



## **THE THREE HUNDRED AND NINETY FIRST MEETING OF FEDERAL EXECUTIVE**

2:30 PM, MONDAY 22 DECEMBER 2025

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

### **AGENDA**

- (1) Attendance and Apologies
- (2) Federal Election Review
- (3) Federal Awards



*As this meeting is called for a specific purpose, all other business including the minutes from the previous meeting is deferred to the next meeting of Federal Executive.*

**FEDERAL EXECUTIVE MEETING  
22 DECEMBER 2025, R.G. MENZIES HOUSE, BARTON**

**ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**

*\*to be confirmed on the day*

|                                 |                                                           |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| The Hon. Sussan Ley MP          | Federal Leader                                            |
| Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash | Leader of the Opposition in the Senate                    |
| Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston    | Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate             |
| The Hon. John Olsen AO          | Federal President                                         |
| Ms Caroline Inge                | Federal Vice President                                    |
| Mr Gerry Wheeler                | Federal Vice President                                    |
| Mr Ben Small                    | Federal Vice President                                    |
| Ms Fiona Scott                  | Federal Vice President                                    |
| Mr Charlie Taylor               | Honorary Federal Treasurer                                |
| Mr Philip Davis                 | State Vice President, VIC                                 |
| The Hon. Nick Greiner AO        | Immediate Past President; Chair, NSW Management Committee |
| Mr Doug Hawkes                  | State President, LNP                                      |
| Senator Leah Blyth              | State President, SA                                       |
| Ms Caroline Di Russo            | State President, WA                                       |
| Mr Michael McKenna              | State President, TAS                                      |
|                                 | Territory President, ACT                                  |
| Ms Evelyn Cacas                 | President, Young Liberal Movement                         |
| Mr Chanum Torres                | Vice President, Young Liberal Movement                    |
| Ms Melina Morgan                | President, Federal Women's Committee                      |
| Mr Michael Heydon               | Acting Chairman, Federal Regional and Rural Committee     |
| Mr Andrew Hirst                 | Federal Director                                          |
| Mr Simon Berger                 | Deputy Federal Director                                   |
| Mr Josh Manuatu                 | Assistant Federal Director                                |
| Mr Chris Stone                  | State Director, NSW                                       |
| Ms Alyson Hannam                | State Director, VIC                                       |
| Mr Ben Riley                    | State Director, LNP                                       |
| Mr Alex Hyde                    | State Director, SA                                        |
| Mr Simon Morgan                 | State Director, WA                                        |
| Mr Adam Wojtonis                | Territory Director, ACT                                   |
| Mr Sam McQuestin                | State Director, TAS                                       |

**APOLOGIES**

|                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Mr Ted O'Brien MP | Deputy Federal Leader |
|-------------------|-----------------------|



# **REVIEW OF THE 2025 FEDERAL ELECTION**

CONDUCTED BY THE HON PRU GOWARD AO AND THE HON NICK MINCHIN AO

## Terms of Reference

To conduct a review of the Liberal Party's 2025 federal election result, including the campaign and the parliamentary term, and to make recommendations arising from the review.

The review will include examination of the performance of – and lessons arising for – the Federal Secretariat/CCHQ, the Parliamentary party, the Divisions of the Liberal Party (including the Country Liberal Party's campaign in Solomon), and consultants and service providers used by the Party.

The review will also examine, among other things:

- An historically low primary vote for the Liberal Party.
- The Party's electoral performance among different voter segments.
- The long-term challenge for the Party presented by 'independents'.

The review will consult with relevant subject matter experts.

Further relevant matters may be considered as the review progresses, where they are judged to have a material bearing on the Party's electoral prospects.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge those many people who took the time to provide written submissions to this review. In total, we received well over three hundred responses of varying length and nature. Not all were from Party members, but they were of great assistance in understanding the diversity and commonality of views within the Liberal movement, the strength of conviction and the depth of commitment of Party supporters. The submissions usefully shared experience in this and previous campaigns, particularly on the ground campaigning. Most submissions identified state or national logistical problems with the campaign. Many addressed what they perceived to be policy failures, lack of a values statement and a comprehensive policy package, concerns about the Party's future, particularly the fear the Party might collapse or disappear. A summary of the submissions is contained later in our report.

Further to the submissions, we consulted extensively in face-to-face meetings with those we believed had a material impact on the campaign and its outcomes, or expert insights. We met with every state director and state president where these were available. This was in addition to meeting unsuccessful and successful candidates; all provided vivid examples of the problems and successes of the campaign. In total, we conducted almost one hundred in person meetings in addition to several online meetings. We spoke to most federal elected members; regrettably it was not possible within the time constraints to speak to everyone. We also sought an independent analysis of the campaign's social media campaign from Eric Wilson, Executive Director of the Centre for Campaign Innovation. Mr Wilson has managed digital campaigns around the world but was not involved in the 2025 campaign for any party or group. His insights have been most helpful.

The submissions are broadly reflected in this report, although many submissions were concerned with policy detail or values questions which we consider to be beyond the scope of our review.

The opinions expressed in this report, while derived from the feedback we received, are our own, jointly held conclusions.

There was little feedback from those decision-makers in this campaign about their own shortcomings. While every submission criticised the actions of other decision-makers and provided examples, there was a notable absence of reflection on how a decision-maker, that is a campaign director, paid official, MP or candidate, could have done better. This has made the task of determining what went wrong more difficult and we have often been left with opposing accounts of events or shortcomings in campaign implementation which can only be reconciled by a forensic examination of emails, meeting notes and diary entries. We did not have the time or the capacity to conduct such an examination and we acknowledge this in

relevant parts of the Report. For reasons we explore later, critical self-reflection must become part of the Party's professional practice.

We also acknowledge the many election campaign reviews which the Party has conducted in the past, dating from the Valder Review of 1983. These reviews have contained several common features and similar recommendations with, we note, indifferent take up by the Party. Indeed, there is a strong similarity between the terms of reference of the 2022 Election Review and this, the 2025 Election Review.

The Federal Secretariat provided regular updates of its implementation of recommendations to Federal Executive during the last term and also to the Leader's office. By the time of the 2025 election, Federal Secretariat had made progress with those relevant to its responsibilities, such as the establishment of candidate training and campaign training materials. Since many recommendations inevitably required implementation by the state secretariats, state secretariat implementation reports were also necessary. State divisions reported regularly to Federal Executive on female representation, as part of meeting a 10-year target of equal representation. They also provided regular updates on the implementation of other recommendations, but it has not been possible to determine overall implementation and it would greatly assist Federal Executive if the implementation of all recommendations was included in these reports. It is pleasing to note that regular updates were provided to Federal Executive on preselections and just over half of the candidates were preselected 6 months out from the campaign. There were no targets set for preselection timeframes.

Even so, self-assessed implementation reports will have limited use and, resources permitting, it would be useful if some independent evaluation occurred.

The failure to grasp reform opportunities over the years has no doubt played some part in bringing the Liberal Party to its current, unenviable position; it is our hope that the limited number of recommendations in this review will be discussed, adopted and implemented in time to ensure the Party's performance at the next Federal Election improves.

Our recommendations cannot be put on the back burner or implemented over the course of five years. The party's survival requires urgency, determination and unity.

## Introduction

On 17 June 2025, the Federal Executive of the Liberal Party commissioned us to review the Party's loss at the general elections of 3 May 2025, with a particular focus on the conduct of the campaign. As the terms of reference make clear, we were also at liberty to consider wider and longer-term issues, such as the loss of support in key seats to independents and in key demographics. However, the Federal Executive has indicated its intention to commission a wider Party review which would include consideration of gender quotas. For that reason, we have confined our investigations to matters which directly impacted upon the campaign, noting that the campaign will have had some impact on support among those key demographics. To this extent, we have made observations which we believe are pertinent in explaining the election defeat and the loss of support among many voter groups.

While it has been necessary to ensure that no individual is unfairly misrepresented in our report, we have taken the view that the dramatic nature of this election loss demands a public, frank and detailed examination of the conduct of the campaign. We consider that is the best way to ensure the Party, its members and supporters appreciate why and how the election campaign was lost so comprehensively. Without this understanding, it is our view that our recommendations would lack context and their implementation would accordingly lack urgency.

It goes without saying that there were many parts of the campaign which were executed well and the membership worked magnificently to support local campaigns, notwithstanding the ageing of the membership base. The campaign also had the benefit of the vast experience of many campaign professionals and significant financial support from generous donors, many especially keen to assist with policy development. Regrettably, their efforts were not rewarded with government, but rather, a deterioration in the Party's national position. We are confident that their belief and commitment will be rewarded in time and that the lessons of this campaign will be well learnt.

The purpose of this report is to assist the Party win the next election. Inevitably the Report is critical of individuals and of strategies which damaged the Party's vote, but our interest is improvement, not blame. Neither of us consider the Party is facing inevitable destruction, unless of course, the people of the Party wish it to be so. We share the view that there will always be the need for a Centre Right Party which takes a critical view of government intervention in people's lives and is determined to ensure Australians live prosperously and peacefully, enjoying individual freedom, self-reliance and security. For eighty years, that has been the mission of the Liberal Party. In its current state, a herculean restitution may be required, but the rightness of the Liberal cause makes the urgency of this reform the responsibility of all those who believe in Australia's future.

## Results

The Federal Election of 3 May 2025 was a resounding win for the ALP Government. Labor enjoyed a first term swing to them of 3.09% to achieve a two-party preferred vote of 55.22%, the highest two-party preferred vote since 1975. Their primary vote was 34.56% but compulsory preference flows swung strongly to them. The Government now commands a total of 94 seats in the 150 seat House of Representatives.

The Liberal National Coalition now holds only 43 seats in the House of Representatives, representing a total loss of 15 seats; nine Liberal seats, one National Party seat and five Liberal National Party of Queensland seats.

Overall, the Coalition achieved a primary vote of 31.82%, a swing against the party of 3.88% and its lowest primary vote since the Liberal Party's formation.

In the Senate, the Coalition now holds 27 of the 76 Senate seats, having lost three seats at the election. The ALP achieved a 5.02% swing and an additional three seats, taking it to a total of 28 Senate seats. Since 39 seats are required for a majority, the ALP will continue to rely on the support of other parties, including the Coalition, to pass its legislation in the upper house. The Greens hold 11 Senate positions and so the Government may be able to pass some legislation without relying on other crossbenchers but requiring trade-offs with the Greens.

### Federal election primary votes

|                  | 2022  | 2025  | Swing |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Coalition</b> | 35.7% | 31.8% | -3.9% |
| <b>Labor</b>     | 32.6% | 34.6% | 2.0%  |
| <b>Greens</b>    | 12.3% | 12.2% | -0.1% |
| <b>Other</b>     | 19.4% | 21.4% | 2.0%  |
| <b>Total</b>     | 100%  | 100%  |       |

|                            | 2022  | 2025  | Swing |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Liberal</b>             | 23.9% | 20.7% | -3.2% |
| <b>LNP (Qld)</b>           | 8.0%  | 7.1%  | -0.9% |
| <b>Nationals</b>           | 3.6%  | 3.8%  | 0.2%  |
| <b>CLP (NT)</b>            | 0.2%  | 0.2%  | 0.0%  |
| <b>Labor</b>               | 32.6% | 34.6% | 2.0%  |
| <b>Greens</b>              | 12.3% | 12.2% | -0.1% |
| <b>Independents</b>        | 5.3%  | 7.3%  | 2.0%  |
| <b>One Nation</b>          | 5.0%  | 6.4%  | 1.4%  |
| <b>UAP / Trumpet</b>       | 4.1%  | 1.9%  | -2.2% |
| <b>Other minor parties</b> | 5.1%  | 5.8%  | 0.7%  |

## Two Party Preferred by State

| TPP                          | Coalition | Labor | Swing |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Queensland                   | 50.6%     | 49.4% | -3.5% |
| New South Wales              | 44.7%     | 55.3% | -3.9% |
| Victoria                     | 43.7%     | 56.3% | -1.5% |
| Australian Capital Territory | 27.5%     | 72.5% | -5.5% |
| Tasmania                     | 36.7%     | 63.3% | -9.0% |
| South Australia              | 40.8%     | 59.2% | -5.2% |
| Western Australia            | 44.2%     | 55.8% | -0.8% |
| Northern Territory           | 45.7%     | 54.3% | 1.3%  |
| Australia                    | 44.8%     | 55.2% | -3.1% |

## Preference Flows

|                  | 2022 | 2025 | Swing |
|------------------|------|------|-------|
| To the Coalition | 38%  | 39%  | 1.3%  |
| To Labor         | 62%  | 61%  | -1.3% |

These results are the worst in the Liberal Party's history. While the combined Coalition representation in the Commonwealth House of Representatives is equal to that of 1983, the number of seats held by the Liberal Party is the lowest since it first won a federal election in 1949. At that election, the Liberal party won an additional 48 seats for a total of 74 in a parliament of only 123 seats.

The Coalition now holds 28.7% of lower house seats, the lowest since the two-party system emerged 120 years ago.

The erosion of support in hitherto safe Liberal seats has also continued. Although the Liberal Party regained the seat of Goldstein in Victoria, this was more than offset by other metropolitan losses, mostly to ALP candidates but also to the Teal Independent in Bradfield, NSW. The continuing loss of metropolitan seats, particularly seats with demographics traditionally aligned with the Liberal Party voter base, is especially concerning for the Party.

## Metropolitan Teal Contests

|                  | Liberal<br>Primary | Teal<br>Primary | Lib<br>Primary<br>Swing | Liberal<br>TPP | Teal TPP | TPP<br>Swing |
|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------|--------------|
| <b>Bradfield</b> | 38.0%              | 27.0%           | -5.6%                   | 50.0%          | 50.0%    | -3.4%        |
| <b>Curtin</b>    | 40.3%              | 32.2%           | -1.1%                   | 46.7%          | 53.3%    | -2.0%        |
| <b>Goldstein</b> | 43.4%              | 30.7%           | 3.9%                    | 50.1%          | 49.9%    | 1.9%         |
| <b>Kooyong</b>   | 43.1%              | 33.9%           | -0.3%                   | 49.3%          | 50.7%    | 1.9%         |
| <b>Mackellar</b> | 35.5%              | 38.0%           | -5.0%                   | 44.3%          | 55.7%    | -3.9%        |
| <b>Warringah</b> | 31.7%              | 39.7%           | -2.6%                   | 38.8%          | 61.2%    | -0.7%        |
| <b>Wentworth</b> | 36.4%              | 36.5%           | -1.2%                   | 41.7%          | 58.3%    | -8.9%        |

## Reflections on Results

### Written Submissions and Other Feedback

We have endeavoured to reflect submissions to the Inquiry throughout this report, but for completeness, provide an overview of prevailing sentiments in submissions, assisted by AI. We also reference specific submissions later in the Report.

