

# FREEDOM MANIFESTO



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

**FEDERAL ELECTION  
2022**



## PRELUDE

Australia is in peril. Typically when a nation faces a grave challenge it is because of international tension or an economic slump. The national trial we face is caused by a failure of political leadership. Our state and federal leaders from both major parties have proven themselves inept.

We will overcome this challenge and do so with strength, but we need real leadership.

Australia had the world's fastest growing economy in the 20th century. Over the past decade however the major parties have abandoned the economic principles which delivered so much success. They still talk about low taxes and balanced budgets but in practice have become reform sloths.

Their extraordinary over-reaction to COVID has only magnified our accumulating economic woes. In the name of 'zero-COVID' we have doubled an already dangerously high commonwealth debt. Misplaced COVID hysteria has violated what many assumed were inviolable civil liberties. When citizens fear the police more than the virus, we have a crisis. We are now internationally infamous for going further down this dark COVID path than any other nation.

Australian federal politics needs a radical jolt.

The Liberal Democrats have advocated for citizen-trusting, freedom-loving and small government policies since 2001. We aim to cultivate a society of peace and prosperity based on individual freedom, personal responsibility, private property rights and voluntary association. This Freedom Manifesto outlines our priorities for the coming federal election.

**John Ruddick** – Liberal Democrats NSW Senate Candidate

**Dr John Humphreys** – Liberal Democrats National President & Lecturer of Economics, UQ

**Rob Cribb** – Chair of the Liberal Democrats Policy Standing Committee

**Mark Hornshaw** – Lecturer of Business and Economics, The University of Notre Dame Australia

*"Government is not the solution to our problems, government is the problem."* Ronald Reagan 20 January 1981





# FREEDOM MANIFESTO

## TEN POLICIES TO SAVE AUSTRALIA

1.	FREEDOM FROM COVID ALARMISM	4
2.	RECALL ELECTIONS	7
3.	DEBT & DEFICIT	9
4.	LOW, FLAT TAXES	12
5.	VOLUNTARY SUPERANNUATION	15
6.	SMALL BUSINESS	17
7.	CHEAP & RELIABLE ENERGY	22
8.	DECENTRALISED EDUCATION	25
9.	FREE SPEECH	28
10.	FREEDOM FROM SURVEILLANCE	30

P O L I C Y O N E

# FREEDOM FROM COVID ALARMISM

# FREEDOM FROM COVID ALARMISM

COVID is a real problem, but the government's response is being driven by fear that is out of proportion to the actual risk. The policy of "zero COVID" was absurd, impossible, and hugely costly. The only sustainable solution is that Australia will need to learn how to live with COVID just as we live with the flu and other viruses. Ongoing government restrictions have created massive harms in terms of personal freedom, children's education, struggling businesses & community groups, government debt, lost personal connections, loss of privacy, deteriorating health & happiness, mental health issues, and lives lost. This cannot continue. Australia needs some real leadership to show a clear path out of the current mess.

## IMMEDIATE CHANGES

- **Open the schools, and keep them open.** School closures have created far more harm than benefit, and schools should be reopened immediately.
- **Never lockdown again.** Lockdowns created more harm than benefit and should never have been introduced. Don't think lockdowns are behind us simply because we are now in the warmer months. Parts of the Northern Hemisphere are locking down again now. We need the national strength to say: never again.
- **Peaceful protests must be allowed.** The right to protest is fundamental to a free society, and the police should work with protest organisers to ensure safe and peaceful events are able to go ahead.
- **Vaccines should be available and voluntary.** Mandatory vaccinations and domestic vaccine passports are incompatible with a free society and should never be tolerated. Private property owners should be able to set conditions of entry, but they should not be encouraged to discriminate by regulatory favours or government programs. Real vaccination choice also means open access to vaccines, free from unnecessary regulatory burdens.
- **End the mask mandate.** The use of some types of masks can be helpful in some circumstances, but they should not be forced on people by the government. Businesses should be allowed to set their own mask rules on their own property, but all remaining government mask rules should be removed, so that we return to the pre-COVID situation.
- **Ensure Australians can get home.** The government should never abandon Australians caught overseas who want to return home.

## **REAL FREEDOM DAY**

After almost two years it is long past time for Australia to set a date for returning to the “old normal” with no COVID restrictions. This “Freedom Day” should be before Christmas this year, and we have suggested aiming for the 4th of December, which is the first weekend of summer. Setting a date will give people time to get vaccinated if they choose, make their own preparations, and provide hope that we will soon be able to live in a free country again.

