

THE QUEENSLAND *on*LINE

WITH SENATOR SUE BOYCE



September 29, 2009

IN CANBERRA

In July last year I [predicted](#) that Labor would, in time, find it "more productive" to negotiate with the Liberals in the Senate than to attempt to meet the disparate wishes of the Greens, Family First senator Stephen Fielding and Independent senator Nick Xenophon.

Despite all the blathering and posturing from the Prime Minister and from Climate Change Minister Penny Wong, the Rudd Labor Government finally appears to have come to this view on Climate Change.

For the first time, the Rudd Government appears to have accepted that it has a mandate to set the agenda, not to do whatever it likes on whatever timetable it likes.

That the exigency of getting a workable [Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme](#) through the Senate has forced this change of attitude will serve Australia well in the long term.

It is a pity that Minister Wong has wasted so much time insisting Labor's scheme was set in concrete and any changes were non-negotiable.

The most sensible thing she has done in two years is agree to negotiate amendments to the CPRS with the Coalition, even though she had bizarrely tried to dress up this back-down by issuing an ultimatum on the negotiating timeframe.

Nevertheless, Coalition Leader Malcolm Turnbull and acting Shadow Climate Change Minister Ian Macfarlane are confident that our amendments will be ready by Minister Wong's "deadline" of October 19.

Far too many appear to have forgotten that the Coalition supports an Emissions Trading Scheme for Australia and that a workable, sustainable ETS was one of the policies we took to the last election.

Our united position was, and is, for an unconditional reduction in emissions of five per cent from 2000 levels by 2020, and a reduction of up to 25 per cent in the event of a comprehensive global agreement.

The Coalition has set out our amendment agenda in the [Nine Principles](#) released more than two months ago.

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The Government's immensely complex emissions trading scheme, unless amended, will seriously disadvantage our export and import competing industries costing thousands of jobs and killing investment without producing any meaningful reductions in CO₂ abatement.

Under the Rudd scheme Australian export and import competing industries will be effectively taxed an extra \$12 billion over five years that they can't pass on as they are price takers. Australian aluminium and zinc production pumps out 50 per cent to 60 per cent less CO₂ than similar industries in China and our cement manufacturers are comparatively low emitters.

Even State Labor Government modelling has shown that the Rudd CPRS would cost Queensland 28,000 jobs.

DOUBLE DISSOLUTION?

There are no current triggers for a double dissolution election, but "Will we have a double dissolution?" is a question I'm often asked.

Legislation originating from the House of Representatives that has been voted down once in the Senate includes

- the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bills;
- the Fairer Health Incentives Bills;
- the Australian Business Investment Partnership Bills (RuddBank);
- the Horse Disease Response Levy Bills; and
- the National Fuelwatch legislation.



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If the Bills are defeated for a second time in the Senate they could then be used as double dissolution triggers by the Government, although an election on equine flu measures is a little hard to imagine.

The Rudd Labor Government has tried to wave the terms "mandate" and "double dissolution" like some modern-day sword of Damocles hanging over the head of the Coalition.

But a double dissolution could be very damaging to the Labor Government with all 76 Senate spots up for re-election. In this situation, more Greens and independents could be elected to the Senate and hold the balance of power.

Prime Minister Rudd needs to be very careful of what he wishes for.

In my view, and the view of the majority of Coalition members, we serve the Australian people best by working to get good, values-based legislation first and worrying about double dissolutions a distant second.

The Parliamentary Library has produced the following table:

NEXT POSSIBLE FEDERAL ELECTION DATES

	Last Election	Earliest Date	Latest Date
Simultaneous half-Senate and House of Representatives	24 November 2007	7 August 2010	16 April 2011
House of Representatives			16 April 2011
Half-Senate		7 August 2010	21 May 2011
Double-dissolution			16 October 2010

MARGARET MAY AND BRENDAN NELSON

Whilst I unswervingly support Coalition Leader Malcolm Turnbull, I came to have enormous respect for Dr Brendan Nelson for the gracious and collaborative way he went about leading the Coalition during the very unpleasant early months of accepting that we were the Opposition.

Dr Nelson was the Member for Bradfield on Sydney's north shore for almost 13 years. Originally a doctor, he was also the Federal President of the Australian Medical Association (1993 - 1995), and served as Minister for Education, Science and Training (2001 - 2006) and Minister for Defence (2006 - 2007).

He will be missed from the Australian Parliament but I'm sure he'll make a very significant contribution for Australia in his new role as Ambassador to the European Communities and NATO.

