

[RENEW AUSTRALIA]

A new party for a new vision for Australia

Founding Members' Statement of Values & Purpose

Our Purpose

When over long duration the foundations of political parties become eroded and their purposes fall out of touch with the nation's basic values and beliefs, and when government and opposition join in advocating policies ever more corrosive of our national spirit of fairness and justice, there arises the need for new political groupings to better express the voice of the people.

When high national purpose gives way to cynical political opportunism; when ethical ways of behaving are diminished by expedient or corrupt party practices; when the major parties become out-dated, behave undemocratically and serve the vested interests of the few rather than the broad national interests of the many; and when decency and compassion are subordinated to the base calculations of party machine-men, the trust of the people is lost and those of conscience and goodwill must assert a new way of governing the country.

Many of us believe we have now reached such a time in our history, and we are joining in common cause to advocate a new path for Australia. The party we have formed, *[Renew Australia]*, seeks to embody the principles and policies required to restore trust and reassert the decent and enduring values of Australian society and advance Australian democracy.

We do not take this step lightly or impulsively. Our party has been created in the belief that the major political parties— as if in a corrosive grand alliance— have repeatedly failed Australians on the big issues and the country is looking once more for intelligent and enlightened leadership, inspired by a belief in justice, integrity

and a sense of a fair go. These are values that need to be better enshrined in a modern, independent and progressive political party of national purpose as we face the new and sometimes harsh realities of the 21st century— an era of remarkable challenges and opportunities.

Our Values

The new party wants to put an end to politics as usual in Australia. It dedicates itself to be vigorously democratic and egalitarian in its core beliefs and processes; progressive and actively reform-minded in its policy outlook; inclusive, collaborative and transparent in its political style; respectful of the rule of law; and confidently independent in its international relations.

We want the party to be a voice for renewal— to offer clear leadership, to articulate an enlarging vision for the country and to bring forth innovative, enlightened and compassionate policies to establish a national unity of purpose. We want it to be the voice of Australians who share its values, join with it in achieving its objectives, or support it electorally. We believe in earning the trust of the people and their confidence that we will tell the truth and do what we say we are going to do.

Importantly, we believe in the vitality of younger Australians, and we see it as essential for *[Renew Australia]* to be an inclusive party of youthful spirit— to embrace policies and processes about which young people can feel enthusiastic and in which they will feel engaged and want to participate, not least because they will inherit the legacy of our actions.

We also acknowledge the importance of older Australians and policies framed to address their distinctive needs: as their numbers expand so too will the requirement for quality healthcare and innovative social infrastructure and appropriate amenity.

We are conscious of the contribution of those who have gone before us. We remember Australians who have served in war and conflict, particularly those men and women whose service, courage and sacrifice in two world wars has defined our nation and secured our liberty. We pay tribute to our ancestors, many of whom came from other lands and cultures, whose pioneering spirit and sense of society has built the nation whose bounty we enjoy today. And we respect the contribution of a generation of older Australians, whose hard work and self-sacrifice has secured those foundations for the benefit of all.

In taking up that legacy, we will be mindful of all that has gone before us in working to advance a modern, multicultural and progressive Australia, one prepared for the distinctively different challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, and one animated by the hope that— together— we can achieve a better nation for ourselves and future generations of Australians: more prosperous, more fair, more just, and more confident about the advances we are yet to make.

Our Approach

We will promote open and honest debate about the future of Australia, free from personal denigration and sloganeering. Most importantly, we will listen to the contributions of Australians from all walks of life. We believe it is important for Australia to conduct its political life differently from what has prevailed now for some time: less rancorous, more ethical, and more focused on reform and dealing with the challenging social and economic issues facing the country. We are not a populist party, but we welcome the contest of ideas and we want mature and informed discussion based on truth, values and knowledge.

We will seek to define the kind of country we want for ourselves and future generations, and play a leadership role in advancing that aspiration and debate about our nation and its place in the world. We will do so mindful of the imperative to offer genuine leadership that looks to constructive solutions to the challenges we face, rather than cynically promoting issues that seek partisan advantage by generating fear and uncertainty in the minds of voters.

