

# MAKE PARLIAMENT WORK FOR YOU

The purpose of this case study is to highlight how the people of Indi use the **Parliamentary system** to make our electorate an even better place to live.

The document **showcases practical examples** of Indi communities and their elected MP working together to resolve issues, turning their vision into reality.

From a community-driven campaign in 2013 grew **The Indi Way** – a choice for the future. Indi will continue to thrive as more organisations, groups, communities and individuals gain the confidence to seek their own solutions, make plans and take action.

This case study sets a **benchmark** for how politics is done in Indi - a standard the Indi electorate expects of its elected representatives.

# THE ROLE OF A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



## A Member of Parliament and their office has many roles, including: In Parliament

- Representing the views of people in the electorate.
- Debating and voting on bills (proposed laws).
- Representation on Parliamentary Committees examining important issues.
- Attending Parliamentary meetings and working with other MPs.
- Scrutinising the work of the Government, holding it to account.
- Discussing issues of national and international importance.

## In the electorate

- Coordinating the Indi office - staff, volunteers and administration.
- Meeting with and listening to constituents to stay informed about issues causing concern.
- Representing constituents and speaking up on local, regional and national issues.
- Helping constituents by responding to their concerns.
- Connecting people across the electorate to encourage collective action on an issue.

Since 2013, the Indi electorate has made its voice heard by using a range of Parliamentary tools, including:

 <b>3500</b> Individual contacts with the Indi office per month via emails, letters, phone calls and visits	 <b>2500+</b> Letters to Government Ministers
 <b>15</b> Petitions initiated in Indi	 <b>17</b> Advocacy visits to Parliament House
 <b>3000+</b> Responses to Indi Budget Impact Surveys	 <b>10</b> Ministerial visits hosted by Indi communities

Since 2013, action in Parliament on behalf of the Indi electorate includes:

 <b>478</b> Speeches in Parliament	 <b>10</b> Private Members' Bills
 <b>67</b> Questions without notice (verbal)	 <b>111</b> Questions in writing (with notice)
 <b>34</b> Motions	 <b>8</b> Proposed amendments to Government bills

# YOU HAVE A VOICE - MAKE IT COUNT!

## There are many ways to take action on an issue affecting you.

### 1. Get organised, be informed

- Understand the issue - is it a service delivery issue or is there a policy failure that needs addressing?
- Get to know the three tiers of Government - local, state and federal. Each has different responsibilities and elected representatives that are accountable.
- Understand the political context to the issue - what are politicians saying? Has the Government taken any action? Are there advocacy groups working on the issue? Is there a relevant Parliamentary Friends Group? How do friends and neighbours feel about the issue?
- Find out how laws are made.
- Learn about Parliament and the policy development process and start thinking through what a solution to an issue might be - use this case study and the Parliamentary websites to learn how to make Parliament work for you.

- [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au)
- [www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au)
- [www.parlwork.aph.gov.au](http://www.parlwork.aph.gov.au)
- [www.cathymcgowan.com.au](http://www.cathymcgowan.com.au)
- 🔍 The Indi Way

### 2. Make your voice heard in Parliament

- Write a letter to the Indi office seeking representation to the responsible Minister on an issue. Include a call to action - what do you want the Government to do? Gather evidence to support your argument and outline the impact of not acting.
- A good letter can be used for multiple parliamentary tools - speeches, motions, questions and representations to Ministers. Questions during Question Time are an important tool used by MPs to request a response from the Government on an issue.
- Write a letter to the editor or an opinion piece for a newspaper.
- Start or sign a petition.
- Join an email or social media campaign that aligns with your concern.
- Make a submission to a Parliamentary inquiry or attend a public hearing.
- Attend a rally, march or protest on Parliament's lawns addressing the issue.
- Host or attend an event in Parliament addressing the issue.
- Arrange a meeting with a Minister or Shadow Minister and their staff to advocate on the issue.
- Invite a Minister to visit Indi to see first-hand your organisation's successes and challenges.
- Work with elected representatives to advocate on the issue, including the Member for Indi, House of Representatives, Senate, and the Victorian upper and lower houses.

- [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au)
- 🔍 [Senators and Members/Contacting Senators and Members](#)
- 🔍 [Parliamentary Business/Petitions](#)

## ELECTORATE OFFICERS - their job is to help resolve an issue

Based in the Wodonga and Wangaratta offices, Electorate Officers are the first point of contact for Indi constituents with a concern about Government services or to offer a solution to a problem.

### Electorate Officers can help by:

- Advising on which level of Government is responsible for addressing your particular concern.
- Directing you towards the relevant Government department and advising you on how to engage.
- For service delivery problems, they can contact the relevant department or agency for you.
- Sending a letter to a Federal Minister on your behalf.
- If you have a potential solution to a policy problem, they can help with Parliamentary tools and advocate for your ideas.
- Helping to organise advocacy visits to Parliament House.

