**Poll Position**

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*In conversation with*

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:03] Good day, everyone, I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute, and I'm sorry, we're a few seconds late this morning, we've had some technical difficulties. Welcome to our fortnightly Poll Position webinar, where we give you the scoop on the latest results of the Guardian essential poll every fortnight. Today, you might see from a different background I'm on Yuin country and I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and pay my respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceeded, and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Dates and times for the Australia Institute's webinars do vary, so please head on over to AustraliaInstitute.org.au to find the details for upcoming webinars. And a couple of quick Zoom housekeeping tips. You can type questions for our panellists in using the Q&A box. You should also be able to upvote other people's questions and make comments on them as well a reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or will boot you out. And finally, a reminder this is a live event and is being recorded, and the video will be available later today at AustraliaInstitute.TV. The audio will also go up as a podcast episode of Guardian's Australian Politics podcast sometime tomorrow morning. I would like to welcome our regular panellists. Katherine Murphy, political editor of Guardian Australia. Pete Lewis, executive director of Essential Media, and Richard Denniss, chief economist at the Australia Institute, is joining us this week as well. Because we're going to be getting stuck into the budget, amongst other things. And they do say that a week is a long time in politics in the last fortnight has been packed in Australian politics. We saw the Treasurer deliver the federal budget. Ukrainian President Vladimir Rotimi Zelensky addressed the Australian Parliament and of course, the prime minister is expected to call the election any day now. Communities across New South Wales and Queensland are still recovering from the floods, and just in the last 24 hours, the IPCC has delivered yet another scathing report about the world's lack of action to reduce emissions. I think last time we spoke, South Australia had just elected a New Labour premier. And just yesterday, the Premier of Tasmania announced he was retiring, meaning there'll be a new liberal premier and a new member elected on count back down there. But really, the last fortnight has been dominated by quite a bit by the internal politics of the Liberal Party in particular. So we might get stuck into why that is the case. But Katharine, we will get stuck into the budget in a second. But I do just want to focus on the non budget politics for a second election any day now. Two weeks ago, we were kind of talking about bullying allegations from Senator Kimberley Kitching after her death, her very sad death. But in the last week, we've seen quite a speech from Senator Fierravanti-Wells from the Liberal Party that's really shifted the debate onto the character of the prime minister. Why is this speech causing the prime minister trouble?

**Katharine Murphy** [00:03:13] Well, it's sort of the sort of short version of the trouble for Morrison. With this intervention and some interventions that have followed it is that it sort of plays to a pre-existing set of propositions. If we look back at the Guardian essential poll over the last 12 months, that's the 12 months just gone. Scott Morrison's approval in the mind of voters dropped by 19 points over the course of the year, and that's sort of a function of you stay around in politics. You get a record and people start to, I guess their impressions of you start to become more solid. And so the sort of damage, I guess, for the prime minister of any fee of A. Wells's intervention is that some of the sort of negative character traits that she alleged against him sort of play back into this sense in the community that the prime minister is off the boil and may not necessarily be governing in their best interests. I missed the last the last poll position because I was out on the ground in Tasmania, in the two marginal seats in the north west of the state, and you do have difficulty at the moment finding voters that you speak to in the streets, in the towns in north west Tasmania, if it is difficult to find someone with a good word to say about the prime minister. So I think that's the difficulty for the government is that it plays into these, I suppose, negative or pre-set negative perceptions of the prime minister. Obviously, if you love the prime minister, it'll make a lot of difference. It'll just make you feel sorry for him and think there's a pile on. But. For voters who are sort of looking at the prime minister and thinking, yeah, I'm not really sure about you, mate, this is not this is not helpful. And also just from a basic campaign strategy point of view, as it points out, the election is imminent. Hours. Days? Who knows? But close, close enough to feel and and touch a at the moment, the liberal campaign will have to be wargaming this sort of this phenomenon that we've seen over the last couple of weeks of blue on blue attacks. This isn't, you know, we've we've not yet seen Labour's negative advertising campaign against the prime minister that will doubtless be unleashed during at some point during the campaign. This is this is criticism and critique of the prime minister emanating from within his own side. Now, obviously, you know, you can you can discount it. You can say, Connie, Fierravanti-Wells and some others have never been a fan of Scott Morrison's, and that is absolutely true. But the difficulty is that it does create this negative feedback loop, which can sort of feed on itself. And then logistically, if he's sitting in the back room of the liberal campaign right at the moment, you'd be thinking to yourself, My God, you know, how does this end? Will it end? And how do we try and inoculate our candidates in marginal seats against sort of being caught in this negative backwash against the prime minister? So it's quite an interesting phenomenon just on the eve of the campaign.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:06:31] It surely is, and we are about to head into the campaign. But Richard, chief economist at the Australia Institute, I did want to touch on the budget just a little bit. Katharine, you're quite escaping in your analysis, which people can find on Guardian Australia, and we might come back to that. But Richard, what was your sense of the budget and how it's landed?