The high level of consistency of submissions on campaign execution is particularly telling, however submissions also canvassed values and strategy. Overall, they reveal a deeply engaged supporter base that was dissatisfied with the Party's policy and campaign direction, messaging, and execution. While contributors remain committed to Liberal values, there is a strong call for renewal organisationally, culturally, and strategically. We consider our recommendations support that call.

#### *Tone and Sentiment of Submissions*

The tone across submissions was constructive but critical, with more than two-thirds expressing frustration about policy, campaign and communication management. Positive sentiment centred on the Party's enduring principles and the defeat of The Voice referendum, viewed as proof that values-based arguments can succeed when articulated clearly. Negative sentiment focused on leadership presentation, policy confusion, and centralised control.

#### *Key Findings of Submissions*

##### 1. Campaign Management and Operations

Strongly negative. Members described Federal and State campaign coordination as slow, overly centralised and reactive. Approval processes and timing of advertising were frequent complaints. (Also consistent with candidate interviews).

##### 2. Leadership and Messaging

Peter Dutton was viewed as lacking connection with women and younger voters. Submissions urged a more empathetic and modern presentation of leadership.

### 3. Policy Direction

The campaign was seen as incoherent: nuclear and working-from-home policies were widely criticised as politically mistimed or alienating; economic management and tax policy were viewed as confused and short-term. Conversely, members expressed appetite for serious reform in housing, productivity and energy security, coupled with clear Liberal values. (Almost all those we interviewed reflected these concerns.)

### 4. Values and Identity

Strong desire for the Party to re-assert its philosophical core: small government, personal responsibility and aspiration, while modernising its tone. Members warned against becoming “Labor-lite” and urged clearer differentiation. (Candidates, both successful and unsuccessful, were more mixed in their approach.)

### 5. Demographic and Cultural Reach

Persistent concern over the Party’s standing with young people, women, and multicultural Australians. Calls for genuine engagement, community visibility, and locally resonant policy were consistent across states. (These sentiments were strongly endorsed by candidates).

### 6. Operational Renewal

Submissions emphasised the need to decentralise decision-making, improve communication between divisions while establishing consistent campaign standards nationally.

Based on submissions and interviews, our observations about the election results are consistent with those made after the 2022 federal election; foremost, that the Liberal Party continues to lose support in key voter demographics and in metropolitan Australia. Once seats held by the Liberal National Party of Queensland the Coalition are included, The Coalition now holds only nine metropolitan seats in Australia. These are almost entirely outer-metropolitan. One of the two inner-metropolitan seats, Goldstein, was won thanks to the consistent and determined effort of the local candidate, and, arguably, the demographics of the seat. The Federal Secretariat’s voter research supported the need for campaigns to focus on the Teal member’s alignment with the Greens in both this seat and the neighbouring seat of Kooyong. This was successful in not only Goldstein, but in other seats where the main opposing candidate was a Teal. In this seat, it appears that the response of the ALP government and local Teal member to the Israel-Gaza conflict may also have swung voters back to the Coalition, where Liberal candidate, Tim Wilson, strongly articulated support for Israel and the campaign’s social media supported

this. The regaining of Goldstein is to the credit of the candidate and Federal Secretariat research, but the cost, which was almost \$200,000 alone in federally funded advertising, and more in Victorian and local funding, was a huge impost on the national campaign. There is no guarantee that this will remain the case and the seat is marginal.

It is undeniably true that no party in Australia can expect to win government without holding a substantial share of metropolitan seats.

The swing against the Party, although not uniform, occurred in almost all 150 seats. Only seven now-held seats, Canning, O'Connor, Durack, Casey, Monash, Goldstein and Herbert recorded a swing to the Liberal Party. There are a further eleven seats not currently held by the Party that recorded swings to the Party. The Party would be advised to provide some analysis of these successful campaigns and their strategies for success to future candidates, in addition to reforming the overall campaign strategy.

The Liberal Party only won a majority of votes in the over 55 age group, 55.8% TPP. All other demographics were lost. This includes professional and managerial workers, sales, clerical and services workers, blue collar workers and those unemployed.

Based on Crosby Textor's post-election survey of voting provided to this review, while 46.8% of men voted Coalition (TPP), only 42.1% of women did so, representing a gender gap of 4.7% and worrying in a country where there are more female voters than male.

## Two Party Preferred by Age and Gender

| Column %           | NET   | Male  | Female | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+   |
|--------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Coalition</b>   | 44.4% | 46.8% | 42.1%  | 26.8% | 45.8% | 55.8% |
| <b>Labor Party</b> | 55.6% | 53.2% | 57.9%  | 73.2% | 54.2% | 44.2% |
| <b>NET</b>         | -5.6  | -3.2  | -7.9   | -23.2 | -4.2  | 5.8   |

*Source: Crosby Textor*

It is also no longer the case among women that only professional women chose not to vote Liberal; women in all age and socio-economic demographics predominantly voted for non-Liberal parties. Crosby Textor post-election polling also found seats with a higher female to male voter ratio were less inclined to vote Liberal. This was more pronounced in outer metropolitan and inner regional seats. Redbridge polling confirmed the Crosby Textor results.

The female vote decline was referenced by many submissions. Some attributed it to the lack of female candidates in winnable seats and called for quotas. While the percentage of women candidates in winnable seats varied across the state divisions despite this, even in a state like NSW with a high number of female candidates, the swings were broadly comparable. Excellent female candidates failed to be elected.

|                     | Total Female Candidates | Female HoR Candidates |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>ACT</b>          | 40%                     | 33%                   |
| <b>NSW</b>          | 46%                     | 43%                   |
| <b>QLD</b>          | 15%                     | 13%                   |
| <b>VIC</b>          | 30%                     | 29%                   |
| <b>SA</b>           | 29%                     | 30%                   |
| <b>WA</b>           | 30%                     | 25%                   |
| <b>TAS</b>          | 63%                     | 60%                   |
| <b>NT (Solomon)</b> | 100%                    | 100%                  |
| <b>National</b>     | 34%                     | 32%                   |

Other submissions criticised the lack of policies relevant to women's interests, or marketing which targeted men, not women. Several female candidates told us that Peter Dutton was disliked by women and asked for him not to visit their electorates. The policies were also seen as female-unfriendly. At least one regional candidate considered the Working from Home policy was the turning point which cost her the seat.

It has not been possible, as part of this review, to gain a better understanding of why the female vote declined across the board, noting that the Liberal vote also declined in other demographics. Deeper research will be needed to determine whether it was the campaign which lost the female vote, the Leader's appeal, policies, communications, other factors; or a combination of all of them. Many submissions encouraged us to recommend quotas while others counselled against them. With so many high-quality female candidates failing to be elected in winnable seats, it has not been possible to determine whether quotas would have made any difference in a campaign so badly marred in strategy and execution.

The Crosby Textor poll suggests a gender gap of 4.7%, however, the generational divide was more marked, with only 26.8% (TPP) of Gen Z women and Gen Z men intending to vote Liberal.<sup>1</sup> Redbridge polling put this closer to 20:80. The Coalition's gender problem is outweighed by the age problem, although the gender gap constitutes the largest gap in absolute numbers of voters.

While birthplace did not appear to significantly affect voting intention, for voters who spoke a language other than English at home, the gap identified by Redbridge was far greater than the overall two-party preferred gap. Of these voters, 63% intended to vote Labor and 37% Liberal. The multicultural problem appears to also outweigh the gender problem, although CT post-electoral polling found that the shift to Labor among Islamic voters and Chinese speaking voters was no greater than the overall

<sup>1</sup> Gen Z voters are those born between 1995 and 2007, characterised by a natural familiarity with digital technology.

shift. That suggests the losses of those Liberal Party seats with high proportions of Chinese voters was either not significantly influenced by Chinese voters (unlikely) or that Chinese voters in these electorates were very effectively targeted by Labor and Green campaigning.

Rural electorates remained supportive of the Coalition but provincial electorates also swung away.

Redbridge's analysis of voting intentions also found a clear divide in religious affiliations. While voters who identified as Christian (Catholic and Protestant) were slightly more likely to vote Liberal, those of other religions or no religions were significantly less likely; 54-46 (Labor-Liberal) and 63-37 (Labor-Liberal) respectively.

We note that while the Coalition's primary vote is now at 31.8%, the ALP vote is not much higher, at 34.6%. It goes without saying that the ALP better leveraged preference flows from other candidates than the Coalition. While this may not be directly related to campaigning, the primary vote decline is a factor which needs to be accounted for in future campaigns. Unless preference flows from other groups substantially improve, Coalition parties will need to win a much higher primary vote to have any chance of government.

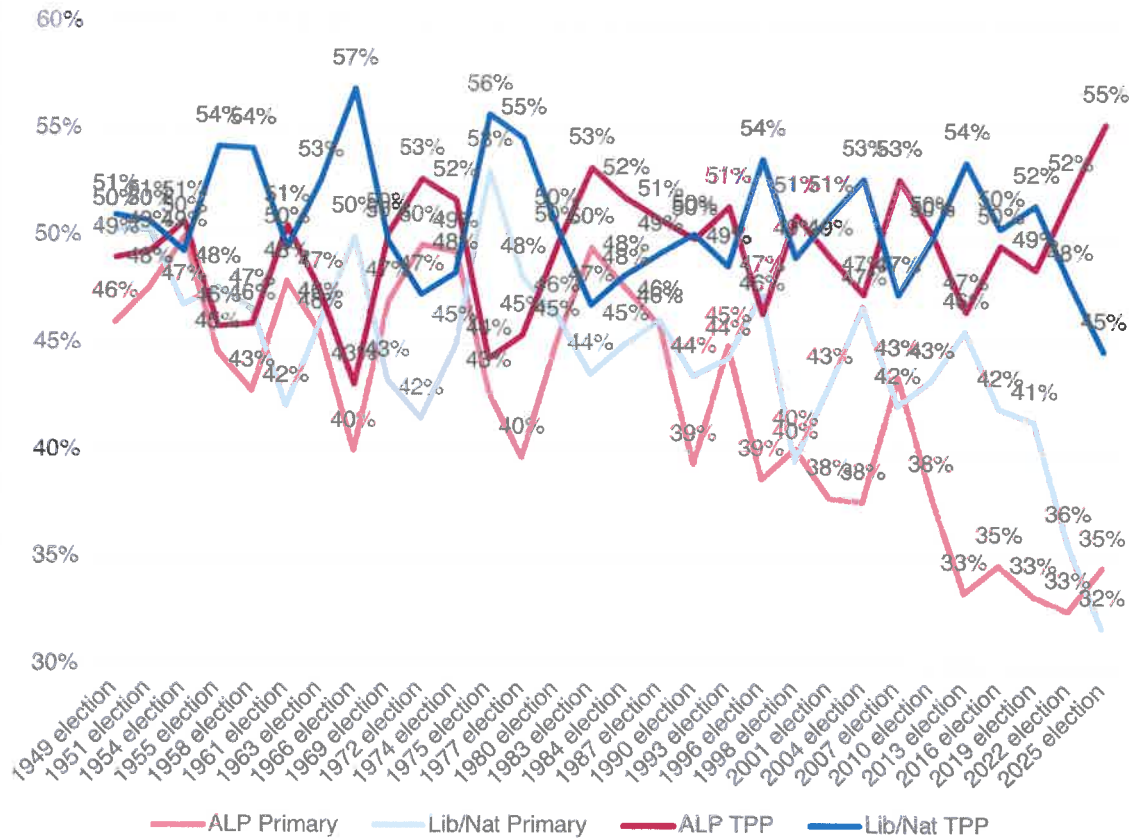
As observed in one submission, the demise of majority government will have serious implications:

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*This will lead, unless reversed, to the end of the concept of majority government, with its relative stability, and the inevitable weakening of governments (and the strengthening of bureaucracies as in Europe) by the requirement for coalitions of otherwise competing parties to form often fragile administrations.*

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## Liberal/National and Labor Primary and TPP Results



## The 2025 Campaign Settings

Before examining the March-May 2025 campaign period, it is necessary to consider the impact of the events leading into it. Without this, it is not possible to fully appreciate the consequences of the campaign's many errors.

### Change Seemed Possible

The first term ALP government, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, went into the 2025 election year with opinion polls suggesting a change of government was marginally possible. Throughout the 2022-25 term the Coalition, although new to the difficulties of Opposition, had performed well. Notably, the leader of the Opposition, Peter Dutton, led a strong campaign against the Government sponsored The Voice referendum, which was defeated in October 2023. He was applauded for that and by 2024, the Opposition had a new confidence. Mindful of the political damage caused by disunity, the parliamentary party remained determinedly loyal to the Opposition Leader throughout the term. However, the reality was that the Coalition needed to gain a net 20 seats to win government, requiring a swing of around 5%, historically a huge task. As psephologist Antony Green observed, based on the opinion polls in the months leading up to the election, only twice did the Coalition's two-party preferred vote rise above 52%, regarded as the minimum lead required for majority government. Furthermore, it must be a sustained lead over time, which was also not the case.

### The 2023 Voice Referendum

Initially, polling confirmed the Government's decision to pursue constitutional reform (The Voice Referendum) would enjoy majority voter support. However, after some consideration and internal discussion, the Opposition Leader, Peter Dutton, determined that the Liberal Party would join the National Party in campaigning for a No vote. The Coalition's success in this campaign, implemented by the Federal Secretariat, gave it great confidence and momentum; meanwhile the Government's approval ratings struggled after the Referendum's defeat.