Modern progressive democracy

At the broadest level of political principle, we assert the primacy of representative democracy in a system of responsible government, with Parliament as the fullest expression of the will of the people choosing, and exercising authority over, Executive government according to the Australian Constitution, its instruments and conventions, and operating under the rule of law. We acknowledge the fundamental requirement of a separation of powers between Parliament, executive and a system of justice— independent of executive government— that is equitable, affordable and accessible to all.

We support the freedom of citizens to choose their own way of living, and of life, with respect for the rights of others. We uphold as inalienable an individual's freedom of speech, association, cultural expression and religion. While free speech is not absolute, we regard the virtues of quality journalism, independent public broadcasting and a free, diverse and accountable media— in all its forms— as crucial to an informed citizenry and a robust democracy, and we believe undue concentrations of media ownership should be constrained to ensure the free flow of information and a plurality of views and opinions.

Social justice

We especially uphold the notion of gender equality, where barriers to the advancement of women in all walks of life are progressively broken down. We see advancing the status and position of women

in society as one of our most important objectives.

We uphold freedom of association and assembly as inalienable rights of all individuals. We put a high value on the right to privacy and freedom of religion, where religious and cultural expression and observance for people of all faiths— or no faith— is guaranteed. We will advocate for an entrenched freedom from discrimination and exploitation, where discriminatory and exploitative practice or malicious expression based on race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, colour, or sexuality is outlawed.

We are horrified by the continuing disclosures of child abuse in a number of social institutions responsible for the care and protection of children. We believe that the work of multiple official inquiries must assume the highest priority for state and federal governments. The levels and extent of abuse are truly shocking, and we believe it is incumbent upon government to lead the nation in fully understanding the circumstances and causes of such abuse and eradicating any vestige of institutionally based criminal wrongdoing toward dependent and vulnerable children.

We pledge ourselves to support the ultimate findings and recommendations of the several commissions of enquiry currently underway and ensure they are heard, understood and fully acted upon without delay.

Renewal and independence

We will draw upon the imagination and goodwill of Australians to inspire our vision of renewal, and evidence from the physical and the social sciences to ground our advocacy. We will articulate policies that we believe a majority of well-informed Australians will support. We intend to advocate for a cohesive, diverse, secular, multicultural, fair and free Australia, to initiate reform of the key institutions of our democracy where deficiencies exist, to foster innovation in our economy, to nurture and support creativity and the arts and sciences, and

advance intelligent and achievable nation building.

To better achieve these national purposes, we will be a party free of organisational affiliations to either the union movement or associations representing business or special interests. We would welcome into our party as individuals former members of the major parties who have become as disaffected as we are by their debased and dispiriting policies and performance.

We recognise that we need to invest heavily in the future for a better nation and a better world; we will be fiscally responsible in asserting our priorities. We want a more inclusive society in which people feel that they are not merely observers in the political system but they are able to contribute and that their voice matters. We will respect difference and diversity of opinion, while advocating our policy positions. We will avoid negativity in our advocacy and strive to maintain integrity, respect and civility in political discourse.

We will aim for an Australia that is self-reliant, ethical and independent— for an Australia that can contribute more to good relationships in Asia and the Western Pacific, and which will be respected for her constructive, cooperative yet independent views.

Our values will inform our approach to the momentous challenges facing the country, particularly climate change and a shift to a post-carbon economy, as well as the profoundly disruptive impact of rapid technological change. Our values will also guide our response to the many pressing issues facing Australia— issues such as reforming and democratising our government institutions; providing for sustainable economic and population growth; supporting the vital roles of education and research; defending the principle of universal access in our system of primary healthcare; protecting the rule of law; restoring integrity in our public life; re-assessing our foreign policy; revaluing immigration and urgently addressing the inhumane treatment of

asylum seekers and refugees; and re-asserting the independent role of the public service.

We will be vigilant, too, about unacceptable intrusions onto our hard-won civil liberties. The so-called war on terror has seen a steady expansion of powers by government intelligence services. We are mindful of what history tells us about how easily such powers can be abused and become oppressive. We favour strengthened safeguards in the form of high-level judicial oversight to ensure that such excesses do not occur.

