

National Press Club Address
Beyond the two-party system
Senator Richard Di Natale

Check against delivery

Let me start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people as traditional owners of the land we gather on today and pay my respects to elders past and present.

I acknowledge their custodianship and enduring relationship with their country.

I note that Labor has joined the Greens in support of a national conversation on treaties with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and I hope that Malcolm Turnbull can, in time, show the leadership to join with us on that journey.

I also want to acknowledge my talented team of MPs, some of whom are out and about campaigning in their respective parts of the country.

Let me start with some reflections on my first campaign as leader of the Australian Greens.

If nothing else this will be remembered as the longest campaign in Australian political history.

Most people tell me that they've tuned out and use words like boring, uninspiring and relentlessly negative to explain their frustration. And who can blame them?

The series of debates have been a snooze fest. Announcements have been heavy on slogans and light on substance.

Yes there have been some policy differences at the margins but overall there's been a lack of courage, imagination and vision.

Instead there's been a steady staple of scare campaigns that have become a feature of modern politics.

First there was the Coalition on negative gearing preaching the end of the world as we know it and expecting us to believe that negative gearing doesn't benefit people on high incomes. Facts don't seem to matter anymore in modern politics.

And in a bad version of Groundhog Day, they continue to ramp up the fear even further around the spectre of boat loads of asylum seekers coming to our shores under a Labor - Green - Independent - anyone-else-but-the-Coalition majority. This despite the fact that both parties are on a unity ticket when it comes to cruelty towards refugees.

For Labor's part, it has brought us the scare campaign on the privatisation of Medicare. I understand the theory - if you put popular Medicare and loathed privatisation together you have a potent cocktail. Is this the best Labor can do?

The truth is scary enough with the coalition freezing Medicare rebates and cutting funding to hospital, but of course Labor doesn't want to start there because they have form in both of those areas.

And of course, we have seen the desperate efforts by both sides to portray the other as too close to the Greens.

The prime minister has a nerve talking about potential instability considering the last three years of turmoil under Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull.

We had the cries of a budget emergency with the country going broke yet he's now offering up \$50 billion in tax cuts and is set to return a higher level of debt than what he inherited from Labor.

All this during a period when a first term prime minister doesn't see out two years, setting a new record.

To paraphrase a former PM, we won't be lectured about chaos and instability by this mob.

We then have Labor accusing the Greens of colluding with the Coalition around a preference swap when they were planning to help the coalition all along. More scares, more dishonesty.

The reality is that this campaign been such a turnoff because it has failed to confront some of the most serious issues facing the nation.

Politics at its best addresses the big questions. What do we want from life? Who do we aspire to be? What is the role of government in taking us there?

Yet neither of the two old parties is asking those questions. They are ignoring the challenges facing this generation: global warming, growing inequality and the global displacement of people. Only the Greens are asking what our lives might look like, not in 3 years but in 10, 20 and 50 years.

They don't do it, in part, because they are beholden to vested interests with massive corporate donations flowing freely to shore up their campaign coffers.

There is no vision, just problems to be managed between competing interests.

The old parties are locked in a race to mediocrity, to close down ideas and to shut out competition.

If we have learnt anything from this campaign, it is that our democracy is in desperate need of reinvigoration.

Australians are eager for a different kind of politics, where policy is legislated in the national interest, not according to the will of vested interests.

It's time for some agility and innovation in politics and the Greens are the political disruptors. We are the political ideas boom.

We are out to break the duopoly that is failing Australian politics, to see our parliament become a site for deliberative politics where negotiation between parties and independents is front and centre.

Much has been said about the 2010 government. And yes they were difficult years - but not because of what was going on in the parliament, but because of what was going on in the Labor party.

Disappointingly the internal division and factional infighting tarnished what was otherwise one of the most productive policy eras in modern times.

More bills were passed by Rudd and Gillard in their respective terms, than either Abbott or Howard. But it's not just about numbers.

Multiparty government meant that Labor had to work with the Greens and independents.