Australian households, struggling with higher interest rates and cost of living pressures, wanted government to focus on their economic difficulties and considered the Referendum and national security debates to be distractions. There is also a very long history of the Australian electorate opposing constitutional change, of whatever kind. Having defeated the Referendum, the Opposition continued to talk about the defeat of The Voice, confirming it was not only the Government which had allowed it to distract them from the electorate's cost of living concerns.

The results of The Voice referendum were applied by the Party's pollster, Freshwater, to their weighting of their opinion poll results. They have acknowledged that they over-estimated the expected Liberal vote, based on those results. Some Liberal candidates and MPs also assumed that the defeat of The Voice meant those

who voted No would vote Liberal, not accounting for the difference between the behaviour of Australian voters at referendums and elections. The election results in ALP-held seats, for example, suggests Labor voters clearly voted against The Voice referendum without then deciding to vote Liberal in a general election in which The Voice no longer figured. The two votes were much less connected than Freshwater assumed.

### **Polling Brought Confidence**

Throughout late 2024 and early 2025, Peter Dutton had closed the poll gap between himself and the Prime Minister. For example, the Resolve polls showed the Coalition leading the Government 52-48 TPP in December and January. By the end of January 2025, Peter Dutton held a 39-34 lead over Anthony Albanese as preferred PM, and his net approval rating surged to +6. By Australia Day 2025, Coalition forces were beginning to believe they could win the election, due by the end of May.

Coalition polling by Freshwater had also confirmed these leads but advised that much of the vote was soft, that is, could change. It is a pollster's task to model the soft vote, to track it and see where it eventually lands. Freshwater, as previously noted, appears to have based its predictions on inaccurate weightings.

### **A Stable, First Term Government**

History was on Labor's side. Federal election cycles are short, rarely lasting more than three years, and electorates are disinclined to eject governments which have barely had time to establish themselves. Since the development of the two-party system in the 1920s, only once has a first term government been defeated. That defeat, of the first term Scullin Labor Government in 1931, occurred at the height of the Great Depression when the country was suffering from record unemployment and the birth rate had dropped to its lowest on record. The country was in despair. These circumstances were dramatically different to those facing the electorate in 2025.

### **Absence of a Burning Platform**

While the electorate of 2025 was focused on cost-of-living pressures and housing affordability, these concerns could never have been described as politically catastrophic for a first term government in the same way that the unemployment and social gloom of 1931 clearly was for the Scullin Government. There is no denying that most households in 2025 were very concerned about the cost of living and through that lens judged each party's election commitments and vision, but 2025 was far from a social catastrophe. Furthermore, the Labor Government made the case that responsibility for the country's economic travails were jointly shared with the former Coalition Government, which incurred large Budget deficits during the COVID period, so fuelling inflation. While the polls certainly demonstrate that the

electorate was prepared to consider changing its vote, there was no burning platform to make that a certainty. An excellent campaign would be needed.

## **Relationship Between the Party and the Parliamentary Party**

The key relationship in any Federal or State campaign is between the Federal/State Secretariat and the parliamentary Leader and his/her office. Fundamental to any successful campaign is a strong and trusting relationship between the Federal/State Director and the Parliamentary Leader, including his/her chief of staff.

Clearly, by the 2025 campaign, that relationship was effectively broken. While The Voice had been a success, and there had been swings to the Coalition in Fadden and Cook, the Leader and his Chief of Staff had little trust in the Federal Director/Federal Secretariat, a breakdown which evolved over the parliamentary term, but was not effectively communicated to the Federal Director or the Federal President. The Federal Director irregularly attended shadow cabinet meetings, unlike past practice, and briefed the Party Room seven times during the term. Face to face meetings with the Leader were also infrequent. As the Federal Director said

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*“I met with the Cabinet [in the 2019-22 term] more than the shadow cabinet”.*

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The Leader and the Federal Director had 9 campaign preparation meetings between the November 2024 and April 2025. The Federal Secretariat was concerned that the Leader was not engaging on strategy and message; the Leader did not believe the Federal Secretariat was executing the mechanics satisfactorily. The Federal Director observed that the Leader’s chief of staff would seek to direct campaign decision making for which he did not have responsibility.

The Leader's office observed that the Party’s campaign team, headed by the Federal Director, had in the six years of Anthony Albanese’s leadership failed to develop an effective negative of Albanese.

We note that while that might have been the case during the 2022-25 term, the ALP had commended the Party on its very effective negative campaign in 2022, after the first three years of Mr Albanese’s leadership. There was high recall of “It won’t be easy under Albanese” and the Hole in the Bucket advertisements. Indeed, the Hole in the Bucket has enjoyed professional accolades. That campaign was the responsibility of the same Federal Secretariat staff which served Peter Dutton between 2022-2025. It was the task of the Opposition leader and Federal Secretariat to build on those perceptions during the term, but this did not eventuate. It has been beyond the capacity of this review to adequately explore that failure, but there was most certainly a negative perception of Anthony Albanese developed during the first three years of his leadership.

The Leader's office considered this shortcoming was compounded by the Federal Secretariat's failure to develop a positive narrative about Peter Dutton earlier in the term, despite repeated requests. The Federal Secretariat advised they made attempts to develop a positive campaign strategy but meeting requests were not taken up. Eventually, a positive media campaign was developed by the Federal Secretariat and approved by the Leader in September 2024. It was not proceeded with after the Secretariat was advised he had withdrawn his approval. Finally, thirty and sixty second ads telling the Peter Dutton story were belatedly run in January and February 2025, at a cost of \$1M.

This review was not conducted in a court of law and it is not possible for us to determine why a positive personal campaign was so delayed, whether it should have been delayed, and who is to blame. The Secretariat took the view that such a personal campaign needed to be followed by the Leader's plan for the country and, on the advice of the party's creative and advertising buying agency, that both were best left until the latter part of the term. The Leader considered a positive personal campaign was needed much earlier. Peter Dutton's previous ministerial image as a hard man needed considerable work with paid and unpaid media, but that did not eventuate. The timeliness of such a repositioning is critical and delaying such a campaign, even to sacrifice the good for the perfect, is high risk, as it proved to be in this instance.

Although Labor had started early on the negative portrayal of Peter Dutton with personal references to Voldemort and Mediscare, the Coalition's negative portrayal of Anthony Albanese was much less effective over the 2022-25 term. The worst that could be said of the Labor leader by the end of the campaign was that he was "weak and ineffective".

There appears to have been a lack of understanding in the Leader's office about the responsibilities of the Federal Secretariat/Federal Director on the one hand, and the Leader and his office on the other.

Overall, this disconnection resulted in a lack of critical agreement on strategy, tactics, and message, which crippled the overall campaign.

Advice from the Federal Director and Federal Secretariat seems to have been ignored on a regular basis.

The Federal Campaign Committee, which is the key forum for bringing together the Party and Parliamentary leadership on campaign preparations, appears to have been established only later in the term and rarely met. It met once during the five-week campaign. Although most members were on regular calls with CCHQ, more regular meetings in the lead-up to the campaign itself might have assisted in identifying problems with strategy and policy development earlier.

By the time the election was announced, there was little trust and a poor working relationship between the Party's two most important campaigning arms. As a result, the Leader and his Chief of Staff made key campaign decisions without sufficient consultation with the Federal Director, usurping his proper role as Campaign Director.

This resulted in effectively two separate operations in the campaign, running on insufficiently coordinated paths – the Federal Secretariat/CCHQ, and the Leader and his office, colloquially known as The Plane.

## **Unity Instead of Debate**

Mindful of the political destructiveness of disunity, those MPs who spoke to us consistently admitted they did not challenge a policy direction when they should, nor did they seek party-room debate on contentious issues, over the term. Recollections vary; some MPs believed they had self-censored, keen to preserve unity and avoid damaging leaks from the party room. Others believed dissent and debate were actively discouraged by the Leader or dismissed by the Opposition Leader's chief of staff without further inquiry. One MP said he told the Opposition Leader during a party room meeting that he did not agree with a policy position and was told he could leave the Party if that was how he felt.

## **Policy Development**

The Opposition established a Shadow Expenditure Review Committee (SERC) early in the 2022-25 term to vet spending and policy measures. As several MPs observed, they behaved like a government in exile. Many shadow ministers described taking a policy proposal through a "brutal" SERC process, where the main concern was reportedly ensuring proposed expenditure did not adversely affect the (Shadow) Budget bottom line, rather than fresh, appealing and achievable policy. These policies were then considered by the parliamentary leadership group, after which their management and release became the decision of the Leader's office. Several shadow ministers complained, after the election, that their policy proposals were never released or released too late in the campaign. The Review was told that inquiries to the Opposition Leader's office about policy announcements were met with assurances that the policies would be announced later and would be to their liking, but these never eventuated.

The Party's federal constitution requires that shadow ministers address the Advisory Committee on Federal Policy at least once during the pre-campaign period to discuss policy proposals. Clause 15.2 (c) and (d) place obligations on the federal parliamentary party to report to the Party's Advisory Committee on Federal Policy, and the Federal Executive.

While this happened in the lead up to earlier campaigns, for example, it did not, reportedly, occur during the 2022-25 opposition period. The Advisory Committee had

developed a data base of independent experts to assist shadow ministers, but there is limited evidence of that data base being used.

In total, the Coalition released 23 formal policies between 6 April and 2 May 2025. Their lateness meant the usual approval processes were not, reportedly, followed. However, the Working From Home Policy, which removed the right of Commonwealth public servants to work from home, was announced in March 2025, before the campaign began. This policy was reportedly not taken to the Party Room, nor provided in advance to the Federal Secretariat so that it could be qualitatively tested. Memories vary on who approved it. The policy was reversed a month later.

Similarly, the nuclear power policy to develop a government-owned nuclear power program, while released mid-year 2024, did not release its costings (estimated \$331B) until December 2024. The delay was fatal, allowing the Government to fill the financial vacuum with a scare campaign. But there were also long-standing electoral concerns which needed to be addressed if the program was to be endorsed by the electorate. Dating from the 2019-2022 term, the Liberal Party's Federal Secretariat had considerable research on the politics of nuclear power and the extended time it would take to convince Australians that nuclear power was acceptable. The research confirmed that a long campaign would be needed to change the minds of the majority of Australian voters, especially female voters, who were concerned about nuclear safety and viewed nuclear power sceptically or negatively. Such a campaign would take considerable effort. The research was shared with the Leader's office. The difficulties of proposing a positive nuclear power policy from Opposition, without such an awareness campaign preceding it, were obvious. While the responsible shadow minister, Ted O'Brien, worked tirelessly to promote the nuclear policy, there was not the extensive public education and advertising campaign the Party's research had demonstrated would be necessary if a nuclear power policy was to be accepted. While advertising materials were produced by the Federal Secretariat, they needed to be more comprehensive and have been run over several years as part of a staged campaign to persuade Australians that nuclear power was acceptable.

There was also strong and active support in some business and commercial circles for a nuclear power program, quite separate from the shadow minister and Federal Secretariat. This support would have ideally converted to strong third-party campaigning, but research about the difficulty of the public education task needed to be shared and understood by them. Again, this review was not designed to identify whose responsibility this was, suffice it to say that any opposition leader who commits to an ambitious, courageous policy such as nuclear power, must ensure that third party support is well informed about the challenges ahead and prepared for a long journey.

The absence of a public awareness raising campaign for nuclear power was then compounded by Labor's estimate that the cost to taxpayers would be \$600B. This was relentlessly employed by the Government as part of their He Cuts You Pay campaign and never successfully refuted by the Opposition, whose own costings arrived too late and never penetrated the electorate's consciousness.

The policy was also not linked to cost-of-living relief, which was foremost in voters' minds, although research showed Peter Dutton was marked well for attempting a bold vision. As the election campaign drew on, the nuclear policy receded into the shadows. Despite this, many candidates, although not all, identified nuclear power as a net negative in their campaigns.

This disconnection between the policy driver of the nuclear policy, that is the Leader's office, and the political research arm of the party, the Federal Secretariat, is emblematic of the general disconnect between the Secretariat and the Leader's Office. The Leader's office also had an apparent disregard for the communications challenges of successfully promoting a policy in a few months which Coalition governments had failed to achieve since John Gorton's prime-ministership in 1969 and John Howard's efforts in 2006, both from government.

## **The Trump Factor**

The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in November 2024 was initially welcomed by many who believed he was a strong leader and would restore the fortunes of the US and the West more broadly. Peter Dutton was often likened to President Trump, in the unkind words of one candidate, Temu Trump. Shortly after Mr Trump's election, he announced the establishment of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and declared his Administration's opposition to diversity and inclusion targets. Announcements of mass public service sackings and budget cuts followed. While those announcements may have initially received positive responses, the Australian electorate's view of them quickly soured. The problem was compounded by Peter Dutton's creation, in January 2025, of a shadow ministry for Government Efficiency, similar to President Trump's DOGE. The Opposition's decision to abolish working from home for the public service and its decision to cut 40,000 public service jobs were seen as Trump-like by the electorate and were so deeply unpopular they were later reversed or modified.

President Trump also announced a series of tariff increases in January 2025 which greatly alarmed Australia's resources and agricultural export sectors. While the impact on direct trade between Australia and the US was relatively small, the flow on effects for China, Australia's largest export market, were well understood. This deepened Australian dislike of the President and the Opposition Leader, now successfully painted as Trump-like, began to slide in the preferred prime minister poll. It required a nimble and flexible response from the Opposition Leader and emphatic demonstration that there was no similarity between the two.

## Interest Rates

Housing affordability had increasingly become an issue of concern for the electorate. Thirteen successive interest rate increases by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) between May 2022 and November 2023 had put households under extreme budget pressure. The RBA increased the cash rate to a peak of 4.35% to combat rising inflation; household mortgage payments rose by hundreds of dollars a month. Had the Government gone to the election in December 2024, as widely expected, there is no doubt the interest rate increases would have loomed large in the minds of voters. In February 2025 however, the RBA judged it safe to reduce the cash-rate and mortgage payments fell for the first time in three years. Redbridge polling shows a significant reduction in Coalition support among mortgage holders following the RBA's decision.