Democratic reform

While Australia's democratic credentials are strong and our democratic process is one of enviable integrity and efficiency, there are a number of emerging deficits in our functioning democracy that require attention if we are to reassert the country's position as a world leader in democratic practice.

One crucial issue at present relates to democratic participation in elections. The authority and legitimacy of government depends upon the consent of the governed— as expressed through the ballot box at free and fair elections by a voting constituency that is fully engaged.

In recent years, the proportion of eligible Australians registered to vote, as well as those registered and actually casting a ballot, has fallen appreciably, suggesting indifference at best or alienation at worst. Such disaffection, most pronounced among young people, is borne of a political process that is significantly less democratic, less consultative and less participatory than it ought to be. This deficiency must be addressed to ensure Australians value their democratic rights and are fully engaged in a more transparent electoral system.

Ethical politics

We also believe there is an urgent requirement to restore integrity to our public life. Ongoing disclosures of corrupt practices by MPs and leading figures in the major parties have greatly diminished

in the eyes of the community the ethical standards and reputations of parliaments and government around the country.

We see the establishment (or enhancement, where they already exist) of well resourced and appropriately empowered, broad-based anti-corruption bodies at the federal and state level as essential to the process of returning probity to our democratic institutions and restoring public confidence.

We similarly assert the importance of reform to the ethics around party fundraising. We will advocate strongly to limit the influence of money on party policy-making and government decision-making by requiring that donations to political parties be capped and fully disclosed— publicly and immediately. We will give meaning and strength to our advocacy by adopting that principle for our own party— from its inception as a registered entity.

A secular Australian Republic

A further issue relates to the Constitution and Australian identity where our institutions and national symbols should better reflect a mature and confident sense of nationality. Although the Commonwealth Constitution was framed to entrench a separation between church and state, we are not truly secular as our founding fathers intended.

We will advocate for a fully secular, free and fair Australia that respects diversity and difference and upholds principles of compassion and social justice. Our policies will be guided by the principle of working for the greater common good in society, while respecting the rights of minorities and ensuring fairness and justice for all.

We also propose a renewed debate about an Australian Republic with the goal of a better alignment between our sense of ourselves and our national governance and symbols. We want an Australian head of state: our location in the Asian region, with our economic future tied more strongly to emerging regional economies,

highlights starkly the anomaly of having a head of state who sits on the British throne on the other side of the world.

The status of women

We are strongly committed to advancing the status of women and we will work to advance rights and protections for women—protections against violence and exploitation, and the rights to income equality and due recognition in the workplace. We recognise that social, economic and institutional policies and practices continue to discriminate against and disempower women, and we will work to eradicate such barriers. More than that, we declare our commitment that women and men must be treated as equal citizens. This belief will be the bedrock of our party's approach to everything it does in social policy.

In particular, we recognise the contribution of women in the workforce and acknowledge the needs of women and men who take on family responsibilities—whether out of the workforce, or while working part-time or full-time and balancing family and work.

We will provide support and advance the interests of such women and men through appropriate and equitable policies—including greatly expanding affordable childcare.

Workforce equity and participation

We acknowledge the particular needs of lower-paid workers, and assert the concept of a 'living wage' as an important element of a fair society—one that recognises different capacities but supports a fair minimum wage to underpin a decent standard of living. We recognise the contribution of the labour movement, and we uphold the rights of workers to have their interests represented through union advocacy. We also acknowledge the particular situation of young people in their quest for jobs; we will advocate policies that recognise the often difficult transition from education to work and give a priority to ameliorating the barriers to workforce entry.

We also acknowledge the contribution to the public good of Australia's volunteers, and those who serve in the not-for-profit sector, and the country's numerous community and philanthropic organisations.

A sustainable economy

We assert the values of an export-oriented, globally competitive market-based economy as the dynamic driver of economic innovation, sustainable growth and prosperity, recognising that realistic and sensible government regulation and oversight have a role to play in preventing overt market distortions, market failures and blatant inequalities.

