

Federal Platform

The Liberal Party of Australia



THE LIBERAL WAY

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WE BELIEVE

- In Australia, its people and its future.
- In the innate worth of the individual, in the right to be independent, to own property and to achieve, and in the need to encourage initiative and personal responsibility.
- In the basic freedoms of thought, worship, speech, association and choice.
- In equality of opportunity, with all Australians having the opportunity to reach their full potential in a tolerant national community.
- In a just and humane society, where those who cannot provide for themselves can live in dignity.
- In the family as the primary institution for fostering the values on which a cohesive society is built.
- In the creation of wealth and in competitive enterprise, consumer choice and reward for effort as the proven means of providing prosperity for all Australians.
- In the principle of mutual obligation, whereby those in receipt of government benefits make some form of contribution to the community in return, where this is appropriate.
- In the importance of voluntary effort and voluntary organisations.
- In parliamentary democracy as the best system for the expression and fulfilment of the aspirations of a free people.
- In the separation and distribution of powers as the best protection for the democratic process.
- In a federal system of government and the decentralisation of power, with local decisions being made at the local level.
- In a constitutional head of state as a symbol of unity and continuity.
- In Government being sufficiently responsive so that it can meet its proper obligations to its citizens.

- In Government keeping to its core business and not competing with the private sector.
- In the rule of law and justice, giving all citizens equal rights under the law, responsibilities to maintain it, and the freedom to change it.
- In Australia playing a constructive role in the pursuit and maintenance of international peace in alliance with other free nations and in assisting less advantaged peoples.
- In Liberalism, with its emphasis on the individual and enterprise, as the political philosophy best able to meet the demands and challenges of the 21st century.

MODERN AUSTRALIA – THE CHALLENGE OF NATION BUILDING

Liberals are proud of their nation and its achievements. They admire their fellow Australians who consistently triumph over adversity. They respect the lessons of history that lay the foundations for an even better future.

The story of Australian nation building is a story of remarkable achievement – and it is a story that is ongoing.

Australia is one of the world's great democracies, founded on liberal ideals of human dignity, freedom and equality.

Australia is among the most prosperous and stable nations the world has ever known. Today, that prosperity and stability provide the solid foundation of a society in which a rich diversity of cultures and lifestyles exist together in an environment of harmony and mutual respect, bound together by an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia.

The Europeans who began to settle Australia more than two hundred years ago did not come to an empty land. For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had lived on this continent. Their contribution to Australia's identity has been, and will continue to be, a vital and enriching one.

The history of modern Australia and our democratic institutions reflects the traditions and institutions of Britain from which most of the original European settlers had come. Over time, those traditions and institutions were adapted to Australia's unique circumstances and came to reflect the evolution of a distinct Australian identity. Over the last half century, in particular, Australia's political, economic, social and cultural development has been expanded and accelerated by the migration of people from all parts of the world.

The success of modern Australia has been its ability to accommodate in harmony such a diversity of backgrounds, and to find in that diversity not division but strength in the common acknowledgement of an Australian nationhood, its meaning and importance.

The foundations of modern Australia are its freedom, its opportunity, its tolerance and its egalitarian sense of fairness – all foundations which Liberals are committed to protecting and strengthening.

One of the defining features of our nation has been its commitment to social equality. The distinctive egalitarianism of Australians is reflected in attitudes which have become part of our social fabric – the disdain for rigid class structures, the celebration of mateship, a belief in a “fair go” and an uncompromising commitment to democratic freedoms – as well as in the development of our institutions: universal suffrage, the early enfranchisement of women and the trade union movement.

Part of what makes Australia unique is the beauty and world significance of its environment and diversity. From magnificent tropical reefs and rainforests to austere deserts, there is little the Australian landscape does not offer. The heritage of our natural environment, no less than our cultural heritage, is one of our most precious assets, to be preserved and passed on to future generations.

The life we enjoy in modern Australia would not have been possible without economic prosperity. Nation building in Australia is not just a matter of institutions, cultural values and environmental protection – it is also about providing economic security and opportunity for advancement to all Australians.

All Australians should be rewarded for their productive enterprise and those in crisis or need should be assured of proper support.

The needs of Australian families are important in building a strong social fabric and a sense of community.