- **Remove the border closures & travel restrictions.** After Freedom Day there should be no restrictions on the movement between states, and no limits or quarantine requirements for international travel.
- **Remove contact tracing and QR codes.** The right to privacy is crucial in a free society and needs to be returned to the people as soon as possible.
- **Remove social distancing & mandatory self-isolation.** Private businesses and households are free to maintain their own rules, but all the government’s COVID regulations should be removed.
- **Investigation of Australia’s COVID response.** Once Australia has returned to “old normal” we should have a Royal Commission into our COVID response, including politicians, senior public servants and police.
- **End the “emergency powers”.** Government has operated with emergency powers for too long already. Those powers should not be renewed, and they should not be replaced by imitation legislation that gives similar powers.



P O L I C Y T W O

# RECALL ELECTIONS

# RECALL ELECTIONS

The Liberal Democrats believe government should be a servant, not a master. The response to COVID has demonstrated just how unaccountable governments can become between elections.

The basic rights we thought we enjoyed have not been the norm across human history and were hard-fought to establish. We've benefited so much from those freedoms that many people were taken off guard when our governments bulldozed over them. We will make sure governments can never do this to you again.

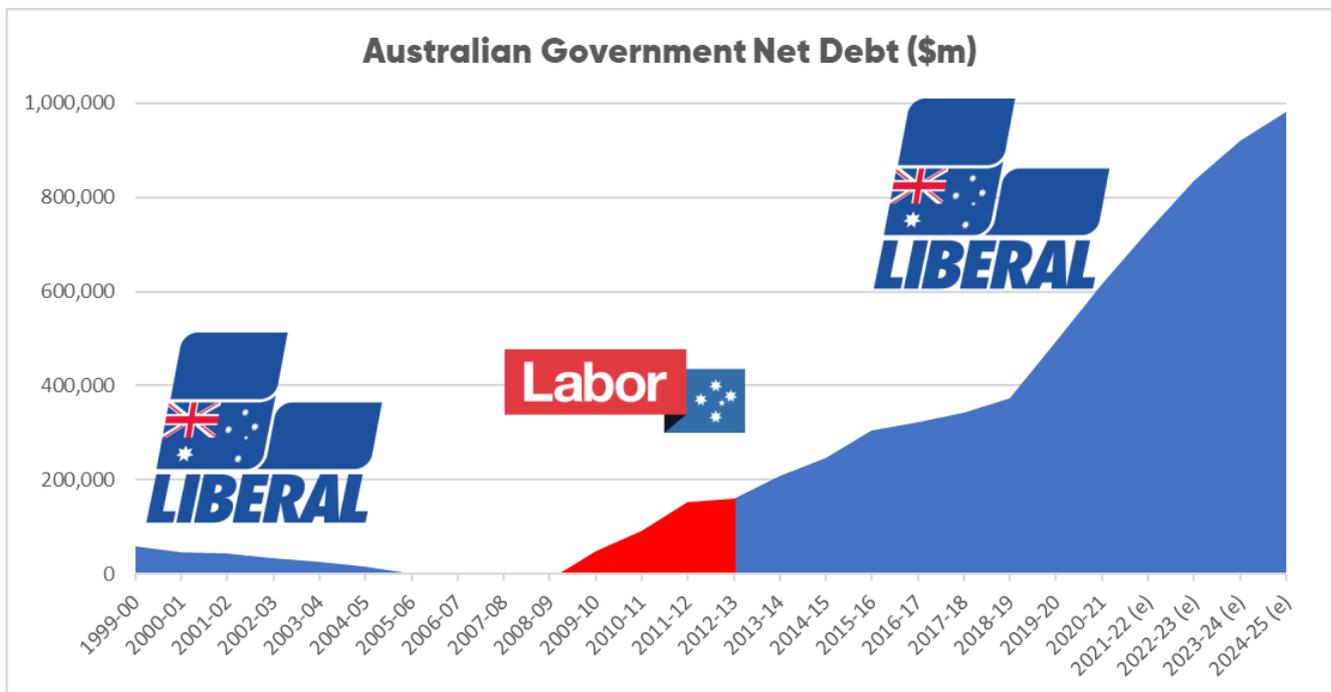
- **Make recall elections available.** Citizens must have the right to recall power-mad politicians. A petition signed by a set percentage of any given electorate should trigger a by-election, and a petition of a set percentage of the whole electoral roll should trigger a full election. Recall elections are rare in jurisdictions that permit them, but the simple fact that they are an option restrains politicians.
- **Enable a citizens' veto of any legislation.** Citizens should also have the right to act as an effective third house of parliament, with the power to recall any legislation. A petition signed by a set percentage of the electoral roll to repeal any legislation should trigger a binding public vote on that legislation.
- **Make voting voluntary.** Voting should be a right, not an obligation. Australia is one of the few democracies in which government compels people to vote in elections, and this forces political parties to pander to those who are apathetic or uninformed. Voluntary voting would empower informed voters and enable real leadership to emerge.