## Natural Disasters and Long Weekends

Who could forget the political disaster the December 2019 bushfires brought for Prime Minister Scott Morrison when he delayed returning from a family holiday while eastern Australia burned. While disaster management has always been the responsibility of states and territories, that episode made clear that Australians expected their national leader to also provide leadership and to be, in a sense, the national mourner and comforter. The lesson was obviously learnt by his successor, Anthony Albanese. When faced with a similar situation of wide-spread flooding on the east coast of Australia in January 2025, the prime minister ensured he was visible and present, both in comforting communities and addressing the financial needs arising from the damage. It enabled the prime minister to delay the election and be seen at his very best, incidentally enlivening memories of his predecessor's failings. By contrast, the Opposition Leader attended a fund-raiser in Sydney as his electorate was under threat of flooding. While he flew back the following morning and, reportedly, worked hard assisting his neighbours, it contributed to the perception of Peter Dutton as a politician who did not care.

During the campaign there were long weekends, including Easter and Anzac Day, and school holidays. The Opposition needed momentum to change votes but additional holidays, when households are away or busy, made this difficult. The Government did not need momentum, on the other hand, because the tide was already moving their way.

## Tax Cuts

The Government's decision to delay going to the polls brought them unexpected advantages. These included enabling an additional Budget on 25 March 2025. As part of that Budget, the Government announced it would provide an income tax cut of a few hundred dollars for low-income earners in 2026-7 as part of its cost-of-living relief. The Opposition announced that it would oppose that tax cut on Budget Night and voted against it when the legislation was introduced. The election campaign

began three days after the tax cut, on 28 March. The leadership group's decision to oppose an income tax cut, which many MPs told us they had not been consulted about and would have opposed, immediately impacted on the Coalition's economic credentials, historically, a strong part of the Coalition's brand. Members of the former leadership group explained they had made the decision in the Budget lock-up because the tax cut was effectively "a handout" and that supporting it restricted their ability to spend more on Defence, in line with the new expectations of the US Government.

## **Campaign Readiness**

The Federal Secretariat had already booked office accommodation in Parramatta for its campaign headquarters and there were campaign team practices which were considered successful. The team was ready to start whenever the election was called. Whether the composition and alignment of the team is appropriate for modern campaigning is another matter, addressed later in this report.

In summary, while the Opposition began 2025 with an outside chance of winning a narrow victory, there was neither the burning platform for change nor the policy offerings which would make that a certainty. It was always going to be an enormous task, requiring brilliant campaigning, to win 20 seats and a swing of 5% from a first term government.

As events unfolded in early 2025, including international events such as the US tariff announcement and the east coast floods, the Opposition's lead faltered. By the time the election campaign began on 28 March 2025, the Opposition faced considerable headwinds. Some of these were beyond its control but many were of its own making. Polling advice, which is explored later in this report, had meanwhile served to significantly and falsely inflate the Opposition's confidence and it entered the campaign not as the underdog, traditionally the role of opposition parties, but as the government in waiting. The campaign dynamic changed accordingly and became about the Opposition's policies and not the Government's record. Similarly, the Opposition Leader became the subject of greater scrutiny. As the campaign increased in pace, the Liberal National Coalition became the riskier choice.

# The Campaign

An election campaign has several components, and this chapter deals with each of them in turn. They form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

- CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE
- CAMPAIGN STRATEGY
- CAMPAIGN STAFF AND IMPLEMENTATION
- POLICY DEVELOPMENT
- POLLING AND RESEARCH
- TEAL SEATS
- THIRD PARTY ENGAGEMENT
- CANDIDATES
- FUNDRAISING
- LEADERSHIP

## Campaign Structure and Strategy

Some former leaders have said that the parliamentary leader runs the election campaign but effectively this has always been the responsibility of the Party's Federal Director. The logistics of campaigning, particularly the schedule for policy commitments announcements, the production of campaigning materials, including advertising and digital media, the postal vote process and supervising local campaigns rest on the federal and state directors. Polling and research are also the responsibility of the Federal Director, whose task it is to provide advice to the parliamentary leader based on that research and to adjust the campaign's messaging, communications method and style if research dictates it. The Federal Director, traditionally an experienced campaign operative, is also expected to provide the parliamentary leader and the parliamentary party with advice, not always pleasant, about their progress. It is the Director's responsibility to develop a campaign strategy (agreed with the leader, states and territories) and plan, usually known as the 33 Day Plan in acknowledgement of the usual length of campaigns, in consultation with the parliamentary leader. The campaign director is responsible for a tactics and communications plan to ensure that policy releases are accompanied by appropriate messaging and opponents' announcements critically scrutinised.

The Party's Constitution has little to say about the Federal Director's roles and responsibilities, and even less about the Federal Director's authority. Historically, this authority has been undefined but de facto assumed. Campaigns have been conducted based on mutual understanding between the parliamentary leader and the Federal Director and their team.

During the campaign, the parliamentary leader is expected to deliver and defend the Party's commitments to the electorate, address shortcomings raised by opponents

and by force of personality and argument, persuade the electorate to vote for the Liberal (and National) Party. The leader is afforded the privilege of a RAAF aircraft and is responsible for determining where it goes each day of the campaign. Traditionally, this has been based on the 33 Day Plan, unless circumstances change so drastically that a quick decision must be made, as they say, “on the plane”. There have usually been sufficient checks and balances, including conference calls and consultations with experienced advisors, to ensure even last-minute decisions are well thought through and agreed between the campaign director and parliamentary leader.

In this campaign, several factors were absent which made a usually consensual relationship of shared authority between the Leader and the Federal Director unworkable. Both the Director, Andrew Hirst, and the Opposition Leader, Peter Dutton, acknowledged that their relationship was not good enough. Peter Dutton had little confidence in the Director from the beginning of the term, which the Director and President consider were never, either directly, or through intermediaries, communicated to them. The Director, for his part, considered he had a limited relationship with the Leader’s chief of staff, and felt shut out.

The Leader’s parliamentary colleagues, with some exceptions, also said they felt shut out of decision-making. Mr Dutton acknowledged that he trusted the judgment of very few of his colleagues and doubted the motives of many of them. Party room meetings, while united, apparently were not places for policy debate. One senator observed that Peter Dutton’s advisors “treated MPs as irrelevant” and were “disrespected”. Gradually, the Opposition Leader and his office assumed the role of campaign director as well as spokesperson-leader. The very positive polling only served to (falsely as it turned out) strengthen the Leader’s authority and the reluctance of both his parliamentary colleagues and the Party to challenge his judgement.

There are good reasons for keeping the campaign director and parliamentary leader roles separate. Were the parliamentary leader to also run the campaign, the leader is in the invidious position of marking his or her own homework, that is, using their judgement to adjust their tone and messaging according to polling and other feedback. People deal differently with conflicts of interest and negative feedback but suffice it to say that both directing and being the face of a five-week political campaign would be an extreme challenge. There is also the problem of capacity. Being a 24/7 spokesperson for the biggest game in town is hard enough; being distracted by the complexities of campaign management can only be a brake on doing either job well. This campaign has demonstrated exactly how much of a fatal flaw the unofficial combining of the two roles in the 2025 campaign proved to be. As one state director put it

During the campaign, the disconnection between campaign director and leader continued. Morning conference calls were reportedly short, lacked discussion or critical feedback. Their unstrategic nature was described as “a joke”. On the plane ruled. The lack of a parliamentary colleague on the plane with the Leader, as had occurred in the past, meant there was no one who could give the Leader unvarnished feedback about the day’s performance or rehearse for what lay ahead. Jamie Briggs, a former MP who was close to the Leader, was paid to be his conduit at campaign headquarters, but apparently not for the purpose of providing tough advice in person.

The takeover of campaign management by the Leader and his office had several consequences, one being that the Leader did not appear to enjoy the campaign. Campaigning is a daunting task, but also an exciting one and should be full of energy, engagement, even humour. The electorate expects to see and hear an upbeat and inspiring leader. All of that was lacking and the Leader’s grim and introverted demeanour, clothed in the ubiquitous suit whatever the occasion, did not change during the campaign and perhaps reflected the heavy and additional burden he imposed on himself.

However, the most significant costs of this management arrangement were the lack of an agreed strategy and the chaotic travel and policy announcements. As a result, policies were often only decided upon by the Leader’s office a few hours or days before they were to be launched and Coalition Campaign Headquarters, CCHQ, would then be tasked with developing appropriate social media and advertising materials at the last minute. Sometimes policy announcements were only shared with CCHQ the afternoon before the planned launch, requiring staff to scramble overnight drafting supporting materials. “The plane” occasionally decided to travel to a different destination to that decided upon earlier that day, and CCHQ was given little notice. As a result, advancing (by a staff member who checked out the planned location and people who would be at the event) could not always occur and at least one event needed to be cancelled when last minute inquiries confirmed there were political risks attached to the location. Candidates or senators reported they could be rung by the Leader’s office and required to attend a policy launch without knowing the detail of the policy until the last moment and again with little notice. Peter Dutton advised that there was a 33 Day Plan in his office, but that it evolved and changed depending on the circumstances.

The domestic and family violence policy launch was instructive. Both Sussan Ley, then Shadow Minister for Women, and Senator Kerryne Liddle, then Shadow Minister for Child Protection and the Prevention of Family Violence, were advised by the Leader’s office that the policy was to be announced in Tasmania. Senator Liddle

was given a few hours to make travel arrangements from South Australia. Tasmanians were concerned that there had been no local domestic violence issue in Tasmania which might have strengthened the news-worthiness of the announcement occurring in their state. The Liberal Party's most senior woman and deputy leader, Sussan Ley, could only reach the announcement on time by the last-minute cancellation of other arrangements.

The final policy announcement in Tasmania then featured, reportedly, \$20M for a women's shelter in the seat of Robertson, NSW, and nothing bespoke for Tasmania. This funding decision was reportedly made without reference to the shadow minister and there was no explanation for why Tasmania was chosen when the shadow minister, if asked, would have been able to suggest a more suitable event and location. Overall, the announcement was not part of any 33-day plan and there was no policy package around it which built broader themes, such as community safety. It is doubtful it impacted on a single vote. Planning and executing would have been a distraction for the Opposition Leader and his office with predictably poor results, when it could have been managed by campaign headquarters. As a state president observed of the Plan

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*We were so busy chasing the ball when we should have been throwing it.*

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While it was obviously seriously problematic that the Federal Director and Leader could not work effectively together, the point is that nothing was done about it. It resulted in a lack of a shared strategy and the 33 Day Plan not being followed. This meant policy launches, electorate visits and the movements of other MPs could often not be organised in time, nor could social media and advertising. It meant qualitative research and polling results were provided but critical discussion with the Leader was not possible. Indeed, the Leader turned directly to the pollster, Dr Mike Turner, to provide advice on messaging and strategy, and regularly rang him personally. In past campaigns, polling and research results were commissioned by, and provided to, the Federal Director who, in consultation with his senior campaign officials, relayed the results and advice to the Leader, however unpleasant the contents. In the case of this broken relationship, neither demanded the resignation of the other, unlike one former Federal Director, who had occasionally threatened to resign (once doing so in writing) when he felt the Leader was overriding his advice. David Kemp, who has conducted election reviews in the past and who stands as one of the Party's great protectors, observed

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*The campaign director must do everything possible to remain in control of the campaign, including being prepared to take a leader*

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*privately to task to keep an agreed campaign management and strategy on track. A wise leader will recognise that he cannot control a campaign and also carry out leadership functions properly.*

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Former federal directors stressed the need for the Federal Director to be assertive in his/her relationship with the Leader and the parliamentary party.

The Party's Constitution, appropriately revised, would clarify the responsibilities of the Party's leadership team and is recommended. However, the failure of both parties to seek a resolution to a catastrophic communication breakdown, either directly or through a trusted third party such as the Federal President, remains unaddressed. No doubt, as many others have attested, the character of this leader made that difficult, and no doubt reasonable people like the Federal Director felt it inappropriate to take on such a breakdown and preferred to battle through. The distrust was not mediated. Whatever the reason for inaction on the part of both men, or indeed the failure of third parties to seek to resolve it, the price paid for this breakdown was extremely damaging for the campaign and its outcome.

One option for remedying the lack of communication between the Federal Secretariat and the Leader may have been to take the problem to the Federal Campaign Committee, which is responsible for overseeing federal election campaigns. This time, however, the Committee was barely functioning and played little role during the Campaign, despite its constitutional authority. While it has the potential to require the various sections of the Party, including the parliamentary party, the Leader's office and the Federal Secretariat, to answer to it and work together, this Committee has increasingly faded from view. It seems a sensible precaution to restore the status of the Committee and ensure it provides oversight in future campaigns.

On the ground campaigning was the subject of many submissions to the review. Most were concerned with the slow arrival of voting materials such as How to Vote Cards and pledge pamphlets, often too late to distribute. While the Federal Secretariat provided the art work within 24 hours of the ballot draw, printing and distribution was the responsibility of state divisions.

Other submissions were critical of the national flavour of campaign advertising and the absence of local messages about local issues. The Federal Secretariat considers they made extensive attempts to localise mail pieces with local sections and the incorporation of an expanded Fighting For section, which resulted in over 1,000 local initiatives being announced. As some counter to the Leader's unpopularity, the Federal Secretariat designed Postal Vote Applications using candidate letterhead rather than the Leader's letterhead. All politics is local and there was some criticism that campaigns were not sufficiently localised.

Submissions were also critical of slow approval times for local responses to opponents, or local social media messages, by both CCHQ and state divisions. Approvals could take up to four days. Individual social media posts or videos did not require federal approval unless the state division wanted it fact-checked or it included a policy announcement.

NSW state director, Chris Stone, considered the campaign was marked by unduly prescriptive federal control. He felt there had been too much federal interference, slowing down their local campaigns and advised that media releases could sometimes take over a week to be cleared by CCHQ, a complaint echoed by other directors. Federal Secretariat disagreed, citing approval times for announcements involving local funding as short as a few hours, an average of 24 hours and one instance of four days. The Federal Director considers the state directors were all involved in determining the approvals process for this campaign and that concerns had not been raised.

The consistency of the criticism that all approvals were too slow cannot be dismissed. While it was nowhere near the problem that the Leader's popularity, lack of strategy, policy and message created, it is important to get right. We have concluded that widespread criticism about the approvals processes suggests approvals processes need improvement and proper stress testing before the next federal election to see where improvements can be made.