**Richard Denniss** [00:06:55] Oh budget, that was a week ago, ebony a week. Oh look, budgets reveal a government's priorities and this budget revealed this government has no priorities really. Like What problem are they trying to solve? What problem were their announcements and their policies focussed on fixing one thing? I really think getting themselves re-elected, you know, if it's fun, it's a giant. If managing the economy was the number one goal. Which part of the economy are they really trying to drive productivity growth because they didn't announce anything that really will? Are they really trying to reshape our labour market? Because if they are, they didn't announce anything that will. They clearly not worried about debt or deficits any more? They clearly not worried about household debt or national debt or the current account deficit. What problem are they actually trying to solve? And of course, the only problem is that Labor might weep, right? So so they literally don't. And needless to say, they're not interested in tackling climate change or reducing income inequality or fixing indigenous disadvantage like these things don't even occur to them to discuss. But even if you want to take their language of managing the economy seriously, which bit of the economy are they trying to manage? Which economic problem is in their sights that they are saying, Come on everyone, we need to get on and do this. It's just here. Have some money. Try and forget that we haven't fixed wages growth. Try and forget the fact that you're spending a fortune on private health insurance, trying to get the fact you can't afford household insurance. Like it's just here's a little bit of money in the lead up to the budget to show we're listening. But that's actually not the job of government. Like listening is not the actually supposed to have some plan for yourself and for your government. And Scott Morrison's plan is to say Anthony Albanese would be worse. Now the voters will decide that. But yet there was literally nothing in the budget to kind of solve any economic problem that was literally just brutal politics. And interesting that I think at this point in world history, where people are looking to government for health, they are looking for government, for climate change, they are looking for health to government to deal with things like gender pay gap. A whole bunch of people are looking to the government to say, Well, what are you going to do about this problem? And Scott's like, Can I give you two hundred and fifty bucks? I don't think it's working.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:09:37] Yeah. And on that note, hey, I know you've got some budget questions in the slides for today's essential poll. So if you want to take us now, I know we're going to start off with that political problem and where things are at in poll positions. Essential essential poll results for this week. So kick us off with the. A slide, if you don't, I will.

**Peter Lewis** [00:10:04] And as everybody knows, we are not interested in horse race polling until it's election time, and then it becomes very exciting and interesting, doesn't it, folks? If you're listening to this as a podcast, you can also go to Essential Report Dot Com, Doherty you and play at home. So the first slide we've got up is federal voting intention summary on one level. This looks really evenly balanced. 36 Primary four Labor. 37 Primary for coalition. 10 for the Greens on one on one flank, 12 for other independents on the other flank, and undecideds down to five per cent, which is pretty low. We've been as high as 12 in our polls, so we are starting to get to people and remember the the undecideds, which have made a conscious decision to keep in the poll. They are people that refused to give an opinion on two attempts. We asked them once we say, Who are you going to vote for? And then if they can't give us an answer, we say, Well, who might you vote for? And then if they can't see an answer to that, then we say, Well, you're someone that hasn't made up their mind yet. That's down to one in 20, which is still enough to change the election, right? That would work out in the old form of a TPP of 50 to forty five. So we're not saying and the ones in front because of those five per cent, but I think that 12 percent, which is the other independent, is also really, really interesting because while it feels that a lot of these that that includes UAP One Nation, but also tail independents, which are in some of the metro areas now polling into the 20s. And I think in a way, there's a bit of a sense that this is the Liberals grand moment that they're really now facing an organised, loose coalition of candidates who are pooling resources to to put pressure on them from their left flank. I just go through these lines in a little bit more granularity this this sort of shows us the journey since midway through last year, it's bounced around a bit as you saw those dots, the dot it without a line is the don't knows and as low as it's been. And then in terms the TPP with don't know is, does that mean Labor is going to win the election? No, I think we've said that it's got to be one state by state, but it's also going to be one on a national wave. History shows us that governments change in a wave election, not in hand-to-hand combat, but particularly given the not so friendly fire that the prime minister's receiving at the moment and the fact that he appears to be now. The real issue this election is about Labor is in a good position to start the campaign, which could be a matter of hours. I might just have

**Ebony Bennett** [00:12:49] Just for those playing at home. That number was Labor on 50 percent, with the Coalition on 45 percent and five percent don't know or undecided.

**Peter Lewis** [00:12:59] Sorry, I was being nonverbal.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:13:01] That's all right, Katharine. Obviously, you've talked a little bit already about some of those negatives, but as Richard was talking about, some of the budget was aimed at trying to plug some of those holes in the dam, so to speak. But it's certainly still not looking great for the coalition.