P O L I C Y T H R E E

# DEBT & DEFICIT

# DEBT & DEFICIT



Future taxpayers are subsidising current waste. The major parties just ignore the debt and hope the citizens don't think about it.

In 2007 the federal government had zero net debt and a robust economy. After six prime ministers and zero economic reform (but much deform), **we are now on track for over one trillion dollars in debt in the coming years.** Stimulus spending is a fool's errand – a cowardly leader's quick fix which kicks the can down the road and magnifies pain. Governments that can't balance their budgets turn to inflation to hide the problem, but this only makes it worse.

Debt and inflation imperceptibly bogs a nation down. Our current trajectory means that by 2030 the Commonwealth will pay \$65 billion a year in interest. Australia will stagnate unless we show real leadership by taking strong action. Before COVID, around one in eight nations were forced to spend more on debt repayment than social services. That's crippling, and it's our future unless we bring back fiscal responsibility.

Debt needs to be repaid and it's a foul dereliction of duty to pass it on to the next generation. Future taxpayers are subsidising current waste. The major parties just ignore the debt and hope the citizens don't think about it.

# DEBT & DEFICIT

- **Cut 10% to all federal departments (besides Defence).** There is waste and luxury in every department, and it will be eliminated if the departments are given the right incentives. A one-off immediate 10% cut to all federal departments must be achieved.
- **Cut a further 1% per year to all federal departments (besides Defence).** This should be pursued each year until net debt is entirely eliminated.
- **Abolish duplicate departments.** The federal government does not run any hospitals or schools, yet still runs bloated Departments of Health and Education, staffed with bureaucrats. State-run services should be left to the states.
- **Defund the ABC & SBS.** Let the ABC & SBS pay their own way through advertising, subscriptions and donations from their adoring fans.
- **Abolish all nanny state advertising.** The role of government should be to protect people's liberty, not mould their behaviour at their own cost.
- **Abolish subsidies for renewable energy.** Renewable energy companies had over a decade of taxpayer funds in an effort to deliver low cost energy – it's time for them to compete in the free market.
- **Remove the pointless tax/welfare churn.** The current system (state and federal) involves hundreds of billions of churn where money is taxed from middle-class families and then given back to the exact same families as direct and indirect handouts. This sort of churn is inefficient, immoral, and a drain on growth and prosperity. Middle-class welfare should be abolished, and the middle-class should instead receive significant tax cuts, so that they can control their own money.
- **Reduce politicians pay by 10%.** Wasteful decisions by irresponsible politicians have created our debt problem, and politicians should share the pain in helping to pay down that debt.
- **Abolish taxpayer funding of political parties.** This is a scheme created for major parties, by major parties. It not only contributes to debt, it also gives incumbent politicians an unfair advantage and entrenches the status quo.



P O L I C Y F O U R

# LOW, FLAT TAXES

# LOW, FLAT TAXES

Every few years on federal budget night, we are told with much fanfare, income tax cuts are on the way! Since the 1980s these meagre tax cuts have done little more than reign in bracket creep (if that). The most powerful tax cuts are those that are so significant they shift people's behaviour towards entrepreneurialism. Aside from reducing the debt itself, our Debt and Deficit policy will greatly reduce the size of government, allowing for substantial tax cuts.

## LOW, FLAT INCOME TAX

- **A \$40,000 tax free threshold, indexed to end bracket creep.**
- **A flat 20% income tax above \$40,000.**

Our current tax laws are so large and complicated that literally nobody understands (or has even read) all the rules. A low flat income tax will simplify our tax system, making it more equitable, efficient, and transparent. Our tax policy will reduce bureaucratic and compliance costs, reduce complicated tax minimisation and evasion schemes, encourage more investment and more efficient labour supply,

By introducing a high tax-free threshold we will ensure that no low-income worker is required to pay income tax, and we will remove the high effective marginal tax rates which trap some people in a cycle of poverty. By indexing tax brackets we will end the dishonest rort that is bracket creep, where the government quietly increases tax by billions of dollars every year as inflation moves people into higher tax brackets.

## LOW, FLAT COMPANY TAX

- **A flat company taxation rate of 20% on profit.**
- **Remove company tax on reinvested profits.**

The tax cut that brings about the greatest increase in prosperity is a tax cut on business... but it is also the least politically popular. Lower company tax rates would both encourage global firms to base their operations in Australia and enable greater growth of existing local businesses, which will lead to more jobs and higher wages.

Despite its benign-sounding name, company tax is paid by regular people, with most of the cost being passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices or workers in the form of lower wages. A lower company tax would lead to higher wages, lower prices, and stronger economic growth.

By removing company tax on reinvested profits, Australian businesses will have a strong incentive to invest in new capital, which leads directly to higher wages and more jobs. These policies represent the most "pro-worker" policies of any political party in Australia because it ensures more people have jobs and that productivity and wages increase into the future.