➤ [www.cathymcgowan.com.au](http://www.cathymcgowan.com.au)

**IMAGE CREDITS:**  
 Front cover: (clockwise from top left) 1. Stuart Crosthwaite, Sarah Crosthwaite and Cathy McGowan discussing the Alpine Valleys Dairy Pathways Project, May 2016 (courtesy of Cathy McGowan MP) 2. Josh Frydenberg MP visiting Indi to discuss renewable energy, March 2018 (courtesy of Cathy McGowan MP) 3. Cathy McGowan MP and the orange army outside Parliament House, December 2013 (courtesy of Ray Strange - News Corp, December 2013). **The role of a Member of Parliament:** 4. Benalla P-12 student leaders visiting Parliament House, August 2018 (courtesy of Cathy McGowan MP). **Getting Things Done in Parliament: The Indi Way** (clockwise from top left) 5. Community celebrating the mobile phone tower launch at Devil's River, December 2016 (courtesy of Cathy McGowan MP) 6. Joint Standing Committee on Constitutional Recognition (JSCCR) chairs Senator Patrick Dodson and Julian Leeser MP, and committee member Warren Snowdon MP in Yackandandah, September 2018 (courtesy of Cathy McGowan MP) 7. Cathy McGowan MP at the public hearing in Wodonga of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network, April 2017 (courtesy of The Border Mail) 8. Patten Bridge contributing to debate at the Indi Summit, October 2015 (courtesy of Cathy McGowan MP) 9. Vigil by Rural Australians for Refugees Wangaratta outside the Indi electorate office, July 2018 (courtesy of Wangaratta Chronicle).

**DATA SOURCES:**  
 Department of Parliamentary Services, Electorate Office records and local media.



# GETTING THINGS DONE - THE INDI WAY

A case study in community action



Communities of Indi and their MP working together in Parliament.

NOVEMBER 2018

For more ways for your voice to be heard visit [www.cathymcgowan.com.au](http://www.cathymcgowan.com.au)



# GETTING THINGS DONE IN PARLIAMENT - THE INDI WAY

It's about knowing what Parliamentary tools to use, when and how to use them...

## Securing funding to eliminate mobile blackspots

Indi communities have demanded better mobile phone services recognising how vital they are for our economy, social connectedness and safety. We have not waited for the Government to act. Working with the Indi Telecommunications Action Group, we have coordinated action between local Governments, businesses, emergency services, community groups and mobile network operators. Indi communities did the groundwork and the Government responded - 48 new and upgraded mobile base stations have been funded by the Federal and Victorian Governments' Mobile Black Spot programs - making Indi a national leader in eliminating mobile blackspots.



## Shaping policy for a more humane treatment of refugees and asylum seekers

The Government's asylum seeker policy has hit a raw nerve in Indi - there are regular vigils outside the Indi offices and Electorate Officers receive thousands of emails demanding better treatment of asylum seekers. As their representative, the Member for Indi has formed strong partnerships with refugee advocates, including Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR). This includes supporting advocacy visits to Canberra, backing Andrew Wilkie MP's **Refugee Protection Bill 2018**, and regularly asking questions and speaking up in Parliament - holding the Government to account and calling for a more humane solution.



## Lobbying for regional higher education and training

Regional communities continue to suffer from low levels of educational attainment compared to cities. In 2015, at the Indi Summit and the Higher Education and Training Forum, Indi communities called for improved coordination of education and workforce planning. The Indi office has advocated strongly for a National Regional Higher Education Strategy, put forward legislation to improve opportunities for regional students, and supported advocacy visits to Parliament House (e.g. North East Local Learning and Employment Network, Alpine Valleys Dairy Pathways Project). This work has helped to put regional education on the Government's agenda, leading to a visit to Indi by the responsible Minister and the commissioning of independent reviews into regional education.



## Standing up for vulnerable witnesses

In 2014, a constituent 'Eleanor' began her campaign to change laws to prevent perpetrators of violence from cross-examining their victims directly in family court proceedings. The Indi office got behind this campaign to have the laws changed. Many Parliamentary tools were used, including representations to Ministers, formation of expert round tables, and visits to Parliament House by advocacy groups. In Parliament, motions were debated and a draft Private Members' Bill was prepared for introduction. The Government was eventually convinced of the need for change. The Attorney-General developed legislation and supported a Parliamentary Committee inquiry into family violence and cross-examination. With this support the laws are in the process of being changed.



## Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Member for Indi is a proud representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in north-east Victoria, and is committed to collaboration and regularly acknowledges, honours and thanks them for their work. This includes co-chairing the Parliamentary Friends of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and working together on issues such as health, education, and employment - including hosting a visit by the Indigenous Health Minister to the electorate to meet with community leaders. The Member of Indi sits on the Parliamentary Committee considering a process towards a voice, treaty and truth telling. The committee held hearings in Wodonga and will release its report in November 2018.