We believe that private enterprise has to be at the centre of the country's economic activity, and that government is typically not best placed to manage complex commercial enterprises. At the same time, we believe that standards of integrity in our corporate sector must greatly improve, particularly in relation to requirements for full market disclosure, and the ethical standards relating to the fiduciary duties and responsibilities of directors.

We particularly deplore as unacceptable the increasing trend of ever more aggressively contrived and complex arrangements for tax avoidance by large corporate entities, especially globally structured ones. We believe more strenuous efforts must be made by government to effectively constrain such manipulation and eliminate sharp practice.

More broadly, we believe informed public debate is overdue on the principles underpinning government revenue raising, and the level of financial resources needed to sustain the services the country requires. Certainly, we want to achieve greater fairness through more balanced contributions from corporates and individual taxpayers to government revenue raising.

We believe that there are significant anomalies in Australia's taxation system

and we will be guided by principles of sustainability, equity and fairness in rectifying such anomalies. We believe in bringing simplicity and efficiency to the tax system, while striving for economic progress and enhanced standards of living and wellbeing for all Australian individuals and families. We particularly recognise the importance of intergenerational equity, and hence we reject policies that would impose unfair and unreasonable burdens on succeeding generations.

We believe in a robust agricultural and rural sector, and we acknowledge the hard work and sacrifice of Australians who have embraced the often difficult calling of life on the land, away from the amenity of the city. We believe in ecologically sustainable agricultural practice and that, through applied research and support for innovation, the rural sector can ensure the country's food security, expand its substantial level of exports and enhance its already significant contribution to the national good.

We affirm the social importance and dignity of fulfilling work, the high value of full employment, and fair and safe workplace practices. We will advocate for budgetary policies that are responsible and equitable and that recognise that nation building through key public infrastructure in education, health and transport is an investment— not merely a cost. Similarly, we lament the lost opportunity of significant nation-building infrastructure that successive mining booms might have afforded the country, and we believe that the legacy of future generations must be secured by visionary and sustainable infrastructure projects that go beyond the short-term interests of mining company equity holders.

A post-carbon future

We accept the overwhelming scientific evidence of climate change, and we see it as a momentous challenge to the nation and the global community. We believe that global warming presents great dangers to human survival, we acknowledge that

human activity is a major cause of it, and we recognise that nothing short of a profoundly different way of structuring the global economy will avert the catastrophic effects of a warming planet.

Despite the un-extracted riches in Australia's coal reserves, the imperative of moving to a post-carbon economy is clear, and the urgency of government intervention to achieve it is compelling. We believe that calibrated, evidence-based policies— introduced in good time with appropriate price signals and investment clarity and certainty for industry— will yield the necessary emissions reductions without up-ending our economy.

Australia's leading universities and research institutions like the CSIRO have a vital role to play in informing such policies. We support greater government investment in research for these institutions to assist our transition to a post carbon economy.

As a beginning, we will look to share in setting and achieving realistic and meaningful targets for clean, renewable energy and emissions reductions in line with international leaders, and employing government-initiated, market mechanisms to achieve those reductions. Australia once led the world in confronting the threats posed by climate change. We can and should do so again.

Such an intervention may still involve significant dislocation and change for the country; it will inevitably involve some level of sacrifice and hardship as we lessen our economic dependence on growth in energy-intensive production and consumption. Hence, while government must draw on the best scientific and economic advice to ameliorate the damage to the global environment and the Australian economy, it must minimise the burden of remediation on ordinary Australians.

We will seek to contribute to a more mature, evidence-based debate on the issue and implications of a post-carbon economy— including prompting an

important national conversation on what we, as a nation, are prepared to give up to achieve a viable and sustainable future and contribute to the global effort on climate change.

Education and research

We believe strongly in the enriching and ennobling quality of education and we place a high value on public education and educational opportunity as a vital part of our nation building— at all levels, from early childhood development, primary and secondary schooling through to a completed tertiary education and beyond.