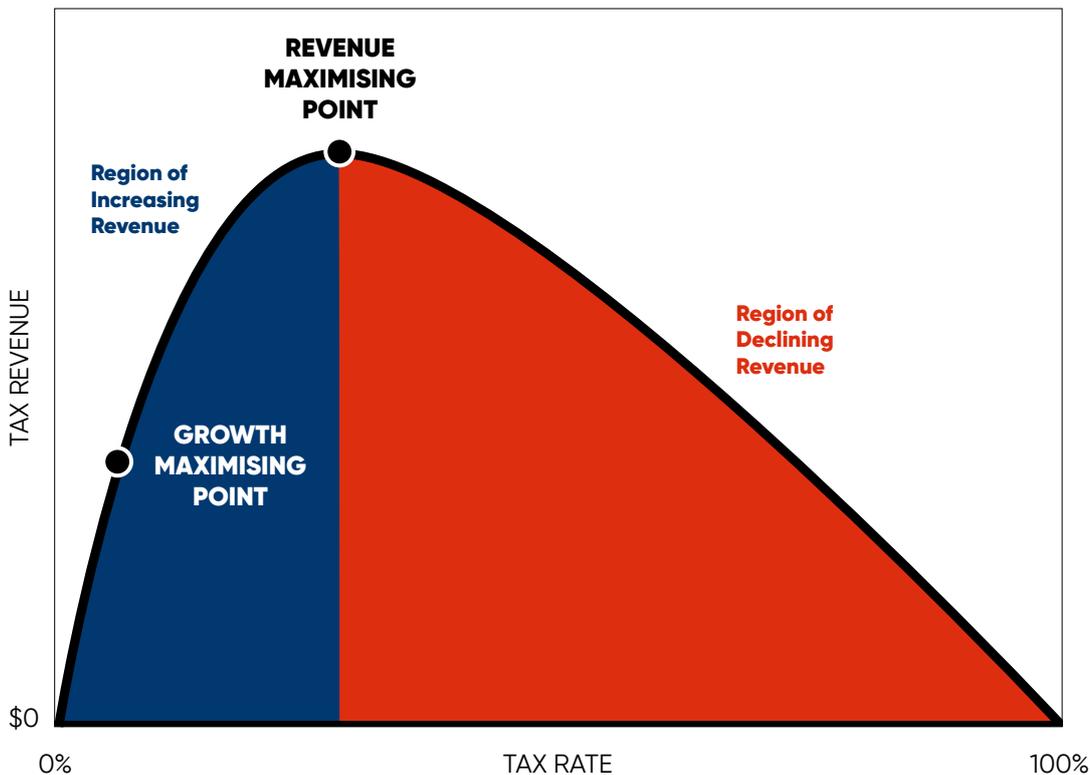
# LOW, FLAT TAXES

The truth of tax cuts is that while they decrease the tax rate (leading to less revenue), they actually increase the tax base (leading to more revenue), and in some instances this can actually result in a net increase in tax revenue. This concept is explained by the Laffer curve, which shows the relationship between tax rates (x-axis) and tax revenue (y-axis). As tax rates increase there is initially an increase in revenue, but if tax rates get too high, then they become counterproductive and they both hurt the economy and also raise less revenue for the government.

Based on dynamic tax modelling, the Liberal Democrats believe that Australian income taxes are currently above the "Laffer Maximum" and need to be slashed to a point well below that maximum.

[See the costings for our tax policy here.](#)

## THE LAFFER CURVE



P O L I C Y F I V E

# **VOLUNTARY SUPERANNUATION**

Superannuation has been endlessly fiddled with for three decades. Constant rule changes make it the most complex part of personal finance.

When compulsory superannuation was introduced, we were told it would gradually result in the government spending significantly less on the aged pension. This hasn't been the case, and today the superannuation system is actually a net cost to the budget. Even worse, Australians are forced to pay \$36 billion in superannuation fees alone, which is inflated by the lack of real competition, which itself can only be fixed by making the superannuation system voluntary.

The reality is that different people have different savings needs based on their circumstances, and for many people it can be optimal to save a different amount, or save differently, or save at different times than currently mandated. Low-income people are particularly harmed, as they are forced to save when their incomes are low just so that they can spend that money later when their incomes are relatively higher. Middle-income people also don't benefit from the current system as it involves a large drop in their working life income for only a small change in their retirement income. While most people lose out from the system, the main winners are the big banks and big unions, who are able to control trillions of dollars of our money while taking the general public for granted.

