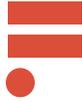




**Australian
Fabians.**

Queensland leads from the front on the big issues

Fabian pamphlet



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Our sincere thanks to the generous people and organisations that donated, via crowd sourcing, to make Fabian Pamphlet No.70 possible.

ISBN: 978-0-9941969-3-4

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About the Australian Fabians

For more than half a century, the Australian Fabians have been at the forefront of research and debate into progressive political ideas and public policy reform.

Australian political life is entering a new era. There is an urgent need for searching debate and new thinking.

The Australian Fabians aim to achieve:

- Greater equality of power, wealth and opportunity.
- Broader promotion of collective actions and public service.
- An accountable, tolerant and active democracy.

The Australian Fabians:

- Contribute to progressive political thinking by generating original ideas that reflect a higher order of thinking in order to meet the challenges of the times.
- Contribute to a progressive political culture by disseminating these ideas and getting them into the public domain.
- Are an active movement of people who identify with, are engaged in and who encourage progressive political debate around social justice, economic and political reform.
- Influence the ideas and policies of political parties, especially the Australian Labor Party.

What makes the Australian Fabians distinctive?

The Australian Fabians are a democratically constituted membership organisation. We provide members with the opportunity to participate in public debate, direct access to our publications and events, and the opportunity to participate fully in the decisions and actions of the organisation.

The Australian Fabians are part of an international social and intellectual movement. The UK Fabian Society has been a central part of the democratic socialist, social democratic and Labour tradition throughout the 20th century in Great Britain.

The Australian Fabians have been active since 1947. The New Zealand Fabians has more recently become part of this tradition.

Because political ideas matter

Over the years, the Australian Fabians has looked to the Australian Labor Party as a Party through which social democratic principles and values can be achieved. Our relationship with Australian Labor governments is that of a 'critical friend'. We are neither 'on-' nor 'off-message'. Some of what we do may be congruent with government thinking; some not.

Good government needs new ideas and public debate. The Australian Fabians ask difficult questions – and, if necessary, propose difficult answers. Our constitution and history demand this of us. Our independence of mind is fiercely guarded.

The Australian Fabians is an independent organisation. The Australian Fabians Inc. (also known as the Australian Fabian Society) is a Not-for-profit association incorporated in Victoria, Australia.

If you want to help make new thinking happen join the Australian Fabians. There is a membership form in this publication or join online at fabians.org.au.

Foreword

Queensland is at the forefront of progressive ideas in Australia.

Our progressive leaders must use every opportunity to ensure that decisions that are made in 2018 are ones that fundamentally ensure Queensland's vibrant communities are at the forefront. We challenge the proposition that the only way we all succeed is when our economy succeeds.

For Queensland that means taking the lead on the big issues that focus on building better, more equal societies, not just bigger economies.

In this pamphlet, we have asked key Queenslanders to give some perspectives on how Queensland Labor can get to world on building a better society.

The pamphlet will address regional Queensland inequality, economic inequality, access to TAFE and training, reforming local councils, and making a change on abortion rights.

One of the Australian Fabians' key aims is to analyse the challenges facing Australia and the rest of the industrialised world in a changing society and global economy; to explore the political ideas and the policy reforms which will define progressive politics in the new century.

The Australian Fabians are unique among think tanks in being a democratically constituted membership organisation. While the Fabians have links with the Labor Party, we are editorially and organisationally independent.

The Australian Fabians have played a central role in the development of progressive political ideas and public policy in Australia. Through publications like these, seminars and conferences, and our online member networks, the Fabians provide an arena for open-minded public debate.

Billy Colless

National Chair

Australian Fabians

Putting the social back into socialism

Eva Cox

Eva Cox is an activist, socialist, feminist and academic, as well as the Australian Fabians' National Patron.

As the National Patron for the Australian Fabians, I am looking forward to working with the members to address the lack of good social policies that can reassure voters displaying widespread distrust of democratic processes that governments offer policies that create community wellbeing and make societies more civil. We need to restore policies that re-create the social contract of fairness between citizens and those in power via collective, equitable programs that enhance social cohesion and the common good.

There is an under-discussed gap in current policy making in Australia that reflects similar changes in the rest of the 'developed' world. For more than three decades, policy on offer has been infected by the neoliberal virus. This created paradigm replaced the perceived need for welfare state social policies that ensured the necessary trust and legitimacy of governments in the post war decades; the welfare state designed to counter the inequities that created distrust of democracy and led to Hitler, other dictatorships and World War II.

This reliance on policies, driven by market models and capitalist excess, is creating high democratic distrust as voters see the disappearing role of governments in dominant forms of neoliberal economics. The result is the widespread growth of populisms, which often results in the election of authoritarian representatives who are undermining many of the positive changes of the last five decades including the social equity programs that reduced market based inequities and affirmed the legitimacy of democracy with voters.

These damage trust by the removal of public services and state ownership of facilities, often seen as part of the social contract, because they offered fairness. Publically owned commitments and services have been replaced by contracted out or privatised versions. The effect of their absence is undermining

the explicit and implicit contract between state and voters because the public know they are now redefined customers of governments. As this is implicitly a distrust relationship, i.e. searching for the best price, it is no wonder voters don't trust those in power, or those seeking power with similar basic assumptions.

The current ALP priorities are aimed at working people, for example: workplace rights, but they fail to address the non-work related needs, such as privatisation and gaps in community service and the problems of welfare payments.

Social derives from the Latin 'socius', the links we have with other people. People see themselves as part of societies, not just individuals, so tend to see ourselves as linked. Our sense of community belonging counts as part of our identities. Therefore, many of the tensions undermining trust in democratic processes come from the increasing invisibility of links to the public sphere, of government as provider and funder of the services that most people need, so expect to access equitably.

Current policy priorities of the ALP are often focused on adjusting the market model to make it less nasty. This is clearly seen in the lack of mentions of community or society in the Federal Platform. The current ALP priorities are aimed at working people, for example: workplace rights, but they fail to address the non-work related needs, such as privatisation and gaps in community service and the problems of welfare payments. Where is the debate on direct public services, more equitable modes of welfare payments and community services that address the needs that can't be equitably offered as market based goods or services?

Too often, progressive policy proposals define 'paid workers' as their core constituency, and therefore ignore the unpaid social fabric that underpins societies and depends on non-materialist relationships. People have a need to belong, a recognition of the need for collective well-being and fairness. Adjusting earned income levels has its place, but it is not enough to cover the complexities of wellbeing. Proposed economic changes must be designed together with others that benefit society more broadly. Ensuring voter trust

is crucial, as governments make difficult decisions to address the combined effects of environmental damage and increased automation question growth and future labour demands.

We need to look more broadly at what really matters and develop good social goals so that Queenslanders feel their needs will be met in a range of areas, not just income. Current market based growth goals may need to morph into setting social objectives for our communities, redistribute to create fairness and thereby encourage more trust of both governments and acceptance of diversity of other people. The best democratic model requires legitimacy via governance so people can trust those in power to work for the common good, not just promises of individuated material success.

Economics is essential for calculating the means to pay for material resources but these are limited as they do not offer voters a sense of belonging or trustworthiness. This means that progressives need to also deliver policy options to address social relational, anxiety-inducing changes. These are the drivers of populist emotions that welcome options for the appealing revived conservative right tendencies, offering limited forms of social identity via mythic pasts. This has to be countered by our offering policies that prove we live in societies where belonging, relationships, unpaid contributions and ethics count.

My proposal is that we, as Fabians, need to engage in filling some of these policy gaps by offering ideas and some options for policy alternatives that more clearly differentiate the ALP from the Coalition in these crucial areas. These can restore trust that the democratic model of politics has the capacity to meet voter needs.

The Fabians have the connections and independent structure that allows us to offer ideas for discussion with minimal organisational barriers. We need to ensure there is a forum for left debates that looks at putting citizenship, the common good and collective forms of well-being back onto socialist agendas, as they seem to have been mislaid. There is a clear gap in serious policy leadership which requires offering space to debate options and alternatives that can both undo the ill effects of market models and show voters that there are trustworthy progressive alternatives.

Act on continuing evidence that disadvantaged and Indigenous communities need effective support and development programs, which must be community based and controlled services (self determination).

We need to ensure there are progressive contributions to the debate on what follows the current shift of the failing paradigm, which only took over in the eighties. Its clear focus on individualised greed and self-interest, based on distrust of anything communal or collective, inherently breaches the implicit social contract that underpins the legitimacy of democracy.

Some needed reforms as examples

The following options, both State based issues and broader issues, show some examples of the need for social well-being policies. Most community services are primarily state funded and/or state controlled or, even when federally funded, are licensed by states. Therefore, it is reasonable for Queensland to raise them. There are also options for using COAG, where states can lead discussion for federal changes.

Listed below are some areas that require serious attention:

- Set up some procedural rules for funding local community services that recognise the need for the local and user based planning of services via policies that recognise how much user local inputs contribute to the effectiveness of such services.
- Explore how issues like child welfare and child protection can be dealt with by good generalist community services that support families and meet needs. The current model is more concerned with individualised risk management and is devastating Indigenous communities with child removals.
- Act on continuing evidence that disadvantaged and Indigenous communities need effective support and development programs, which must be community based and controlled services (self determination).
- Local community services should meet local needs and therefore have connections. Funding processes should encourage these services, and not

just bigger commercial or major agency services. So we need to ensure the funding of services is adequate to meet local/community needs, for both diversity and cultural appropriateness.

- These should include locally run collective women's refuges that must be separate from homelessness services.

