

**Keith Pitt MP**  
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**The people, the power and the path to a better Australia**  
**[check against delivery]**

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

So said Nelson Mandela. His message is one of perseverance. If you’re a conservative, someone who fights the socialist agenda, an individual who truly believes in our democracy, who thinks you advance through the sweat of your own brow, not through a reliance on handouts from the state, then it’s a message you should hold dear to your hearts.

Because there’s no doubt the conservative side of politics has been through a few dry gullies recently. In Queensland the LNP held government for a single term under the Campbell Newman landslide, something which motivated me to join a political party.

In South Australia, again a single term, beaten badly in Victoria, belted in Western Australia and now the people of NSW have thrown out probably the most competent state government in the country. Adding to this train wreck, our own defeat in the federal election last year.

The cries of ‘move further to the left’ ring loudly in the streets and at activist rallies, except of course for where it matters, the ballot box. With our people.

The punters in the regions. And yet our parties continue to be hijacked by the progressive agenda.

The conservatives that I talk to – the quiet Australians, Tony’s Tradies, Menzies forgotten people, the working-class poor, the high vis army – they all tell me the same thing. They are over it! They’re over the ludicrous left ideologies running rampant and threatening their way of life. Sure, everyone can have an opinion, but don’t force that wild opinion down their throats to stop their voices being heard.

They love our country and its flag. They don’t care if you come from a foreign shore, whether you were born here or took the oath of citizenship last week. They consider us all Australians. From every walk of life. Work hard, play hard but play fair.

They don’t think if you’ve had the advantage of testosterone, you should be playing sport with their mothers, sisters and daughters. They think that DNA doesn’t lie.

They want to feel safe and be safe in their homes and on the streets. They want to look after the environment but not at a cost the nation simply can’t pay. They want the lights to stay on and to be able to afford to pay the bill.

Every now and again I get accused of being part of the so called ‘political-class’ which I find very funny, for a bloke who’s as common as dirt, that went to public schools, did a trade and a degree, ran a small business, and was a cane farmer. To call me a political careerist proves they don’t know me at all. It is

that real world life experience and education that makes me look at policy in a different light, a more practical light that many Australians value.

However, the only way conservative politicians can prosecute conservative policies is by winning government. You can't implement a policy agenda from opposition. You may as well try and boil the ocean.

Going back to Mandela's statement earlier, we've been knocked down but it's time to get up again. Going into the next election we need to have a proposition. One which not only resonates but matters to the Australian people. A plan for the future and an acknowledgement of the past. A plan that is true to our values, with core elements that the Labor Party simply can never go with us on. Because the #metoo movement extends to politics as you all know. If there's no differential the mob will just vote for the real thing. Labor-lite, Teals, SFF, independents, One Nation. A vote for any of them gives you a Labor government, as has been demonstrated in recent years and in a trend ruthlessly exploited by the Labor Party.

I believe that the primaries at the last federal election show that for one of the major parties, the jig is up. And that major party is Labor. Their policy positions, decisions and ultimately how they are governing is of a party for which the old Labor right no longer exists. They are no longer the party of working people and haven't been for some time. They are the party of the inner city, the university activist and union organisers. Not even the party of union members, just union bosses. Labor is no longer the party for those for whom fifty dollars a week means everything. They are the party for those who can afford to be idealists. The feel-good class, because they can afford it.

Working people are never going back to Labor because they can't afford to. Those days are long gone like instant coffee over soy lattes.

For the Liberal and National parties, I'm the first to admit that big chunks of our people have wandered through the open gate and are over on another hill side having a look around. But we can win them back. Through the right policy. By standing by our core values, being courageous and brave and not giving in. By being knocked down but getting back up. By delivering. To do that requires a proposition and a vision.

But, what should that proposition be? Let's start with energy.

Vexed. Expensive. Divisive. A number of words to describe what's happening with energy policy in this country. As someone who did a trade as an electrician in heavy industry followed by a degree in electrical engineering, well, it's just not that hard.

**Rule 1.** Do things that work. You will never make electricity affordable if you build two generation systems simply because one doesn't work all the time.

**Rule 2.** Keep costs as low as possible.

**Rule 3.** It's an engineering problem not a social problem. And this is important. You shouldn't be designing critical infrastructure based on a feeling or a vibe.

