3.5-star fridge.

The certificates are awarded to our seven-star fridge manufacturer who sells certificates to the energy retailer. The energy retailer is required to purchase certificates as the way of signing off on their share of the government's annual energy efficiency target. The certificates, which are equivalent to cash, fund the fridge development costs and the discount at point of sale.

However, refrigerators are small beer compared with the big-scale energy efficiency opportunities out there. Owners of commercial buildings have few incentives to reduce the electricity used by their tenants on air conditioning. There is big scope for industry to invest in process upgrades.

The price of the certificates would be decided by market forces of supply and demand together with the cost of the investment. Penalties would apply for non-compliance.

A version of white certificate trading is already in use in the UK and Italy. France is considering it, and the European Union is pushing it along.

The Australian Democrats are calling for energy saving trading scheme in this country and a yearly 2 per cent energy efficiency target. We recently introduced a private member's bill to get the process started.

Energy efficiency is the cheapest and safest way to cut emissions. It is also the easiest and quickest market system to set up and would avoid the need for nuclear power.

No gay old time



Australian Democrats leader Lyn Allison at this year's Mardi Gras.

Lyn Allison says it's "ridiculous" and "insulting" that same-sex couples don't receive the same financial and work-related entitlements as their heterosexual counterparts. Even the Prime Minister, a social conservative, admits that removal of the discrimination is "inevitable".

The Australian Democrats have introduced a bill to give same-sex couples equal rights. At least 20,000 same-sex couples in Australia face discrimination on a daily basis because 58 Commonwealth laws don't recognise their relationships.

"The changes we're proposing are simple but will make a world of difference in many

people's lives," Allison said.

Same-sex couples have to spend more money on medical expenses than heterosexual couples to enjoy the Medicare safety net.

They're denied certain tax concessions and aren't guaranteed the right to take carer's leave to look after a sick partner.

Many still don't have access to superannuation and workers' compensation death benefits.

"People are being treated unfairly because of our elected representatives' bigoted views or indifferent attitudes," she said. "We're not asking that gay people be accorded special privileges — just equal treatment."

Young Chipp off the old block



Laura Chipp, 21, wants to follow in her late father's footsteps.

Laura Chipp, daughter of the late Australian Democrats founder Don Chipp, hopes to follow in her father's political footsteps.

The 21-year-old Monash University commerce/law student will run as a Democrats candidate for the federal seat of Isaacs this year.

"I hope to carry on my dad's legacy. As a senator, he tried to keep the bastards honest and he gave them ideas. That's what I would do if elected," she said. "The Democrats fight the good fights and have made a real

difference over the last 30 years.

Ms Chipp has worked with street children in the Philippines and is passionate about women's rights, poverty alleviation and the environment.

She was recently appointed national spokesperson for the Young Australian Democrats (www.yads.org.au).

"There's a revitalisation in the party, and I think it is really starting to snowball. Closer to the election we'll get a lot more active support with the public."

The 'YouTube election'

The media have described this year's federal election as the "YouTube election". Even Prime Minister John Howard, the unfunkiest guy in politics, has his own YouTube channel. But Democrat Lyn Allison got in a full six months ahead of him. She now has videos on euthanasia, the access card, nuclear disarmament, same-sex entitlements, poverty and more.



www.youtube.com/LynAllison



www.myspace.com/LynAllison

Make love, not war

Peace is more than just a hippie ideal, says the Democrats leader, who recently introduced a bill into the Senate to set up a Peace and Non-Violence Commission.

"Our defence forces are becoming more and more geared towards a war-fighting capability rather than peacekeeping. We need a countenance, and that's what this commission would be," she said.

A ban on cluster bombs

When Lyn Allison visited Lebanon last year shortly after the war had ended, she was horrified by the widespread use of cluster bombs.

"These are inhumane, indiscriminate weapons that should be banned," she said. "More than 98 per cent of cluster bomb victims are civilians and most are children who mistake them for toys."

Since then, negotiations for an international ban have commenced. But it looks as though the senator's bill, introduced late last year, for a domestic ban won't become law anytime soon.

Just listen to Bono

With our own economy booming, isn't it time we increased our foreign aid contribution to the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income? Lyn Allison thinks so. As does Irish rockstar Bono. Both have endorsed the Make Poverty History campaign and say it's time for our government to act. "We can afford it. Let's do it. Let's make poverty history," Allison recently said.

Democrats turn 30

Few can believe it's true. It's 30 years since Don Chipp's famous Town Hall meeting that started the Democrats.

Fifteen of the party's parliamentarians attended a dinner in Melbourne recently to celebrate the anniversary.

"We can look back over these 30 years of achievement with pride," said the party's leader. "Our story is impressive."

She cited Dems initiatives that helped to strengthen the Australian economy, that delivered stronger environmental protection laws and that bolstered the Senate's capacity to act as a "genuine house of review".

A book has been produced to mark the occasion. You can order a copy online at www.democrats.org.au. And Lyn Allison has said she's happy to sign it for you.