**Katharine Murphy** [00:13:21] Well, look, there's a sort of mythology that we all engage in year in, year out about budgets that there's sort of there's a bounce to be had that is a political bounce to be had over budgets. If you look at data over the long cycle, it's very rare actually for a budget to deliver a measurable bounce for an incumbent government. It's just not really how it works. But in terms of how the government wanted to start off this campaign, they were certainly hopeful that the budget would do a couple of things for them. One sort of turn the conversation back into issues of economic management and security, which the liberal and nationals have an historical advantage over their opponents in terms of if we look at the data, although interestingly, not at the moment, which is something that we could possibly get to. But look, historically, it's certainly true if the conversation is about security and economic management libraries not advantaged by that conversation. So I think what the government wanted the budget to do was give people a fistful of dollars, which is absolutely what happened. Pay off Barnaby Joyce for his support for net zero with an absolutely astonishingly huge infrastructure package, most of it out on the never never. But nonetheless, there it is. And also turn the conversation back to those main issues where where the coalition historically has an advantage over their opponents. And then so if we measure that and what happened next? Okay, the budget's delivered sort of momentarily. After the budget was delivered, there was a memorial service for Shane Warne, which bomb blanket it out. Sort of much discussion about the key initiatives. Also, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells chose budget night to get up in the adjournment in the Senate and lob her Katyusha missile. So I think basically that sort of first, you know, the days after the budget where the government would have hoped that there would have been a lot of attention on the measures and a lot of discussion around their preferred frame was basically a complete white wipe-out. So I think what the prime minister is trying to do this week in the days or hours that remain before the election's called is to try and sort of revisit that patch like just before we came together for the show today, guys, the prime minister was standing up literally in front of a petrol bowser in Sydney, and Marise Payne was taking questions about the latest developments in the Ukraine in front of a petrol bazaar, which is sort of like not a not a sight you see very often. So anyway, look, the government is trying to get the focus back on the budget. We gave you money, look, the fuel prices lower and you trust us more than the others to do all this hard stuff. That's what he's trying to do in the days or hours that remain ahead of the election. But, you know, so far there's been more distraction, I guess, than than clear air for the prime minister to engineer that pivot that he's trying to do at the moment.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:16:28] Yeah, thank you. Do you want to take us back into the slides again and we'll get into some of those budget slides?

**Peter Lewis** [00:16:35] Indeed. Again, the graceful pivot. So this first slide, you might need to go in a little bit tight listeners, but it's looking at this question we ask up to every budget in general. Do you think the federal budget will be good or bad for the following groups? And the one I want to look at is the Red Line, because that's. A retail line that's you personally, 24 per cent of people in what is a cash splash budget are actually saying it's going to be good for me personally. That is not a great result from where I sit. The biggest beneficiaries, 44 per cent the Green Line people who are well off, there's another bunch of other formulations, but there is in terms of it being a circuit breaker breaker, I don't think it's broken any circuits here. Second question most important economic issue. I think the coalition, we're ready to run an election on unemployment. I think they've been test driving an iteration of an old, famous British campaign, which would have been our plan is working. The Tories won in England back in the eighties. I think it was with Britons not working and it would be Nate. And it, you know, there are certain formulations that have been tested by the other side. I can say that it doesn't quite work at the moment because I think the biggest problem with unemployment is that if unemployment's low, there's fewer people that are worried about that particular economic indicator. Cost of living is the only story. As you can say here, 61 per cent say cost of living is the most important economic issue, followed by housing prices. That's people that are renting. Government debts under 10 per cent wage growth. While it's getting a lot of, you know, focus, only eight per cent put it ahead of cost of living. I think those two are probably inextricably linked. And then unemployment data at six per cent and interest rate is almost as low as the interest rates at the moment, three per cent a run through a couple of others just to sort of give you the picture because we probed the budget for a few angles. This is interesting party trust to help manage household expenses, which is really what the cost of living election is about. Labour's ahead 37 26, with thirty seven saying make no difference. That number almost reflects the slide we had on national security a few weeks ago as well in terms of managing the relationship with China. So both where we all think the Coalition has a natural advantage. Economic management and national security. The actual indicators of both those Labor is actually a hit, although not a majority and a lot still to be convinced. I hope I'm building a bit of a picture here. I thought this was also interesting. Federal budget impact on voting intention total all Australians. Twenty five per cent are more likely to vote the Coalition 19 per cent less. It wasn't as if the budget stiffed people. If you say, do you want free money, people will say Yes, thank you. It just means what comes after that is not necessarily their vote. The big problem was that most of those that thought they were more likely to vote for the coalition were going to vote for them anyway. So that's probably and protect your base. Rather than build only eight per cent of people that weren't already considering, the coalition are now more likely to look at them. And that's not nothing, but it's not quite. It's also, well, that's actually eight per cent of coalition vote. It's less likely to vote for them. So that's probably unintended consequence. Finally, views towards the objective of federal government 56 per cent and think it's just about the election. They agree with Richard 44 per cent helping the economy build and get stronger. We asked that after budget, the interesting thing there is after the last budget, it was 55 45 the other way where normally cynical, but not this cynical.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:20:36] Very interesting. Thank you, Pete. Katharine, I want to come back to you just on, I guess, yeah, the overall picture of the budget and of course, we've had Anthony Albanese's budget reply as well in the interim. You've talked about the fact that kind of isn't any bounce there, but the cost of living issues are real ones. How much is that going to hurt that people are genuinely feeling these pressures but aren't necessarily feeling that relief from the budget?