I've spent the last ten years fighting the madness of intermittent wind and solar at every level. And to put some context around why, ask yourself this question: would you drive your car filled with your family members over a bridge designed by a political lobbyist, by a member or senator, or an activist?

None of which have any relevant bridge building qualification whatsoever. They know how to make it sound nice, and give you a warm feeling, but it puts your family at imminent risk. Unfortunately, this is where we are at with unqualified, vocal lobbyists and activists designing Australia's energy future.

The solution in my view is straightforward. Right now, we should be utilising our existing assets for as long as possible. Coal, gas and traditional hydro.

So let's look at the government's current energy dreamscape: An idealist's world built on a feeling.

The recent budget isn't getting electricity prices down. Labor decisions are putting taxpayer subsidies up. And no matter what spin the spinning top Energy Minister spins, Labor's policies can only increase costs. **THEY CAN ONLY INCREASE COSTS.** Labor isn't getting prices down, they are literally driving them up.

Labor's climate plan is economic suicide for this country. Our competitive edge has always been the fact we are blessed with resources, smart, hard-working people, and energy costs that were low and competitive.

The short version of Labor's plan is this:

- two million plus hectares of solar panels (keep in mind the entire Australian sugar industry only covers about 350,000 hectares), like a giant tarpaulin across our natural environment.
- Thousands of wind turbines throughout regional Australia where, let's be clear, there is enormous opposition to these plans.

- Ten thousand kilometres plus of transmission lines through easements that don't exist, impacting thousands of landholders who don't want them anywhere near them or their community.
- And 3.8 million electric vehicle chargers in homes and businesses, none of which is costed, and all to be operational by 2030 – less than seven years away.

Even AEMO says you may require a sixty percent increase in electricity generation, transmission, and distribution capacity. Think about that. Every power line, substation and cable that provides power to your house being upgraded by sixty percent. Bigger cables, bigger conduits, digging up every kerb and footpath, upgrading every substation and all of the overhead network. That's without even thinking about the new power stations needed. As Paul Broad, former Snowy Hydro CEO, recently stated but I'll paraphrase to be more acceptable, it's rubbish, fairyland.

Apparently all of these developments will have no delays with environmental approvals. No issues with Aboriginal heritage or hundreds of other permits and approvals that would normally be required. Are they just going to be ticked and flicked? Why? Because those installations are going on cleared or partially cleared agricultural land. Don't believe me, check out last November's CSIRO report. And take a drive to the country where this insanity is spreading.

What's the alternative you may ask? Well, it's pretty simple. Extend the life of our existing coal assets for as long as possible. Utilise technology, including nuclear technology, as it develops over time. Expand our natural resource opportunities particularly with additional development of gas in the Beetaloo, offshore Scarborough and Barossa and extend our onshore gas pipelines and infrastructure.

The Energy Minister wants to tell the everyday Australian consumer that Federal Labor is acting in the world's interest. That regardless of the fact Australia contributes only around one percent of the world emissions, Australians must pay. Pay through higher electricity and gas prices. Pay for more transmission lines. Pay for climate reparations to third world countries. Pay more, for cement, steel and in construction costs. Pay more for freight and logistics. Pay more for fuel and vehicles. Including a six cent increase in diesel for heavy vehicle transport in the last budget.

Even though you could close the entire Australian economy tomorrow and it would have no impact on the global temperature. Even though emissions are already down by more than twenty percent. Even though Australian manufacturing can't be internationally competitive unless energy in this country is reliable and affordable. Even though industry has said they expect as much as a 35 percent increase in electricity prices in the next 12 months. Even though most solar panels and wind turbine manufacturing will benefit China. Even though China is the big winner. Australians, under a Labor government, have to pay. I simply don't get it.

Let's get our head out of the sand here. Labor's strategy is the equivalent of walking outside and setting your car on fire because it runs on diesel, even though you still owe fifty grand on it and will have to borrow even more to buy another one. Who is impacted the most? Australians who can't afford to pay.

So what does the everyday Australian have to say in this conversation? They want to look after the environment. We all do. The question is how much do

they want to pay, how much do they want our nation placed at risk due to a failure of energy security and reliance on Chinese manufacturing? Are they willing to have transmission lines, solar panels and wind turbines sprayed all over their backyards? Are they willing to consider big policy alternatives like nuclear?