We negotiated historic climate change laws that were the envy of the world including the creation of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (from which the Coalition, aided by

Labor is cutting about \$1 billion dollars) and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (which Turnbull is raiding to repackage for his election announcements).

The Greens brought forward the establishment of Medicare funded dental care for kids, the first stage of our Denticare scheme, bringing dental care to thousands of children in families that could never before afford to go to the dentist. We want to expand it so that more people have access. The Government wants to cut it.

These were constructive, progressive measures brought forward by the Greens which were making a real difference to the future of this country.

Even in this current term of government, the Greens have used our influence and demonstrated our ability to negotiate important reforms.

We've brought forward reforms to the Senate electoral system to put power back into the hands of voters.

We've brought forward reforms to address multinational tax avoidance to ensure that important revenue is available for our schools and hospitals. We ensured that foreign investment in agricultural land got the scrutiny it deserves.

We made progress on access to medicinal cannabis by working across party lines, drafting legislation, building community support and compelling the government to act.

We've driven the national debate on difficult issues such as drug law reform that few people will touch. Something I plan to take into the next parliament.

The Greens are winning by demonstrating that a voice representing mainstream progressive values can make a difference to the laws and policies that are passed through our federal parliament.

If we are to continue to make progress on the big issues confronting the nation we must renew our democracy to ensure that ordinary people have a say in the decisions shaping their future.

For too long, wealthy individuals and corporations have wielded an extraordinary amount of power over our political process.

We see it in the lobbyists that prowl the halls of Parliament House, in the massive donations made to political parties by fossil fuel companies, and the lack of transparency around political decisions.

Soon after being elected I had a baptism of fire with the pokies debate.

The parliament at that time had a wonderful opportunity to take action on the issue of problem gambling.

Some very modest reforms were proposed initially, such as one dollar bet limits which the Greens continue to advocate. Despite huge public support and majority support in the parliament the ALP caved into well-funded lobbying efforts and watered down the reform.

Remarkably, in the lead-up to the next election, the Coalition announced their policy on the Clubs Australia website.

Then after losing government the Labor Party joined with the coalition to repeal its own very modest pre-commitment scheme.

For me it was a formative experience and represents everything that is wrong with politics in Australia.

The power of vested interests doing the bidding of big business, making huge donations and ensuring that members of parliament are subjected to concerted lobbying and pressure. And most politicians do not have the guts to stand up to them.

Australians are over it. When wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few, and they wield that power for their own narrow interests, democracy cannot flourish.

We need to break this 'business as usual' model of politics and give power back to ordinary people.

We have achieved the first step with a reformed Senate electoral system that puts power back into the hands of the voters. We abolished group voting tickets and back room deals that saw people elected with less than half a percent.

We need to go much further in renewing our democracy with greater transparency, accountability and participation.

The Greens have a plan which will clean up politics at the federal level through a national anti-corruption watchdog and political donations laws that improve transparency, end corporate donations and ensure public funding of elections.

I announce today that political donations reform and the establishment of a corruption watchdog will be one of the key issues in any negotiations if no party is able to form a majority after 2 July.

The Greens are demonstrating that politics does not have to be a two horse race, even if parts of the media still see it that way.

The hard political reality is that the major party vote share is dropping over time - a trend that shows no sign of stopping.

This makes multi-party governments more likely and more common into the future – and rather than accept this as the will of the people, we have scaremongering from the old parties who are desperately resisting the trend.

A majority of the world's democratic systems have embraced a different model that produces greater diversity and enhances representation.

As the electorate increasingly embraces third parties and independents, major parties have to adjust to multi party, cooperative government.

In general, you see more detailed agreements between parties on policy in multi-party governments and they make for more cooperative rather than combative parliaments.

In New Zealand from 2011 to the present, National has had a confidence and supply agreement with United Future, ACT and Maori Party which survived the 2014 election and previously NZ Labour formed government backed by the Progressive Party, NZ First and United Future.