Compulsory superannuation also heavily contributes to the “woke capitalism” phenomenon, by putting large chunks of Australia's investment sector into the hands of a few industry-controlled super funds by default. Ethical investment charters have forced prospective start-ups to adhere to diversity and gender quotas, emissions targets etc. to secure investment due to this distorted market. We don't support additional regulation of these funds but believe their existing market power is artificial and should be tested under more competitive and voluntary conditions.

- **Make superannuation voluntary.** Employees should be given option of taking their entire income as PAYG income and opting out of superannuation contributions. Most employees will choose to continue building their retirement nest-egg through superannuation, but others will invest (creating more jobs and growing the economy) or spend it in other ways. The Liberal Democrats are pro-choice when it comes to superannuation.
- **No more increases to default superannuation rates.** We reject the increase from 10% to 12% as a dead-weight on business and employees, as well as the associated personal and compliance costs with constant changes.
- **Simplify the superannuation industry.** Self-managed superannuation funds (SMSFs) are notoriously complex, and there are too many barriers for new super funds to enter the market. We support the simplification of superannuation regulation, especially for SMSFs, which will give people more control over their own investment decisions and financial future.



P O L I C Y   S I X

# SMALL BUSINESS

# P O L I C Y S I X

## SMALL BUSINESS



The major parties have lost touch with the needs of Australian entrepreneurs and small business owners. They are happy to hinder growth with red tape and unfair restrictions on new innovations.

Entrepreneurs must have freedom to flourish. Many new migrants with a limited knowledge of the English language get into business, and in many cases that will be because they simply aren't aware of what is and what isn't permitted – they just *do*.

We have the benefit of having centuries of history to see what works. With very few exceptions, when a nation has embraced a low-touch regulatory framework, the citizens flourish and the nation becomes strong.

In 2017 the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) published a paper entitled *Reducing Red Tape in Australia*. The IPA found:

- Red tape costs the Australian economy \$176 billion, 11 per cent of GDP, each year in foregone economic output.
- **Between 2013 and 2017 the Liberal government added 107,885 pages of regulation!**



Big business can cope with a regulatory burden, but it is often crippling for new and small businesses. The IPA found the share of national income accruing to family-run and small businesses had declined from 26% in 1960 to just 9% in 2019.

# P O L I C Y S I X

## SMALL BUSINESS

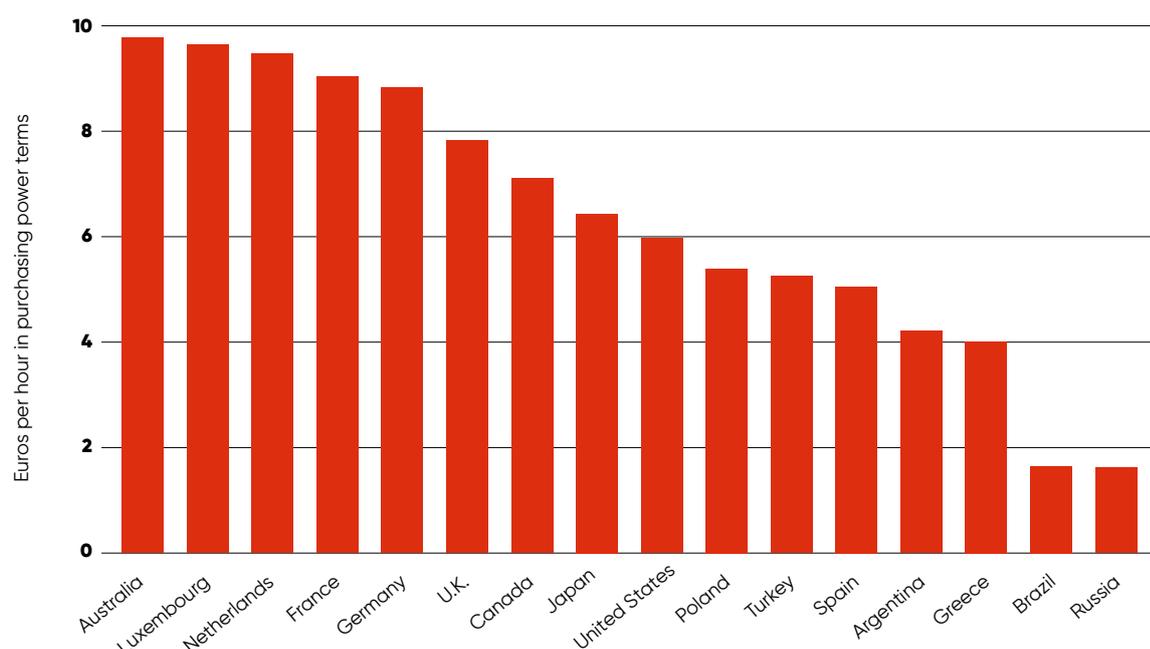
- **One in, two out.** For every one new regulation issued, at least two prior regulations must be identified for elimination. This policy was effectively introduced in the United States in 2017.
- **Remove retail trading hour restrictions.** Businesses should be able to determine their own opening hours without government interference.
- **Freeze and decentralise the minimum wage.** The minimum wage is effectively a ban on employment for low-skill and entry-level workers, and directly causes unemployment. Based on analysis from Dr Andrew Leigh (now a Labor MP) the minimum wage is denying hundreds of thousands of people the chance to get a start in the workplace and the dignity that comes from having a job. Forbidding somebody from taking an \$18/hr job and then giving them even less in welfare to do nothing is nonsensical. The most effective and efficient way to help low-income people is to ensure they aren't caught in the income tax system, and to drive productivity growth so that wages increase sustainably.

