



**SUBMISSION TO THE FEDERAL
ELECTION REVIEW 2019 FROM LEAN
MEMBERS**

INTRODUCTION

The LEAN National Executive sought feedback from our members on their frontline experience of the federal election campaign. We asked them to identify issues and to make suggestions for future election campaigns not only regarding environment but more broadly. We had an overwhelming response receiving approximately **60 submissions** and members were appreciative of the opportunity to share their views and experience. **The following document summarises the reflections and recommendations made by our passionate members.**

The LEAN National Executive undertook this process for a number of reasons. LEAN believes that hearing directly from the membership is vital if we want to grow and succeed as a party; often the voice of the membership is not clearly heard or listened to. Additionally, while this process allowed people a chance to share their insights and experiences, it also helped them to process their grief, anger and disappointment. And perhaps most importantly, the lived experience of volunteers in the various electorates far away from the cameras and media and echo chambers of people engaged in politics gives a clearer indication of what worked and what didn't.

Obvious themes emerged which included Labor's messaging, the prevaricating on Adani, franking credits, huge amounts of money spent on campaigns, fake news and the disengagement of voters. There are many nuances within the many themes but the crux of all the issues was Labor's messaging and the ability to cut through the crowded market of social and mainstream media and connect with voters and overcome self-interest.

Our members reiterated that they were proud of the strong progressive, bold and positive agenda Labor presented and the tireless work of Bill and his team to present a united front. They emphatically want Labor to continue on this track of progressive reform and unity but emphasised the need to strategise around the messaging.

MESSAGING/STORYTELLING

Messaging was the most repeated and emphasized reason given by LEAN member as to why Labor lost the election. It was also the area in which LEAN members felt Labor could have the most direct control and needed the most focus for the future. They felt we had many many good and great policies but our narrative around them was problematic. Creating a narrative that connects with voters was identified as the most important to win an election.

Humans are facing a tsunami of change and we as a species are not wired for rapid change nor do we like change. People want simple solutions to complex

problems and to be reassured that the government will look after them and make their lives better or at least not worse. So the key is the messages we give. Labor needs to become expert storytellers who translate good policy into an accessible outcome. How we frame reform and policies and the language we use needs to connect to all from the engaged to the unengaged voter.

Of course, achieving this is not easy They need to be simple, short and repetitive. And we need to limit the number of messages we use.

LEAN members identified many aspects to messaging that need to be considered.

- Timing of messaging - Labor needs to begin the long-term game now. Look ahead to how we embed our story into the societal consciousness over the next few years not just a year out from an election.
- Simplify message to key 3-5 ones and keep using them over and over.
- Unfortunately it seems that three and four word slogans work
- Negative campaigning works - simplify the attack and keep repeating.
- Structure policy messaging to withstand the current media/social media circumstances and biases.
- Keep fantastic progressive policies just simplify how they are expressed and don't try to sell them all in one hit.
- Localise the messaging.
- Need to be about jobs jobs and opportunity- articulate what jobs and make them concrete for the voter.
- Speak to how our policies will make their lives better.
- In the electorates we didn't win, find out why the messaging didn't work there.
- Limit our exposure a degree - save some big reform announcements until government.

"Create new messages that are visionary ---- clearly-articulated futures that provide a narrative of where we wish to go (economic prosperity, healthy planet, peaceful societies)".

"Sadly I think Labor's policy and advertising for 2022 will need to be crafted to withstand—to beat—an environment of lies and fear campaigns".

"...confetti of promises, without the space to explain them, and with not enough of a strong unifying message".

FEAR/SELF-INTEREST

The election highlighted that people are very susceptible to fear campaigns and lies when under threat. Self-interest often wins.

During the election the LNP fear campaign about electric vehicles or franking credits drowned out the message. The inability to prevent fake news online eg a death tax makes dealing with this more difficult.

So how Labor structures policy and messaging considering how people respond to fear needs to be a priority, especially for the communities facing rapid and massive change and economic insecurity.

"The potential hip pocket hit was easier to understand than our policies".

"We forgot Maslow's Hierarchy of needs by appearing to threaten the needs of rural voters e.g. employment, family, food, shelter, property, clothing, stability".