Children's services

- Develop a planning model that ensures all local children have access to culturally appropriate local support services that can meet their developmental and social needs.
- Use the states' role in registering services and local planning to set local input and planning requirements for services that ensure local needs and affordability are taken into account.
- Encourage the federal government to return to direct funding of childcare services so there is a clear contract between funder and provider, so services meet locality needs and reasonable fee levels.
- Ensure planning restrict chain commercial services and encourage community based, locally run services that put service user needs first and develop community links.
- Ensure all schools have access to out of school hour services that reflect local needs and control the entry of outsider commercial chains. Stop competitive tendering for such services.

Other issues, less state based that need addressing

Advocacy for payments and income support

The current welfare payments system has serious unfairness effects because of both the focus on the 'working age population' requirements that they seek paid jobs, and meet unfair conditions of means tests and compliance demands. Its failure to acknowledge the value of those with unpaid responsibilities and roles seriously affects those who give in other ways and reinforces biases against these roles. Such changes would address the gender pay gap by recognising unpaid roles and assist Indigenous and others following more communally oriented activities and choices. The following changes need to be explored as possible options.

A social dividend as a universal basic income

- Initiate discussion on the need for forms of universal income support that cover basic necessary spending. This would recognise the gender gaps, most unpaid contributions and alternative, more collective lifestyles. We need equity that is not solely based on earned income, as well as supporting more labour mobility and likely lower demand for waged labour.
- Propose/ support a trial replacing the BasicsCard and Cashless Debit Card with unconditional similar pay rates to test the concept and stop the damage of the current programs. This would be possible without extra spending, and would show whether it works.

Why do these issues matter?

We have neglected to develop the necessary social capital that makes for more civil societies, based on trust that I covered in my 1995 *ABC Boyer Lectures*. Access to public and private formal goods and services, as well as markets, add to the sense we have of how we are perceived and valued.

Why I am pushing these issues as National Patron? Do I have the experience and skills?

My background contributes to my political commitments. I was born in Vienna just before Hitler added Austria to his Nazi empire. My family lost their citizenship because we were Jewish, and became refugees. I ended up in England with my mother in 1939.

Two experiences stick in my memory, as contributing to my later desires for political involvement. Being a refugee was awkward, billeted in people's spare bedrooms, wondering why we were there, and my father was far away in the army. Why did we have to leave Vienna, where my mother had been a medical student? Another clear memory was aged three, when a preschool teacher denied my request for a drum, explaining they were for boys, as were the cymbals so girls got the less noisy triangles and tambourines. I was cross and complained to my mother I didn't want to be told that girls only got quieter ones. So, I became a feminist, alerted to unfairness in many areas.

After the war, we spent a couple of years in Rome, when my father, who was very into world saving, was working on displaced persons for the UN who came from concentration camps. We came to Australia in 1948, and I was called a 'reffero' at Bondi Beach school. So, I realised from an early age that what I had experienced was unfair. I wanted to fix it for others and myself.

I grew up believing people should/could stop inequities. This got me into trouble at school and stimulated my interest in politics. In the mid-1950s, at Sydney University, I was involved in setting up the ALP club, but didn't join the party then. Instead, I found the Sydney Libertarian Push, which allowed me to become both a socialist and anarchist. Told they were contradictory, I said socialism created fairness, and anarchism showed those in power didn't have to dominate. I still manage the contradictions.

I joined the ALP in the late sixties to stop White Australia and the Vietnam war. I qualified as a sociologist at UNSW, returning to study as a sole parent on social security payments. I also was an early active member of the Women's Electoral Lobby, where I pursued my feminist/left agenda for many years, without more recent successes.

I've been an academic, a political advisor, consultant, teacher, researcher and welfare advocate over the past decades. I taught research and advocacy and policy at UTS and UNSW, and am currently an Adjunct Professor at UTS. I have done a lot of media and in 1995, in my ABC Boyer lectures on a *Truly Civil Society*, I predicted a lot of the problems we are now seeing, as I was very concerned that the emphasis on individual self-interest, greed, markets and materialism was undermining social cohesion.

So, I accepted the role of mentor, as an activist, to push for more debate and action on better policies for the future. There are many out there who want to influence more optimistic social policies that can attract progressive voters, looking for something better than what is currently on offer.

If you would like to contribute in these areas, please consider joining the Fabians and help us create more positive changes.

A history of abortion law reform

Senator the Hon Claire Moore

Senator the Hon Claire Moore is Senator for Queensland in the 45rd Australian Parliament, Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific. Senator Moore is Patron of the Queensland Fabians.

The *Queensland Criminal Code* (1899) has been amended 195 times since its introduction in 1899. This year the Queensland Parliament will debate legislation to make several further amendments, effectively repealing Sections 224, 225 and 226, after almost 120 years – finally responding to generations of women and men demanding reform of abortion law in our state.

There is a real commitment from the Government to have legislation before the Parliament this year and further opportunities for the community to be involved through committee hearings over the next few months.

When Premier Palaszczuk referred the important and long awaited review and investigation of Queensland laws relating to the termination of pregnancy to the Queensland Law Reform Commission she requested that the commission make recommendations and prepare draft legislation.

In June 2018, the Commission reported to the Premier with six key recommendations and a draft bill, the *Termination of Pregnancy Bill* (2018). The full report is public on the website and it is a “good read”, particularly for so many Queenslanders who have been maintaining the struggle for reform.

The Commission consulted widely on this review – this is an important element of the work of the Law Reform Commission, as it has a real commitment to ensuring that Queenslanders have the opportunity to express their opinions about our law. It released a detailed consultation paper outlining the relevant legal issues and seeking submissions on a range of specific questions. Queenslanders responded in staggering numbers – nearly 1200 submissions were received.

The Commission was also required, in its terms of reference, to consider the work of the Parliamentary Committee, which reviewed the two private members Bills in 2016 including submissions, the transcripts of evidence from the public meeting, and two reports.

The six recommendations define changes to the *Queensland Criminal Code*, including lawful terminations, the role of the registered health practitioners, including conscientious objections and referral, and the introduction of safe access zones around premises where the termination services are provided.

There is a real commitment from the Government to have legislation before the Parliament this year and further opportunities for the community to be involved through committee hearings over the next few months.

This is not the first time legislation referring to terminations has been debated in our Parliament with the forceful arguments of different views, lobbying of parliamentarians and passionate media coverage.

Two private members bills were presented to the last parliament, and referred to the Queensland Parliaments' Health Committees, Disability Services and Domestic Violence Prevention Committee. Full public hearings were conducted. This provided the stimulant for the *Law Reform Commission Report*. While the 2016 Private Members Bills presented by Mr Robert Pyne, MP (former member for Cairns), supported changes to make abortion more accessible to Queensland women, in 1980 the *Pregnancy Termination Control Bill* had a distinctly different focus.

In 1980 the then Minister for Health, Sir William Knox, supported the introduction of the *Pregnancy Termination Control Bill*. This came after years of questioning about the rights of women to make decisions about their fertility and the formation of strong women's groups such as *Children by Choice* in Brisbane. This organisation was formed in March 1972 with a focus on building advocacy around rights for accessible abortion, and over the years developed support and counselling assistance for women across the state.

My friend Beryl Holmes, a founding member of *Children by Choice*, has been active in the ongoing campaign to achieve legal access to abortion services.

Her insightful and inspiring account of the history of the struggle, particularly around the *Pregnancy Termination Control Bill*, is available on the *Children by Choice* website *Struggle for Choice*.

As we engage in the 2018 campaign to achieve real justice, it is particularly valuable to learn from the successful work of women and men across the community in the last century. The impact on the Queensland community of the debate around the *Pregnancy Termination Control Bill* was significant. According to Hansard, “few Queenslanders can recall a Parliamentary debate which aroused such bitterness and involvement both within and without Parliament. Terms such as fascist, murderer, baby-killer, rabid, bigot, were used by members on both sides of the House” (Hansard, 2017). In this quote, Hansard recalls passionate debate from 1980 and identifies comparisons with some of the comments in the 2017 debates around the abortion bills which led to the *Law Reform Commission* referral. These comments show that while members may have shown some varying styles the key arguments remain very similar.

Parliamentary debates reflect community concerns and politicians regularly refer to their constituents in presenting their arguments. The campaigns in 1980 identified the importance of personal contact with individual parliamentarians and the challenge to provide effective communications to convince both the wider community and the parliament.

Struggle for Choice describes the strategies developed by *Right to Choice* advocates to identify particular target groups for information and to focus on parliamentarians across the government and the opposition. The basic lobbying rule of “doing the numbers” was actioned by surveying sitting members and working with supporters within the parties. I particularly admired the three groupings devised by the campaign to focus their attention – ‘for abortion choice’, ‘hopeless’ and ‘worth working with’. These groupings were widely distributed throughout the state so that *Children by Choice* members could work with local people to approach their own members of parliament. Nothing is better in any campaign than personal, local contact by the voting public.

Right to Choice advocates have a strong commitment to ensuring that this debate is around health and the personal decision of the mother.

Another basic campaign tactic is to know the opposition. The *Pregnancy Termination Control Bill* was directly traceable to the *Right to Life* movement. Mr Glasson (Gregory) said in the second reading debate on 21 May:

*“The Bill was introduced as a result of pressure exerted by people in Queensland following the opening of the Bayliss clinic at Greenslopes. Let there be no mistake. From the pressure groups such as the League of Rights, the Right to Life, and the Women’s Electoral Lobby”^{††} (sic) petitions came to this Parliament day after day, week after week, until there was the feeling that something had to be done. That was the start of the move for this Bill.”
^{††} He undoubtedly meant the Women’s Action Alliance” (Gregory, 2018).*

Over the months of the debate, the campaign to oppose the restrictive legislation was engrossed in a tactical battle with *Right to Life* to get the message to Queenslanders. Political lobbying was based on the strength of public involvement.