It is incumbent on all secretariats to review their approvals processes. This task could be overseen by the Party's staff planning committee. If federal approvals rely ultimately on one person's decision, as described by one CCHQ insider, then perhaps the number of decision-makers at CCHQ should be expanded. While CCHQ advises it had several approvals processes involving several senior officials, with twice daily approvals meetings, the strong sense that there was a bottle neck in CCHQ needs to be addressed. If CCHQ considers it was unduly burdened by approving press releases with glaring errors and proofing problems, then state and local campaign managers need to be tasked with improvement. Improving the efficiency of the approvals process must be undertaken; it does not need each division to reinvent the process, but for the collective executive to rework what was obviously a great frustration for candidates and members.

Successful candidates like Tim Wilson, ran very localised campaigns. Wilson's campaign was based on strong local and Federal Secretariat research. He built his campaign over almost the entire term and understood the campaign needed two stages: one to break the electorate's relationship to the incumbent, before a second stage to persuade them to vote Liberal. Even so, he complained of late artwork for corflutes and social media videos not being approved until the end of January. As previously noted, a further complication for the finalisation of mail pieces was the

haphazard release of national policies, often with little notice, so that media and communications teams had little time to prepare materials for candidates.

The ageing of the Party's support base has made it difficult to equip every candidate with an experienced campaign manager and organisers. The deployment of battleground or field officers to winnable seats, as occurred in previous campaigns, would have assisted local campaign managers and provided professional assistance with campaign monitoring.

The Party reportedly had between 30 and 40 full-time organisers in electorates during the 1960s. In South Australia alone the State Secretariat employed 5 full-time campaign field officers during the 1980s. More recently, battleground directors in NSW during the 2013 campaign were responsible for nightly data reports, matching doorknocking and phone canvassing feedback from real voters, not focus-group attendees, against polling data.

In this campaign, the Liberal Party's data analytics were able to re-cast the electorate regularly. Candidates were trained in canvassing and how to access data, consider the verbatim responses and follow up with individual voters. Although the collection of information was considerably more sophisticated than 2013, candidates and their teams needed to be able to exploit the information. The ageing support base would often not have been equipped to do so and more on the ground support from field officers would have enabled better use of the data, much earlier pivoting in endangered seats or a more critical examination of electorate polling conducted by Freshwater.

Electorates varied in their capacity to muster supporters for Pre Poll and Election Day. Unlike the ALP, which rallies trade union members as booth workers, the Coalition relies on individual volunteers. The ageing of Party members has added to the problem of providing sufficient numbers of booth workers over the years, and some campaigns were grateful for the assistance of volunteers who were also members of the Plymouth Brethren.

There were divided opinions about the value of having Plymouth Brethren members handing out Liberal Party How to Vote cards, but clearly better training of all booth workers would ensure clear messaging and consistently appropriate engagement with voters as they approached the polling booth. The Liberal Party does not, nor should have, a religious affiliation test. Protestants, Catholics, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu followers supported the Liberal Party. The Plymouth Brethren are also not the only support group who has been accused of poor behaviour on polling booths; union officials, for example, are frequently criticised for their harassment of voters. It will need further investigation to determine why such exception has been taken to the role of the Plymouth Brethren; no doubt Brethren members themselves are reviewing their involvement.

## Campaign Staff Performance

The Federal Secretariat has been based in Menzies House, Canberra, since 1965. It has housed the Federal Director and staff for all that time. The Federal Secretariat advises that seven of the staff are based interstate but a core of five staff (including the executive assistant) is based in Canberra, although only the Federal Director is required to live in Canberra. For many years the Federal Director and his staff have relocated outside Canberra for the duration of the election campaign, most recently to Parramatta, before returning to the sombre quiet of Menzies House shortly thereafter. The current staff are expected to manage a range of responsibilities and most have backgrounds in the Party, working for MPs, although some, like the Deputy Director, also have experience in the private sector. The Federal Secretariat already permits remote home working and this should continue if the Party is to attract the best available talent, with emphasis on digital and third party online campaigning expertise.

The absence of senior female staff in the Liberal Secretariat is particularly striking and commented on by male and female MPs, noting the excellent contributions of existing female staff including in the fundraising, finance and data teams. Despite previous reviews having identified a problem with the female vote, there is no women's officer or senior female official in the Secretariat with direct input into strategy, campaign materials and communications. We are not aware that such positions exist at state levels, where a similar lens is also required. A senior campaign staff member with responsibilities that include the development of working relationships with political women's networks, such as Hilma's Network or the non-partisan Women for Election, could help ensure a female lens is applied to campaigning. Both those organisations have successfully identified and trained election candidates, and their alumni lists are impressive. They could claim some expert knowledge of the female vote and what moves it. Yet both described a lack of interest in their work from MPs and some Women's Councils, even distrust and hostility, including from the former Leader's Office. No doubt there is history there but since the Hilma's Network receives funding from the main Liberal Party donor, the Cormack Foundation, improved future engagement is likely to benefit both organisations. The recently established Margaret Guilfoyle Network, in accordance with the 2022 Review recommendations, also has the potential to bolster connection with women and should foster a relationship with these bodies.

After at least a decade of a declining female vote it remains a mystery that the Party has not performed a deep-dive into its causes.

A similar approach to better engaging with young people, who overwhelmingly did not vote for the Liberal Party, could also have assisted.

By contrast, Australia's top performing marketing, data analytics, advertising and communications companies are based in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne. They are

often internationally connected and adopt world best practice. These industries are highly competitive and excellence is a prerequisite for survival. Their workplaces mostly include senior women and are culturally diverse, better able to reflect different experiences and understanding of data and audiences. While political operators are inclined to argue that political marketing requires different skills, it is also true that marketing and communications of any kind relies on the same basic skills of strong research, good data analytics, insight, originality and experience.

Over the 2022-25 term, the Liberal Party engaged four market research agencies, two world- leading analytics firms, two digital media agencies, three media buyers, a leading web-design firm and video production crews, all from outside Canberra. The Federal Secretariat is satisfied that the data analytics employed in this campaign was the most sophisticated ever used by the Party and did not contribute to the defeat. It was possible for MPs and candidates to reach voters with a high degree of accuracy. In preparation for future campaigns, it will be important to ensure all campaign managers, MPs and candidates are data match fit; there is no disagreement about the growing importance it plays.

The Labor campaign team also relied heavily on good data analytics and research. Following its unexpected loss in 2019, it reportedly revised its polling strategy and now relies upon several pollsters for advice. These each have slightly different specialisations but, after several years of working together with philosophically aligned advertising and communications companies, Labor has developed a highly integrated, experienced and intelligent campaign team, comfortable together and, for the duration of the campaign, focused on serving their one client, the ALP.

The Liberal Party relied on one polling and research company, Freshwater, which had not worked with the federal party before. Several of its staff had previously worked for Crosby Textor, a large and sophisticated outfit which had provided the Party's polling and research for many years. Freshwater's principal pollster, Mike Turner, previously of Crosby Textor, had worked on previous federal campaigns in that capacity. Dr Turner acknowledges he formed a direct relationship with the parliamentary leader, Peter Dutton, and was often telephoned by the leader for advice. Dr Turner acknowledged that he is a pollster, not a political strategist expert at giving political advice. That advice is for others to give the Leader, and this direct contact risked undermining or countermanding the advice given by others. It is also unclear whether the lack of transparency about the political advice Dr Turner provided helped or hindered the growth of the broader campaign team into a coherent unit. Dr Turner was also servicing other clients, including the National Party, which would have further limited his capacity to provide thoughtful advice.

As part of this review, digital media expert, Eric Wilson, was commissioned to assess the Party's digital campaign efforts. His assessment is instructive. While Labor spent between 20 and 25% more on advertising on digital platforms, he advises this was

not “catastrophic”. He was particularly complimentary about the Party’s new website, especially its upgraded appearance and capacity to deal with sudden spikes in website traffic. However, he found that Liberal Party advertisements on digital platforms were overwhelmingly negative, 3:1, focused on attacking Greens, Teals and the ALP. He advised:

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*The overemphasis on negative messages indicates either a lack of effectiveness in the positive messages or insufficient content for positive ads. CCHQ should lead on positive messages while allied outside groups should work to drive up opponents on the negative side.*

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Other submissions argued for more negative advertising:

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*In pursuing the strategy of demonstrating why your opponent does not deserve your vote, it was evident not only that Labor had lied to win office in 2022 but that it would do so again.*

*A successful negative campaign in this score required not only a campaign reinforcing the message of Labor’s last-time lies, but putting their inevitable future campaign lies in that context of also not being believable.*

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Clearly, the negative campaign, whether too big or too small, was not effective. For voters, it confirmed the Party’s negatives. The Teals spoke a great deal about kindness and even if they were able to hide their own personal attacks on Liberal candidates behind third parties, there is no doubt their supporters saw the Liberal Party’s attacks as lacking the kindness they value in the Teal brand.

Arguably, negative attack ads are more reasonable for an underdog. However, in this campaign, where the Coalition had positioned itself as the favourite, the electorate had greater expectations and looked for hope and more information about the Coalition’s plan for government, particularly a plan to relieve cost of living and affordable housing pressures. Unfortunately, the campaign’s limited policy announcements, many of them in the final days of the campaign, critically reduced the capacity of content creators to deliver positive messages, giving people a reason to vote Liberal which was, as one submission put it,

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*consistent with the basic thrust of Liberal democratic principles, but not to the extent of making us the issue.*

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Many submissions expressed concern that the campaign spending commitments were reactive too often and sought to match Labor spending promises, denying the Party the chance to stand up for its values. While appeasement is never the path to victory over a determined opponent, it is recognised that the leadership must judge which battles it needs to fight and which must be left alone. Whether the Leader got the balance right in this campaign is debatable and a cautionary tale for future leaders.

Eric Wilson made the following recommendations about balancing negative and positive messages of social media:

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*Continue to invest in paid digital media at higher levels as media consumption habits shift, expanding to include streaming services.*

*Monitor budgets to ensure positive messaging receives appropriate weight across target audiences.*

*Supplement vote propensity scores with issue model scores to better match creative content and messages to specific audiences.*

*Move beyond simply extending TV ad creatives to streaming platforms and invest in shorter, more tailored ads that take advantage of targeting.*

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The success of these recommendations relies on strong research, especially of key voter demographics. A diverse group of experts needs to take that research and develop messages quickly and as a tight-knit team. It will be difficult for the Liberal Party to implement these recommendations without a highly integrated group of experts with experience of digital and social media campaigning.

Some MPs argued that the Federal Secretariat should have an expanded number of specialised data intelligence and marketing staff. Former MP, Keith Wolahan noted that a separate data fusion cell would be central to the party better identifying the key issues of the key people in the key seats. Arguably, the Party already has a sophisticated level of data fusion, as previously explored. However, as we move into an era where AI will increasingly dominate political campaigning, it is important the Party ensure its campaign analytics and data integration deepens. We are unable to

determine if that is best done by a separate cell of people dedicated to the task, or several contractors working to the Federal Director. We conclude that it must be made a priority and given focus by Federal Executive.

The importance of research and data analytics cannot be overestimated. Gone are the days when leaders or campaign directors might intuitively know what policy to adopt, how to describe it and be forgiven for careless mistakes or wording that could be offensive or counter to the Party's values. The turnaround speed of advertising, especially social media, requires greater accuracy, high volume and less guess work. It also depends on the leader and campaign director heeding the research. While the Federal Director can be assumed to follow research he has commissioned, it is unclear how much advice Peter Dutton accepted.

Modern campaigning relies heavily on digital content generated by the political party, its MPs, candidates and third parties. Sean Topham, from Topham Guerin, an advertising and digital marketing company which worked on the Nationals NZ campaign, the 2019 Conservative Party election campaign in the UK and the Liberal 2025 campaign, considered Opposition MPs had failed to provide a high volume of digital content. While he spent time with NZ MPs ensuring they were digitally "match fit" for the campaign, he says that did not happen in Australia and MPs, who had become reliant on advisors in government, were less inclined to do their own social media in Opposition. By contrast, ALP front benchers and MPs were "busier producing and publishing content". Although MPs were required to meet KPIs for doorknocking, Facebook advertising and telephone canvassing, with the Federal Secretariat providing incentives to encourage this, Mr Topham suggested they should also be tasked with producing digital content to reach key demographics.

Mistakes can easily be weaponised by opponents, as they were in this campaign. During this campaign and in the lead up to it, there were many instances of policy announcements which, with greater consultation, could have been improved.

Many written submissions, and those who we interviewed, provided examples of mistakes. These included the persistent confusion of the terms Chinese and China, the people with the Government; the single but unfortunate reference to Chinese spies; the Federal Budget lock-up decision on the eve of the campaign to oppose income tax cuts; the Working from Home Public Service Policy and its reversal; the lack of distinction between migrants and immigration; the failure to explain the cost of the Nuclear Power Policy and how it fitted with international experience, or to connect it with cost of living concerns. The lack of policy messages relevant to women and the lack of policies for young people were also viewed as mistakes. The decision to oppose the Government's HECS forgiveness policy without replacing it with a better way of easing the cost-of-living pressures on young people was highlighted by several metropolitan candidates as a lost opportunity.

While mistakes are human and understandable, each of these could have been avoided or minimised if the Party's campaign teams had better applied their research to understand voter expectations and, particularly, voter perceptions of the language used. The absence of experienced campaigners who understood the value of this research is likely to have been a contributing factor to the failure of senior MPs and the Opposition Leader's office to even ask how the electorate, or a sensitive voter group, might react. If nothing else, a small, voluntary group of sharp and experienced political campaigners to give immediate feedback on how the ALP is likely to respond to a new policy announcement, a so-called Red Team, would have been a useful first check for both the leader and campaign director.