**Katharine Murphy** [00:21:06] Yeah. Well, it sort of depends how what mindset people are, but I think there's no conflict between the major parties on the budget measures for cost of living relief. Labor was not inclined to pick a fight this close to the election about any of those measures in the budget. So the cut to fuel excise and also the cash payments, all of that was sort of waved through in the blink of an eye. So there's sort of no stickiness there around sort of the respective approaches to ameliorating cost of living pressure. But obviously, if we step back a bit, there are quite quite different approaches in the platforms of the respective parties about what approach you take in the event either one wins the election to get a more durable solution to these issues. So but you know, again, it's sort of incumbent on Labor, though, to sort of move from the point of no disagreement in the budget to the point of disagreement on on the policy solutions more broadly, right? Because the interesting thing about voters at the moment or certainly voters that we've spoken to in the run up to the campaign for a marginal seats period series, which we will start to roll out reasonably soon, is, you know, as I said, there is a lot of negative feedback about the prime minister at the moment, which people literally line up to give you that where we've been, though the Labor alternative is not has not cut through yet to voters, voters aren't really sure what Labour's about. It's not like it was in 2019, when we were out in the field. In 2019, there was a lot of really foregrounded hostility about Bill Shorten as a candidate. People were quite negative about him and a bit like Morrison. Now they'd cross the road to tell you about it. Now the situation's reversed. They're certainly not negative about the opposition leader. I can't recall anybody who who who said anything particularly negative about him, but they they they really don't know what the Labor offer is. And in order to change the government, I think there does have to be a call to action that voters recognise. It's not just a matter of people being so angry with Morrison that it's all done, although that happens anyway. It's a bit of a long winded answer to the question, but the short version is that there's a campaign to be won. I think by either side, there is some scope for Morrison to turn back some of the negative sentiment. There's also scope for Labour to really dig in and and sort of draw, I guess, sort of paint the picture of how all of these negative perceptions of Morrison fit together in a picture that's not pretty for the country for the next three years. So we'll will we shall see, as I say, in the classics, we shall see.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:24:07] Pete just coming back to you. You had kind of a funny take on that. I thought today in your Guardian Op-Ed.

**Peter Lewis** [00:24:14] I've held another metaphor hostage today, Ebony Bennett. I do see this as being a clash of different styles, and I see Morrison as being like a sumo wrestler who's just trying to use the heft of incumbency to squash the opponent with, you know, boondoggles and cheesy photo ops and lots and lots of money. Whereas I do a bit of research on this about the difference, but Albo is more doing judo where he's trying to use the opponent's power against him to trip him up. And I think he's done this quite effectively over the last year to the point now where I think about Scott Morrison in a spot where Morrison is Morrison's biggest weakness, and the problem Morrison now faces is that every day of the campaign, the biggest weakness of Morrison is going to be delivering the grabs to the media. And Morrison can't do a Dave Sharma and say, I'm not with Morrison because Morrison is Morrison. So if this gets pulled off like this, it is actually, you know, in the finest traditions of judo, of not engaging head on but taking your opponent's heft. Even to the extent the budget was about aged care, aged care is actually about saying that's not you Labor policy. That's Morrison ... Thinking that Bill Shorten would poison their children, but three years later, like the boots on the other foot and he can't hide from it, he can't run a campaign that he's not the front of and that is his biggest risk of holding onto power.

**Katharine Murphy** [00:26:07] I could just say something real quick. Just on that point, it is interesting. So for folks on with this on the show today to think about that, this is the first election campaign in a very long while where the incumbent prime minister will have a record. It's the long it's in a very long while because basically because of the revolving door of prime ministers over the last 10 years, the contests, you know where where the incumbent has a record of being the exceptions rather than the rules. So it is really interesting to think about, you know, how that how that impacts the contest anyway. Just simple point just wanted to put that in people's minds.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:26:53] Yeah, Richard, I wanted to come back to you. Katharine mentioned earlier some boondoggles for Barnaby Joyce in the budget. And I know you've been looking a little bit into that. And I guess I guess this is in the context of all of those cost of living pressures that people are feeling the cash splashes that were also there, as you know, one of handouts for people. But can you just talk to me a little bit about what was in the budget for Barnaby Joyce as kind of payback for passing net zero by 2050?

**Richard Denniss** [00:27:28] Oh sure, I will. But if you don't mind, I'll do it in the context of Pete's metaphor. And leaving aside that, I don't like picturing Scott Morrison in one of those sumo underpants.

**Peter Lewis** [00:27:38] Mawashi. It's the first time I've got to use political Mawashi.

**Katharine Murphy** [00:27:43] Could I just say, Can I just say Richard without disrupting your flow, Pete needs no encouragement with the metaphors, but anyway, back to you.