Right to Choice advocates have a strong commitment to ensuring that this debate is around health and the personal decision of the mother. *Struggle for Choice* describes the engagement strategies with medical professionals and the courage of doctors who signed petitions and publically objected to the 1980 legislation. The critical importance of awareness campaigns and the distribution of information around the debates of legislation was, as always, essential in this process. Women who had personal experience in the system, and therefore provided specialised information, contacted many medical practitioners.

The *Right to Life* Campaign published a full-page advertisement in the *Courier Mail* in April with the names of many doctors who supported “Life”. *Children by*

Choice were able to show that over 20 of their signatories had referred patients to their service over the years.

Public meetings, strategic lobbying of parliamentarians across the state and media appearances maintained pressure across the Parliament. Certainly, the *Courier Mail* benefited from advertisement revenue as both sides established their position. King George Square was the scene of regular public gatherings with hundreds of people proclaiming their rejection of the legislation and the impact on women.

Despite efforts, the bill passed its first reading on 29 April. The battle intensified as the full impact of the legislation was understood and cracks appeared among the parliamentarians. Beryl Holmes recognised that the debate engaged with many women who had never been politically active before. The strategy of public rallies and individual lobbying presented a real opportunity for people to get involved.

In Brisbane, a public meeting at City Hall was called for 15 May. Nervously, the organisers planned the event with the expectation that this would reflect the passion to stop the legislation. In fact, over 2000 people filled the venue. “Their faith was vindicated. The miracle had occurred”.

The debate in parliament did not follow party lines. Many courageous parliamentarians stood up to oppose the attacks on women’s rights. Mrs Rosemary Kyburz, Liberal Member for Salisbury, was particularly active in her work to expose the background within the government and her comment that men “were playing at God with the lives of women” continues to be quoted vehemently in current campaigns. *Struggle for Choice* describes the position of backbencher, Mr Col Miller, a supporter of the bill who changed his vote after conducting a “referendum” in his electorate of Ithaca – a clear result of strong local campaigning.

At 11.35pm on 21 May, the Bill was defeated 40 – 35.

So, in 2018, the struggle continues. Despite the 1980’s victory, women in Queensland do not have the legal right to abortion services, although surveys over many years reflect that many people in Queensland are unaware of this

legislation. The campaigns to change the law have never ceased and each International Women's Day across the state there are demands for change. There has been no commitment from any government to introduce legislation for debate until now. The *Law Reform Commission* has developed draft legislation. The government will introduce a Bill. Nevertheless, we still need to take up the struggle from 1980.

We have learned numerous lessons – from the importance of personal lobbying of parliamentarians, public rallies and information campaigns, to ensuring knowledge of the opposition. Most importantly, we should never give up. We have the legacy of so many women and men who have gone before us and whose legacy we can never forget. Beryl and the *Children by Choice* members, Rosemary Kyburz, Robert Sparkes from the National Party, and many committed Labor women who argued at Labor Conferences for strong pro-choice policy, inspiring the current *Labor for Choice* women fighting for reform in 2018. It is impossible to name all those who have contributed over the years, but I want to acknowledge the inspiration and resilience of Bonny Barry, previous member for Apsley who will be there through the debate. When this 2018 debate draws near to its conclusion, a new chapter must be added to *Struggle for Choice* with the title – *Choice Success*.

Future of VET and TAFE in Queensland

Shannon Fentiman

The Hon Shannon Fentiman MP is Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development in the 56th Queensland Parliament.

Queensland's population rose to 5,000,000 in May 2018 – a statistic reached four years ahead of schedule.

And this figure continues to grow by about 80,000 a year - as Queensland's fantastic lifestyle and plethora of job and training opportunities continues to attract new residents.

Over the past 12 months, Queensland has boasted one of the fastest job growth rates in the country.

Integral to this growth is the vocational education and training (VET) sector, which is crucial to Queensland's economy both through workforce development and by serving as a major export industry.

We are creating a VET system that is efficient, responsive and agile. This is because we need it to be sufficiently visionary to train for the jobs of the future - jobs that do not yet exist whilst maintaining a high standard of training for those jobs that do.

To meet this challenge, we need comprehensive industry engagement and advice; we need consistent policy and resourcing from the Commonwealth, and we need to ask some challenging questions: what are the critical skill needs? Where are the emerging opportunities? How do they meet regional and national economic priorities?

The good news

In Queensland, we are starting from a strong base. Our VET system has high levels of participation, completion and equity.

Each year, more than 250,000 Queenslanders undertake publicly-funded training to attain more than 100,000 qualifications.

Queensland is the national leader in the delivery of VET for school-aged students. We have more than 78,000 VET students in our schools - greater than 30 per cent of the national total.

Queensland also has the largest number of school-registered training organisations (RTOs) in Australia, with more than 300 school RTOs representing about 70 per cent of the national total.

Queensland students continue to represent more than half the national total of school-based apprentices and trainees: 8,740 of 17,198.

TAFE Queensland trains roughly 120,000 students a year in more than 500 nationally-recognised qualifications.

The challenges

Nationally, the number of students participating in VET in the past 20 years has increased, but participation by working-age Australians has been flat.

Part of the reason is the disparity between funding and loans available for university students compared with VET students.

Restrictive policy responses from the Federal Government mean that, for students, courses in the VET sector can be more expensive than university. Students at university also have the capacity to defer payment of their fees until they are earning a decent wage. Many TAFE students don't have this luxury.

A disparaging attitude from the Federal Government hasn't helped the reputation of the public training sector. We can only hope that the Minister for Education and Training Simon Birmingham's comments about "basket weaving" come back to bite him when he next needs a plumber, electrician, child carer or aged-care worker.

We know that the Prime Minister is not interested in engaging with Queensland and coming to the table on the National Partnership on the Skilling Australians Fund. This lack of engagement will result in a terrible deal for our state.

Initially, the federal government committed \$1.5 billion over four years in its 2017 budget. That figure has now been slashed to \$1.2 billion. That means Queensland loses \$70 million in the first year - putting up to 7,000 apprenticeships and traineeships at risk state-wide.

Labor recognises these problems and is conducting a once-in-a-generation national inquiry into post-secondary education.

The inquiry is not about TAFE versus university, or practical skills versus research. This is about ensuring our children have the widest range of career options available and making sure they are best equipped to face the educational and workforce challenges coming their way.

What does the future hold for VET and TAFE?

As already mentioned, we know that the ways of working and engaging in work are changing.

We understand that the jobs of the future will be shaped by several factors, including an ageing population, population drift, globalisation, increased competition, and digital technologies.

International research over the past 15 years shows there has been a shift from low-skill routine jobs to higher-skill, non-routine jobs.

This is borne out by the prediction that the bulk of jobs growth in the next five years will be in the more highly-skilled occupations, such as health care and social assistance, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), education and training.

The VET sector provides training for nine out of 10 of these current and forecast occupations.

As well as training at hundreds of quality, smaller private providers across the state, TAFE is key to better access to VET in Queensland. That's why we have

invested up to \$85 million over three years to upgrade TAFE campuses to ensure students and staff have access to the best facilities and resources.

That said, we acknowledge Queensland's VET system needs to change: to know how to change and build flexibility into its structure so it can continue to be relevant to the changing needs of the labour market.

What has the Palaszczuk Government done so far

One of the key election commitments of the Palaszczuk Government is to release a new strategy on Training and Skills.

To ensure the VET sector performs at its optimum level, we must draft policy that caters for the changing workplace and prepares the workforce for the jobs of the future. Policy that embraces our entire workforce – from women returning to work to disadvantaged young people and our enormously experienced older workers.

We need to make it easier to upskill and reskill for emerging technologies through our VET system.

We need to devise policy that provides for inclusive growth and delivers Queensland a high-tech workforce for jobs in emerging industries.

Which is why we are determined to ensure that no one is left behind.

In the 2018-19 State Budget, we announced increased investment in successful programs such as Skilling Queenslanders for Work and Back to Work.

We are supporting targeted regional investment through the Regional Skills Investment Strategy and the Regional Skills Adjustment Strategy.

With TAFE Queensland as the key partner, workers are being helped to transition into the new jobs that are in demand.

Jobs Queensland is providing strategic advice to government through its industry and regionally focussed workforce plans.

Increase awareness of VET successes

There are many paths to a rewarding, high-paying, high-status career.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) released its report on VET in Schools students in September 2017. Tracking the students, five years after leaving school, the study revealed that close to 90 per cent were either working, studying or both.

The report concludes that quality VET in schools can have very positive outcomes for students.

Students and their families are aware of this and the enrolment figures reflect the growing status of VET studies across Australia.

I can't emphasise enough just how much the Palaszczuk Government values VET as a pathway in senior secondary schooling.

VET qualifications will contribute towards new senior assessment and tertiary entrance arrangements for students who enter Year 11 from 2019.

But there is room for improvement and an opportunity to build on existing strengths.

Governments, industry, training providers, schools and universities need to work together to support a dynamic workforce capable of reskilling and up-skilling.

We need to better inform potential customers about what VET can offer, and we need to give them access to a flexible training system.

Our people

Most importantly, none of this is happening in a vacuum.

We have VET students and graduates who are not just getting jobs, as important as that is, but who are dreaming – and dreaming big.

Brisbane resident Tia-Bree completed a Certificate III in Individual Support as a fee-free Year 12 graduate.

She's now working at Capella Bay nursing home in Capalaba and plans on doing further studies in health.

Then there is Sharine Milne in Townsville.

Sharine is a motorcycle mechanic who now owns the business where she started as an apprentice more than 10 years ago, R.H.D. Classic Supplies and Services.

Through VET, Sharine focussed on her passion and is now able to give back to her community by providing training and work experience for others.

These inspiring stories are examples of why this is such an exciting time to be the Minister for Employment and Small Business, and for Training and Skills Development.