We will encourage excellence and seek to establish high-quality standards in affordable education, recognising that a well-educated community will contribute significantly to Australia's future. As a corollary, we assert the fundamental importance of research across all disciplines, as necessary to promote scientific and medical discovery, especially research-led excellence in clinical care.

We want to enhance economic and social learning and understanding, generally, and we believe it is important to reverse the cultural shift forced upon our universities by successive governments for them to become more like trading corporations.

We favour an expanded program of student exchanges between Australia and partners in our region and beyond to advance learning and cultural understanding. We will also support and encourage life-long learning as a means by which all Australians can enrich the community and their own lives.

Health

We firmly believe that a fundamental mark of a good society is the quality of its healthcare. We uphold the importance of a world-class health system for Australia that addresses the ongoing challenges of rapid technological advances, an ageing population, affordability and accessibility— and which meets the needs

of our disabled and otherwise disadvantaged or marginalised citizens.

Having ready and affordable access to quality healthcare ought not be seen as dependent upon one's income, but as a basic right for all. In respect of primary healthcare, in particular, we strongly support the principle of universal access as the vital core of the system, one much admired by other countries in the developed world. The importance of universal healthcare will become even greater with the ever-increasing numbers of elderly Australians.

Indigenous Australians

We recognise Indigenous Australians, whose ancient cultures we respect— and we acknowledge Aboriginal dispossession and the damage to Indigenous culture associated with it. Indigenous Australians are the custodians of one of the oldest continuous cultures on Earth and we are the poorer for not fully embracing this unique heritage.

We also need to more effectively work with Aboriginal communities to address the condition of Indigenous Australians. The standard of living and life expectancy of Aboriginal people— which is well short of non-Indigenous Australians— is a continuing national disgrace, and the treatment by government of Aboriginal people, generally, has been consistently deplorable.

Government interventions have been typically based upon a fundamentally flawed model that has denied Indigenous people ownership of the policy process underpinning these interventions. Such paternalistic, 'them and us' approaches— which were always doomed to fail— must change. As a first step, we will advocate for a comprehensive Treaty with Indigenous Australians— as other countries have successfully done with their indigenous peoples— to more fully effect reconciliation, and to begin again the process of addressing the flaws in policies and processes affecting Indigenous people.

We will also support moves to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution. Beyond doing a better job of empowering Indigenous Australians to live healthier, fulfilling lives within our society, we must more fully respect and acknowledge their cultural identity within the national consciousness.

We need to act more vigorously to address these human rights deficiencies in our society— for its own sake, for the benefit of those who bear the burden of these deficiencies, and to make Australia a more credible and effective advocate for human rights beyond our shores.

Human rights and asylum seekers

We uphold and advocate for an unequivocal acceptance of, and respect for, the rule of law, and the advancement of a more just society. Our policies will be designed to uphold the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and promote the passage of an Australian statutory Charter of Human Rights— consistent with the UN Declaration— giving legislative protection to our fundamental rights and freedoms.

In line with our population objective, we affirm our commitment to the United Nations Refugee Convention, to which Australia has been a signatory since 1954. Contrary to the cruel practices of successive governments of both major parties since 1992, asylum seekers should be treated with respect and in a way consistent with our obligations under international covenants.

Like other countries in the developed world, Australia is a signatory to six international human rights conventions, some dating back fifty or sixty years, which offer safety and provide protections to asylum seekers, especially to children.

These instruments represent our solemn promise to the international community, but the indefinite detention of asylum seekers, the abusive neglect and deprivation of children in detention, and the brutal treatment of people in offshore

processing centres, mean that Australia has committed gross, unconscionable breaches of our obligations under international law.

We strongly believe current policies and practices must change, urgently and fundamentally. We must also take the step of entrenching our international human rights obligations into Australian domestic law. Moreover, experience over the last sixty years has shown that an open and humane attitude towards people fleeing war, persecution and oppression in other lands has improved the quality and the richness of life in Australia.

There can be few issues that more directly speak to our sense of ourselves as a nation than how we treat some of the world's most vulnerable people, who seek our help and protection.

Population and immigration

Australia has a long history of valuing immigration and encouraging and welcoming those who come to share their lives in this country. Our nation has been built in no small part by the energy, skills and enterprise of immigrants.