And I will miss my Queensland colleague and friend, Margaret May, even more when she retires at the next election. Margaret and I are the only Queensland women in the Coalition.

Margaret has held the seat of McPherson since the 1998 election. Her preselection - from 21 other candidates - was a gruelling all-day affair that has become Queensland Liberal Party legend.

She has been the Shadow Minister for Ageing since December 2007 and demonstrated a wide and practical understanding of this complex industry. Unfortunately the same can't be said of her Government counterpart, Justine Elliot, who appears to be more ideologically interested in destroying the private sector of the industry than in meeting the needs of older Australians.

LNP WOMEN WERE FIRST!

I had a finger-licking good time creating dessert - Chocolate on Chocolate Trifle - for the LAW (Logan, Albert & Waterford) Women's function on September 19.

Congratulations to Freya Ostapovitch and Andrea Johanson on the establishment of this group. And special thanks to my "sous-chef" Jaimi-lee Johanson.

And - for the record - this function was planned well before a certain Queensland Premier decided to star in MasterChef and it took me away from my senatorial duties for only two hours.



SENATE COMMITTEES

A WIN ON MIDWIVES

From the glazed expressions, I'm aware that many people find the workings of the Senate Committee system somewhat arcane.

So I'm delighted to report that the work of my Community Affairs Committee has forced Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon into a back-down on new laws governing midwives and homebirths.

Minister Roxon has announced a two-year exemption for privately practising midwives who can't obtain indemnity insurance for attending a homebirth - conveniently after the next election.

Labor's proposed legislation contained a number of good initiatives but it would also, in practice, have made midwife-assisted homebirths illegal. About 200 independent midwives would have faced deregistration from July 2010 and risked fines of up to \$30,000 if they continued working.

In our [Minority Report](#), Senator Judith Adams and I noted that we approached the Inquiry with two principles in mind:

"Firstly, that expecting parents should have a right to choose where their child is born. Secondly, the Parliament must not allow the practice of home-birthing to go underground. By essentially outlawing homebirths, the Government will force many mothers to give birth in potentially unsafe environments."

Home-birthing is a very complex and emotional issue and deserves better than the too-hard basket from the Minister. The last thing Australia needs is women choosing "backyard" homebirths to avoid being forced to have a hospital birth.

I had no idea until this Inquiry that there are two categories of homebirth - midwife assisted and "freebirth" (with no health professional assistance). Both are lumped together as homebirths in statistics that purport to show the dangers of homebirth.

UPCOMING SENATE INQUIRIES

[I'm a member of the Senate Community Affairs Committee, deputy Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Australian Crime Commission, and a member of the Joint Committee for Corporations & Financial Services and the Joint Committee on Migration.]

The *Community Affairs Committee* has announced new inquiries into the following:

[Hearing Health In Australia](#) - submissions should be received by October 9, 2009 to report by the end of February, 2010.

This inquiry will look at the current state of hearing health in Australia, and the effect poor hearing has on our community.

[Suicide In Australia](#) - submissions should be received by October 20, 2009 to report by the end of April, 2010.

This inquiry will examine the costs of suicide in Australia, particularly the disproportionate effect on young, indigenous and rural Australians. We'll also be looking at the effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, and ways improvements can be made.

The *Corporations and Financial Services Committee* is currently inquiring into:

[Financial Products and Services In Australia](#) - inquire and report back by November 23, 2009.

This inquiry is currently investigating financial advisers and associated legislation, with particular reference to the collapse of Storm and OPES.

The *Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission* has announced a new inquiry into the following:

[Adequacy of Aviation and Maritime Security Measures to Combat Serious and Organised Crime](#) - submissions should be received by November 6, 2009.

This inquiry will look at the methods used by serious and organised criminal groups to infiltrate Australia's airports and ports, and the extent of infiltration. This includes illegal imports of drugs, firearms, money laundering and people smuggling.

The *Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration* has announced a new inquiry into the following:

[Inquiry into the Migration Treatment of Disability](#) - submissions should be received by **October 28, 2009**

The Committee will investigate the assessment of the health and community costs associated with a disability as part of visa processing in Australia.

OTHER INQUIRIES

[Inquiry into Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities](#) - inquire and report by **October 29, 2009.**

This inquiry is looking into the difficulties faced by rural and remote students when looking at education. It will also look at the costs these students face.

[The GroceryChoice Website](#) - inquire and report by **October 20, 2009.**

This inquiry will examine the establishment, management, operation and closure of the GroceryChoice website.

[Welfare of International Students](#) - inquire and report by **November 16, 2009.**

The committee is to inquire into the current problems faced by international students in Australia, including the collapse of training facilities and student safety.