## Demographic Losses

Submissions reflected on the alarming voting gap among those aged less than thirty-four, with Redbridge finding fewer than 20% of them voted LNP. Crosby Textor found a slightly higher number, TPP, voted Liberal. It reflects badly on the party's policy direction, led by the parliamentary party, that such a gap has been allowed to grow unchallenged. Labor's policy of relieving some students part of their HECS burden was dismissed critically by the Liberal Party, instead of thoughtfully refashioned into a better proposition. The home ownership policy, which could have been promoted effectively to young people and their parents, was released late and lost in the final downpour of messages and attacks. As David Kemp observed

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*Young people respond to leadership that articulates purpose and direction, rather than being locked into some supposed 'Left-Right' divide. Young people can be alarmed by false claims, as many have been on climate change, but the over-riding concerns of most are closer to home: owning a house and having a real job. Together with leadership providing purpose and direction, those are the kind of policies to which we need to give priority in making a case to young people.*

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The Young Liberal Movement, once a powerful and energetic force, its flying squads rushing from electorate to electorate, was almost entirely absent from the policy stage when it was clear that the Party and the Leader were not reaching young people and potentially, Young Liberals could have productively met that gap. If that requires reform of the Young Liberals, then that should be addressed.

The Party's female vote has been declining for years, but there was strong consensus among submissions and MPs that the Working from Home policy, while only intended for Commonwealth public servants, unnecessarily sent the message that the Liberals were unsympathetic to the needs of women to better balance their work and family life. Even submissions from older Australians argued that the policy

announcement dissuaded their own children from voting Liberal, given how difficult the policy would have made their lives. Others argued it added to the Trump impression surrounding the Opposition Leader. Many female candidates, including MPs who survived, also confirmed how much damage this announcement did to their support. In a seat like Wentworth female voters said to Ro Knox

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*“I like you, but you can’t expect me to vote for Peter Dutton”.*

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A significant minority of submissions also said the Leader’s change of heart on the policy, after consistent criticism, then reduced his credibility as a strong leader and so the Party lost both ways.

Such a misstep could have been easily avoided had the Party ensured it tested the responses of female voters, including its own female MPs, to the policy proposal. The policy was not brought to the attention of the Federal Secretariat and tested, as a matter of course, before its announcement. Potentially, a closer partnership with women’s political organisations like Hilma’s Network or Women for Election might have assisted the parliamentary leadership’s policy development. Similarly, the Party’s comprehensive nuclear power policy was deeply unpopular with women, who CT found “considered it weird” but there was insufficient marketing effort made to address their concerns.

The loss of support for the Liberal Party within the Chinese community especially, but within migrant communities more generally, was addressed generally in written submissions. However, Keith Wolahan, the MP for Menzies, in Victoria, who lost his seat with a swing of 0.66% against him, provided insightful analysis. At the 2022 election, Mr Wolahan suffered a 6.3% swing against him which was largely attributed to the party losing support with a growing Chinese diaspora. The seat was redistributed after 2022 and became notionally ALP. Menzies has the highest proportion of people with a Chinese heritage in Australia. Accordingly, Mr Wolahan deployed a three-year campaign to recover the Chinese vote and received donations to improve the Party’s reach and communication within the Chinese community, focussing on 13 diaspora heavy seats he identified nationally. The team provided daily updates on Chinese language media and social media, as well as targeted national campaigns. It was Mr Wolahan’s assessment that the party was making inroads, but it collapsed in the final days when the dominant coverage was Senator Hume’s unfortunate “Chinese spies” comment, which went viral in local Chinese language platforms. That said, Mr Wolahan said it was clear that the strongest local swings were in the areas with the highest education and HECS debt. This was the manifestation of cost of living for thousands of urban households. It was a failure by the party to not identify how important this was and to match it, which it ultimately did in the new parliament.

In Kooyong, issues for Chinese voters were identified as crime, opposition to public housing and the sense that they were not welcome in the community, but the Liberal campaign failed to convert these concerns to vote drivers.

Those seats in NSW with similarly high Chinese votes also suffered punishing swings, including Bradfield, Bennelong and Banks.

The Party's capacity to thoughtlessly offend groups, including the Chinese, was, as others have observed, a widespread problem. Good research and discipline when discussing sensitive topics is a lesson well learnt from the ALP. Keith Wolahan also believed Peter Dutton's record as Immigration Minister had not endeared him to the Chinese and Indian diasporas.

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*Diaspora campaigning is critical in Australia, we will never be back in government until we understand it and the diaspora respects us.*

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Several unsuccessful metropolitan candidates and senators reflected on the changing nature of Australian suburbs:

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*the Liberal Party needs to understand Australia as it is and not how we would like it to be.*

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Amelia Hamer, who narrowly failed to win the seat of Kooyong from a Teal MP and who had the most significant swings against her in suburbs with high Chinese populations observed

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*modern migrants no longer come to Australia because they are forever leaving behind their old country and will never go back. They see themselves as part of both places and we need to understand that.*

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Kimberley Washington, the unsuccessful but hard-working candidate in the ALP stronghold of Lilley, observed that the multicultural community was used by candidates, rather than brought on board. As she said of the Queensland Sikh community:

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*“Ask the leadership what they want, just don’t take photos and walk away”.*

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## Polling

There is strong consensus that the Party’s faulty polling was a major problem for the campaign, fuelling false confidence, diverting resources from marginal seats to seats that were not winnable and discouraging disagreement or even discussion about the Leader’s campaign strategy. Winners are rarely criticised, and Peter Dutton was seen as winning. Freshwater’s Mike Turner told us he too, was concerned about the gap between his results and those of other polling companies, as was the Federal Director. The absence of any alternative polling, combined with the National Party’s reliance on the same pollster for both quantitative and qualitative research, blinded the Coalition to the swing underway against them.

Unfortunately, misleading polling added to the misallocation of financial and booth worker resources. At least one candidate advised that, since their polling looked good, they lost their booth workers to other seats. In the end, both their seat and the recipient seat were lost. Faulty polling meant Peter Dutton began election day in Victoria, instead of in his own seat in Queensland, which he lost.

During our meetings with Dr Turner and other pollsters, it was generally agreed that modern telephone polling, CATI, has become more unreliable as people decline to answer their telephones and even fewer are prepared to complete the interview. Most pollsters augment telephone polling with paid online polling and use intensive qualitative work to test the results and deepen understanding of them. To some degree, the Liberal Party reconciled this polling work with telephone and face to face canvassing. Some divisions employed other pollsters and confirmed their suspicions that the campaign was not going as well as Freshwater’s polling suggested.

The polling failure can be illustrated by the results in NSW. During the election campaign, tracking over 10 nights in five NSW seats, Bennelong, Gilmore, Patterson, Robertson and Werriwa was used to determine the voting trend. Based on these decks, Freshwater concluded the TPP vote would be 54-46 to the Liberal Party, without adding the name of the candidate. In the event, the results in NSW were almost reversed. Meanwhile, a week out from polling day, a Freshwater spot poll in the Sydney metropolitan seat of Banks concluded that the TPP vote would be 62-38 in favour of the sitting Liberal member. In the event, there was a significant swing against him and the seat was lost to the ALP.

Freshwater conceded that the softness of much of the vote, in combination with faulty weighting of the Referendum results, meant they overestimated Coalition support.

For the purposes of this review, suffice it to say there was significant risk in relying upon a single agency for all Coalition research and this should not reoccur. Further, Freshwater's key staff were spread thinly, with the company also servicing other clients during the campaign period. We suggest that polling providers be required to work exclusively for the Liberal Party in their political work for future contracts. This is the same requirement placed by the Labor Party on its providers. During formal campaign periods, contracted pollsters should ensure their focus is exclusively on serving the Liberal Party.

## **Policy Development**

The absence of a comprehensive suite of policies was the result of three years of poor policy processes followed by the parliamentary party, as we have already observed. There were not only significant policy gaps but also the promotion of policies which defied the Party's values, such as the opposition to an income tax cut and the denial of flexible working arrangements agreed between employees and employers.

It should be noted that the evident failure to look at each policy through the electorate's prism, which was overwhelmingly about the cost of living, was a cumulative and unarrested flaw. Assessing the impact of a policy, or the Government's policy, on a particular demographic, for example young voters, was another necessary but often absent discipline. The Party's parliamentary leadership should bear ultimate responsibility for this, but even branch members should consider the impact of a policy proposal on key voter demographics when debating policy.

Menzies Research Centre Director, David Hughes expressed concern that around half of the policy team in Campaign Headquarters, while skilled, had not written election policy before. The Menzies Research Centre, which had been established specifically to assist the Coalition parties with policy development, had no formal role in policy development during the term. Policy work that the Centre had done, such as on indexation of income tax thresholds was not adopted as election policy.

Shadow ministers also rarely used the expert groups set up by the Party as sounding boards.

The absence of comprehensive policies, particularly those concerned with the cost of living, or their late and haphazard release, limited the ability of the Party's advertising and social media creatives to develop effective messaging. In these circumstances it is not surprising, as Eric Wilson reported, that the Party's campaign was overwhelmingly negative. There was nothing positive, other than a petrol and diesel fuel rebate, to promote.

Almost every candidate and MP observed that the Party had no overall message and no policy agenda that would solve people's problems with the cost of living (other

than a short-term fuel rebate). The campaign slogan, Get Australia Back on Track, was described as meaningless and lacking cut through. Shadow MPs assured us that they had done substantial policy development but that it disappeared into the Leader's Office and mostly did not reappear.

Whatever the reason for the lack of policy, particularly a comprehensive suite of policies to restore prosperity and address the cost-of-living crisis, a transparent policy process would have kept everyone accountable. While not every shadow minister is equipped to write and develop policy, the Menzies Research Centre is ideally placed to assist shadow ministers in policy development. The main task of any shadow minister is to develop relationships with relevant interest groups, who are mostly keen to assist in policy development but can also assist a shadow minister to understand the risks and opportunities in their portfolio areas. Successful engagement with their advocacy groups also provides third party opportunities and media support. It is critical for the parliamentary party to establish an agreed policy development program for the parliamentary term, with suitable KPIs or other accountability measures for MPs, including the Leader's office. The party's Constitution should ensure adherence to this agreed process.

## Teal Seats

As the Greens have peeled off seats from the ALP, so the Teals have won what were once the safest and wealthiest Liberal seats. In the view of unsuccessful Liberal candidates in Teal seats, almost all of whom were women, the campaign machinery did not recognise the different factors at play in Teal seats and failed to approach them differently to ALP held seats. The most successful Liberal in a Teal seat was Tim Wilson, who regained the seat he formerly held from a Teal incumbent. Victorian Dan Tehan successfully fought off a Teal challenge in the rural seat of Wannon, as did Leon Rebello in McPherson, Ben Small in Forrest, Zoe McKenzie in Flinders and Angie Bell in Moncrieff, but these are a few bright spots in an otherwise gloomy outlook. Overall, the Teals have one fewer member in the House of Representatives, an encouraging result for the Party.

Candidates with Teal candidates found the Teal campaigning style to be different to Labor's. MPs and candidates in Teal-held seats who spoke to us had a range of ideas for better engagement with Teal candidates. The importance of local issues, local campaigning, local messaging and finding ways to hold Teal MPs accountable when their brand image is defined as non-political, requires serious examination and planning by the Party. There is evidence that some local candidates, with input from the Federal Secretariat, were able to reduce the favourability rating of Teal candidates by referencing previous membership of the Greens, voting records and inflammatory social media posts. This research work will need to continue, and be expanded, if the Teals are to be reduced as a political force.

The two major parties have long been frustrated by minor party and independent candidates describing themselves as non-political, but both have struggled to develop effective narratives which demonstrate that this is not the case. All politicians are political. Liberal candidates like Ro Knox, Amelia Hamer and Giselle Kapterian felt personal attacks on them and Peter Dutton were effectively deployed by Teal candidate third-party groups, allowing the Teal candidate herself to remain positive and pleasant, effectively the hallmark of being non-political. The Liberal Party's campaigns failed to deploy third-party attacks, and consequently, Teal candidates were likely to retain their reputations, or favourability. There were exceptions to this, such as in Forrest, Wannon and Goldstein, where the Liberal candidate succeeded, and in Monash and Bradfield, where Teal favourability declined, but insufficiently. In Kooyong, there was the absence of third-party online groups which could easily have been established by local supports. A youth page on Amelia Hamer's website was applied for but refused. By contrast, Teal third-party forums were adept at recording, editing and distributing negative social media grabs about Liberal candidates to multiple voter groups.

There was a general sentiment among candidates contesting seats against Teal candidates that the huge budgets enjoyed by the Teal candidates had made a difference. In Bradfield, reportedly, retirees were paid to stand with Teal billboards while other Teal candidates had paid campaign managers. If there was a significant Chinese population, a Chinese language field officer or writer would, reportedly, be employed to write posts.

Jenny Ware, who lost her seat of Hughes to the ALP but also had a Teal candidate, stressed the importance of local support, irrespective of party membership, which bolstered the Teal candidate's campaign.

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*People struggle with the idea of joining a political party but will work for a local candidate who has been helpful.*

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MPs considered the Teals demonstrated the power of local campaigns, with locally pitched signage varying in colour and style. This was echoed by Ro Knox, who also complained that the Liberal Party's approval processes for social media meant she was rarely able to combat the Teals' social media, which turned messages around quickly and effectively. Teal social media extended to reaching young, enrolled voters currently overseas.

Local campaigns on local issues, if managed consistently with party policy, are powerful vote changers but not always easy for a new candidate to identify.

Ro Knox recommended a Teal seat strategy group to share intelligence and strategies. Several state directors considered there had been too much focus on the

Teal seats instead of marginal ALP seats, but this should not prevent the development of a separate strategy group feeding into the main strategy effort.

### **Third Party and Social Media Engagement**

While direct voter engagement through telephone canvassing and doorknocking is critical, election campaigns heavily rely on mass marketing, targeting swing cohorts with information and messaging carefully selected to match the voter's interests. Attack advertising criticising opponents is a necessary part of campaigning but often attracts disapproval because of its negativity and aggressively personal nature. Online marketing has enabled the development of high-volume third-party strategies, sometimes to generate interest in an issue among community members not otherwise engaged with politics, but more often for attacks on opponents that are not sheeted home to the political party.

Several candidates argued that the Liberal Party and its local campaigns had not invested in the development of third-party engagement anywhere near the degree of the ALP, Greens and Teals. Basically, the Liberal Party did not have sufficient numbers of keyboard warrior groups supporting Liberal candidates or mocking and attacking their opponents in retaliation.

