

# Webinar Title

**Katherine Murphy**

Political Editor, Guardian Australia

**Pete Lewis**

Executive Director, Essential Media

*In conversation with*

**Ebony Bennett**

Deputy Director at the Australia Institute

---

**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:04] G'day everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute and welcome to our regular fortnightly poll position where we dive into the latest Guardian Essential Poll Results and talk about the week in politics. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Canberra is Ngunnawal and Ngambri country and pay my respects to elders past and present, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. And this always was and always will be. Aboriginal land days and times for our webinars do vary, I hope at least some of you tuned in for our webinar with Joseph Stiglitz yesterday. Thank you so much for joining us today. You can head on over to Australia Institute dot org dot au to find all our upcoming webinars. And just a reminder that you can type in questions for our panel today using the Q&A box down the bottom of your zoom window. A reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or Kate will boot you out. And finally, a reminder that this is a live event and it is being recorded. The video will go up on our YouTube channel, that's Australia Institute TV and the audio will go up as part of the Guardian's Australian Politics podcast tomorrow morning. So make sure that you're subscribed to that. For those listening on the pod, you can find all the results at Essential report. dot com dot au. So. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has just returned from an international charm offensive to repair a series of international relationships that had gone awry. He visited Ukraine as part of that trip and now he's come back to Australia where at home we have floods and pestilence it seems with many communities in New South Wales recovering from sometimes their third or fourth flood this year. At the same time we've got incursions from the enormously destructive varroa mite in New South Wales, beehives and an outbreak of foot and mouth disease that has struck Indonesia that we're trying to prepare our best to avoid. We've also got an October budget coming up, part of which will be a wellbeing statement from the Treasurer Jim Chalmers. He announced that this week as well as a jobs summit coming up in early September. So to discuss all this and more, I'm delighted to welcome our regular panellists, Katherine Murphy, chief political correspondent at Guardian Australia, and Pete Lewis, Executive Director of Essential Media. Thanks so much for joining us. Katherine, I'll start with you as always. As always. A lot happening in Australian politics. Where do we begin this week?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:02:42] Oh gosh, it's hard to know where to begin it. I think you're right though. The Prime Minister's just come home from another big overseas trip that included a Night-Time meeting in Spain, a diplomatic rapprochement with Macron in Paris, and, as you said, a trip to

the war zone in Ukraine, which was sort of about tending relationships on a range of fronts. And also, you know, embarking on the specific resets that you were talking about this some relationships that's that suffered basically in the at the tail end of the Morrison Government. And Anthony Albanese is pretty laser focussed on resetting a number of those relationships as quickly as possible. He he is home, he's done various domestic things including giving a speech to the Sydney Energy Forum in Sydney today, which is all about, you know, sort of building, building coalitions, building consensus, building alliances around climate action in the Indo-Pacific. And a major theme of the speech was we know all about climate change in the Indo-Pacific because we live on the front line. Going back to Abe's point that we've had some communities in Australia now having their third major flood event of this year know we no longer have to speculate about climate change being something that's off in the in the future. We are in fact living through it now. And and that's the message the Prime Minister's sort of been starting to stitch through his rhetoric ahead of the parliamentary sitting at the opening of the 40 of the 47th Parliament in just a couple of weeks on. So in between now and then, the Prime Minister will go tomorrow to the Pacific Islands Forum, where again, climate change will be one of the many issues under discussion by Pacific leaders. We've we've still got this amazing sort of geostrategic competition in the region. Such China is sort of a backing vocal to everything that Australia is doing at this point in time, including the trip to the other hemisphere by the prime. Minister at the same time as the new government sort of try to set up its or project its values, shall we say, sort of embark on this round of foreign policy relationship tending through the projection of values and through using Labour's more ambitious climate change policy. Is it or not? That's also important. The Government's also trying to reset relations carefully with China and that's the other major thing that's sort of played out in the last fortnight. We've got diplomatic meetings at ministerial level starting to reopen, although there are many, many years since in that relationship and I don't think any of us should be holding our breath about how quickly that relationship can be, embrace it in any way. So China's in the background of the PIF. And then in terms of the whole climate message, which I've sort of been focussing on in the summary of the last couple of weeks, that's important. Looking into the opening of the 47th Parliament because Chris Bowen will bring forward legislation in the opening a couple of weeks of the new Parliament. One piece of legislation giving effect to Labour's 43% emissions reduction target by 20 2030. And another adjustment to legislation which is part of measures to try and bring down the sticker price of electric vehicles, which is the beginning of a of an AB or a transport emissions reduction strategy. So we've sort of got all these interesting pieces on our, on our chessboard that are sort of all kind of moving, moving around to sort of reset the debate in Australia on on a couple of key questions and the Prime Minister at the moment, both in foreign affairs mode and in domestic mode, is trying to project this sense of consensus, this sense that we can rebuild things, we can trade issues seriously if there is collaboration and cooperation. I think one of the interesting things really about the Prime Minister and domestic mode over the last week or so is the amount of appearances he's done with the New South Wales Premier, Don Perrottet. Obviously that's been a major event in New South Wales, a major flooding event, but also I think by that frequent appearance of the two leaders together trying to speak sort of more or less on the same song sheet, that is a sort of visual and aural projection of what Anthony Albanese wants to sort of put in the minds of voters at the moment that that we can with a little bit of patience and a little bit of effort, reset relationships all around the world, within the federation, within the region, if people of goodwill can come together and try and progress some modest changes. So anyway, you know, that's that's the set up, I guess, for for for what you know, what we'll talk about in the poll tonight.