[Matters Relating To The Torres Strait Region](#) - submissions should be received by **October 30, 2009 to report by February 26, 2010.**

This inquiry will examine the Torres Strait region, including fisheries, trade, sustainability, border security, immigration, government cooperation and transport.

PEOPLE SMUGGLING - THE ISSUES

Since August 2008, the Australian Navy has picked up 32 people-smuggler boats carrying a total of 1518 asylum seekers.

This compares with just 18 boats carrying 301 asylum seekers intercepted in the six year period between July 2002 and August 2008 under the Howard-Costello Government. Further details are available [here](#).

People-smuggling is an abhorrent crime.

Asylum seekers are forced to live in squalid, life-threatening conditions for months before reaching Australia. The Howard Government laws worked because they discouraged this practice by increasing the likelihood that people-smugglers would be caught.

Over the past year decisions by the Rudd Government have been seen as weakening Australia's people-smuggling laws and, combined with conditions in countries of origin, have led to an increase in this disgusting human trade.

KEVIN RUDD - A REVIEW!

In less than two years of office, Kevin Rudd's government has produced more than 140 separate reports, averaging one a week for a total of more than 20,000 pages.

Year	Vessels	People
2001-02	19	3039
2002-03	0	0
2003-04	3	82
2004-05	0	0
2005-06	8	61
2006-07	4	133
2007-08	3	25
2008-09	25	1088
2009-10	7	430

This number includes tax reviews, higher education reviews, climate change reports and an examination of the health system. It doesn't include what could be termed the 'normal' business-of-government reports, such as annual reports, statutory reports and Senate Inquiry reports.

I'm not quite sure how many trees have been sacrificed for the Rudd Government, but I'm sure there's a report on that too.

While the paperwork has been impressive, actual activity hasn't been.

During the 2007 election, Kevin Rudd said the "buck will stop with me" on health reform and he would take over the running of public hospitals if they had not improved by mid-2009.

The fact that successive Labor State governments had run their health departments in the ground - nowhere more evident than in Queensland - didn't prevent him from committing the government to take action.

A review of Dr Catherine Bennett's report into Australian health and hospitals (yes, a review of a report) was delivered to the government at the end of June. The government has decided to take immediate action - and take another five months with community and health industry discussion before going to the states and territories for further discussion.

So the buck hasn't quite stopped with Kevin Rudd.

Other commitments made before the 2007 election to tackle food and petrol prices, provide indigenous housing and fix homelessness all look like they can be safely used again in the run-up to the next election.

Don't forget the outcomes from the 2020 Summit. I'm sure you've been waiting to hear what happened to the 900 ideas that were included in the 2020 Report.

So far, just nine ideas from the 2020 Summit have been developed. I'm not quite sure what you do with leftover ideas, but I'm positive there will be a report coming out on that shortly.

GROWTH, BUT WHAT'S THE COST?

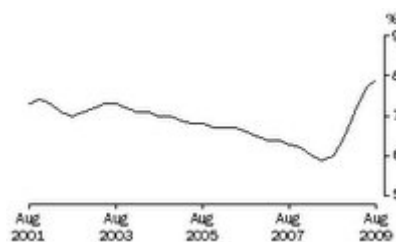
Australia's economy grew again in the June quarter by 0.6 per cent and continued to defy the world economic downturn.

Prime Minister Rudd and Treasury Wayne Swan are keen to take all of the credit for Australia's economic performance, but the Government is quick to forget the exceptional economic position inherited from the Howard/Costello Government. The Labor Government would not have been able to splash around billions of dollars of taxpayers' money without the Coalition's legacy of a Budget in surplus by \$20 billion and with \$60 billion in reserves.

A Coalition Government would have tackled the recession by cutting red tape for small businesses and stimulating the economy through tax cuts. The 'Labor Way' – splashing cash around without short-term or long-term accountability – has plunged Australia into record levels of debt.

But the stimulus has failed to deliver on the Government's promise to protect jobs.

Australia's unemployment rate is at 5.8 per cent, its highest level since October 2003. To make matters worse, Australia's employment participation rate is at 65.2 per cent, its lowest level since August 2007. [ABS Underemployment Rate August 2009](#)



Thousands of Australians now have reduced working hours and pay. ABS statistics show the dramatic spike in underemployment. The percentage of underemployed workers has risen to a record high of 7.9 per cent, or 891,800 workers, since September 2007. Treasury calculates this to be the equivalent of 200,000 full-time jobs.