## Advocating for regional development policy

Since the Kitchen Table Conversations started in 2013, Indi's message has been loud, clear and consistent - Governments need to listen to and take action on behalf of regional Australia. The Indi office led the way in influencing policy debate through tabling motions, introducing legislation and instigating an inquiry on regional development and decentralisation. The inquiry report, **Regions at the Ready - Investing in Australia's future** (June 2018), was a bipartisan document calling for a regional Australia White Paper and a regional development policy - for regional Australia by regional Australia.



## PARLIAMENTARY TOOLBOX

### Influencing debate in the HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**SPEECHES** and **DEBATES**



**QUESTIONS** in writing and during Question Time



**AMENDMENTS** to Government Legislation



**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS** (proposed laws) and **MOTIONS** calling on the House of Representatives to take action



**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE** debated after Question Time



**VOTING** to accept or reject Government legislation or motions



**PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES** examining important issues



**PETITIONS** to formally request action on an issue



### Representing the community agenda to the GOVERNMENT and the OPPOSITION

**MEETINGS WITH MINISTERS** including the Prime Minister, responsible Ministers, Shadow Ministers and the Senate cross bench



**WRITING MINISTERIALS** supported by a strong letter from Indi constituents addressing the issue



**MINISTERIAL VISITS TO INDI** showing Government the impact of policy on the ground



**SENATE BUDGET ESTIMATES** to interrogate the Government and public services on budget expenditure



**BRIEFINGS** from departmental staff and Ministerial advisers



**DELEGATIONS FROM INDI** to meet with Ministers at Parliament House



Interrogation of **PUBLIC SERVICE REPORTING**



### Influencing PARLIAMENT in other ways

**PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUPS** of like-minded MPs collaborating to support a particular policy or issue



**CROSS PARTY** and **CROSS BENCH** co-operation



**EVENTS** including hosting and attending releases of reports, round-table debates, showcases and award ceremonies



**MEETINGS WITH ADVOCACY GROUPS** including industry leaders, unions and other lobbyists



**MEDIA** to reach a local and national audience via press conferences and Question Time



**PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY** research to inform policy development



**PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICE COSTINGS** to inform policy development



**MEETINGS WITH MPs AND SENATORS** during Parliamentary sitting weeks



## Ensuring that Government services and support are delivered to Indi communities

An effective Member of Parliament holds the Government to account for service delivery in the electorate - this is one of the most important roles of the Member for Indi.

Since 2013, the Indi electorate office has helped tens of thousands of constituents navigate the bureaucracy. When services fall short, questions can be taken directly to the relevant Minister.



## Working to improve the roll-out of the National Broadband Network (nbn™)

The nbn™ rollout across Indi has caused many problems. It was a full-time job helping constituents navigate the system and working directly with NBN Co and telcos to resolve issues. The early rollout was chaotic, the customer service experience had not been considered and confusion of roles and responsibilities left people unsure of where to go. Since 2014, more than 700 cases have been managed by the Indi electorate office - including continued missed appointments, arbitrary decisions about access and issues with limits on data and speeds. Inadequate responsiveness and customer focus during the rollout was ultimately a result of poor policy design. A strong momentum for change came from the work of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network. The Indi electorate made 39 submissions and locals participated in a public hearing in Wodonga. Based on the work of the committee the focus of the NBN Co began to shift towards supporting the customer, particularly in regional areas. Not all issues have been resolved however the NBN Co has now taken greater responsibility for customer service. The voice of Indi has resulted in significant progress.



## Working to improve the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS has the potential to transform people's lives, therefore it is essential that the implementation meets customer expectations. There are many NDIS success stories in Indi, but the rollout is falling short of expectations for some in the community. The Indi office has been assisting constituents to navigate the system. Many Parliamentary tools have been used to raise these concerns, including questions to the Minister for Social Services and direct representations to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). In August 2018, the Indi office convened two NDIS public information sessions in Indi involving representatives from NDIA. These forums informed speeches made in Parliament and a letter to the Minister. The work to improve the implementation of the NDIS is on-going and constituents are encouraged to contact the Indi office to make their voice heard.



## Ensuring farmers can access support payments in their time of need

More than 100 dairy farming families live in the catchments of the Kiewa, Upper Murray, Mitta Mitta, Ovens and King rivers. In 2016, many of these families needed financial assistance during the dairy crisis. The Government's emergency dairy support package promised a process of fast-tracking household support allowances. However farmers in these valleys experienced delays of up to 20 weeks to get assistance - this was not good enough. Following a question in Parliament by the Member for Indi, the Government arranged four dairy roundtable meetings across Victoria in late 2016. The first was at the Tangambalanga Community Centre involving 50 dairy farmers, the Government and representatives from the departments of Human Services and Agriculture. The Government heard first-hand the difficulties faced in applying for assistance. As a result the Government committed to review its approach and provide the necessary resources to speed up processing times and clear the backlog of applications.



For more information about Parliamentary tools visit [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au) and their use in Indi visit [www.cathymcgowan.com.au/getting\\_things\\_done\\_in\\_parliament](http://www.cathymcgowan.com.au/getting_things_done_in_parliament)