Above all, the focus of nation building is on the future, giving all Australians a sense of hope in terms of their own personal future and optimism in terms of Australia’s future in a rapidly changing world.

Our young people are the future of the Australian nation. They deserve a future in which they can achieve fulfilment of their talent through rewarding jobs, in which they can be involved in forging a vision for Australia’s future and in which they can be proud of what Australia has achieved as a nation in the past and confident about what it can achieve in the future.

THE LIBERAL WAY

Liberalism is a set of democratic values based upon a central belief in the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all people as individuals and upon a conviction that those individual rights, freedoms and responsibilities are the surest foundation of strong community life.

Liberalism is not a fixed ideology but a broad-based political philosophy that relates a core set of enduring values to the changing realities and challenges that societies confront over time.

Liberals believe in freedom of choice and a “fair go” for all. Only in a society where individuals are free to pursue their individual goals can tyranny be avoided. Only in a society where opportunity, initiative and personal responsibility are fostered can prosperity be attained. Freedom can only be meaningful if individuals have the opportunity to participate, to achieve and to develop their talents. Respect for the individual implies tolerance of others.

This is why Liberalism is the enemy of privilege, sectional interests and narrow prejudice.

Freedom is essential to liberalism, but it is not absolute and unfettered freedom, and the rights of any individual are limited and constrained by the equal rights of other individuals.

Intrusive government has been demonstrated by history to be inefficient, cruel and discouraging to human achievement. Liberalism is a philosophy of strategic but limited government. The role of government is to set the framework of laws and other rules within which individuals and families can freely make decisions about their own lives and pursue their goals with confidence. By both the laws it enacts and the taxation it exacts, government should interfere as little with the freedom of the individual as is consistent with the maintenance of a fair and open society.

Liberals support the family as the fundamental institution for the raising and nurturing of children and for making each individual an integral part of society. Liberals recognise that the values, choices and actions of families have a profound influence on the welfare of

the nation and that the interests of families should be at the centre of national policy making.

Liberals believe that an economy based on private property, free enterprise and competitive markets will produce the wealth and jobs Australians want. Government should not provide services that can be better delivered by competitive enterprise.

Liberals recognise the capacity of markets, as well as their limits.

Liberals believe that fair, open and competitive markets provide the best means of ensuring an open, dynamic, prosperous and equitable society. Government needs to ensure that markets are, indeed, fair, open and competitive.

Just as Liberalism recognises the limits of markets, so too does it recognise the limits of government.

Government can never duplicate the range of values and the life experiences of individual citizens and cannot therefore effectively substitute centralised for individual decision-making.

A liberal society relies on voluntary participation in the institutions of civil society – the clubs, associations, charities and community groups freely formed to achieve a great diversity of aims and purposes. Liberals support and encourage involvement in this civil society.

Liberals promote the fundamental importance of education and training at all levels and the benefits of a vibrant and inclusive participation in the arts. They recognise the importance of education in supporting democratic institutions and a progressive society.

Liberals believe in free, open, honest and robustly democratic public institutions, in which respect for our forms of government co-exists productively with public participation in, and criticism of, their processes and outcomes.

Liberals believe in democratic government that protects the rights of Australians by a system of checks and balances.

Creating opportunity and security for Australians is the basic aim of Liberal social policy. As ours is a party for all Australians, Liberals

care about the well-being of all, not just particular lobby groups or sectional interests.

The security and prosperity of all Australians depend on sound financial management producing economic stability, low inflation, high employment and a state debt that does not risk the economic well-being of future generations.

The capacity to grow and develop in a changing world depends upon predictability and social cohesion. Sudden and far-reaching change can be hostile to the stability upon which a liberal society depends. Liberals approach change with a conscious need to respect the legitimate expectations of our citizens and to ensure that social unity is not threatened by that change.

The heritage of Australian Liberalism is an important part of the broader history of Australia; and it is from the history of our political tradition that we can build on acquired wisdom. The Liberal political tradition has made a decisive contribution to nation building in Australia.

Every act of government is to be judged by a simple test: Is it in the best interests of Australia and Australians? Liberalism succeeds by relating its values to the practical concerns of people, by remaining attuned to the changing needs of the Australian nation and offering a framework for stable government and effective leadership.

In summary, Australian Liberalism holds that individual people matter most, that the family is the most fundamental institution for development of the individual, that strong civil society is the most effective way to advance shared community interests and values, and that government exists to serve people and not the reverse.