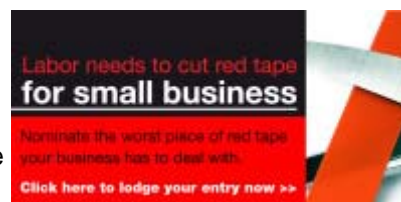
Of course, Labor's IR laws will only exacerbate employer uncertainty about taking on new full-time staff further.

Despite ongoing efforts by PM Rudd to rewrite economic history, only the Coalition has a track record of competently managing Australia's economy whilst growing employment levels and keeping people in jobs.

QUEENSLAND TOP RED TAPE STATE

Queensland has scored another "first" under the Bligh Government - State with the most Red Tape!

Queensland businesses are being strangled by an estimated \$17.1 billion a year in red tape contained in more than 70,000 pages of state legislation.



Next highest is Western Australia with 63,657 pages. It is significantly more than both NSW at 40,417 pages and Victoria 56,839 pages, according to a count by the Productivity Commission.

The latest survey found:

- 80 per cent of businesses surveyed have been significantly or moderately impacted by red tape;
- 25 per cent of businesses spend more than 20 hours per week on compliance;
- over the past two years, more than 80 per cent of respondents have observed an increase in the cost and time it takes to comply with regulations;
- two-thirds of businesses surveyed believed that government regulation had prevented them from making changes to grow their business.

Anna Bligh committed the government to addressing this huge hidden tax in both the 2008-09 State Budget and the Premier's Towards Q2 Statement. But, in 2008-2009, 19 new Acts and 3,117 pages of new amended legislation were introduced in Queensland.

And manufacture of Red Tape in Queensland has an admirable growth rate - five per cent a year.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland has launched a [campaign](#) calling on the State Government to reduce the amount of red tape.

SEPTEMBER SHOPSMART

Despite the abysmal failure of the Government's GroceryChoice website, a Senate inquiry into the debacle and consumer group *Choice* announcing legal action against the Government, my ShopSmart website continues on.

Just click on CalcuKate for the latest survey and for lots of tips and links on managing money.

ShopSmart compares a standard basket of items across Queensland supermarkets once a month to give Queensland consumers information on price trends.

Our best performing store this month was Coles at Toombul. This store has consistently been the cheapest in our surveys over the past year.

ShopSmart is available at www.shopsmart.sueboyce.com.au



BLUE SKIES

Imagine a Queensland where other people decide where and how you live, and the only assistance you get often comes far too late.

For many Queenslanders with disabilities this is everyday life with funding and service delivery driven by a 'crisis mop-up' mentality, not by any sense of planning.

A group of committed Queenslanders - The Blue Skies Group - have developed an outline for a new and inclusive Queensland by 2020.



I was delighted to attend their successful launch last week, and it was a very positive sign to see more than 250 people gathered in Brisbane's Botanic Gardens.

On December 3, International Day of Persons With Disability, The Blue Skies Group are asking Queenslanders to join them in answering the question "What will it take to turn vision into reality?"

If you would like to contribute, or just need further information, please contact them at www.blue-skies.info

CARERS WEEK 18-24 OCTOBER 2009

Anyone, Anytime is the theme of this year's Carers Week - recognising that becoming a carer is not often planned.

There are more than 2.5 million unpaid family carers in Australia - people who have taken on the responsibility to care for those who can't care for themselves. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail.

More than one in eight Australians provide care of this kind.

This year, Carers Week runs from October 18 - 24, and the goal is to raise awareness of the work carers do with limited support and limited availability and access to resources.

For information about Carers Week events near you, check out [Carers Week in Queensland 2009](#) or contact 1800 242 636.

KNITTING FOR THE NEEDY

As we head into an early Queensland summer, it's easy to forget that Queensland does have a winter, and for those living on the streets the cold weather adds to their problems.

[Knitting For Brisbane's Needy](#) is a local charity whose members knit, crochet and sew items for those in need. If you would like to donate yarn and material, or knitted items, you can help make someone's life a little better. Last year they donated more than 22,000 items.

For more information go to <http://www.knittingforbrisbanesneedy.com/index.htm>, but if you'd like to drop anything off to my office I'll make sure it reaches them.

POSTSCRIPT

From our reader Kerry:

"Now that a Canberra Telco is sponsoring the Last Post at the Australian War Memorial, will the next step be a Telco sponsoring the ANZAC Day march?"

How about Coles Kokoda Trail expeditions? Or perhaps the KFC Gallipoli gathering. McDonalds could even name a Big Mac after the Aussies of Nui Dat?"

If you know someone who'd like to receive Queensland onLine, please email the office at online@sueboyce.com.au

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