By working with industry and employer stakeholders, in partnership with TAFE Queensland and other quality providers, we can ensure that Queenslanders are being trained today in the skills needed for a prosperous future.

TAFE is too important to lose

Brendan Crotty

Brendan Crotty is the Deputy General Secretary of the Queensland Teachers' Union. He is public education advocate and former teacher of vocational education in high schools.

TAFE used to be a place of high quality technical and further education. But, like many other public institutions, is also a centre of learning connected directly to the local community.

The contestable market system has failed in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector to such an extent that it has almost brought the TAFE system to its knees.

TAFE has been a highly respected institution for more than 100 years with quality at its heart. Unfortunately, significant structural adjustments to the Australian economy, along with the abandonment of government supported employment programs have seen the vocational education and training sector deconstructed. Short-sighted public policy has allowed for-profit providers to thrive and the worst parts of neo-liberal market forces let rip.

TAFE used to be a place of high quality technical and further education. But, like many other public institutions, is also a centre of learning connected directly to the local community. Over the past few decades we have seen a chipping away of recurrent expenditure from state and federal governments, and most importantly a lack of investment in the capital facilities in many of our TAFE campuses.

The real kick in the teeth faced by TAFE was the move to a market model where non-government providers were able to cherry pick highly profitable, easy to deliver courses, with low human and physical resource delivery costs. TAFE has been left in an untenable position; required to deliver the remaining high cost delivery courses.

The introduction of the fee for service model of delivery was akin to a voucher system that again undercut the ability of our public provider maintaining a consistent budget position, which in turn increased casual employment in the sector.

TAFE should not just be another business in a market of providers. TAFE should be the premium and preferred provider of vocational education and training right across the country. TAFE should be resourced so that training in local communities can be geared towards the economic opportunities in that area, so real skills can lead to real jobs.

TAFE is also the protector of quality. The red tape our TAFE institutes have been bound up in through audits that are designed to catch out the poor practices in some of the private sector need to be reformed. Regulation of a market that has been let rip never works and always ends up punishing the ethical and professional operators in that sector.

Many people have accessed TAFE for its other purpose - second chance education. A disengaged young person, a recently retrenched factory worker or a parent who left school early to get a job but now wants to re-enter employment. Successfully completing a short course at TAFE can also be the gateway to rebuilding the self-confidence to enrol in further training.

So, what can be done to repair the failings of the past?

1. We need at least 70 per cent of the training budget of state and federal governments delivered through the TAFE system. This would provide budget certainty and still allow subsidised funding for quality non-government providers.
2. Remove the cap on student loans for those students who undertake and complete their education at TAFE. This would ensure TAFE would continue to set the standard in a high-quality VET system.
3. All private providers need to be subject to a community mutual obligation agreement where a minimum standard of service is a condition of government funding.

4. All government funding of major projects must include a training component delivered locally through TAFE and an obligation to employ new apprentices on all major projects. This will connect these projects directly to their communities and enable TAFE to remain on the cutting edge of training.
5. We need to re-tool TAFE with a broad scale investment in new capital, so the quality of the training delivered there matches the environment where the training is delivered.

Sadly, TAFE was almost lost forever. We need to band together to demand change so that TAFE will remain the centre of our community well into the future.

Trickledown economics and inequality in Australia

Hon Wayne Swan MP

Federal Member for Lilley, National ALP President-Elect, former Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister, and author of *The Good Fight*.

Its reality is tax cuts for the rich, deregulation for the powerful, destruction of social safety nets, the end of universal health and education programs, and wage suppression for working people.

In the movie *The Wild One*, Marlon Brando's character is famously asked: "What are you rebelling against?" Brando coolly responds – as only Brando can – "What've you got?"

As I get older, I feel more like Brando. All of us should feel that way.

There is something fundamentally wrong with our economy that calls for rebellion. It's becoming more and more unequal, unfair and unjust. And the people in charge are colluding in this and justifying it in their self-serving editorials, comment and lobbying efforts.

The cause is trickledown economics. The fraud of trickledown economics.

The Australian people know that it's a fraud and that the fraud is being perpetrated upon them.

They're crying out for leadership to end trickledown and deliver some economic justice and fairness to our nation.

That leadership must come from us. I believe our future may very well depend upon it.

What is trickledown economics, this thing that we're rebelling against? It has been the driver of rampant income and wealth inequality around the world over the past 30 years including, in recent times, Australia.

In theory, trickledown economics is fundamentally about redistributing resources to the already wealthy or advantaged.

Its supporters will use any economic or linguistic doublespeak – say, “aspirational” or “innovation” or “competitiveness” – to claim that redirecting resources to the rich at the top of the income and wealth scale is our best chance of sharing them with everybody else.

A rising tide lifts all boats, they like to say.

Being a surfer, I happen to know a little bit about tides. Tides never rise from the top down. They rise from the bottom up.

That’s why in practice, trickledown economics is a recipe for rampant income and wealth inequality.

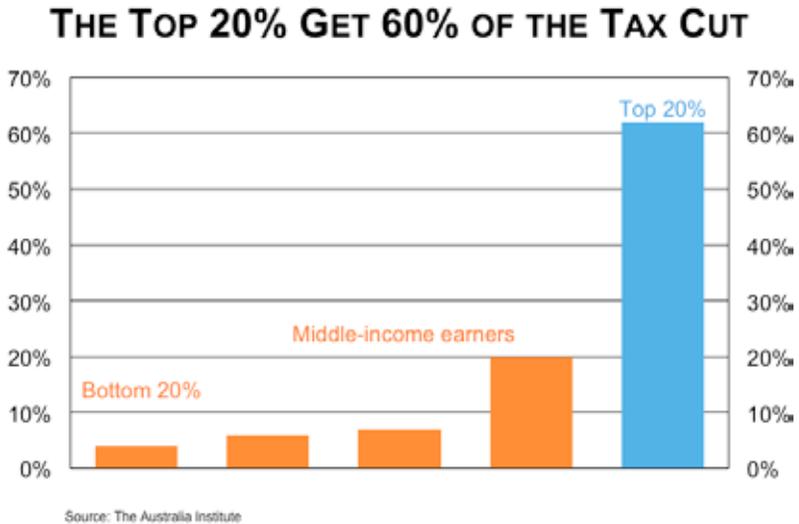
Its reality is tax cuts for the rich, deregulation for the powerful, destruction of social safety nets, the end of universal health and education programs, and wage suppression for working people.

Trickledown gives the most to those who need it least, and the least to those who need it most.

The rich get richer, the middle gets hollowed out, and vast armies of working poor are created.

Right now, the Turnbull Government’s trickledown script is playing out most blatantly in the tax system and in the labour market.

Figure 1: The top 20% of earners in Australia receive more than 60% of available tax cuts

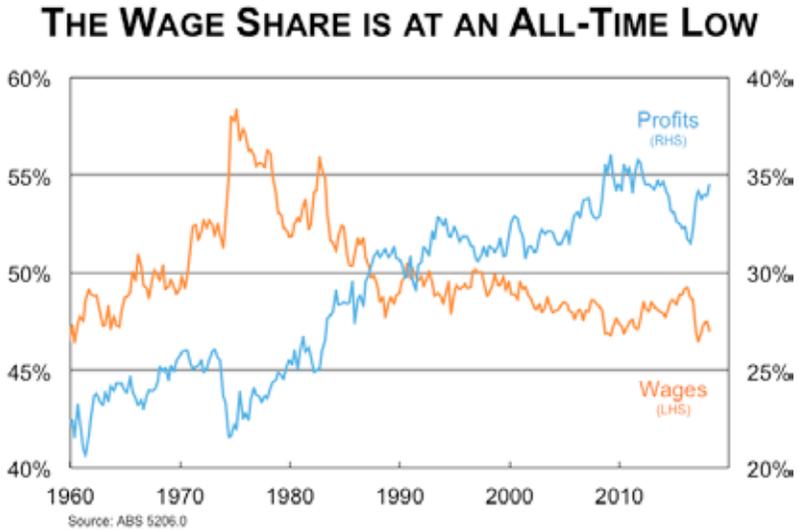


The Coalition is driving a steamroller through Australia's progressive income tax schedule. More than 60 per cent of the benefits of their new income tax cuts go to the top 20 per cent of earners, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

At the same time, the Turnbull Government is slashing the corporate tax rate for big business – a package that includes a \$17 billion handout to the big banks.

All up, it's a quarter of a trillion dollar smash and grab on our future capacity to fund health, education and vital public services.

Figure 2: Wage share and wage growth is at an all-time low

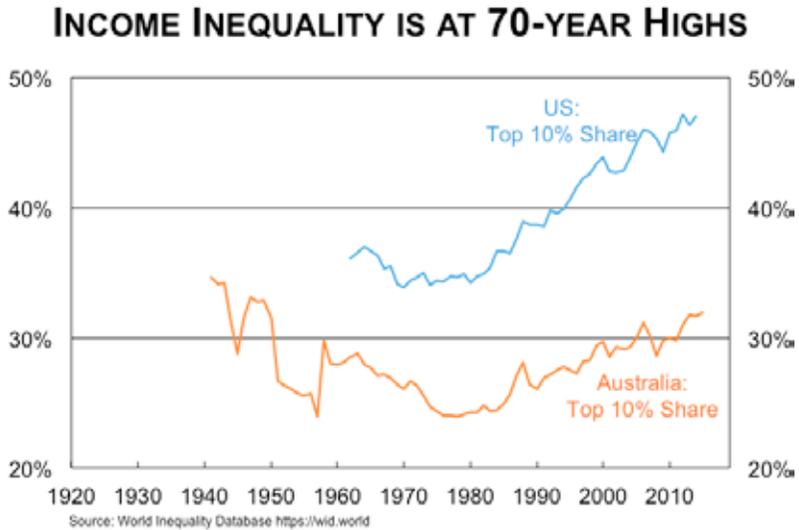


Meanwhile in the labour market, the trickledown agenda is seen in penalty rate cuts, the stacking of the Fair Work Commission, the decimation of public sector workforces, and the outrageous behaviour of employers in enterprise bargaining.