Senator James McGrath, who ran the parliamentary party's Fighting For strategy for local election commitments, observed that a number of MPs and candidates did not use the strategy to build connections with local groups who were seeking spending commitments for community projects. These groups are ultimately local vote influencers. While many MPs considered the Fighting For had been a worthwhile exercise, Senator McGrath felt there had been a complacency about the need to engage with community groups and that some candidates had failed to understand the power of local network connection.

There was some poor management of local requests for funding. In Kooyong, where polling had identified road funding as the most significant local issue and formed the basis for Amelia Hamer's Fighting For request, funding was denied because it did not meet the criteria. It was only ultimately provided through another process two weeks before election day and too late to make much impact on her vote.

It was understood by Liberal candidates that the ALP and Teals both relied on third party community groups, bogus and genuine, to attack them. These groups might have only a handful of members, but it was their online effort which counted. Experienced campaigners also observed that modern digital campaigning relies on many messages, all being heard and shared in their own online communities.

Tim Wilson invested in research in early 2023 to understand the specific nature of defeating a Teal Independent. He was able to work with others to raise to raise legitimate questions that undermined the trustworthiness of the sitting Member. He judged when to own the criticism of his opponent or deflect and also noted the

success of third-party campaigners like Australians for Prosperity and the Teal-aligned Get Up and Smart Energy Council.

Third party endorsements through influencers, paid and unpaid, were also powerful. Labor used influencers, reportedly, in the Budget 2025 lock-up and throughout the campaign. Several young women influencers, paid and unpaid, canvassed for the ALP vote and effectively attacked Peter Dutton to their followers with personal remarks which would not have been acceptable from political figures. The Liberal Party needs to make a concerted effort to cultivate supportive third-party campaigns who will also criticise opponents. Whatever reluctance Party members might feel, engaging and encouraging like-minded online groups would greatly enrich digital media campaigning.

In this campaign, third-party negative campaigners were overwhelmingly anti Liberal. For example, Eric Wilson's digital media review of third-party advertising found:

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*The lack of well-resourced allies placed the Coalition at a significant disadvantage. Spending data revealed that "pro-Liberal/National Party groups were outspent on Meta (which owns Facebook) almost 3:1 by anti-Liberal groups."*

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Appealing advertising material was, according to submissions, sorely lacking. Music and clever humour are powerful tools with the politically less engaged but those who made submissions to the review considered they were not evident in Liberal social media or advertising. Yet, during the campaign, the Party released a rap song and deployed humour and music in hundreds of social media videos. It might have been the case that older people did not see this material or that it was not their idea of funny or engaging, or that it did not take hold in the broader online community. In the absence of feedback from target voter groups, we have been unable to determine how effective these videos were in shifting votes, but the question should be asked.

Kimberley Washington, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate for Lilley, recorded the smallest swing against the Party in Queensland. Her experience shows that voters respond when campaigns speak to what matters locally. She identified an off-shore windfarm proposal early as a concern for locals. When she sought to lead a measured community campaign on it, she met internal resistance. She was asked to find a third party to run the issue instead, but this left her without a clear local message and relying on national policies not ready for the ground. She considers her campaign would have been more successful if the Party had stayed the course on a local issue identified early.

Local campaigns on local issues, if managed consistently with party policy, are powerful vote changers but not always easy for a new candidate to identify. To better

identify salient local issues in future campaigns will require the development of a systematic approach by local conferences and state secretariats and should be adopted as part of campaign best practice.

## Candidates

There are varying views about the pre-selection timetable. Some submissions advocated a two year lead-time, others considered six months to be adequate. For many candidates it was necessary to take leave from paid employment and a long campaign period was not financially feasible. While Luke Howarth lost his seat to an ALP candidate who only appeared a few weeks before Election Day, others had opponents who had previously been in the field as local government candidates, state government candidates or had run before. Name recognition is crucial to any candidate and while we are unwilling to make a prescriptive recommendation, we recognise it is not possible to successfully campaign for a seat without adequate time to raise recognition. In Teal seats particularly, there was consensus among candidates that the very local nature of the campaigns required candidates to be in place early. Considering the risk that several high quality but unsuccessful 2025 candidates might now drift away, arguably candidates could be reassigned early in the term or the alumni at least encouraged or assisted to maintain local presence in the interim. It is important to ensure unsuccessful female Liberal candidates remain connected to the Party. One of the 2022 recommendations was the establishment of such a network and the Former Colleagues Network is now tasked with this. At the time of the preparation of this report, former candidates advised they had not received formal follow-up contact from the Party and it is recommended that this is addressed.

Candidate quality varied but the high quality of female candidates is noteworthy. There was little difference between the number of female Liberal candidate in winnable seats and Labor candidates. The difference is that Labor already had a significant proportion of elected female MPs.

Over the years, all parties have been dogged by revelations about aspects of a candidate's background which then makes them unacceptable to the electorate. Candidate vetting is a critical prerequisite and must be done to a high standard. In the last campaign, some divisions elected to save money by conducting their own vetting, instead of relying on professional vetting companies. As was the case in the NSW seat of Whitlam, when later personal revelations, not all made public, required the Party to disendorse their candidate and turn to the former state member who had previously lost his seat to an Independent. This was not ideal, the local branches were angry and the seat remains an ALP seat.

David Hughes, a veteran of six federal campaign headquarters and also the owner of a professional vetting organisation, advised that 80% of candidates were vetted independently, but that when the NSW division did its own, for the candidate in

Fowler, social media commentary was missed. Fowler, Lalor, Wills and Leichhardt are all examples of seats where the candidate was not vetted by an external professional and something was missed, resulting in negative stories.

Late pre-selections also meant vetting could not be done to a high standard, risking local campaigns but also denying the candidate the opportunity to learn the skills of campaigning, the rules and the opportunity to earn name recognition.

## **Fundraising**

Fundraising was conducted by candidates, state divisions, the federal division and senior parliamentary Liberals, notably the Opposition leader. Directors complained of having their business community raided for funds by other groups, while the resources involved and time demands of fund-raising impacted on overall campaign effort. Although the Party raised considerable funds, they were outspent by the ALP, largely funded by the unions but with some corporations, keen to be even handed, donating to both.

Fundraising has long been done by high profile MPs with properly established local accounts. Many MPs and candidates reported that they had provided funds to other campaigns and no doubt some use their funds to curry favour with parliamentary colleagues. Other candidates were given only small shares of the funds raised by their predecessors and then struggled to both raise their own funding and conduct their campaigns.

Fundraising takes the time of candidates and parliamentary leaders which might be better spent on the ground. In the case of Peter Dutton, attending a major fundraiser in Sydney during the Queensland floods was damaging and may have contributed to the loss of his seat.

## Conclusions

The 2025 Federal Liberal campaign failure is widely considered to be the worst campaign the Party has ever fought. It was the result of an extraordinary combination of internal errors by the Parliamentary Party and the Party's organisation, compounded by several adverse external factors, including the February interest rate cut and the East Coast flood-induced election delay. That delay rolled onto Labor's consequent Budget, which gave the Government the opportunity to refine its financial pitch to swing voter groups. The election of President Trump, while initially positively received by Australians, soon became problematic for the Opposition Leader. The ALP successfully identified Peter Dutton with the US leader and as the President's decisions (DOGE and public service cuts) became more unappealing to Australians, Peter Dutton's perceived similarity negatively affected his approval rating. The Liberal Party was unable to shake this off. Careless remarks, such as Make Australia Great Again, and the creation of a shadow portfolio for government efficiency, reinforced the similarity with the US President. However, it was the President's decision to impose tariffs on US imports which probably had the greatest impact on voter sentiment. The Opposition Leader's efforts to criticise the tariff decision and instead back Team Australia, were ineffectual in changing voters' minds about him.

Successful campaigns are based on a relatively straightforward rule - get the right message to the right people in the right place at the right time. The Liberal Party in 2025 comprehensively failed to follow that rule.

There was no clear, effective message, either positive or negative. The campaign was disastrously misled in targeting and resourcing by its market research. This led to unfounded confidence that the Party could win the election.

The overall strategy, determined by the Leader, was unclear.

Against a first-term government, after 3 terms of Coalition government and needing around 20 seats to form government with an unpopular Leader, an "underdog" strategy would clearly have been more appropriate and effective. It would also have demonstrated the Liberal Party's preparedness to search its soul and, after nine years in government, renew its policies and relationships with the electorate.

The campaign was fatally flawed by the Leader and his office taking over the overall conduct of the campaign, leaving the Party's organisation responsible only for campaign mechanics. Furthermore, while Peter Dutton was never opposed or criticised openly by his parliamentary colleagues, there was widespread acknowledgement that he lacked appeal, especially to women, but his image was never successfully remade or addressed. Compounding this, the Opposition failed to frame the Prime Minister sufficiently negatively. The Preferred Prime Minister poll results demonstrate the consequences of both those shortcomings.

The Federal Parliamentary Party failed in its responsibility to develop a comprehensive campaign policy platform that reflected an Opposition refreshed from its years in office, with new insights and capable of being considered as a competent, trustworthy alternative.

The slowness of approvals processes requires improvement. While complaints about slow approvals and delayed development and delivery of campaign materials are made after each election campaign, the speed with which social media campaigns can take off and build significant traction means the Party's approvals processes at both state and federal levels, across print, television, radio and social media should be reviewed.

Similarly, while fundraising has always been a time-consuming distraction from campaigning, this was more problematic in this campaign.

In the event, the election result was a classic "stick with the devil you know" vote by a majority of Australians.

This campaign demonstrated that the Labor campaign machine is a highly professional outfit finely tuned to the needs of modern campaigning.

The election confirmed the continuing growth in the "soft" vote in Australia, which went against the Coalition in 2025, but can just as decisively swing against Labor in the future.

The Liberal Party, at both the Parliamentary and Organisational levels, must develop a hard-headed, professional, disciplined approach to persuading the majority of Australians that the Coalition can once again be trusted with the privilege of governing Australia. With these election results, the Party is obliged to examine everything about its operations, including where it is based.

While the shortcomings of the Leader and his office, the breakdown in communication between the Leader and the Party, the policy failure and the polling failure have been well canvassed, campaign execution by the state and federal secretariats in this defeat is not so obvious, although the focus of many submissions. Slow approval processes for the issuing of materials have been identified, so have slow pre-selections. The absence of a strong working relationship between the various specialist campaign groups such as data, marketing and advertising is possibly a contributing factor. By now, the trail is cold.

It is usual when organisations suffer unexpected loss for there to be immediate reviews, while people's memories are fresh, in which the organisation focuses on what it did badly and well, rather than on what others could have improved. This immediate introspection is variously called a Hot Wash Up, a Root Cause Analysis or a Critical Incident Review and is widely used in the professional world to form the basis of a response while longer reviews are conducted. We understand it has not

been the practice of Liberal Party secretariats to review their own part in defeats but consider critical self-reflection is necessary in professional organisations and should be adopted.

## **A Final Observation**

The most critical component of an election campaign is the contribution of the parliamentary leader, who is the campaign and the Party's public face. Increasingly, Australian election campaigns are presidential, that is, focused on the leader, their character, foibles, values, style and communications. For the Liberal Party of Australia, this leadership is entirely the decision of elected members of parliament, as is the revoking of that decision.

While we have made several observations about the leadership of Peter Dutton, these will not be directly reflected in the recommendations which follow, except insofar as the campaign structure, control and execution require the cooperation and contribution of the parliamentary leader and staff, with the Party.

Providing the leader with frank and appropriate advice over the term and during the campaign is the Federal Director's challenge and responsibility. If the Federal Director considers that well-based advice is being rejected or ignored, it is for the Federal Director to leverage authority through the campaign's structure, including the Federal Campaign Committee and Federal Executive, to resolve this. We do not consider it necessary to recommend changes to the role of the leader and consider the recommendations we make will provide better support to both the leader and the campaign director during future campaigns.

# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

The Party must never again allow the Parliamentary Leader and Office to effectively run the campaign.

The Federal Director is the Campaign Director and must have overall responsibility for the conduct of the campaign.

Just as you should never be your own barrister in a court of law, the Parliamentary Leader must never be his own campaign director.

The Campaign Director is and must be a campaign professional whose job it is to run the campaign. The Leader and his office must work extremely closely with the Federal Director and team on planning and executing the campaign strategy and tactics, but it is the federal Director as Campaign director who must be and must be seen to be in overall charge of the campaign.

The Federal Director's vital role as the Campaign Director for federal elections is not provided for in the party's Federal Constitution. This should be rectified.

The Federal Constitution's description of the 'Functions and Powers' of the Federal Secretariat (Ch13.3) should be rewritten to give absolute primacy to the campaign responsibilities of the Federal Secretariat. Currently the only reference to campaigning is in 13.3 (g) 'to undertake federal election campaigns in conjunction with the divisions'.

To ensure political research is well understood by the parliamentary party in its policy and communications preparations, the Federal Director, when in Opposition, should attend all Shadow Cabinet meetings and regular party-room briefings.

## Recommendation 2

The Federal Secretariat should be reviewed to ensure it is a campaign centre of excellence, that is, a National Campaign Unit comprised of the best campaign professionals, including market research, communications, advertising, digital media and data analytics.

It is clear from the 2025 election that the ALP has surpassed the LPA in conducting highly professional campaigns.

The ALP made a considerable leap forward after its defeat in 2019. The LPA must now match and surpass the ALP in the professionalism of its campaign machinery.

### **Recommendation 3**

The party's state and federal secretariats must adopt critical internal review processes, including immediate Hot Wash Up reviews, to ensure their future campaign execution is of high quality.

### **Recommendation 4**

The Party's Staff Planning Committee should review and reform the federal and state approvals process for optimality and ensure it is appropriately stress tested. While full devolution of approvals would lead to chaos, the improved approvals process needs to maximise the use of CCHQ's fact checking capabilities and account for the concerns of local campaigns, as well as reduce unnecessary delays.

### **Recommendation 5**

To confirm the Party organisation's overall responsibility for campaigning, the Federal Constitution CH 16, "Federal Campaign Committee" should be reviewed and amended to ensure that Committee's primacy.