**Richard Denniss** [00:27:51] Well, but I think the thing that Scott Morrison fears most is being held accountable. If you look through his career, pre politics and even politics, he's always been promoted out of trouble. You know, whenever there's been an unfinished problem or a crisis, he's actually just been promoted out. But of course, when you're the prime minister, there's nowhere but down. So I think what, what, what Anthony Albanese does very well is, keep saying, Sorry, Scott, that's on you. What do you know? How how did that go? And again, I think the budget really kind of draws out how how can a role the politics of events any I'm sorry, Scott Morrison's approach is and and how vulnerable he is to Anthony Albanese, because the one thing we know the prime minister thinks he's good at is the announce table, and the budget papers are just full of announced bills and soon to be announced bills. But that's that's the trap, right? Because no one actually believes he'll finish anything. No one thinks that anything he announces will be delivered or have the benefits that it's supposed to be. And yes, he'll be very creative. Oh, look, that's a hat I haven't seen him wear before. Oh, look, he's next to a petrol bowser. I mean, the TV news will love it. But really, now I think the fact that 61 per percent of people are thinking about cost of living, the fact that most people think that he's in it for himself means that the one thing he knows how to do is announce something new to distract you from what he didn't do. You know, that's now his weakness. So the dams, I think, are that writ large. Barnaby Joyce is out there saying, Look, I got $5 billion for this dam that I.E.D. years treasurers have said no to for 80 years. Finance ministers have said no to Josh Frydenberg's the first treasurer in Australian history. They think the hills guide them is a good idea. Now, of course, he doesn't think it's a good idea, or he just knows he can't win a fight with Barnaby. So when Barnaby, he's out there standing in front of the big dam and Morrison's out there saying, Look at all the money, we're pouring literally down this drain. I think people are beginning to say this is this is your only trick. And again, at a time when people are worried about COVID, they are worried about hospitals, they are worried about climate change, they are worried about defence. I think they know they need more than that. And it's true that, you know, Labor hasn't laid out a big positive agenda, but I think Labor have said we take this stuff more seriously than that. And for Morrison just being asked again and again, why didn't you finish the. The last thing you started, why didn't you achieve the last thing you promised? Has this thing really going to help? I think that's that's that's in a lot of people's heads and you know, it'll be a it'll be a bitter and acrimonious election campaign. They always are. But Scott Morrison's look at my new thing ignore my track record. I don't think that's going to work and catcher makes an important point. He's the first prime minister with a track record to tie it to an election, and that's the last thing he really wants us to focus on.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:24] Yeah, look, I'm just going to apologise because the next door neighbours just started his track to my the lawns before it starts raining in here. So if it's loud, I'm going to try and keep myself on mute as much as possible and apologies if you can hear the dogs on the tractor in the background. I'll go to the Q&A from the audience. Now, the first question I've got is from Judith Hudson, who says recently Laura Tingle gave figures to illustrate that it's a myth the LNP are better financial managers. And her question is, how can we help voters to realise this? But I guess my question for you, I'll start with you, Katharine, is do voters realise this? We're kind of saying that aren't we in the. In the polling results, I guess, well,

**Katharine Murphy** [00:32:09] yeah, there is this interesting reversal in in the polling results and there's there's sort of three different markers that we've had over the last few months. One sort of broad broadly, you know, neutrally worded question on economic management, which Labor was ahead of the government on another one on the China relationship that referenced early day. And we've sort of got Labor ahead of their opponents on the most salient issue. Economic management issue of the moment, which is cost of living right? So there's that. It's quite interesting poll like that is not normally the case in polls. So anyway, we'll see how that all pans out. I'm not sure what figures Laura used in order to make the point, but you know, there's a very simple comparison that can be made obviously during the global financial crisis. The Labour government did avoid a recession that, you know, we did have a technical recession in Australia in the opening stages of the pandemic. But I mean, I wouldn't be lining up to blast the government for that. I think in a fiscal sense, the government moved heaven and earth to try and avoid that. And in fact, I think there's some merit to their case that the economy is sort of coming out of the transition without labour market scarring because of that. Right? I mean, there's other scarring and and and anyway, that's a whole other point that I would unlock. We'd still be here in three hours anyway. I do think it's interesting that at the moment that the prime minister feels compelled is certainly done at the last couple of days. And he's certain this morning to sort of foreground this idea that the global financial crisis, which Labor Labor government managed obviously domestically, was nothing compared to the crisis that he has managed, i.e. the pandemic and the the sort of global economic and other ramifications of it. It's sort of like my crisis is bigger than their crisis is really quite an interesting sort of turn in the public conversation. And I've been curious about this for the last few days because it's sort of an odd thing to say now. I mean, obviously, one can measure the respective crises, and I understand what the prime minister is talking about because obviously a pandemic has more complexity than a global financial meltdown caused by inept banking regulations in the United States and other countries, right? Obviously, pandemics got more dimensions to it, but I'm quite interested in my crisis is bigger than your crisis because it's suggestive to me that some of the arguments that the coalition would often advance in this in this message frame in economic management perhaps are not doing the heavy lifting they have done for them in the past. So again, Morrison's trying to reframe to say, Well, you know, look, that was really big what I did, it was huge. And you know what? I had you say, thank you. I mean, obviously, he's not saying that in those overt terms, but it's sort of a it's sort of a plea really to to, you know, to voters, please reward me for that stuff I did. And sort of just the last point looping back to the global financial crisis. That is, of course, the lesson Labor learnt. No one thanks you for doing your job, and the prime minister is sort of reliving that ten years after the fact with a different crisis. It's much more important a large crisis, he tells us. But he is. You can see him. He's now learning the lesson that Labor learnt at the end of the GFC, which is No one. Thanks you for doing your job.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:35:50] Did you have anything to add to that just in terms of, you know, how voters have that perception?