GOVERNING AUSTRALIA WELL

Liberals believe in limited government – the idea that governments should do only those things that the private sector cannot and should only provide financial assistance to the private sector in cases where there is a clear public benefit.

Decisions of government must be taken, and be seen to be taken, in the public interest. They must be carried out efficiently and according to the law. To safeguard these goals, Liberals support governments open to public scrutiny and with effective mechanisms of accountability.

The structure of government, with a bicameral parliament, independent courts and a federation of states, provides the Australian people with the means to protect their liberties. In defending that structure, and in opposing laws infringing social, political or economic liberties, Liberals are able to guard the freedoms of the Australian people.

The Commonwealth Parliament has an important role as a balance to the Executive, and the Senate should operate as a House of Review without obstructing the will of the elected Government. The courts must interpret the law and settle disputes but respect the Constitution's division of powers and leave law-making to the Parliaments.

Liberals support an independent judiciary to ensure that governments stay within the law and that all citizens are treated with impartiality and justice.

The Commonwealth Constitution embodies the democratic values of the Australian people, establishing a democratic parliament, courts to maintain the rule of law, a federal system, limits on the powers of government and protection of liberty. Liberals believe that constitutional change should take place only after careful consideration and with strong public support as expressed in a referendum.

The liberties of Australia's people are not, with a few exceptions, specifically protected by the Constitution. The greatest protection of those liberties is the Australian people's understanding of and commitment to them.

Australian federalism reflects the fact that, while some tasks of government are best performed nationally, many responsibilities are better carried out by other spheres of government. Liberals strongly support federalism.

- Federalism, including the territories and local governments established under State legislation, takes government closer to local people, creating higher levels of democratic participation and government more closely reflecting the people's wishes and regional needs. Federalism reduces the chance of laws appropriate only to one area being imposed on another.
- Federalism allows for policy experiments, so that governments can learn from each other's successes and failures and can compete with each other for citizens and business by offering the best possible policy frameworks.
- A strong federal system requires commitment from the governments of the States and the Commonwealth. Responsibilities should be divided according to federal principles, without the Commonwealth taking advantage of powers it has acquired other than by referendum. All spheres of government should possess and exercise taxing powers commensurate with their responsibilities.

WORK AND PROSPERITY FOR AUSTRALIANS

A competitive and vibrant Australian economy is the best means of enhancing our national wealth in a way that generates jobs, raises living standards and enables proper care for those in need.

Liberals want an economy that provides quality jobs and high living standards across the nation. Achieving these goals in a competitive global marketplace means we must have on-going economic reform.

Liberals believe the best strategy for jobs and prosperity includes:

- giving priority to sound economic fundamentals, including responsible fiscal management, low inflation, low interest rates, rising employment levels, low net debt and high real business investment;
- supporting the role of small business as the engine room of job generation;
- encouraging workplace reform through promoting the shared interests of employers and employees in building efficient, cohesive, profitable and competitive enterprises and through breaking down centralised controls that have held back productivity and sustainable real wage growth;
- ensuring that all have the choice to belong, or not, to unions and professional associations;
- encouraging competitive markets by restricting monopoly and prohibiting unfair trading practices;
- building a taxation system which enhances fairness and incentives to work and save, provides sound finance for government services, boosts business investment and exports, promotes simplicity and consistency and is internationally competitive;
- minimising the regulatory burden on business, consistent with protecting consumers, the environment and the safety of employees;

- pursuing an industry policy which maximises Australia's global competitive advantage;
- moving toward free trade at a pace which recognizes the rate of change in a global context;
- facilitating a world-class communications and transport infrastructure;
- strengthening a high quality and internationally competitive education and training system, including apprenticeships, that equips people with relevant skills for rewarding jobs, provides avenues for re-training and re-skilling, especially for those who are unemployed, and encourages life long learning;
- boosting innovation and technological development;
- giving all Australians the opportunity to invest in, or to create their own, business;
- making Australia an attractive destination for global investment; and
- corporatising and privatising government business enterprises to provide better and cheaper services for taxpayers' dollars.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUSTRALIANS

Liberals believe in a society in which all children have the opportunity to develop their potential and all people have the opportunity to achieve.

The education system is fundamental to achieving this goal, but education goes beyond schools to include family and community.