The Federal Campaign committee is the primary organ for ensuring maximum coordination of the campaign activities of the Party Organisation and the Federal Parliamentary Party.

CI 16.1 of the Constitution should be amended to require the Federal President to establish the Campaign Committee no later than 6 months after a federal election.

CI 16 should be amended to require regular meetings of the Federal Campaign committee, and for it to report regularly to the Federal Executive and the Federal Parliamentary Party on campaign preparations.

### **Recommendation 6**

The Federal Parliamentary Party, which has the privilege of determining the Party's federal policies, must in future and especially in opposition, comply with its obligations under the Federal Constitution to consult with the Party Organisation on the formulation of policy, and to do so in a timely manner.

It is clear that there was a significant breakdown in the required consultation process, to the detriment of the 2025 campaign. The Parliamentary leader needs to account for the development of sound policy to the Party.

### **Recommendation 7**

During the campaign, the Leader should be accompanied on the travelling team by a senior Parliamentary colleague able to provide an alternative source of advice and to be a link with MPs and candidates, as has occurred in previous federal campaigns but not in 2025.

## **Recommendation 8**

The party must never again rely on one polling firm for market research, as occurred in 2025. It is noteworthy that the ALP had access to several polling companies, while the LP relied on one pollster who was also working for the National Party and other clients during the campaign.

The pollsters engaged by the party are answerable to the Federal Campaign Director and must not be allowed to have a direct line to the Party Leader, without the express knowledge and approval of the Federal Director.

## **Recommendation 9**

The Party must ensure that the vetting of candidates is done independently and professionally to eliminate the possibility of embarrassing information arising during the campaign.

## **Recommendation 10**

The Federal Campaign committee should assemble an expert advisory panel of the best, most experienced Liberal campaign professionals, to act as a sounding board for the Federal Campaign Director and to stress test proposed campaign ideas and initiatives. The views of key voter demographics, notably women, young people and those from multicultural communities, must be accounted for in these discussions.

## **Recommendation 11**

Future Federal Campaigns should assemble a “Red Team”, a group of experienced people to anticipate ALP campaign initiatives and responses to proposed Liberal initiatives and policies.

## **Recommendation 12**

The party needs to re-establish a network of field officers/campaign organisers in target federal electorates.

The Party needs to return to having full-time professional, on-the-ground campaign staff to maximise the party’s localised campaign effectiveness.

With the shrinking and ageing of the Party’s membership, re-establishing a network of electorate campaign organisers is even more important, and should be an urgent priority for the Federal and State Directors.

## **Recommendation 13**

The Teal movement needs to be confronted head-on in electorates they contest.

The Party needs the best possible intelligence on Teal candidates – their backgrounds, policies, previous statements etc – so that individual electorates can communicate the facts about Teal candidates to voters.

Liberal campaigning in seats held or contested by Teal candidates must start as early as possible and emphasise community engagement.

The best Liberal candidates in these seats will be the ones with the highest level of long-term community engagement.

## **Recommendation 14**

The female vote is clearly a problem for the Liberal Party.

The combination of a Leader unattractive to women, and policies or messaging that alienated women was a major factor in 2025. Further research to understand the loss of the female vote over the past decade must be undertaken urgently.

However, the Party had high-quality female candidates in many seats, who could not overcome the leadership and policy obstacles.

The proposed National Campaign Unit must employ an appropriate number of senior women with relevant expertise and ensure they have a voice at the decision-making table.

The Party Organisation must continue to ensure the opportunity for capable talented women to win preselection in winnable seats and seek opportunities to partner with women's organisations with shared policy and political interests.

## **Recommendation 15**

Broadening the support base is necessary if the Party is to reflect modern Australia. The Party must develop a renewal strategy for engagement with multicultural communities and young people in which MPs are held accountable for their engagement efforts.

## **Recommendation 16**

The Party must invest in building greater third-party support, both at local levels and for digital media. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of state secretariat staff and national campaign unit staff, as well as MPs, should include the development of, and engagement with, third-party support groups.

## **Recommendation 17**

The Party must review its fundraising practices to ensure optimality, probity and to minimise risks of conflicts of interest. The Party's Constitution provides for a Federal Finance Committee whose oversight of fundraising should be observed.





## PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN – 2025 ELECTION REVIEW

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Lead                                          | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Proposed Official Response |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p><b>Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>The Party must never again allow the Parliamentary Leader and Office to effectively run the campaign.</p> <p>The Federal Director is the Campaign Director and must have overall responsibility for the conduct of the campaign.</p> <p>Just as you should never be your own barrister in a court of law, the Parliamentary Leader must never be his own campaign director.</p> <p>The Campaign Director is and must be a campaign professional whose job it is to run the campaign. The Leader and his office must work extremely closely with the Federal Director and team on planning and executing the campaign strategy and tactics, but it is the federal Director as Campaign director who must be and must be seen to be in overall charge of the campaign.</p> <p>The federal Director's vital role as the Campaign Director for federal elections is not provided for in the party's Federal Constitution. This should be rectified.</p> <p>The Federal Constitution's description of the 'Functions and Powers' of the Federal Secretariat (Ch13.3) should be rewritten to give absolute primacy to the campaign responsibilities of the Federal Secretariat. Currently the only reference to campaigning is in 13.3 (g) 'to undertake federal election campaigns in conjunction with the divisions'.</p> <p>To ensure political research is well understood by the parliamentary party in its policy and communications preparations, the Federal Director, when in Opposition, should attend all Shadow Cabinet meetings and regular party-room briefings.</p> | <p>Federal Secretariat<br/>Federal Leader</p> | <p>The Federal Secretariat will draft amendments to the Federal Constitution for consideration at the next meeting of Federal Council.</p> <p>The Federal Leader is responsible for determining invitations to Shadow Cabinet and the Party Room.</p> | <p>Accept</p>              |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Lead                     | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Proposed Official Response |
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| <b>Recommendation 2</b><br><p>The Federal Secretariat should be reviewed to ensure it is a campaign centre of excellence, that is, a National Campaign Unit comprised of the best campaign professionals, including market research, communications, advertising, digital media and data analytics.</p> <p>It is clear from the 2025 election that the ALP has surpassed the LPA in conducting highly professional campaigns.</p> <p>The ALP made a considerable leap forward after its defeat in 2019. The LPA must now match and surpass the ALP in the professionalism of its campaign machinery.</p> | Federal Secretariat      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 3</b><br><p>The party's state and federal secretariats must adopt critical internal review processes, including immediate Hot Wash Up reviews, to ensure their future campaign execution is of high quality.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Staff Planning Committee | <p>The main election review is the traditional way of ensuring a robust consideration of an election campaign and shouldn't be supplanted. The Staff Planning Committee could develop a standard exit questionnaire for CCHQ and State Division staff and candidates to be circulated immediately following an election.</p> <p>SPC to review and consider.</p> | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 4</b><br><p>The Party's Staff Planning Committee should review and reform the federal and state approvals process for optimality and ensure it is appropriately stress tested. While full devolution of approvals would lead to chaos, the improved approvals process needs to maximise the use of CCHQ's fact checking capabilities and account for the concerns of local campaigns, as well as reduce unnecessary delays.</p>                                                                                                                                                        | Staff Planning Committee |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Accept                     |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Lead                | Comments                                                                                                  | Proposed Official Response |
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| <p><b>Recommendation 5</b></p> <p>To confirm the Party organisation's overall responsibility for campaigning, the Federal Constitution CH 16, "Federal Campaign Committee" should be reviewed and amended to ensure that Committee's primacy.</p> <p>The Federal Campaign committee is the primary organ for ensuring maximum coordination of the campaign activities of the Party Organisation and the Federal Parliamentary Party.</p> <p>Cl 16.1 of the Constitution should be amended to require the Federal President to establish the Campaign Committee no later than 6 months after a federal election.</p> <p>Cl 16 should be amended to require regular meetings of the Federal Campaign committee, and for it to report regularly to the Federal Executive and the Federal Parliamentary Party on campaign preparations.</p> | Federal Council     | Federal Secretariat to draft Constitutional amendments in consultation with the Liberal Party Commission. | Accept                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>The Federal Parliamentary Party, which has the privilege of determining the Party's federal policies, must in future and especially in opposition, comply with its obligations under the Federal Constitution to consult with the Party Organisation on the formulation of policy, and to do so in a timely manner.</p> <p>It is clear that there was a significant breakdown in the required consultation process, to the detriment of the 2025 campaign. The Parliamentary leader needs to account for the development of sound policy to the Party.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Parliamentary Party | Advise the Party Room.                                                                                    | Accept                     |
| <p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <p>During the campaign, the Leader should be accompanied on the travelling team by a senior Parliamentary colleague able to provide an alternative source of advice and to be a link with MPs and candidates, as has occurred in previous federal campaigns but not in 2025.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Federal Leader      |                                                                                                           | Accept                     |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Lead                       | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Proposed Official Response |
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| <b>Recommendation 8</b><br><p>The party must never again rely on one polling firm for market research, as occurred in 2025. It is noteworthy that the ALP had access to several polling companies, while the LP relied on one pollster who was also working for the National Party and other clients during the campaign.</p> <p>The pollsters engaged by the party are answerable to the Federal Campaign Director and must not be allowed to have a direct line to the Party Leader, without the express knowledge and approval of the Federal Director.</p> | Federal Secretariat        | The Australian polling market is limited, and careful consideration of how this recommendation can be implemented will need to occur.                                                                             | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 9</b><br><p>The Party must ensure that the vetting of candidates is done independently and professionally to eliminate the possibility of embarrassing information arising during the campaign.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | State Divisions            | <p>Federal Executive has previously affirmed protocols for vetting which have been implemented variably.</p> <p>Liberal Party Commission may consider recommendations to ensure greater powers for Divisions.</p> | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 10</b><br><p>The Federal Campaign committee should assemble an expert advisory panel of the best, most experienced Liberal campaign professionals, to act as a sounding board for the Federal Campaign Director and to stress test proposed campaign ideas and initiatives. The views of key voter demographics, notably women, young people and those from multicultural communities, must be accounted for in these discussions.</p>                                                                                                       | Federal Campaign Committee | This already occurs in practice.                                                                                                                                                                                  | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 11</b><br><p>Future Federal Campaigns should assemble a “Red Team”, a group of experienced people to anticipate ALP campaign initiatives and responses to proposed Liberal initiatives and policies.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Federal Secretariat        | This is a core role of the Research and Tactics team at CCHQ. This function can be stood up earlier to ensure it can stress test policies early.                                                                  | Accept                     |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Lead                                   | Comments                                                                                                                | Proposed Official Response |
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| <p><b>Recommendation 12</b></p> <p>The party needs to re-establish a network of field officers/campaign organisers in target federal electorates.</p> <p>The Party needs to return to having full-time professional, on-the-ground campaign staff to maximise the party's localised campaign effectiveness.</p> <p>With the shrinking and ageing of the Party's membership, re-establishing a network of electorate campaign organisers is even more important, and should be an urgent priority for the Federal and State Directors.</p>                                                                                  | State Divisions                        | <p>Through SPC, State Divisions to prepare costings.</p> <p>This recommendation may require significant resourcing.</p> | Accept-in-principle        |
| <p><b>Recommendation 13</b></p> <p>The Teal movement needs to be confronted head-on in electorates they contest.</p> <p>The Party needs the best possible intelligence on Teal candidates – their backgrounds, policies, previous statements etc – so that individual electorates can communicate the facts about Teal candidates to voters.</p> <p>Liberal campaigning in seats held or contested by Teal candidates must start as early as possible and emphasise community engagement.</p> <p>The best Liberal candidates in these seats will be the ones with the highest level of long-term community engagement.</p> | Federal Secretariat<br>State Divisions |                                                                                                                         | Accept                     |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Lead                                                         | Comments                                                                                                                                                       | Proposed Official Response |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Recommendation 14</b><br><p>The female vote is clearly a problem for the Liberal Party.</p> <p>The combination of a Leader unattractive to women, and policies or messaging that alienated women was a major factor in 2025. Further research to understand the loss of the female vote over the past decade must be undertaken urgently.</p> <p>However, the Party had high-quality female candidates in many seats, who could not overcome the leadership and policy obstacles.</p> <p>The proposed National Campaign Unit must employ an appropriate number of senior women with relevant expertise and ensure they have a voice at the decision-making table.</p> <p>The Party Organisation must continue to ensure the opportunity for capable talented women to win preselection in winnable seats and seek opportunities to partner with women's organisations with shared policy and political interests.</p> | Federal Secretariat<br>State Divisions                       |                                                                                                                                                                | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 15</b><br><p>Broadening the support base is necessary if the Party is to reflect modern Australia. The Party must develop a renewal strategy for engagement with multicultural communities and young people in which MPs are held accountable for their engagement efforts.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Federal Secretariat<br>State Divisions<br>Parliamentary Team | Federal Executive has previously adopted a discussion paper on multicultural engagement. This must be led by the Parliamentary Team. New efforts must be made. | Accept                     |
| <b>Recommendation 16</b><br><p>The Party must invest in building greater third-party support, both at local levels and for digital media. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of state secretariat staff and national campaign unit staff, as well as MPs, should include the development of, and engagement with, third-party support groups.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Federal Secretariat<br>State Divisions<br>Parliamentary Team |                                                                                                                                                                | Accept                     |

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Lead                                                         | Comments                                                                                           | Proposed Official Response |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>Recommendation 17</p> <p>The Party must review its fundraising practices to ensure optimality, probity and to minimise risks of conflicts of interest. The Party's Constitution provides for a Federal Finance Committee whose oversight of fundraising should be observed.</p> | <p>Federal Secretariat<br/>Federal Finance<br/>Committee</p> | <p>The Federal Secretariat will prepare a paper for the Federal Finance Committee to consider.</p> | <p>Accept</p>              |



## FEDERAL AWARDS

The following nominations have been received for Federal Awards:

### Meritorious Service Award

|     |                |
|-----|----------------|
| ACT | John Czesla    |
|     | Danielle Young |

### ***Awards Reminder***

Nominations for Federal Awards must be with the Federal Executive 8 days prior to each meeting of Federal Executive.

Where there are urgent circumstances, Federal Executive has delegated powers to the President to approve awards in between meetings of Federal Executive.