Even in opposition, there is a stark contrast between the Australian Labor Party and its sister organisation across the ditch. While the Australian Labor Party has been drumming up lies about dirty deals between the Liberals and the Greens, New Zealand Labour and the NZ Green Party have just entered into a signed working arrangement to bring more progressive policies into government for the benefit of the people of New Zealand.

In Germany, we find that multi-party governments are the norm and Angela Merkel has governed effectively in coalition since 2005. And prior to that, from 1998 to 2005, the Social Democratic Party governed in coalition with the Greens.

It's true that these are countries with proportional representation which makes this outcome more likely, however countries like Canada, which does not have proportional representation, demonstrate that a two party state is not the natural order of things.

To paraphrase political scientist Katrin Steinack, multi-party governments can be successful over long periods, with the general acknowledgement that democracy more often than not is about compromising.

It sounds like Sammy J has been reading her work, along with my colleague Adam Bandt, telling us on Playground Politics that the principles of minority government are Negotiate, Cooperate and Legislate.

This is the future for politics in Australia.

The Greens are a future focused party, looking beyond short term fixes and measurements for prosperity and we play the long game.

Look at what we are offering at this election. We have our eye fixed on sunrise industries that will help build a better world, because we know that the industries that built our past prosperity cannot deliver it into the future.

Successive governments may have wasted the rivers of gold from the mining boom, but we can still fix the budget through responsible revenue and savings measures that will improve productivity.

The plan we take to this election is fully costed by the Parliamentary Budget Office with spending of \$123 billion completely offset by reducing wasteful or harmful spending of \$63 billion and revenue measures worth \$66 billion. Taken together, the Greens platform will be saving \$129 billion to build for our future.

Neither of the old parties can claim an agenda as bold in its aspirations but as pragmatic in its application.

The Greens budget management exercise has been all about demonstrating that every step along the way there are choices – in other words, the voting public shouldn't be fooled into thinking we have to accept that there are some things we just cannot do.

We can fix the structural problem with the budget through re-invigorating a progressive taxation system, removing unfair tax breaks, making savings in programs that don't make sense or do damage – and investing in areas that benefit people, the environment and the economy.

I say to the voters coming to this election, don't be fooled into thinking you have to settle for second best hospitals, schools and NBN in order to service the nation's debt.

Don't be fooled into thinking that subsidies for the top end of town will trickle down to the bottom.

Don't be fooled into thinking that a prosperous economy is dependent on the old industries of the past.

There is no escaping our economic future. It is clean and green or it is no future at all. We need to act now and act fast.

Raising Revenue

The focus on the spend-o-meter at this election is a sorry reflection of what elections and politics more broadly in this country have become. It encourages politics before policies, short-termism over long-term vision and entrenches timidity in our nation's leaders.

This election we've seen the old parties dribble out daily minor announcements in marginal seats while avoiding the sort of nation-building projects and reform measures that will create a new, fairer and clean economy.

Instead, we have a focus on the rev-o-meter.

This election the Greens have announced a suite of targeted, costed measures that will bring in significant amounts of revenue while not detracting from Australia's competitive economic advantages including:

- removing tax free fuel and other perks for miners raises - \$24 billion
- phasing out the private health insurance rebate - \$13 billion
- ending negative gearing for future purchases and unwinding the discount on capital gains tax completely - \$14 billion
- clamping down on tax avoidance by individuals through a Buffet rule, limiting debt loading by companies and stopping the concealment and splitting of income by trusts - \$14 billion
- making our superannuation system progressive - \$10 billion
- efficiencies in defence spending - \$14 million
- putting a price on carbon pollution - \$16 million
- A levy on the big four banks, based on the Reserve Bank's calculations to recoup the price benefit they get because the government will always bail them out in a crisis - \$15 billion
- Making the deficit levy permanent, opposing income tax cuts for the top quarter of taxpayers and a new 50% rate for people earning over a million dollars - \$9 billion

We will pay for it through the mix of progressive revenue and savings measures I've just mentioned and which they aren't factoring in.