Australia currently has the highest minimum wage in the world, and this is particularly damaging for low skilled workers and small businesses. When minimum wages make unskilled labour too expensive, larger businesses can afford to replace workers with machines, while small businesses just have to do without. State governments should be given the power to set their own minimum wages, allowing competition between them to find a more appropriate rate.

Entrepreneurs  
must have  
freedom to  
flourish.

### Which country has the highest minimum wage?

Comparison data from the Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut



P O L I C Y S I X

# SMALL BUSINESS



- **Relax occupational licensing and certification.** Overzealous licensing requirements stifle the entrepreneurial spirit and impose costs on small businesses. Auctioneers, bar staff, casino workers, hairdressers etc. should not require licensing to operate.
- **Cut green tape.** Environmental regulations are out of control and look set to worsen with insane “net-zero emissions” targets. These regulations not only directly harm those in the resources and energy sectors, they also drive up electricity costs for all small businesses. The Renewable Energy Target should be abolished, and all associated regulations scrapped.
- **Constrain the excess of government agencies.** Agencies like the ATO and ASIC have become bloated, unaccountable and a major threat to small businesses. We believe their powers should be strictly limited.
- **Make it easier to start a business.** Start-up firms must be allowed to issue shares in lieu of income if agreed to by both parties. Allow family micro-businesses the leeway to opt-out of most regulations until they've had the opportunity to establish themselves in the marketplace. This should be associated with clear signage so that consumers can make an informed decision.
- **Reform employment law.** We'd make it easy and straightforward for small businesses to employ people under flexible agreements that work for employer & employee, and enable people to be safely terminated for misconduct or non-performance.

For every one new regulation issued, at least two prior regulations must be identified for elimination.

# P O L I C Y S I X

# SMALL BUSINESS

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

One of the most over-regulated sectors of the economy is financial services - home loans, insurance, personal investment, superannuation etc.

The orthodox view is that the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008 was caused by a lack of regulation. That is false. The GFC was the result of over-regulation that forced banks to approve home loans for borrowers who did not meet traditional banking standards. This, coupled with government guarantees and bailouts caused a moral hazard.

Despite the Liberal Party claiming to be the party of deregulation, we have seen an ever-increasing rise in financial regulations. This does very little good for consumers, but makes the process cumbersome and confusing, and adds cost and complexity to businesses providing these services.

### THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS SUPPORT:

- **Consumers having the power to opt in or opt out of regulatory regimes.** In many cases unregulated products will offer better value and quality as a trade-off for less protection. That risk assessment is one for individuals to make, not bureaucrats.
- **Removal of the implicit government guarantee of financial institutions.** If a bank or insurance company collapses, the government should not use taxpayer funds to bail out bad management. Without a government guarantee, consumers will need to be prudent about who to invest in or borrow from. The existing government guarantees against failure have made our financial institutions less innovative.
- **Classifying cryptocurrency as a currency.** Traders of traditional currencies do not have to pay capital gains tax (CGT) if the value of their holdings increases compared to the Australian Dollar, but as cryptocurrency is classified as an asset its traders are unfairly discriminated against.

P O L I C Y S E V E N

# CHEAP & RELIABLE ENERGY

# CHEAP & RELIABLE ENERGY

Australia is a resource-rich country that once enjoyed cheap and reliable energy. This natural advantage was a bedrock of Australia's economy, but today we are saddled with some of the highest prices in the world.

High electricity prices not only increase the basic cost of living for households, they also increase costs for businesses and stifle economic growth.

The major causes of these runaway prices are clear – overregulation, climate alarmist ideology, irrational prohibition of some energy sources and low business confidence in investment as a result. These problems seem set to get even worse with new “net-zero emissions” targets and associated regulations.