And the speed of Labor's train wreck is increasing. The Energy Minister wants us to be an intermittent wind and solar super unreliable power. Most Australians I know want the lights to stay on and be able to afford to pay their power bills. An increase in costs for electricity and gas puts up the cost of everything. Because everything that Labor is proposing costs money and has to be paid for. Every pole, every wire, every panel, every tower, every substation, every charger. Most of the intermittent energy sources have a life cycle of twenty years at best. Then you replace them all, again and again and again.

Which brings me to nuclear.

Following the AUKUS announcement, the majority of challenges with developing a nuclear industry in this country must now be dealt with. Because necessity is a great motivator. Keep in mind the reactor on the Virginia class boat I'm told is around the size of a wheelie bin and will last for thirty plus years without refuelling. In terms of the current roadblocks, Federal Labor has addressed the moratorium on nuclear because you can't build nuclear subs in Adelaide with the current prohibitions in place. A domestic nuclear capability has to be built for AUKUS, including technical capacity. This means training and recruiting the right people. Labor's own statements say 10,000 plus Australians must be ready for recruitment. Nuclear subs will produce high level radioactive waste, so a high-level radioactive waste facility is now a necessity.



So, in the very near future we could have no moratorium on nuclear, domestic technical capacity and a high-level radioactive waste facility. If you can put a reactor in a sophisticated tin can 200 metres under the ocean, then surely you can put one on a block of concrete in one of the most stable continents in the world, to provide reliable base load zero emissions power for up to 100 years, in which time Labor's wind and solar installations would have been replaced five times, assuming they did not get hit by a fire, flood, cyclone or hail storm.

All that's left is location, location, location. And this needs to be the Coalition's focus. No community will get a nuclear reactor that the majority in the region don't want. Giving free electricity to those communities is something that should be actively considered. And if South Korea, Japan, the UAE, France, the UK and almost everyone else is commencing or expanding their nuclear industry, why on earth wouldn't we? And for those howling at the moon on costs, let's look at reality. South Korea's most recent build was around \$18 billion US for four 1350 MW power stations. Labor's most recent budget is claiming \$40 billion towards their super unreliable power plan. Including \$20 billion towards transmission lines, which could be as much as \$80 billion short of what's needed.

But, there's more to winning voters back than energy.

On social policy, Australia we have a problem. Difficult. Tough to acknowledge but it exists. Far too many Australians are caught in multigenerational welfare dependent households. Far too many never break that cycle. As part of the

Cashless Debit Card trial in my electorate of Hinkler we analysed the history of Newstart recipients.

Some of the statistics from then are pretty sobering. In 2017 when the Hinkler trial site was announced, of those who were under 30 on welfare, 90 percent had a parent who was also on welfare during the past 15 years – the majority of whom were on welfare for at least 9 of the last 15 years.

Without any intervention, it was projected that 57 percent of those under 30 on welfare would still be on income support in 10 years' time. So, it was great to see Peter Dutton commit to put the Cashless Debit Card back on the Coalition's agenda when we win government. And I emphasise WHEN.

Dealing with multi-generational welfare dependence will take tough decisions and commitment from government. While the CDC is just one tool in the toolbox the cashless debit card worked. Labor's idealistic decision to remove the CDC trial sites and prevent further roll out was described by one local to have "unleashed chaos". The voices Labor listened to were the socialist alliance, the Greens, inner city idealists and the left of their own party.

The Coalition is listening to the voices of the people that live in those communities: front line workers, police, teachers and local Aboriginal leaders. This is a technology that should absolutely be rolled out nation-wide, with similar settings as the trial in my electorate of Hinkler. Under 35, on Newstart now Jobseeker, youth allowance other and parenting payment partnered or single. All the backroom IT costs are paid already. The testing, the comms, the training. It's a commitment we should run hard on to the next election. A

national roll out of the Cashless Debit Card. By comparison, Labor is spending \$217 million on their new Smart Card. Just 22 people in my electorate are utilising that technology according to evidence given in estimates. Doesn't seem that smart to me when around 7,000 were on the CDC.

At the same time as dealing with challenges around welfare dependence, we have an unemployment rate under four percent and a resources sector breaking all records. So why is Labor reaching for the immigration bucket, not the 'Australians option' bucket? With housing prices out of reach for many, rental costs through the roof or simply unavailable Labor's solution is reportedly to bring in an immigration tidal wave across this financial year and next, so that Australia will experience the biggest two-year population surge in its history. Where will they live? What jobs will they take? What impact will this massive increase in population have on services already stretched thin in health care and education? How will local government provide them with essential services, land for housing and where will materials to build those houses come from given current shortages?