In Australia today we need to promote an open discussion about population. While some in this country believe Australia is already fully populated, nobody in any other country of the world would accept or believe that.

With population pressures worldwide, our country must be prepared to do more to increase its population and build the economic and social infrastructure to support it, while ensuring full employment, social harmony and preserving community amenity. Certainly, to achieve that outcome, we will have to move away from the historical Australian experience of urban sprawl and megacities— where sixty per cent of the national population lives in five capital cities— to a more geographically dispersed model of smaller urban centres, as in the UK and elsewhere.

We recognise that, for the most part, ours is a large, arid and sparsely populated country, one reflecting harsh climatic conditions, often poor soils, prone to prolonged drought and much of it exhibiting marginal agricultural utility.

However, we believe that— mindful of the cultural and environmental sensitivities, and with very careful stewardship as we move to a post-carbon economy— we can sustain a larger population, which will contribute to our long-term vitality and security. Clearly, a more populous nation will have greater influence in advancing the values and issues important to Australia within our region and the world.

Defence and foreign policy

We uphold the importance of defence positions and strategies that are framed, and capabilities developed, to protect our country, underpin an independent posture in the region, and ensure the security of the nation against any external threat of aggression.

We advocate the benefits of a strategic, independent Australia and we will assert independent foreign policies that are based on the values of friendly and constructive bilateral and multilateral engagement in advancing the national interest. From Federation in 1901, Australia had a sense of strategic dependence on the United Kingdom that was transferred to the United States during World War II. But many Australians are unaware of the fact that our defence treaty with the United States is a commitment to consult, not a guarantee to defend.

Today, the strategic context in which Australia operates is quite different from that of earlier times, and our nation must develop its own sense of independence and identity. Our foreign policy and diplomacy must convey that independence. Above all, we should not cede to any foreign country the capacity to decide whether Australia is at peace or goes to war; nor will we participate in war just because our traditional allies go to war. Alliances are

important, but they must serve mutual interests.

Supporting the UN

We recognise the crucial role of the United Nations, its agencies and processes, and the need to support its resolutions. Too often, major powers have supported the UN only where it has suited their interests. To be fully effective, all powers great and small must respect the United Nations and, in their policies, seek to strengthen it and make it more effective, especially in achieving the peaceful resolution of international disputes and conflicts. A stable global order will ultimately depend upon a successful United Nations.

Apart from the UN, there are opportunities for Australia to participate more fully in international affairs by working directly with other like-minded countries to promote a more stable and peaceful world. In many ways Australia is fortunate being on the edge of a dynamic and fast developing part of the world. We must value and promote positive bilateral relations with our neighbours, including restoring historic levels of overseas aid and directing that aid towards solving the pressing problems within our region. Asia and South Asia will be the global economic powerhouses for the present and the future. We must more fully embrace the idea that this is where our future lies. We can make ourselves more fully part of the region if we have the wit and the will to do so.

A robust public service

We value and uphold the importance of effective public administration. Hence, we will seek to revalue the role, independence and contribution of a robust and efficient public service, one resourced and supported to the highest standard, and emboldened to give frank and fearless advice. In recent times the public service has lost status, prestige and influence as Ministers rely more heavily on politically appointed staff in their private offices. There is often competition between the two for authority and influence.

We need to establish a system that is more cohesive, more thoughtful and effective, and which makes the best advice available to government. We need an open discussion about the best way of resolving the conflicts that often arise, and a way of achieving a better balance between these two competing advisory and administrative systems. A modern, independent and efficient public service helps provide the foundations for good governance.

[Renew Australia] for a new way forward

Our corroded national politics has led many Australians, particularly young

people, to increasing disillusionment, disengagement and despair. Significant change is necessary and overdue. *[Renew Australia]* is espousing a values-based approach to advancing our democracy—charting a new way forward— with honesty and transparency for the benefit of the country. We now seek the support of all Australians so that collectively we may successfully navigate the very significant challenges and opportunities facing us in this early part of the 21st century and beyond.

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