- **Free market energy.** Government funding, ownership and regulation of energy sources only distort the market and reduce business confidence. All sources of energy should compete in the market on their own merits of reliability and cost.
- **Certainty for the energy industry.** The risk of reckless future regulations is preventing investment in new energy production. Government should be required to pay regulatory compensation in cases where new regulation directly harms the value of private property.
- **No net-zero emissions target.** This target is an absurd extension of climate alarmist ideology that will have grave effects on living standards for all Australians if it is pursued.
- **Abolish the renewable energy target (RET).** The RET is a significant contributor to Australia's runaway electricity prices. It has created a muddled and complex regulatory framework and taken away the incentive for investment into cheaper energy sources.

High electricity prices not only increase the basic cost of living for households, they also increase costs for businesses and stifle economic growth.



## NUCLEAR

Nuclear energy is the cleanest, safest and most reliable means of making grid-scale electricity. It is also one of the lowest emitters of carbon dioxide, generates significantly less waste than solar energy, and has comparatively tiny land requirements.

Recently Australia signed a historic agreement with the United States and United Kingdom that will see us acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. We support that agreement, but nuclear-powered submarines need nuclear energy which requires uranium. The good news is that Australia is already the world's third largest uranium miner, with twice the proven uranium reserves of any other nation.

Nuclear energy is the cleanest, safest and most reliable means of making grid-scale electricity.

Today there are 440 operating nuclear power-plants in the world and another 164 either being built or planned. Over 70% of French electricity is generated by nuclear energy and over a dozen other nations generate more than 20% of their electricity from nuclear energy.

Australia has all the ingredients to be a world leader in nuclear energy. There have been three government inquiries in recent years that recommended a nuclear energy industry, but cowardly politicians lack the will to start.

- **Repeal the blanket ban on nuclear energy in Australia.** This ban is an anachronistic relic that only serves to stifle innovation and drive up electricity costs. Australia should license modern nuclear power plants based on international best practice.
- **Lift state government bans on uranium mining.** Uranium is a valuable resource that is in abundance in Australia. Our economy should be benefiting from this natural advantage
- **Make regulations fair and consistent.** Nuclear energy should be given equal treatment with other low carbon technologies, and radiation in the nuclear energy sector should not be regulated more harshly than radiation in other sectors.
- **Safe waste storage industry.** Owners of nuclear power plants are responsible for the cost of recycling, storing and disposing of waste as necessary. This creates opportunities for new industries. With large endowments of geologically stable land, and a strong track record in safety, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory could become world leaders in the field of safe storage of nuclear waste.

P O L I C Y E I G H T

# DECENTRALISED EDUCATION

# DECENTRALISED EDUCATION

Education is a lifelong process of discovery and growth, and is the responsibility of individuals, families and employers. Education is far too important to be relinquished to governments and central planners with their cookie-cutter moulds. The Liberal Democrats want to empower people to learn and grow in ways that benefit each person's unique talents, interests and ambitions.

Governments claim they are investing in education by simply shovelling more money into their own failed institutions and hoping that somehow this time it will be different. While education spending has skyrocketed over the past 50 years, there is little to show for it other than bloated institutions that fail to innovate and fail to serve their students' needs, while pushing their own narrow agendas. True educational reform means taking power away from bureaucracies and decentralising decision making, with decisions being made as close as possible to the individual learner. Schools, childcare centres and higher education institutions should compete for students by offering a better product, and new alternative institutions should be allowed to innovate and compete as well.

The Liberal Democrats want to empower people to learn and grow in ways that benefit each person's unique talents, interests and ambitions.

- **Allow schools to opt out of the National Curriculum.** Instead of an endless political battle over who gets to be the gatekeepers of knowledge, curriculum decisions should be devolved as close as possible to the individual level. Some schools would continue to use it, but others would opt out. More curriculum options mean more choice and better matching to individual needs. Parents would be able to choose a school that matched the needs of their children.
- **Abolish centralised testing such as NAPLAN.** A single 'measure' of learning is a ridiculous notion, and it causes real, useful learning to suffer, as teachers teach to the test. Many teachers will say it is an impediment to quality education.
- **Fund students not institutions.** At every level, any government funding should go to the student through an education 'voucher'. If an educational institution or childcare centre is offering a valuable service they have nothing to worry about, as people will use their education voucher there willingly.
- **Allow new and innovative business models.** Currently there are three major cartels – the childcare industry, the school industry and the university industry. Each of these are protected from competition by a raft of regulations that make it virtually impossible to start up and compete by using any different or innovative model. We want to see a market process where entrepreneurs can innovate and see what works.

# DECENTRALISED EDUCATION

- **Allow home education co-ops.** There has been a substantial increase in home education as parents are uniquely positioned to cater to the unique needs and strengths of their children. Parents should be able to start co-ops and micro schools in their homes without being forced to comply with all the regulatory burdens placed on larger institutions.
- **University reform.** The current university system has too little competition, too much power, and not enough free speech. Senior academics often act as the "high priests" for big-spending politicians, being paid handsomely by the government to argue for ever-more government power. Australia should retain a HECS-style delayed payment system to ensure that everybody can always access university, but there is no good reason that non-university students should be forced to subsidise the choices of (relatively more wealthy) university students. There should be less regulation on setting up new universities, and universities should have to compete in terms of price and quality to attract students.