All of this is cheered on by a government intent on producing the lowest real wage growth and lowest wage share of income in recorded history – as seen in Figure 2.

Across the developed world, over the last 30 years, these types of policies have driven a rapid rise in income and wealth inequality.

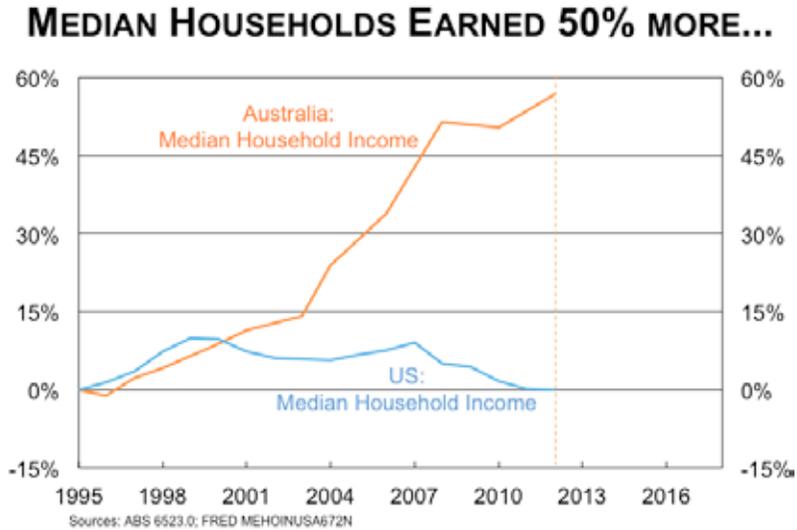
Figure 3: Income inequality in the US and Australia



In the United States, almost half of every dollar earned is now captured by the top 10 per cent, as Figure 3 shows.

In Australia, almost one third of every dollar earned goes to the top 10 per cent – the highest share they’ve captured since the end of the Second World War.

Figure 4: Median household income in US and Australia

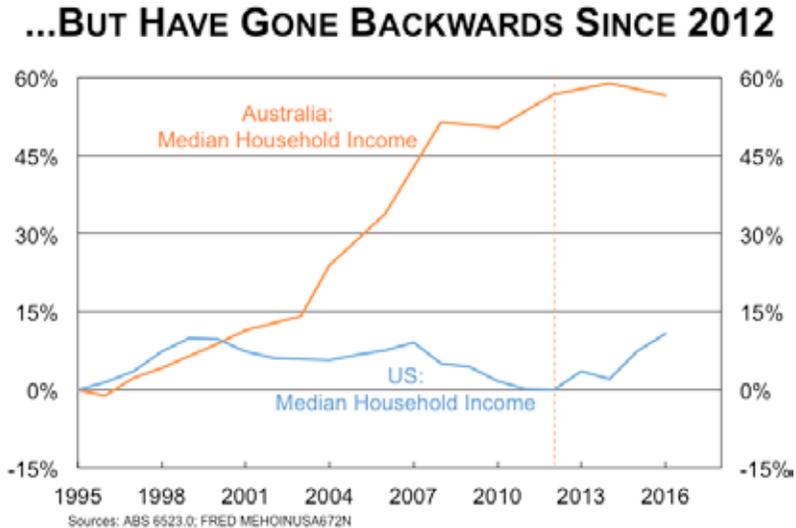


For most of the past twenty years, Australia has managed to avoid the worst of American-style income inequality.

Until about 2013, median households in Australia were 50 per cent better off than they were in the mid-1990s, as Figure 4 shows. It's a picture we should be proud of.

Over the same period, median households in the US have gone backwards.

Figure 5: Median household growth in US and Australia

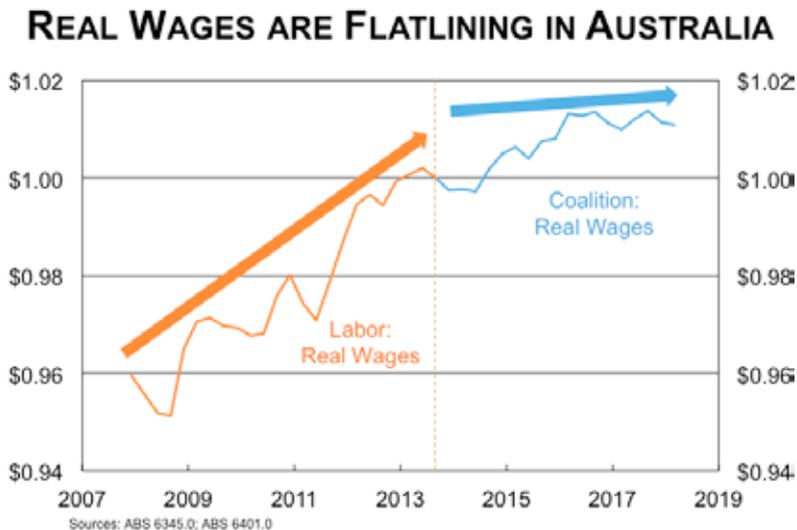


But over the past five years, it's been average Australian households that have started to go backwards, as you can see in Figure 5.

Why has Australia's working and middle class been squeezed? We need look no further than the labour market.

Wages are easily the biggest source of income for average households. Despite Turnbull's claims, working Australians aren't relying on tax lurks and perks like negatively gearing their fifth investment property. They're depending on a decent day's pay for a decent day's work.

Figure 6: Wage growth in Australia



During the financial crisis – and throughout Labor’s period in government – Australia distinguished itself by delivering a real wage increase to working people, as shown in Figure 6.

Since the election of the Abbott and Turnbull Governments, the tide has turned abruptly for workers.

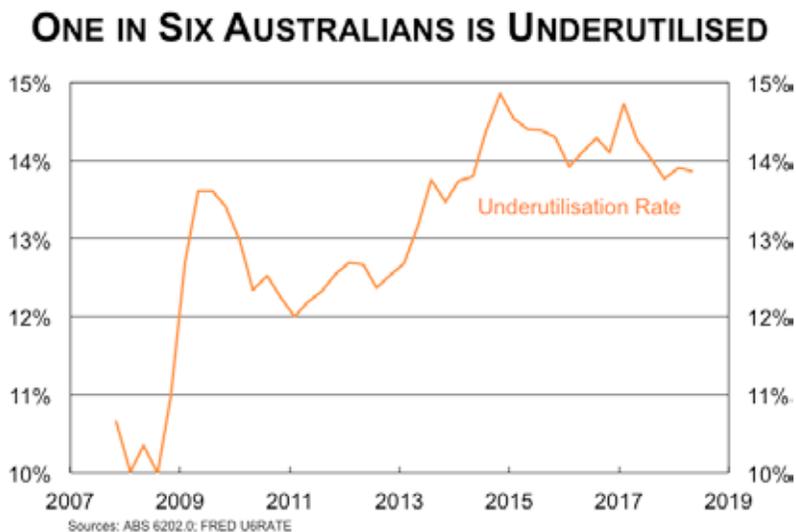
If you work in the private sector in Australia, your real wage has grown by just one per cent under Abbott and Turnbull. Not one per cent a year – one per cent in five years.

Essentially, the Coalition has taken five years to deliver the same wage growth that Labor delivered in just one year of government.

Ordinary Australians are like the frog being boiled slowly in a pot of water – except they’ve now woken up and are demanding a better deal and a fairer go.

It’s no coincidence that wage growth in Australia is so slow when our labour market is enduring a record degree of underutilisation.

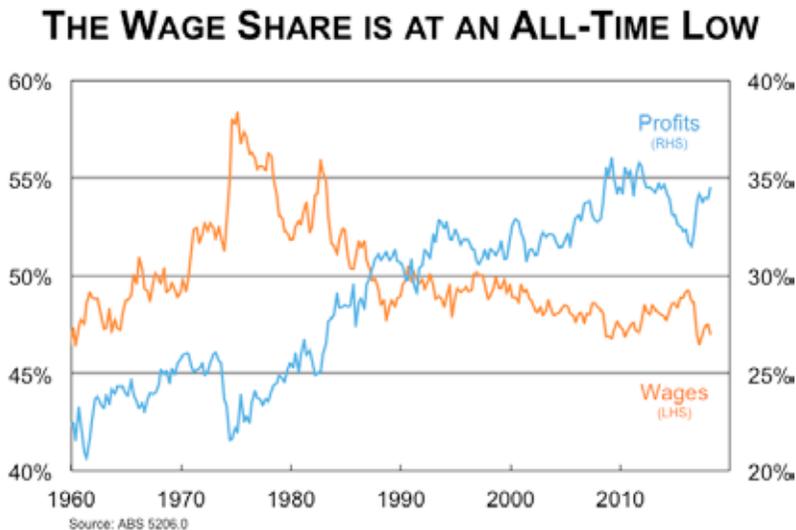
Figure 7: Underutilisation in the labour force



Almost one in six people in Australia is either unemployed or can't get the hours of work they want – more than at the height of the GFC, as Figure 7 shows.

Stagnant wages added to this level of labour market slack gives you a record-low share of income going to working people, and a record high share going to big business.

Figure 8: Wage share at an all-time low



You can't have a prosperous economy while there's a declining share of income going to working people. Figure 8, a copy of Figure 2, demonstrates an outcome which is the culmination of the trickle-down project in Australia.