Material reward, cultural enrichment and personal fulfilment may be derived from an effective education system that seeks to overcome limitations imposed by disadvantage and maximises opportunities for all.

Liberals are committed to the widest possible freedom of choice in education. The right to choose should not be just a privilege for the rich.

In creating opportunities for Australians, Liberals will:

- recognize the importance of families and good parenting to children in policies that protect and strengthen the family;
- ensure the widest possible freedom in choice in education, promoted by diversity of systems and schools;
- ensure that all children have access to the best possible education, irrespective of sex, race, religion, socioeconomic background or place of residence;
- establish standards of literacy and numeracy, and accountability mechanisms for their achievement;
- help students overcome limitations and disadvantages by fostering choice in education, accommodating diversity in needs and aspirations, and encouraging excellence;
- decentralise the control and administration of schooling by empowering local systems and respecting school communities;
- promote awareness of the need for adults to upgrade their education and provide appropriate opportunities for doing so;

- offer financial assistance where appropriate so that educational needs can be met;
- oppose discrimination based on irrelevant criteria;
- implement economic policies that generate employment opportunities;
- assist migrants to integrate and find appropriate employment;
- provide for the needs of special groups in the community, including the disabled, the aged, indigenous Australians and remote communities; and
- recognise that gifted and talented children often have special educational needs, which must be met if their potential is to be realized.

ENHANCING SECURITY

Liberals aim to develop policies that foster long-term security.

Liberal economic policies will create an economy better able to adapt to a changing world market. Liberal education policies will give people the skills they need to stay in the workforce. Liberal family policies support the fundamental institution behind the welfare of most individuals. Critical as all these are to creating security, they cannot deal with all individuals and all situations.

Other measures to enhance security include:

- providing financial help to families where necessary;
- assisting the unemployed, the disabled and the ill;
- paying special attention to the needs of children and young adults;
- taking care of veterans and the aged;
- encouraging people to make adequate provision for their retirement;
- promoting home ownership;
- making health services available, while encouraging preventative measures and private insurance;
- promoting and assisting the inclusion of all into Australian society;
- encouraging community based and other crime prevention programs; and
- reinforcing the importance of law and order in the community.

LIVING IN AUSTRALIA

The geographical and cultural diversity of Australia provides a unique and enviable living environment. Liberals recognize that the needs and interests of Australians vary according to their location and heritage.

The high quality of life in Australia is testimony to the strength of its people's pioneering spirit and hard work and to the role of ongoing technological advances in providing real opportunities for Australians.

Liberals recognize that maintaining our quality of life is contingent upon:

- accepting individuality, free choice and freedom of expression;
- recognising the diverse nature of the needs and interests of Australians;
- recognising that regional and rural communities face unique problems concerning the delivery of health, education and other services;
- maintaining a diverse, independent and vigorous media;
- protecting personal privacy;
- the contributions of voluntary community based organizations;
- establishing effective and cost-efficient communication and transport systems throughout Australia;
- fostering a high quality of achievement in the arts and, within the community, widespread appreciation, understanding and accessibility of the various art forms;
- a commitment to conservation and environmental enrichment that balances our immediate economic needs with a need to conserve and nurture our environment and natural resources for future generations;
- preserving Australia's cultural and architectural heritage; and
- providing access to a variety of leisure pursuits.

AUSTRALIA AND THE WORLD

Australia's international interests are threefold. They encompass an important network of relationships with our Asia-Pacific region, a longstanding history of links with Commonwealth countries and the US, and a continuing development of our other international relationships, all of which are important in the emerging wired world. Liberals recognise the growing influence of globalisation but guard the sovereignty of our nation.

Liberals believe that Australia's priority in foreign and trade policy must be to:

- further develop the capacity of an internationally competitive Australian economy to benefit from the globalisation of trade and investment flows;
- maintain a strong national defence capability, with an appropriate mix of bilateral, regional and multilateral security alliances;
- strengthen our international relationships and alliances, especially with the United States;
- maximise the economic and strategic opportunities offered by closer engagement with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region;
- participate in international organisations including the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Nations;
- provide international aid and assistance, including a safe haven for refugees, within the limits of our national resources;
- work with non-government agencies to advance less developed nations and promote human rights; and
- enhance security and stability in our region.

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