**Please note this transcript is automated**

**Ebony Bennett** [00:08:06] That's an interesting observation about Dominic Perrottet and New South Wales as well, because I felt like he also went out of his way to reset that relationship. and Defend Anthony Albanese from some of that rubbish criticism about travelling overseas, as if any Coalition Prime Minister would refuse an invitation to a NATO summit. But I just thought it was also really interesting, Katherine, to say climate change, essentially, as you said, be Australia's entry ticket to a whole range of international fora where we used to be, you know, a pariah petro state with Saudi Arabia and Russia and the like. Now it's kind of, you know, he's our way to mend the fence. Please let us back in. We take this this seriously. It seems certainly seem to work in a lot of spaces.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:08:53] In a lot of spaces it has. It'll be interesting to watch the Pacific Island Forum over the next couple of days. Obviously, traditionally, Pacific countries have wanted Australia not only just to turn up with something that isn't laughable, but actually have very ambitious commitments like, you know, phasing out coal and gas and all of that sort of stuff. So far that's kind of been on the periphery of the PIF discussions. And as Penny Wong said in a press conference this morning, well, she didn't express surprise, but she said she was asked a direct question as this come up yet, you know, has the Pacific's more ambitious attitude towards climate action come up yet? And she said, well, actually bilaterally, no, because everybody at the moment is so relieved that somebody is actually proposing to do something, that that we're sort of starting from that that that sort of basic proposition of goodwill. But it wouldn't be a fight, I think, if if we didn't see some sort of more sharply focussed difference in ambition, I think, between Pacific Island states and Australia, notwithstanding the fact that we. Of a more ambitious climate policy now under this government. So anyway, good good get interesting over the next sort of 24 hours or so.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:10:09] Yeah. The other big, I guess thing that's happening across Australia is the massive increase in COVID cases and COVID deaths. And I know that we go into that in this week's Essential Poll. I'm not sure about Sydney where you are, but in Canberra at least games like people are dropping like flies to either the flu or COVID in workplaces around the place. Do you want to take us through the first couple of slides here?

**Pete Lewis** [00:10:42] Well, yes, I'm just coming off the back of it. So I've joined the exclusive club that people are joining in droves at the moment. And apologies for not being around a fortnight ago, but that was my ailment. I was also out was widely tipped over that 10,000 mark, which is one of the rhetoric that sort of helped inform the questions I put in the field this week or not. But I thought it was a good time to take stock of where we've been with COVID. So the first couple of slides are really, you know, barometers of national mood, both towards the general direction of Australia and our new leader. Why do we even bother polling outside an election cycle? Well, I think over the last three years, creating some baselines of of national consensus around sort of non-voting issues has been really useful. Katherine and I started anchoring our discussions around approval of government's handling of the pandemic at the start of the pandemic, and it created a really compelling series over time. I'm not saying direction of Australia is necessarily the baseline, but it does show there was not an overwhelming that a significant uptick after the election in the number of people that thought we were starting to hit along the right direction. And bear in mind, this isn't a political facing question. And so we've got these numbers in the context of, you know, war, flood