This is why economic radicals – like the Governor of the Reserve Bank – now say that the most substantial threat to economic growth isn't militant unions or the urgent need for big corporate tax cuts.

It's our stagnant wages and our growing levels of income inequality.

The reason why economic inequality is a handbrake on economic growth is very simple. If you give a tax cut to big business, they're not going to invest in extra capacity, or expand their workforces, or raise wages if demand is weak.

As demonstrated in the United States, Donald Trump's corporate tax cuts aren't going towards higher wages. Overwhelmingly, big companies are using the extra cash to buy back their own shares, boost boardroom bonuses, and increase dividends for investors.

Figure 9: Savings rates amongst Australians



It's a similar story for individuals.

If you give a tax cut to the top 1 per cent or the top 10 per cent, they'll save a large part of it, rather than spend it back into the economy. Figure 9 shows the high saving rates of these high-income earners.

Now, it looks like there's a bar missing on this chart – that for the bottom 90 per cent. The bar isn't missing – it's actually zero. If you give a tax cut to the bottom 90 per cent of income earners, next to none of it is saved. Almost all of it is spent back into the economy.

Cutting working people's penalty rates is only penalising businesses, as it creates lower spending and lower sales.

This is why the trickledown agenda kills growth and grows inequality.

The trickledown claim is that if you give the most to those who need it least – the so called 'wealth creators' in their mahogany lined boardrooms – then a grateful and prosperous working and middle class will follow.

But they've got it exactly backwards. A prosperous working and middle class is a source of growth, not a consequence of it.

Figure 10: Middle Australians as a source of growth

WORKING PEOPLE ARE A SOURCE OF GROWTH



Source: Chifley Research Centre (2016) *The Facts and The Future*.
<http://www.chifley.org.au/inequality-the-facts-and-the-future>

The message needs to be spread that nurses, builders, truckies, teachers, hairdressers and shop assistants are just as much wealth creators as bankers, investors and multinational companies.

Because one worker's spending is another worker's income, we can create a virtuous cycle – from decent wages, to more spending, to more jobs, to decent wages, and so on.

Clearly, this alternative to trickle-down isn't an "anti-business" agenda. It's an anti-plutocrat agenda.

It's not an anti-wealth agenda. It's anti-wealth concentration agenda.

The trickle-downers respect wealth for its own sake. Respect and reward should be given to the hard work involved in creating that wealth.

The trickle-downers like to tell us “there is no alternative” to their scorched-earth agenda – or more accurately, their flat-earth agenda. But of course, there are many alternatives.

Our alternative is one of inclusive prosperity.

Our sustained response must be to lift demand in the economy and raise the bargaining power of the Australian worker.

We need to invest in our human and physical infrastructure to lift productivity, to build a more progressive and growth-friendly tax system which provides incentives for work and investment. And finally, reduce the political clout of the wealthy elite.

Figure 11: The pillars of Laborism

FOUR PILLARS OF LABORISM

1. Full Employment
2. Stronger Worker Voice
3. Taming Corporate Excess
4. Progressive Tax

Our response must be to firstly, embrace fiscal policy to eliminate labour underutilisation and achieve true full employment. Full employment is a non-negotiable objective for the labour movement. There should be no higher goal for the Labor Party and the trade union movement in a time of high inequality than obtaining and sustaining full employment. Second, we must elevate and amplify the voice of working people – rewriting the Fair Work Act, rebalancing the Fair Work Commission, and restoring workers to the boards of public and major private companies.

We need broader representation of Australians on our major company boards, which are dominated largely by an old boys' club. The board nomination process needs to be far more open, where leading shareholders propose a shortlist for alternative candidates for open positions.

Third, we must rein in corporate excess, from obscene oligopoly power to indefensible levels of executive pay.

Figure 12: Highest paid CEOs in Australia

HIGHEST-PAID CEOs IN AUSTRALIA			
Rank	CEO	Company	Realised Pay
1	Don Meij	Domino's Pizza	\$36.8 million
2	P & S Lowy	Westfield	\$25.9 million
3	Nicholas Moore	Macquarie	\$25.2 million
4	Chris Rex	Ramsay Health	\$22.3 million
5	Louis Gries	James Hardie	\$18.0 million
6	Andrew Bassat	Seek	\$14.1 million
7	Ron Delia	Amcor	\$12.2 million
8	Alan Joyce	Qantas	\$11.2 million
9	Colin Goldschmidt	Sonic	\$10.6 million
10	Mike Cane	Boral	\$9.8 million
TOTAL			\$186.1 million

Source: ACSI

Recently, it was reported that the pay of ASX100 CEOs has hit record highs. Figure 12 shows some of these pay packets. The highest-paid CEO took home as much as 600 average Australian workers.

If company boards can't impose pay restraint on these exorbitant executive salaries, it's time for shareholders to take matters into their own hands and agitate for a binding vote to cap CEO pay.

Even the most enterprising CEO will never generate as much economic growth as 600 workers. That makes this sort of wage inequality toxic for economic growth.

Just as millionaires and billionaires have changed the rules to suit themselves, well-organised working people armed with the right set of policies, and who are unapologetic about whose side we're on, can change them back.

This is why we need, as a fourth pillar, to defend and advance our progressive tax system, so we can better recognise and reward the wealth creators throughout our economy – not just those at the top end of town.

The regressive tax agenda which slashes headline corporate and top personal tax rates, which sees tax evasion and avoidance by multinationals go unpunished, and which allows massive loopholes to persist, robs us all of the resources we need for a fair and productive society.

It gives the green light to a society in which inequality isn't just tolerated, but encouraged.

Trickledown policies which lead us down the American road are not only stupid and immoral, they are unpopular. The ACTU's Change the Rules campaign has tapped into that unpopularity.

Importantly, trickledown isn't inevitable – there are viable alternatives.

We need to change the way the Australian people think about what sort of economy and what sort of society they want to live in.

We need to turn people's frustration with trickledown into a movement and put organised labour at the head of it.

Just as millionaires and billionaires have changed the rules to suit themselves, well-organised working people armed with the right set of policies, and who are unapologetic about whose side we're on, can change them back.

A Labor perspective on regional inequality

Senator the Hon Chris Ketter

Senator the Hon Chris Ketter is Senator for Queensland in the 45th Australian Parliament; Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate; Chair of the Economics References Committee; and Deputy Chair of Economics Legislation Committee.

All Australians should be able to participate in our community and our economy and make their fullest contribution to this great country.

Introduction to the issue

Rising inequality is undoubtedly one of the major policy challenges facing modern society, particularly in Australia. Often cast in terms of the disparity between the haves and have nots, inequality in modern times also has other shades and nuances worth exploring. The difference in outcomes of life expectancy and wages between people of different gender or race are examples. Regional inequality, the subject of this essay, is another.

I am passionate about Australia's regions and a frequent visitor to regional communities across Queensland. I have heard the anecdotal evidence about regional disparity and seen that the data backs it up. It is quite clear that our regions are falling behind on many fronts including wealth, employment, education, internet access, and business activity. The Turnbull Government, a Coalition comprised of Liberal and National Party representatives, seems to accept regional inequality as a *fait accompli*. This is an appalling outcome when we consider that the Nationals sell themselves as the regional community champions. Labor, on the other hand, believes regional inequality isn't something we should just accept. Governments at all levels have a responsibility to address inequality to ensure that every Australian gets their "Fair Go", regardless of gender, race or geography. All Australians should be able to participate in our community and our economy and make their fullest contribution to this great country.

The problem with inequality is that it is obstructing economic growth. If the majority of the population face record low wage levels then this, along with the compounding issues of rising house prices, insecure work and reduced access to health, education and infrastructure leave the whole population worse off.

Inequality is a problem

We often hear Labor representatives acknowledging that inequality in Australia is at historical highs. The Liberal Nationals deny this, refusing to accept inequality as an issue. Last year, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia observed that income inequality “... grew quite a lot in the 1980s and the 1990s and it has risen a little bit just recently... It has become more pronounced in the past few years because of the rise in assets prices and people that own those assets have seen their wealth go up” (Gartrell & Remeikis 2017). Regardless, Treasurer Scott Morrison last year denied that inequality is worsening.

Outrageously, Queensland LNP MP Andrew Laming thinks inequality is as simple as “... staring over the fence and noticing another guy has a jet ski and you don't have one” (Collett & Martin 2017). When you sweep away all the hyperbole and rhetoric from those who reject the notion of rising inequality, the evidence tells a troubling story. Less than two years ago, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified issues with growing inequality in our nation, stating that “the disposable income per capita gap between the richest and poorest parts of OECD countries grew 1.5% a year on average over 2000-13, with the biggest increases in the Slovak Republic, Australia, Czech Republic and Canada” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also recognised the problem of inequality. The recent IMF Fiscal Monitor made it clear that now was the time for “strengthening fiscal buffers” to prepare for another downturn, and urged “all countries [to] promote inclusive growth to avoid excessive inequality that

can impede social mobility, erode social cohesion, and ultimately hurt growth” (International Monetary Fund 2018).

The problem with inequality is that it is obstructing economic growth. If the majority of the population face record low wage levels then this, along with the compounding issues of rising house prices, insecure work and reduced access to health, education and infrastructure leave the whole population worse off. Those on higher incomes will not be able to take advantage of economic growth if the majority of the population lags behind. Importantly, inequality places stress on our social fabric and our ability to thrive. We only need to turn to the social and political changes occurring overseas to see that inequality can dramatically disrupt the political establishment.

Globally, people are demanding that governments pay attention to the issue of inequality. But, much like the debate on climate change, our political opponents are turning a blind eye. Those of us concerned about rising inequality are in despair. Our Federal LNP Government have and will fail to address inequality. Though this issue could be addressed through the deliberate adjustment of policy in our taxation, health or education systems.