**Peter Lewis** [00:35:55] Yeah. And people that have listened to me previously will know about my favourite theory of polling the fingerhut effect, which is named after Big Fingerhut, a Washington Post that's been doing the game since the 60s and has this really interesting insight right of centre parties, whether they're good, bad or indifferent at managing the economy tend to be seen as better economic managers. And it's only when you put something that relates to individuals into your life that left of party centres get into the economic argument. So in 2007, it was work rights, which was the economic frame that delivered powerful Rudd living like kitchen table living expenses is getting the high economic debates about debt and interest rates and inflation down to tin tacks around the table. And that's why I think is in the game to Katharine's point. I agree that you don't get a reward for something bad not happening. But I also think the other piece is that you've got to give Labor credit in that first year of the pandemic. They did. Only imagine how the coalition would have applied that pandemic if Labor was in power and how they would have run into fear and they would have created that, they would there would not have been that unity. In reality, what Morrison is most remembered for the JobSeeker and JobKeeper, which Labor basically forced him to take up, which has actually been the legacy that he's now running on. But unfortunately for him, a lot of other things have happened, including the second year of the pandemic and the failures of service delivery and the take climate catastrophes that bookended his time in power. So it's just not that he just can't get away with saying mission accomplished. Give me more. And again, back to my earlier point, each time he says anything, it is him saying it and that is taking the salience away from his argument as well.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:37:57] Richard. The next question I've got here is for you from Kristy Breakspear, she says. How much credibility can we attach to Morrison's voice that the Australian economy post-COVID is the best in the world?

**Richard Denniss** [00:38:11] Thanks for the question. Look, best in the world. My crisis was bigger than yours. I mean, unfortunately for the prime minister, exaggeration is his go to for everything. Look, the Australian labour market is doing pretty well at the moment with low unemployment. Underemployment is relatively low by historical standards. It's no doubt the labour market is pretty tight, but the idea that our economy overall is doing really well at the moment. Well, it's laughable. But this is my point about what what part of the economy are they currently trying to fix? What is their goal? We have the lowest productivity growth on record, so that means kind of going forward, we're going to have lower wage growth than you'd ever expect. And guess what? We've already had the lowest wage growth on record, and there's nothing in the budget that's going to help that. So in terms of people's incomes, in the short term, wages growth in the medium term productivity growth, both really low inflation at the moment, cost of living. Big concern also rising rapidly. So that's going to be bad for people's standard of living. And to the extent that there was a sort of fiscal strategy, this government's just pumped money into an economy with inflation. So, you know, if you're talking about managing the economy, you know, you would expect what they're doing to be actually pushing inflation up. Don't deny that between now and the election, you know, but that's that's what the budget papers say. That's what people at the RBA is thinking at the moment. So an economy is a is a is a complicated, multifaceted beast. There's lots of parts to it. Morrison's latched on to one part, and that is low unemployment rate and says, Look, my economy is the best in the world, but I know that's not true in any meaningful sense. And B, I think this is kind of a bigger problem for him. No one feels that, and no one thinks that's true. So as Katharine said, kind of telling everyone, my crisis is better than yours. You know, just makes people think that you know, you're you're losing it and him going out there saying, our economy is the best in the world. He runs that risk of, you've never had it so good. You know, that sort of trap that Paul Keating fell into. And then just finally, you know, kind of can't not say it this time, but you know, the climate has changed. We're not talking about climate change as an abstract phenomena people are experiencing, experiencing, not reading about seeing the biggest fires, the biggest floods, rainfall, even if you didn't get flood. No one that lives in Sydney thinks the climate isn't different from anything they've ever experienced. And I do think that that is is just fundamentally changing the way that people are looking at these issues. They might not think that climate change is the number one voting issue, but this thing is it real isn't real. That's gone. No one thinks that Scott Morrison is the guy that's going to look after you in this new climate. So which which is, of course, a giant part of the economy. Go ask the people of Lismore. You know how their economy is doing well at the moment. It's been ruined by a changed climate. So yeah, no best in the world. No. Meaningless. But even saying it, I think, is dangerous for Scott Morrison. He feels obliged to say it because he's so pleased with himself. But I don't think saying it wins him a vote.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:41:48] Katharine, Richard's just kind of talked there about climate change. Which brings me to the next question from Kate Cooper. She's quoted the Antonio Guterres as saying climate activists are sometimes depicted as dangerous radicals, but the truly dangerous radicals are the country's increasing. Production of fossil fuels and investing in new fossil fuels infrastructure might not describe Australia