Our platform sets out a comprehensive range of investment measures to build a fair and prosperous Australia – many of which have already been announced, over 80 measures, and I'll be talking to this more at our campaign launch on Sunday.

I will outline just some of the highlights of the platform now.

Global warming

Global warming remains the main challenge of our generation – in a way everything else is background noise if we don't fix this, and surveys from the Climate Institute and Lowy Institute this week show that the government is way out of touch with the public on this issue.

Our Renew Australia plan which will create a new clean energy economy with at least 90% renewables by 2030.

To ensure the kind of rapid take up of renewable energy needed if we are to avert catastrophic climate change we need a bold commitment from the next and future governments to invest in it. They've done this for the mining industry, for snowy hydro, it now must be done for the new clean energy economy.

New economy

As a nation we also need to invest in our smarts, our minds not our mines.

The Greens have a comprehensive plan which will increase Australia's investment in science, research and innovation to 3% of GDP by 2025 and aim to get it to 4% of GDP by 2030. Our platform invests \$7 billion for public and private research and would see another \$15 billion if the Future Fund was required to invest 3 per cent of its holdings into cutting edge and innovative firms.

We will invest to ensure Australia has a world-class school education system with needs based funding for all and prioritise and support TAFE as a critical part of the Australian education system - \$12 billion.

We will and boost base funding to universities - \$10 billion

Equality and Compassion

The Greens have a plan for an equal and compassionate Australia which will strengthen the social safety net for the 21st Century by bringing Newstart and Rent Assistance up to levels so they achieve their purpose of keeping people out of poverty, and give the money back that was taken from single parents by both Labor and Liberal - \$14 billion.

By ending negative gearing for future purchases and getting rid of capital gains tax altogether we can help address the housing affordability crisis while providing assistance for homelessness services and investing in public and community housing.

We'd prefer to invest the \$13 billion that Australian taxpayers spend on subsidising people's private health insurance rebates towards properly funding hospitals, expanded Denticare and better health care for everyone.

Protecting Our Precious Places

Around our nation, our environment is being under threat from by global warming, unsustainable development, mining and pollution – with the full support of the old parties.

We will:

- Help farmers with \$2 billion of assistance to better manage water quality in the reef catchments
- Establish a \$2 billion Biodiversity Fund and an extra \$313 million for Indigenous Rangers

- And we will deliver a new Environment Act and a tough new independent watchdog with the National Environment Protection Authority.

A confident Australia

The Greens will reinvest the \$3 billion the government spends each year on its cruel offshore detention centre regime in the UN Refugee Agency to fast track regional processing while increasing our humanitarian intake to 50, 000 people per year.

Balance of Power

We go to this election with a great team of candidates who I believe will soon be taking their place in the Australian parliament.

We put up candidates in Labor held seats like Grayndler, Batman, Wills and Melbourne Ports to give people a choice, and because we have an active party and community support base in these electorates that demand our representation.

We are also putting forward fantastic candidates in Liberal held seats like Higgins and Brisbane and running hard on a second senate seat in Queensland and NSW.

We are here to stay, get used to it.

Both Turnbull and Shorten have ruled out working with the Greens.

But if the Australian people deliver a result on 2nd June which calls for negotiated government, they won't have a choice.

If they do have to negotiate with the Greens they will have to look at cleaning up politics through the establishment of a national anti-corruption commission and reform of political donations – a minority government is the best opportunity for the country to get this done.

Conclusion

Elections are about making choices.

The choices we make reflect our values and aspirations.

For those who choose for their precious places to be protected, for a smart economy based on education and innovation, for women to be safe to thrive and succeed in their chosen careers, for younger people to get a fair go in the housing market, for children and future generations, for a just settlement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for poverty alleviated not entrenched in our society, for equal access to first class education, health and social services, and for a vibrant, prosperous and creative Australia — your choice is the Greens.

Thank you.