Regional inequality

Inequality in Australia also takes a regional dimension. Regional inequality was a topic of conversation throughout my long career as an official in the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees’ Association (SDA). I serviced members in many regional and rural areas and the inequality I heard about and witnessed – whether through disparity in workers’ pay, site conditions or reduced opportunities for advancement – was a key motivation for my entry to Parliament.

While the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not always collate data together in tables that are helpful in comparing inequality across regions, there are quite a number of measures that we can work through. In Queensland for instance, we can compare the Greater Brisbane area (metropolitan in large part) against the ‘Rest of Queensland’.

In terms of employment, Greater Brisbane has an employment rate of 74.1% and a participation rate of 67.9% amongst 15-64 year olds as of May 2018. When

you look at the 'Rest of Queensland', the employment rate is only 71.6% and the participation rate is 63.6%. In terms of general and youth unemployment, Greater Brisbane records 6% and 12.6% respectively. The 'Rest of Queensland' has more concerning rates of 6.7% unemployment and youth unemployment of 17.6% (Department of Jobs and Small Business 2018).

It is only the Labor Party, a worker-focused party who represents these silenced voices, that can really deliver for our regions.

In terms of wealth, a person in Greater Brisbane has an average net worth of \$863,000 versus the 'Rest of Queensland' at \$727,200 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018a). In terms of education, 58.4% of people in Greater Brisbane had a non-school qualification, versus only 51.4% in the 'Rest of Queensland' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b). On internet access, 11.2% of dwellings in Greater Brisbane had not accessed the internet, versus 15.8% in 'Rest of Queensland' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018c).

Therefore, if we consider Australians in terms of wealth, employment and access to communications, those in our regions are falling behind. There are real people living this reality every day, and they need our help. As a Senator for Queensland with regional duty electorates including Flynn, Maranoa and Wright, I meet many regional Australians who possess just as much talent, ability and energy as their city-dwelling cousins but are held back by the tyranny of distance. Alongside economic disparity and employment issues, such as decreased capacity for collective bargaining, there are difficulties and added costs in accessing top quality medical services and often inferior investment in infrastructure, reduced access to education (both practical and financial) and poorer communications capabilities in our regional and rural communities.

If the problem of inequality remains unaddressed then the cycle of relative disadvantage will continue to ravage our regional communities. We will have children growing up in regional Australia only to move to cities later in life to take up considerably better employment and educational opportunities. Australians expect Governments to make use of our geography to sustain a multitude of

diverse, thriving communities. Once again, the failure of the National Party to deliver on this objective in the political sphere is conspicuous. National Party electorates are, on average, poorer or more disadvantaged than those of the other major parties (ABC News 2015). It is only the Labor Party, a worker-focused party who represents these silenced voices, that can really deliver for our regions. It is Labor values that drove me to move a motion through the Senate for an Economics References Committee inquiry into Regional Inequity.

The potential for well-informed and executed decentralisation policies to negate inequality is, I believe, underutilised in both government and the private sector.

The inquiry

In line with the broad scale nature of the problem at hand, the Terms of Reference (ToR) are broad, so that people across the spectrum can have their say. This will enable us to better gauge the full range of issues that our regions are facing. The ToR are set out as follows:

The indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia, with particular reference to government policies and programs in the following areas:

- a) fiscal policies at federal, state and local government levels;*
- b) improved co-ordination of federal, state and local government policies;*
- c) regional development policies;*
- d) infrastructure;*
- e) education;*
- f) building human capital;*
- g) enhancing local workforce skills;*

- h) employment arrangements;*
- i) decentralisation policies;*
- j) innovation;*
- k) manufacturing; and*
- l) any other related matters.*

(Parliament of Australia 2018a)

A number of key themes are encompassed within the terms of reference. The principles, which will guide my consideration of these matters, are outlined as follows:

Government

Government certainly has a place in addressing regional inequality. It is worth capturing the full picture of budget decisions across local, state and federal levels to understand firstly, how our regions are taxed and secondly, how governments reinvest revenue to provide services across the country. The inquiry will aim to expose opportunities for better coordination at and between different levels of Government, to remove duplication of and/or fill existing gaps in services.

Employment

Employment is possibly the best weapon in reducing inequality. The nature of employment arrangements affects worker outcomes whether it be casualisation of the workforce, the accessibility of schools and post-secondary education necessary to gain employment, or the level at which regional employers invest in their workforces. The potential for well-informed and executed decentralisation policies to negate inequality is, I believe, underutilised in both government and the private sector. It is critical for all Australians that we get employment outcomes right.

Infrastructure

It is important that the population in our regions have access to transportation, communications and utilities that connect communities and encourage

investment by the private sector. This inquiry provides unprecedented opportunities for us to consider what works – and what doesn't. It could be public-private collaboration and sharing of resources to keep programs running in regional TAFEs, targeted grant programs for Councils to build infrastructure, or government incentives for businesses that create and sustain jobs in rural communities. Our findings can help inform development of best practice models in the future. This will ensure that our regions are given every opportunity to grow and thrive. I echo the sentiment of one South Australian submission to the inquiry that "Distance is a significant issue, both positive and negative for regions" (Parliament of Australia 2018b). In essence, it's good if you live in a nice place with good services and bad if you don't. This is particularly pertinent to infrastructure.

Submissions

The inquiry has now received 121 public submissions. Local governments, universities, corporations, government departments, regional development associations, unions and think tanks have all made contributions. Across the diverse range of contributors, from areas north, east, south and west, there is a common theme – that regional inequality is real and that it must be addressed. The following extracts from submissions provide a tiny snapshot of the big picture we are forming:

"...regional communities have a substantial way to go, to not only reach parity on service provision, but to be able to offer a quality of life that attracts and retains families.

...current government policy has only symbolically included regional areas and many tangible outcomes are yet to be fully realised."

Central Highlands Regional Council (Parliament of Australia 2018c)

"The inequities and inequalities in health that exist between more urban and rural and remote people is antithetical to the national characteristics valued

by Australians and must be a central concern of any examination of regional inequality. The good health and wellbeing of rural and remote Australians will also be critical to achieving and sustaining regional growth.”

Rural Doctors Association of Australia (Parliament of Australia 2018d)

“There is significant inequality in educational attainment between the regional Australia and major cities. Regional Australia is a generation behind in educational attainment compared to major cities, and it may well take a generation or more to address this inequality.”

Regional Universities Network (Parliament of Australia 2018e)

The next steps

The inquiry will soon progress to public hearings. The intent of these hearings will be to listen to people in regional communities, particularly those who made written submissions and explore both localised issues and common experiences. Public hearings are a fantastic way to gain in-depth understanding of the problems at hand and to test the worthiness of different policy solutions. Due to the diverse nature of our regions, my intention is to push for hearings in most or all States and Territories before the inquiry concludes. Considering the decentralised geography of Queensland, I can't think of a better place to begin the hearings than here in my home state. It is important to note that these are matters for decision by the Committee.

Following public hearings, the committee will consider our findings and deliver a report with recommendations to the government. Ideally, by the time our reporting date of 30 June 2019 arrives, we will have a Federal Labor Government and with it an action plan to tackle regional inequality. Obviously, the future of the inquiry itself will also be affected by the outcome and timing of the next federal election.

Labor is committed to tipping the balance in favour of our regions, to making sure those Australians who are born there and who choose to live there gain more equal access to the wonderful services and life opportunities synonymous with our great country.

Conclusion

Regional Australians have been left behind for too long. It is not acceptable in this day and age to let inequality fall by the wayside. Opportunities are being lost. The LNP have killed off the chance for a true digital revolution by botching rollout of the National Broadband Network. Labor's vision would have levelled the playing field for residents in our regions and revolutionised the delivery of education, health and business services. The Liberal Nationals have taken their eye off the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) rollout and there appears to be the very real risk that it too is being grossly mismanaged. Labor's NDIS was designed to take geography out of the equation when it comes to assisting those with disabilities. My hope for this inquiry is that it can play a part in bringing Labor values to bear for the benefit of workers and others experiencing disadvantage within the wider population. Labor is committed to tipping the balance in favour of our regions, to making sure those Australians who are born there and who choose to live there gain more equal access to the wonderful services and life opportunities synonymous with our great country. Through this inquiry, we are taking steps to expose and measure the causes of regional inequality. Through this process we can explore what policy levers are available to the federal government to address it.

The enduring mission of the Labor Party is to ensure that all Australians, no matter what their postcode, get a fair go. The Senate Economics References Committee has a proud record of shining a light on contemporary issues of profound national importance. Through this inquiry, we can expose another important economic and social issue – regional inequality – and once again create the impetus for action.

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Sticking to the plan

Shane Bevis

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A growing number of people are referring to Brisbane City Council's (BCC) development approval outcomes as a case of "Rafferty's rules". There is an ever-increasing frustration that what is written in Council's *City Plan* and *Local Plan* is ignored at whim for outcomes that ultimately suit the interests of developers over locals who thought they knew how properties in their street, neighbourhood and suburb could be developed. Plans often say that development should not be higher than a certain number of stories or exceed a certain density, yet development applications are approved by BCC that exceed these limits time and time again.

Two recent examples underscore the extent to which BBC is ignoring local plans.

"Champagne flutes" at Toowong

The *Toowong Local Neighbourhood Plan* sets a height limit of 15 storeys for new development, but BCC approved three "champagne flute" towers in 2015; two 24 storey towers and one 27 storey tower. Locals campaigned against this in favour of the outcomes promised in their local plan. They were at first unsuccessful in the Land and Environments Court, before winning a Supreme Court appeal in May 2018. In that Supreme Court victory, Justice Philip McMurdo determined:

"It is not for the decision maker (including in this context a Court), to gainsay the expression of what constitutes the public interest that is in a planning scheme. A decision maker might think that a limit of 15 storeys is too

restrictive, and the public would be better served by a higher limit. But this decision maker must accept that it is in the public interest that the limit be 15 storeys, because that is what the planning scheme effectively provides”.¹

The decision was a clear victory for the local plan that had, until this point, been ignored by the LNP administration in City Hall.