VOTER BEHAVIOUR/DISENGAGEMENT

There are many factors to consider about how voters behave such as only tuning into political campaigns in the last few weeks and how repetitive lies do influence people. But a key one is that Labor is competing for attention in a highly noisy and overpopulated space - it is not merely the other political party messaging and media and the echo chambers of social media - but with the rise of streaming, the ability for the voter to tune out everything except what they want eg bingeing on Game of Thrones or podcasts.

"Most voters make up their minds on passing impressions and emotional reactions and have little time to rethink issues".

"Don't decide their vote until they must. Therefore good policy is not always a factor in their choice.

FRANKING CREDITS

This particular policy gained much traction with the older generation about their real or perceived loss. Although Labor operated transparently and it was a just policy, Labor did not give a clear narrative to explain this nor why it was needed. It left the party open to much fear mongering. Members resoundingly felt this undermined the bigger Labor campaign. Although not ideal, there is validity in considering only introducing big tax reform after Labor forms government or consider grandfathering or capping the amount of the policy.

"Franking credit - this was a reform for the budget once in government".

“The taxes scare seemed to work a lot more than Environment...which although people SAY is important, isn’t so when weighed against other issues”.

MEDIA/POLLING/FAKE NEWS

It is clear that the rules of how the media operates, the accuracy of polling methods and the lack of legislative requirements for online publishers and advertisers such as FB and Twitter mean Labor has to rethink our media strategy. There are obvious legislative need for truth in election advertising both print, online and broadcast with serious penalties for not complying.

In the meantime, Labor needs to create long term strategy working with the current rules of engagement. It may involve employing strategists for three year periods or for interim periods but to change the narrative it requires careful ongoing messaging not just in the year prior to the election. This is an area of great importance with a difficulty factor of 10.

CLIVE PALMER’S \$60 MILLION

People wrote off Clive’s campaign as stupid and ridiculous but in the electorates that are facing the most change or most economic uncertainty, it worked. These electorates and their preferences were key to forming government. It was a terrifying glimpse of the power of big money to change votes with unengaged and fearful voters.

“The Clive effect was the final straw in Qld”.

ADANI/REAL TANGIBLE ALTERNATIVE JOBS

This issue was always going to be a tricky and complex one. Many LEAN members felt that Labor’s fence sitting was problematic while others felt that we should have either committed to the review or took a stand against the mine. However the mix of views and the election loss highlights the challenge ahead for Labor addressing climate change and seeking other economic opportunities for communities as we move to zero emissions by 2050.

Labor needs to plan for decent proper union jobs in new industries for these areas and articulate this new future. Addressing climate change has to be about the economic possibilities and prosperity not the moral argument. The new jobs need to be led and initiated by clever government policy and investment. Labor also needs to communicate in a straightforward manner.

This applies to other areas such as the Hunter Valley. This is the incredibly difficult and important work that Labor needs to get right. Otherwise forming government will not be possible. This is where unions and Labor have to work

together even more. Labor needs to listen to the workers. Find common ground. Bridge the divide. Build a sustainable industry. Such ideas as the Jobs Guarantee for youth and older workers in addition to actual transition plans need to be explored. This requires bold strong policy. Look to national and international examples such as Germany and Victoria.

"We did not make it clear what new kinds of jobs might be created".

"Job security and the cost of living versus voters declining ability to keep up with it were issues raised time and time again".

"Rural and regional electorates specifically queried what Labor means by "just transition"; where exactly the jobs and what the incomes will be and how to encourage a third-generation miner on \$150k to seriously accept that there are alternatives".

BILL SHORTEN

Despite our electoral system not being presidential, in reality the leader of a party very much influences the public's decision to vote. Many people did not trust or like our Leader. It is hard to pinpoint why but no doubt the relentless attacks in the biased media over many years had some effect.

Bill Shorten was an excellent leader with the ability to lead and empower a team and negotiate bold reform. In current media circumstances, it is hard to cut through.

LEAN would like noted how respectful Bill Shorten was of its efforts. He and his office treated LEAN and its members as important stakeholders, for which we are grateful.

COSTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE INACTION

This is a topic in which storytelling will be key. People fear the costs associated with addressing change but we need to tell the story of how the cost of not protecting their homes from sea level rise or heat islands in cities. **We also need to articulate clearly the cost of acting now vs the cost of climate change inaction.** Even if they are ball park figures - we need to be clear and not obfuscate.