Many will be low or semi-skilled workers who end up in unionised workplaces. Some will end up on welfare. This is not a reflection on those individuals. Our country has been built off the back of hard-working immigrants. It's just a statement of fact based on what's happened previously. Regional Australia is desperate for people. But why would you move to an area if it can't provide basic needs? Regional Australia in my view is the heart of our nation. It sets the nation's psyche, the way we think about ourselves and is embedded in the nation's history.

Yet the overwhelming majority of new immigrants will go to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Pre COVID in 2017, 193,800 people migrated from overseas to these three capitals. This is the equivalent of the Queensland regional city of Townsville moving into eastern capitals in just one year. Imagine how many houses, schools, hospitals, roads, etc, that are needed annually for 190,000 people, no matter 900,000.

And you're wondering why as a city resident, you're spending more time stuck in city traffic, can't find childcare or school places and seem constantly to be hitting roadblocks on local services.

Amongst those immigrants are the specialists, doctors, lawyers, accountants and straight-out hard workers that regional Australia desperately needs. And the partners and children that go with them. I say to all of them, if you are looking for a better quality of life, have I got a deal for you!

In the modern world with ever expanding technology and connectivity how do we make living in regional Australia more attractive, maintain regional populations and reduce unsustainable surges in city population? And why should we? Because, in my view, regional populations are essential to the nation's prosperity and the retention of Australia's values and culture. No one can provide a university, oncologist, orthodontist and level 5 hospital in every Australian town. But we can move those services closer to people who rely on them and grow the nation's economy at the same time. To do that, requires planning, strategy and implementation. In other words, action.

Every person sitting in this room today knows what drives the locations of the Australian population. It's jobs, jobs and jobs. And communities of interest.

People go where the work is, where services are provided and a lifestyle exists that suits them and their family. So, the question now is for me, as a federal government MP, do I think we have the levers to drive population location without clunky and unworkable regulation? Of course we do. The government of the day controls the largest budget in Australia at over \$600 billion annually. The taxpayer employs over 2 million public servants. Defence has enormous resources and radical changes can be made around tariffs, taxation zoning or superannuation. Our two Regional Deals were a glimmer of hope and opportunity. Technology now allows individuals to work from practically anywhere in many instances. Clearly governments can shift the population if they have the will. So once a decision is made that we have the capability, the next question becomes where and why, how much and who's paying?

So today, and like others before me, I am calling for a national population policy. A plan to take to the next federal election. A policy that determines where Australia's next major cities will be located. A policy that takes pressure off our cities and city residents. A national vision for regional growth and city relief. Call it a contest or a competition, a detailed and clear-eyed assessment to identify existing towns that have what's needed to become a major city with all of its services.

Where is it in Australia that has sufficient affordable land for expansion?  
Where is it that has potentially over invested in supporting infrastructure for water and sewerage, transport connectivity or potential for connectivity by air, road rail and sea? Where is sufficient water supply to last into the next century?

The mainstream view is that regional development policies should not seek to reverse de-population but to accelerate growth, both economic and population. I'm advised that my Alma Mata the Queensland University of Technology developed a carrying capacity dashboard online tool in 2014 which suggests that Australia can manage a population of around 40 million.

Common sense would tell you infrastructure development in regional areas will be substantially more cost effective than tearing down expensive city housing to build congestion busting infrastructure. Do we want Australia to be a nation of three cities of four million plus or 12 cities of 1 million plus? Unfortunately, under Federal Labor, the infrastructure pipeline is under review which we know is code for 'gone'.

The advent of modern technology, communications, transport and logistics improvements, regional connectivity, means the world as we all know is rapidly changing. Technology should be the great equaliser for regional Australia with video conferencing, remote health and education, access to a wealth of information, drones, automation. The list goes on. But as the former leader of the Nationals, Warren Truss said many times, the upgraded, road, bridge, port or airport has unfortunately become the road out of town. And Australians are siloing to our nation's capitals. Why? Because they can. Because there is work and services and a new lifestyle. In a free nation every individual has the absolute right to live where they chose, to live their life and raise their families in the way they see fit. But we must also consider the national interest, and what's best for all people of this nation.