“Cedar Woods” at Upper Kedron

The *Ferry Grove and Upper Kedron Local Neighbourhood Plan* set density limits for future development at Upper Kedron. However, the LNP administration in BCC approved the “Cedar Woods” development in 2014 that far exceeded this limit providing approval for 980 dwellings.

In making this decision, the LNP in Council did not reference the local neighbourhood plan, despite it being the basis of community objections. Instead, BCC sought to override the local plan and rely on an infrastructure agreement. That agreement was made with the original landowner before the property was bought by the developer without any public consultation, and before any development application was submitted. The development became a focal point for the 2015 state election and the decision was called in to be re-made by the State Government following the election of the Palaszczuk Government. In re-making the decision, the State Government relied on an independent planning report that found:

“The infrastructure agreement that was entered into between Council and the property owner/developer effectively froze the community out of the scheme amendment process. It had the effect of over-riding the planning outcomes sought under both City Plan 2000 and City Plan 2014 with an agreement in place well before a development application was made over the site. In my opinion this serves to undermine the planning process (in

¹ Source: <https://archive.sclqld.org.au/qjudgment/2018/QCA18-084.pdf>

the eyes of the community) and brings into question the integrity of City Plan 2014".²

Following this assessment, the State Government stuck to the plan and granted approval for development on only the land already zoned for emerging community in the City Plan and sent Council back to community to consult on the Local Plan.

...too many developments that are inconsistent with local plans go unchallenged. Brisbane's urban landscape is suffering as a result.

The cause of the problem

These are not isolated examples. Sadly however, the community only has so much fuel in the tank to fight decisions and mount campaigns against the current administration's wilful indifference to local plans. It is simply impractical to rely on State call-in powers and Court challenges to keep a council in check. The fact is too many developments that are inconsistent with local plans go unchallenged. Brisbane's urban landscape is suffering as a result. Put simply, nothing is turning out as planned.

Even worse, this is a deliberate approach adopted by the LNP administration to give nearly unfettered rights and opportunities to property developers placing their short-term profit interests ahead of local community interests, infrastructure needs, and the very local plans designed to balance these things. The LNP administration has taken the most flexible view of performance based planning concepts to ignore or put aside any requirements in the City Plan or local plans agreed to after extensive consultation with the community, in favour of interpretations of acceptable outcomes offered by developers to further their application.

2 Source: <https://dlggpprd.blob.core.windows.net/general/cedar-woods-reel-planning-indep-strat-town-planning-assessment.pdf>

Consequently, locals are left with little to no confidence about how their suburb and neighbourhood may grow and what types of developments could occur. It is also encouraging developers to submit ambit claims as part of their development application so even if they are reduced by council, they are still in excess of the original limits envisaged by a local plan. This is undermining public confidence in our City Plan as a whole and a new approach is desperately needed.

We need to give certainty to both residents and developers that we have a set of rules that we have to stick to (former Lord Mayoral candidate Rod Harding).

Labor's approach

At the last council election, Labor sought to fix this problem and highlight a different approach. Labor's first commitment under the *Better Planning and Development Guarantee* was to stick to the city plan. The Guarantee listed other practical steps that would have shifted this extreme approach, so locals could rely on local plans to be followed. During the campaign, Labor's Lord Mayoral Candidate, Rod Harding, could not have been clearer. "We need to give certainty to both residents and developers that we have a set of rules that we have to stick to. I'm making no bones about that and that's going to change if I'm elected Lord Mayor".³

While the outcome from the 2016 campaign was not what Labor supporters had hoped for, the campaign message of "sticking to the plan" still resonates with many Brisbane locals who have seen the LNP administration ignore, cast aside, or downplay the planning commitments given in the City and local plans.

Indeed, many local community groups are still pursuing decisions made by Council in the Land and Environment Court, armed with local plans and city plan requirements that they want enforced. All have a common theme – locals asking council to stick to the plan.

3 Source: <https://www.afr.com/news/politics/labors-rod-harding-wants-to-stop-cbus-building-a-375m-brisbane-tower-20160315-gnj406>

Earlier this year, a small group of Camp Hill residents fought a BCC decision in the Planning and Environment Court over the development of unit blocks over three storey. In their case the court found in favour of the local plan saying, “to allow the development to proceed would impermissibly cut across formally expressed planning strategies for the future”.⁴ In other words: council got it wrong and should have stuck to the plan.

Another group, *Save our Space*, at Newmarket are fighting an appeal in the Planning and Environment Court over the LNP administrations approval of a four storey 262 unit complex within a small pocket of already overcrowded narrow streets in a low density residential zoned community.

Despite these challenges to decision making by City Hall, the LNP administration refuses to take up the fight. LNP Councillors and the Mayor often say, without evidence, they are powerless to refuse development applications, that State laws requires them to give development the green light or any refusal would be overturned in the Land and Environment Court.

Recently the LNP has taken this excuse to bizarre levels. In May of this year, the Lord Mayor wrote to locals over his administration’s approval of a five-storey development at the Tarragindi Bowls Club. In that letter he told locals that despite his administration’s approval of the development, it was his preference to have no development on this site at all, while at the same time refusing to fight for local planning requirements in court and blaming state legislation for the approval.⁵ While Lord Mayor Quirk protests his impotence, recent court decisions, made using the same rules at Council’s disposal, have exposed the extent the LNP administration is willing to ignore local planning requirements.

The LNP in Council are simply refusing to fight for local plans. Labor’s *Better Planning and Development Guarantee’s* made clear Labor’s alternative by including a commitment to defend our decisions in the Planning and Environment Court.

4 Source: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/residents-get-council-development-decision-overturned-20180209-p4yzv1.html>

5 Source: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/brisbane-city-council-approves-development-then-admits-it-didn-t-want-it-20180307-p4z3ao.html>

...ambiguous and overly flexible planning rules make it unclear what information is expected and how a decision will be made.

Since the 2016 Council elections, and after a State Government call in of its earlier decisions, the LNP administration in BCC has maintained their indifference to upholding local plans. In September last year, with the newly minted draft Ferny Grove and Upper Kedron Local Plan in his hand, Lord Mayor Graham Quirk said “...We’ve seen nothing, we’ve heard nothing to change our view in relation to that original assessment (for Cedar Woods) that was made.”⁶ That is despite the new draft Ferny Grove and Upper Kedron Local Plan stipulating density limits that would require far fewer homes of any future development application than the 980 council voters originally approved.

There remains a genuine choice for Brisbane ratepayers at the 2020 local government elections on this issue to end the “Rafferty’s Rules” approach to planning that favours developers and have an administration that will stick to plans it makes with the community and fight for them in court if need be.

The Queensland Labor Party Policy Platform underscored the Better Planning and Development Guarantee in 2016. Labor commits to, in Chapter 7 of the Party Platform under Building Connected Communities, a key section on “Ensuring Transparent and Accountable Development Assessment”. These key sections support the implementation of the leading practice or “best practice model” developed by the Development Assessment Forum.⁷

The Development Assessment Forum makes clear that it sees benefit in rules meaning what they say. The forum has found ambiguous and overly flexible planning rules make it unclear what information is expected and how a decision will be made. This can lead to frustration and uncertainty for those trying to

6 Page 51, Brisbane City Council (Ordinary) Meeting – 5 September 2017 <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/about-council/governance-strategy/committees-meetings-minutes/councils-meeting-minutes>

7 Section 7.203 “Labor will review the Planning Act 2016 (Qld) to further embed the best practice model developed by the Development Assessment Forum”.

understand and comply with requirements from both the point of view of developers and local residents in Australian cities. This is exactly the situation created by the Brisbane LNP administration in City Hall.

Instead, the Development Assessment Forum argues for objective rules and tests to clearly and transparently set out what is necessary to meet a requirement. To be clear the Development Assessment Forum has even written a guide for Council to follow when making plans:

“Objective rules and tests” are development assessment requirements expressed in a manner that:

(a) “...are transparent and binding (embodied in statutory documents not discretionary policy),

(b) can be objectively applied by experts,

(c) with consistent and predictable results,

(d) are as precise, specific, quantified and objective [measurable] as possible (based on evidence not guesswork),

(e) use the appropriate dimensional, performance or impact techniques to be both effective and efficient, and

*(f) are expressed in plain English using common terms”.*⁸

The current Brisbane City Council could learn a great deal from these guides.

The approach articulated by the Development Assessment Forum, and support by our Party Platform and adopted by Labor’s 2016 Planning Guarantee are the antidote to the LNP administrations “anything goes” approach to changing plans.

⁸ <http://daf.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Guide-for-writing-objectives-rules-and-tests-March-2010.pdf>

A review of council decisions and community challenges in defence of the City Plan and local plans since the 2016 election show that this guarantee and approach is still desperately needed and should be a focus for the 2020 campaign.

At the 2018 Queensland Labor Party State Conference, delegates will consider ways to strengthen our position by including amendments to the party platform that promote transparency in planning.

This includes additions that make clear Labor in councils will place conditions on developments that ensure they comply with local and city plans and that our city and local plans should provide local residents and developers with confidence about how cities, suburbs and neighbourhoods may grow and what types of developments will be approved in the future.

The battlelines over planning from 2016 remain and Labor is well placed to take the fight up in defence of better planning and adherence to local plans when Brisbane rate payers return to the polls in 2020.



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