The party needs to tell the story of how Labor will create jobs and economic prosperity while reducing emissions and how Labor will help people adapt to the changes coming.

"Maybe the economics of climate inaction could play a role in the next campaign".

ATTACK BACK

Labor members were proud of the party's positive campaign. However, they also acknowledged fear is powerful. **They felt Labor needed to attack more and hold the conservatives and media to account.** Further to that, there was a feeling that in the future Labor needs to boldly campaign against the lies and the toxicity and the hypocrisy of the LNP and Greens. It is a fine line but long term strategic thinking around this is required to get that balance right.

"Find the biggest pair of boots you can find and start kicking a few backsides".

" We need to have a defence against 'fixing Labor's mess' and their claims they are better economic managers. I suggest "stop Liberal cuts" or something similar. Three word slogans work – refer to "stop the boats", "axe the tax" and "ditch the witch". There is no point in us taking the moral high ground while letting their attacks hit home undefended".

SOCIAL MEDIA

Given the bias of the mainstream media, social media is exceptionally important especially in regional areas. Labor needs to get smarter and more effective. LEAN members highlighted that many of the LNP videos got higher engagement than any Labor produced. It is also a more affordable and ongoing way to spread our message.

"Our videos were not hard-hitting, not factual and did not deliver a message of hope".

FUTURE POLICY - ENVIRONMENT

The LEAN membership believe a strong commitment to action on climate change, renewable energy, conservation, sustainability and just transitions is core business for the Australian Labor Party. It was before the 2019 election. It must remain so following the 2019 election. It is pleasing that president, Wayne Swan, is committed to this.

There was strong support for Labor to continue with this agenda updating targets and policy according to independent scientific advice. However, Labor need to find a way to sell our climate and environment policy in a way that connects to the average voter. This means keeping the messaging simple, local and focus on a key few. Those who are engaged will seek out the details but we need to embed the idea that it is only Labor that can look after workers, the vulnerable and the environment.

Labor took some significant environmental policies to the election, including:

- A climate change action plan
- An energy plan
- A new National Environment Protection Authority
- A new Environment Act
- A plan for electric vehicles
- A plan to restore Commonwealth Marine Parks
- A rivers rejuvenation plan
- A waste management plan
- A home batteries plan
- A fauna protection plan

While our policies were excellent, LEAN members felt Labor did suffer from some own goals:

- Labor was unable to put a price on its climate change action plan. It couldn't say how much it would cost, where the money was coming from or what economic dividend it would deliver or save. It is basic Australian politics - how much, who pays, what does it save. We had no answers.
- Four weeks before polling day, Labor announced its support for a gas pipeline from the Carmichael basin (Beetaloo project) with a \$1.5 billion promise of government funding. It was from the Carmichael basin, the 'home' of Adani; it involved federal funds (when Labor ruled them out for Adani) and the press release proudly announced "Opening up the Beetaloo alone could provide enough gas to supply the domestic market for up to 400 years" thus causing confusion about Labor's support for fossil fuels. A headline like this made a nonsense of our claim to be committed to addressing climate change and was read as such by many climate concerned voters. For LEAN such policy on the run undermined many of our members' faith in the value of their efforts within the party.
- The decision by the Northern Territory State Labor Government on 17 April 2019 to resume fracking following a moratorium, again sent out the wrong message at the wrong time for federal Labor.
- Forests are a crucial concern for those interested in the environment. Labor was seen to be doing very little for forests.
- Concerning the Just Transitions Policy announced in November 2018, Labor confined this to energy workers. There was no reference to forestry workers who will face change. The forestry policy released on 1 May 2019 made no mention of it either, sending another signal that Labor was supporting forestry at the expense of conservation.
- Labor's plan for 50 per cent of new car sales being electric by 2030 was taken from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency's May 2018 report - a report of the current government. Labor was held to account for it. The government wasn't.

Labor's policies were generally well received by the climate change, environment and renewables "industries". This support, however, didn't translate to the voting public.

CONCLUSION

LEAN members were very proud of Labor and its progressive agenda particularly of its environmental policies. But they feel there is a long way to go to deal with conflicting challenges and with the strategic narrative.

LEAN Members still strongly support the Party's current climate action policies and would not support a reduction in our renewable energy goals and emission target.

LEAN Members still strongly support the Party's policy on creating a new Federal Environment Act and the creation of an independent Environment Protection Agency.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review.