**Katharine Murphy** [00:42:15] well, there is this strange contradiction that regular viewers of the show will be fully aware of, given how often we talk about it, about that old net zero commitment without any sort of actual tangible strategy to get there, including the constraint of fossil fuels, which is part of the equation. You know, I think you don't get to net zero just by offsetting all your emissions and certainly not by exploiting emissions to the rest of the world on the scale that Australia does at the present time. So look, it's yeah, but it's sort of, obviously. A. I just think we need I agree with Richard that I don't think the country, even in the parts of the country that have voted against climate action over the last at every election since 2013. I agree. I don't think there is now a live sort of ridiculous debate about whether or not climate science should be believed or not. I think the country has moved past it for the reasons Richard articulates, which is that this is now a lived reality, not a forecast or, you know, some sort of Nostradamus type prediction. We are we are living in a changed climate and heating is is a is a present experience rather than a forecast. But again, I'm not necessarily saying that climate is the issue that that that will be weaponized again, as it was very successfully in 2019. But there's, you know, there's a tone in the show today that we're sort of, you know, we've already consigned the government to history in terms of this election contest again. Look, I can read the polls, including ours. I know that Labor is currently ahead in the polls. I know from recent field visits that people are really jack of the prime minister. But again, elections in Australia are hard fought with generally close in the event that we are in a quote unquote normal election. I'm sorry, I've been pessimistic on this show now for a number of months about about this, this outlook, because I know we're speaking to a progressive audience. It's, you know, I don't think this election is in the bag for progressive voters. I don't I don't think that that it's all that it's all done and that people are now. So Jack Morrison that they can't possibly re-elect them. I think there is a campaign there that one side will win and one side will lose, and that's what we're looking at over the next sort of eight weeks or so.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:45:01] Yeah. Richard, I want to come to you just sticking with climate change for a bit because Katherine mentioned Australia's exports there, and I feel like a lot of our climate debate around policy is often, I mean, usefully directed at what's happening domestically with the transition and those kinds of things. But as Katharine mentioned, we've got huge exports as well that don't really get a huge amount of scrutiny. Could you just lay out for us in terms of Australia's exports of fossil fuels, kind of the scope of the problem that we're not dealing with?

**Richard Denniss** [00:45:39] Oh, absolutely. So step one Australia is the lead, the third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world. We're behind two little countries. People have probably heard of Saudi Arabia and Russia. We are the third biggest exporter of fossil fuels in the world, but we're not, you know, we're not resting on our laurels. We are determined to increase our exports of fossil fuels, and the budget papers sort of make this crystal clear. So not only are we the third largest in the world, we are planning for a big expansion and we often hear the talk about the domestic transition towards renewables or the domestic transition away from fossil fuels. That's all great, as our 60 year old steam engine coal fired power stations fall to pieces. You bet they're being replaced with renewables, and that's good, but that's not policy that's driving that at the moment. It's all right. But when it comes to things that we can control, we are transitioning towards fossil fuels. So I like to go back to Paris. 2015 and 2015 Australia didn't mine coal in North Queensland. Right now we do. We've got the Adani coal mine up there exporting coal with plans to open new coal mines in the Galilee Basin. So we're transitioning new parts of the country into coal. We are now. Since 2015, we've become the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, overtaking Qatar. We didn't export any LNG from the east coast of Australia in 2015. Now we're the world's largest exporter. Yeah, us, but we're not resting on our laurels again. We've got the enormous Beetaloo Basin in Queensland. We've got gas developments in North West Australia and of course, all of this mining of coal and extracting of gas. Not only will that increase the world's emissions when they burn it, that doesn't count on our account. But the mere act of extracting it is driving Australia's emissions through the roof with our emissions arising from those sectors. But we're using. Dodgy offsets to sort of say, Oh, if you look at the land sector and blah blah blah, the fact is our fossil fuel emissions are rising, not falling, and we are spending $11 billion a year subsidising the expansion of fossil fuels. So it's great that there's more renewables in Australia thumbs up us, but we are the third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world we are. We are betting that the rest of the world is not taking their climate commitments seriously, and we're particularly keen to work with the Southeast Asian countries to say, Why don't you buy our gas? We'll sell you some coal. So Europe and the US, the transitioning fast, but we're flooding into domestic countries. And now if I was sort of made this clear, when the Australian prime minister goes overseas, we're lobbying Bangladesh, Vietnam, all these countries to commit to coal and gas so we can sell it to them.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:48:56] Katharine, I'm not sure if we've got a response to that, but I was just going to point out. The Australia Institute recently released a report on the total subsidies public subsidies for the fossil fuel industry across state and federal governments, which is up more than a billion dollars from last year. It's more than $11 billion in the last year for that. But Katharine, you look like you were going to say,