P O L I C Y N I N E

# FREE SPEECH

# FREE SPEECH

Freedom of speech is fundamental in a democratic society. The free exchange of ideas and opinions allows these ideas and opinions to be tested, with the more robust being accepted. Speech that is agreeable and popular is protected by default. The most important function of free speech is to protect unpopular speech.

Continued government attacks on free speech because it is "offensive" or "hate speech" simply shrink the window of allowable opinion and set a precedent for further, even more puritanical censorship. This is awful for democracy and the pursuit of a free society – it harms both the people being censored and those people who are denied the right to hear forbidden words.

- **A free speech constitutional amendment.** Free speech is too important to be left to the whim of politicians. The Liberal Democrats would campaign to add the following to the Australian Constitution: "Parliament shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."
- **Abolish Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, and all similar legislation.** Legislation such as 18C makes it unlawful to "offend, insult or humiliate", and hauls those who fall foul of it up before secret kangaroo courts, headed by bureaucrats at the Australian Human Rights Commission. It is a gross affront to free speech and the idea of a fair trial.
- **Stop internet censorship.** A decade and a half ago the consensus in the West was that it was necessary to censor radical propaganda, but this has led to an internet filter consisting of thousands of blocked websites for a wide range of reasons. Some of these may be well intentioned, but putting this power in the hands of government can rapidly turn into the banning of anything that does not suit their political agenda.
- **Encourage a free and open internet.** Much of the increasingly political censorship imposed by tech companies is done in fear of further regulation being targeted at them to tackle "misinformation" or "fake news". This is particularly true in Australia where platforms and page owners can be held liable for what is posted by other users. A clear framework of no internet censorship by the government would take away much of the incentive for tech companies to censor their own content.

Freedom of speech is fundamental in a democratic society.



P O L I C Y T E N

# FREEDOM FROM SURVEILLANCE

# FREEDOM FROM SURVEILLANCE

Terrorism and criminal organisations are real problems. However, the government's response to indiscriminately spy on Australians is disproportionate to the risk. Likewise, the government's mass surveillance laws enable warrantless access to data, grant the government access to private organisations' networks, and enable government to take over Australians' online accounts.

Government mass surveillance has steadily grown, especially after 9/11. Mass surveillance laws aren't justified, are often rushed through parliament without scrutiny, and treat Australians as guilty without evidence. These laws concentrate too much power in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats.



- **No digital identity laws.** Australians should be free to buy and sell and contract with each other, and free to move around and communicate with each other, without having to "show their papers" and without intrusive governments tracking their every move.
- **Abolish mass surveillance laws.** Mass surveillance laws are an unnecessary invasion of privacy and have expanded excessively over recent decades. Whenever people can be made to be fearful, the government grabs even more power and money, which they never voluntarily relinquish.
- **Stop government hacking and seizure.** The government can add, copy, delete or alter data on Australians' devices, take over online accounts, and gain access to private networks. These powers are unnecessary and enable the government to plant evidence on Australians.

# FREEDOM FROM SURVEILLANCE

- **Devolution of surveillance laws to states and territories.** After 9/11, surveillance laws were federalised, granting the federal government too much power over Australians. A return to states and territories handling surveillance laws distributes and dilutes power, ensuring Australians aren't indiscriminately targeted.
- **Stop the collection of metadata.** Despite government promises, metadata collection has expanded to local councils. The collection of metadata treats Australians as guilty without having committed a crime.
- **Require warrants for targeted surveillance of individual Australians.** Surveillance must only occur after a warrant has been approved for specific individuals. The judicial system is an important bulwark against government overreach.
- **No cash bans.** Cash bans enable government surveillance by forcing Australians to pay for goods and services with traceable bank-issued payment methods (e.g., debit cards). To protect privacy, Australians must be able to trade with each other without government surveillance.
- **Stop attacks on encryption.** The government continually attempts to undermine encryption through laws that weaken security and promotes backdoors. Australians must be able to talk to each other without surveillance
- **Focus government on improving its own cyber security.** The government regularly fails its own cyber security audits. Improvement is required to avoid foreign governments compromising government systems. The effort the government spends spying on Australians is better spent protecting Australians.
- **Free Assange.** Julian Assange alerted the world to the dangerous power of the State in the age of the internet. We will advocate for his immediate release and repatriation.

Mass surveillance laws concentrate too much power in the hands of government.





**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
ON THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS,  
PLEASE VISIT:**

**[LibDems.org.au](http://LibDems.org.au)**