Much of Australia's prosperity comes from the regions. ABARES estimated in 2021 farm gate value in agriculture was over \$66 billion. Resources exports, according to the Resources and Energy Quarterly are around \$460 billion with coal now our largest resource export at \$130 plus billion. The 30 percent of the Australian people that currently chose to make the regions their home are doing their fair share and more when it comes to delivering for the national economy.

So as policy makers should we continue to allow nature to take its course when it comes to the location of Australia's population? Do we stand by and allow the stripping from Australia's regions of the people and services it needs and the massive growth in our cities which directly affects their liveability? Or do we make a stand?

In Queensland, Labor governments systematically closed maternity services in regional Queensland. Just took them away. And State Labor continue to drive up the price of energy and water in Queensland making some industries, like the sugar industry, practically unviable. I'm naturally suspicious of anything that a Labor government does but the damage these decisions have had on regional communities is deplorable. In recent years regions have lost banking services, railways, departmental staff, medical services and even local grocery stores. And in contrast our cities have had massive, unplanned increases in population. We need to invest in the regions that produce so much with so few, in a bid to attract and retain more people in the regions.

But we also need every Australian to contribute. We need everyone that is capable of work, to be at work, making a contribution, making a difference, building this nation, not just a few.

How is it possible that we have 512,000 unemployed Australians but some regional areas are desperate for labour, both skilled and unskilled? That without Working Holiday Makers and 457 Skilled Migrant Visas many businesses would close their doors. While this is a simplistic assessment of a complicated issue the questions are obvious.

It's very clear that policy settings are not giving everyday Australians the results they deserve. It has been the creeping death of opportunity over a long period of time for Australian youth. So, what can be done? Like the great reformists of previous governments – Howard, Keating and Hawke – we must all make some tough decisions. While I recognise that tough decisions take political capital, and there are limited opportunities to do anything but oppose from opposition, I believe, truly believe, the Australian people want a vision for the future. And if our current and previous leaders can't or won't provide it then someone has to demand that action. We cannot afford to simply continue to slide into an abyss, an abyss where a generation of Australians are being lost to welfare dependence.

So again, let's look at some numbers.

A single parent with three kids under 8 receives welfare payments and rental assistance of around \$2,055 per fortnight with additional benefits of a health care card and cheaper childcare or kindergarten. Remember this is tax free.



A couple with three kids under 8 with one parent working for minimum wage, receives around \$3,055 with wages and government assistance combined, before the tax man takes his slice.

How can this continue? We have to act so all Australians contribute in a meaningful way to making this nation better.

In summary, ladies and gentleman, I'm calling for the possible to become certain. What some believe unlikely I call the achievable, the necessary and the must be. A long-term vision for our Nation:

- Affordable reliable energy with a new industry thrown in to boot – Nuclear;
- Getting serious about multi-generational welfare and the future of our children;
- And a population plan that works for all Australians, now and into the future.

Delivering that vision comes with an added bonus - delivery of services to those that choose regional life. And a manageable level of growth for our cities. Tough policies that deliver outcomes not ideals for those caught in the welfare trap. And finally, a fair-go for those that work hard by putting more money in working Australians pockets when compared to being on welfare.

Will these outcomes for our Nation come to be reality? That will be determined by each individual politician's will to succeed being stronger than the desperation to just hold on.

I believe the Australian people are desperate for a long-term vision for our nation, and for that vision to be successful it must include regional Australia,

not just our cities. The engine room of our export industry and the backbone of our national economy lies in the regions.

Australians are tired of being told what they can say, think and do by idealists. Idealists that tolerate no dissent to their world view, and in fact attack viciously, those who might disagree with them.

Australians don't demand a lot, but they deserve much. They work hard, play hard and take financial risks every day. They employ and build businesses. Regional Australians have been at the heart of our nation's public identity for more than two centuries. It's not an Akubra hat, big belt buckle and RM Williams boots that make a person an Australian. It's determination, a will to succeed, a resilience in the face of all challenges that confront them. That is what makes Australians unique in the world, and its past time that those in public life act for their long-term benefit. And I for one, while my electorate continues to support me, won't leave that life without continuing the fight for their interests. We must plan, implement, and deliver a path to a better Australia.

Thank you.