**Katharine Murphy** [00:49:21] No, no, I was just talking about that. Put it in my mind just about the expansion of the fossil fuel sector and in current events. Just worth bookmarking again with folks today, a couple of points. Obviously, we did see a foray by the Energy Minister Angus Taylor, a public foray into saying to the European Union at one point, Boy, you guys a bit you. You wish you'd pursued a gas fired recovery after after the after the pandemic is we have done in Australia. You know, now you relied on Putin's gas, right? What we did see Angus Taylor come out and make a bit of a show of this, then that point was never seen or heard of again. It was so I threw a blanket over that real, real quick. The other thing, too, that is of interest just to, you know, Richard and my analysis around these questions and my and me saying to progressive, lovely, progressive people listening, very. And the campaign hasn't been one. I think it is interesting that around the whole sort of pitch of the budget, if you if you look at how the budget was sold, including the element of Barnaby Joyce's rather large infrastructure package that he extracted in order to support net zero, all of that gas fired recovery language, in fact, was on the down low so massively it was not even sighted anywhere. It was, you know, in the Treasurer's speech, I don't think there was one reference to gas, for example, in anything that he said. And again, I thought that was interesting. Just on the point, Richard's fundamental point about the climate change argument is more or less settled in the country that I don't dispute. I think that's a marker of it, in fact, that, you know, at one point, Joyce would have marketed his own package on the national stage as being, you know, a big win for the fossil fuels industry because a lot of it is back end infrastructure to support fossil fuels in parts of the country. But not even he's been selling it that way. He's been talking about dams and agriculture and other things, which which is quite interesting for those of us who have, you know, hit our heads on the table about climate, climate and how climate policy has been weaponised in Australian election campaigns for more than a decade. I think there's a lot of evidence surrounding the public space at the moment that the country has has moved on from those fundamental questions. Anyway, that was all I was going to say.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:05] Well, it wouldn't be a proposition if we didn't spend a chunk of it on climate change. I feel like say thanks for the great question. And so those responses, Katherine and Richard, we've got I can see almost 900 people on the line with us. So thank you for joining us today. Katharine, I've got just one question here from Paul Cox, who asked about the recent political appointments to the IHT, apparently a huge number appointed yesterday. And you just tell us a little bit about that appointment palooza.

**Katharine Murphy** [00:52:39] Yes, there is. There is no sure a sign of the fact that the campaign or the start of the official campaign is now only days away, then the absolute torrent of appointments that. Rushes out of the government in its last weeks. We actually had Guardian Australia did an analysis of the number of appointments prior to the 2019 election, which if you search for the reporter Christopher Knauss and appointments, you'll probably still be able to search on Guardian Australia for that story. We actually quantified the number and let's just, you know, spoiler alert, gobsmacking amount of appointments of people with political connexions. What's happened yesterday? Yes, there was there were a bunch of new appointees to the 80, including people with coalition backgrounds, either as protagonists or staffers. Also a former parliamentarian, John McVeigh. I think now people will correct me if I'm wrong, was appointed to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority as well. Also, just in the context of the discussion we just had then about gas and gas exports. A gas lobbyist, Andrew McConville, who currently heads up the Gas Industry Association in Canberra, was also appointed, I think, to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. So into a water role, which is obviously interesting given the crossover between gas extraction and water issues. So, yeah, look, it's just basically, you know, the government is using its remaining time in order to get through appointments that it wants to get and make sure all bodies are reappointed or that, you know, as part of, you know, just what politicians do. But also, I think, to determine the sort of future direction of these bodies in the event that there's a change of government, it's sort of twofold. It's kind of like, you know, appointing people who you know, are rewarded with these opportunities, but also influencing the direction of the country over the future. Mm-Hmm.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:55:01] Yeah, I'm not sure about, as you were saying, that appointment of the gas executive to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and given water is such a precious resource and

**Katharine Murphy** [00:55:14] Well it's an interesting appointment. And obviously, I've got nothing against Andrew McConville, who appears to be a thoroughly competent person. But I suspect there'll be a bit of a backlash to that

**Ebony Bennett** [00:55:25] because you point out it's like actually it's in conflict in a lot of areas, like a lot of people contemplating putting gas wells on their property, for example, the water table and the impact on water is kind of the number one reason why people freak out about it. Yeah, yeah. Very interesting to watch. I'm I'm afraid we might have to wrap it up there. Thank you very much, everyone, for your fantastic questions. As always, I'm afraid that we couldn't get to all of them, but we did have, as I said, close to 900 people on the line with us today. So there's some fantastic questions in there and hopefully we've covered a fair amount of ground. Thank you to pay Kathryn and Richard for all of your help today and also thank you to Sienna Parrot for moderating and to me. Three Venkatesh Subramanian for live tweeting this event. We really appreciate it. Thank you all of you for coming along. I will be back a fortnight from now. Probably the election will be called in the meantime, but don't forget to check out Guardian Australia for the analysis of the central poll today. The Essential Report Dot com dot a u for all those latest results from the polling. This audio will be available as a podcast on Guardian Australia from tomorrow morning, and of course, the recording will go up on Australian TV. Thanks so much for joining us today. Take care out there. Make sure you are registered to vote. I moved in the last 12 months not to hear this is my dad's place, but I was reminded very recently that I had an update of my registration, so now is a good time to remember to do that at the AEC. Perhaps you've moved and forgotten to update your enrolment and we are headed to an election so everyone should be involved and make sure you're updated and enrolled to vote. Thank you so much for joining us today. We'll see you again very soon. Thanks very much, everyone.

**Richard Denniss** [00:57:20] Thanks Eb. Thanks, guys.