**Please note this transcript is automated**

and pestilence. So I think it is fair to say that the new government is has shifted the mood positively, if not. Been able to solve all the world's problems, which, of course, we know is outside the pay grade of any individual government. If we go and have a look at Albanese's approval. This was the. Yes, this was the amazing job. After the election, I'm sure you guys spoke about this last time, but there was a 40% or 40 point improvement in everybody's net positives. So nothing like a winner. Right. So we went from we went from basically being law and ball positive, negative to God. How good is this guy? So there's been a little bit of a drop off. I think Katherine did the sums better than I. We've dropped four points in approval and increased six points in disapproval. So that's a double digit shift on one telling of history that could be the world's shortest ever honeymoon, although I think it's just a bit of a correction. And I guess the the real the real issue will be how that stabilises over the next 6 to 12 months. People with memories will realise that the first year of the Kevin Rudd government was 70% approvals and everything was, everything was hunky dory. And it just what, what you say is that, that, that speaks to the political capital that a new leader brings into the job. Part of the trick of holding onto power is maintaining that capital and drawing it down in slow increments rather than dropping it all at once. And you know, I think in terms of a lot of the the decision making and the way that the government is approaching their business, I do think that there is a recognition that the capital is gold and you've got to hold on to it for as long as you can.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:14:18] Hold on to it or spend it. Katherine, the eternal question.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:14:23] Exactly, exactly. That is the eternal question.

**Pete Lewis** [00:14:26] What's the use it wisely, you guys?

**Ebony Bennett** [00:14:29] Exactly. But as I said in the intro, we've got the jobs summit coming up. The Prime Minister's been at various announcements of whether that additional, you know, flood assistance in in New South Wales or elsewhere. He's certainly been extremely busy. Are you reading this kind of drop is just, you know, that blip of kind of returning to to normal after that big jump after the election?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:14:58] Yeah. Well, obviously in all things, you know, the trend is our friend. This is this. We need to we need to look at how this kind of shakes out, either over a period of time, not over just two polls. But I think that it's sort of interesting that, you know, sort of drawing that Rudd comparison and Rudd's sort of new stratospheric approval ratings certainly over the first 12 months of his prime ministership. I do think it's sort of a bit different this time. I clearly remember when the Government changed in 2007 and this was of course before the global financial crisis, which was the event that reset global politics, you know, from a sort of a period of, you know, we're all going to be fine to a period of, you know, of of sort of real populism in politics. Yeah, we had Brexit as a consequence of it. We had the rise of Donald Trump as a consequence, all that, you know, the GFC really reset politics everywhere, all around the world, even in Australia, even though we avoided the recession, they with this there's also been a reset here. And so it's sort of like, you know,

**Please note this transcript is automated**

remember that hope that accompanied the election of Kevin Rudd and that that capital that he maintained over the first 12 months. It's sort of like, I don't know, it feels like I'm sort of trying to think of the right analogy. It sort of feels like a more innocent time that.

**Pete Lewis [00:16:34]** But I also think there was a sense that he died with me. This I reckon he burnt a lot of capital to maintain his capital like everything was fast for gratification to keep things up. I remember particularly the whole heroic takeover of the health system was going to be Kevin and saving us all. And so in a way there was really high approval because the surface looked great, but there wasn't a strong superstructure underneath it. So yeah, well, I don't know if we can think about an economic analogy for that in terms of maintaining a capital, but it just feels like, you know, keep it there for the sake of it, you've got to use it. But, you know, the one that I'm still struggling to think through has been the negotiations with the crossbenchers on staff and whether that's been worth an expenditure of capital.

**Katherine Murphy [00:17:24]** But yeah, but it's.

**Pete Lewis [00:17:25]** A monster now.

**Katherine Murphy [00:17:26]** Well, great minds in house, but also from the time I'm not sort of saying that glibly. I mean, it's just like we don't get much evidence. It's. You know, in terms of his approval is still well and truly in positive territory. This is a correction, right? Yeah. So but but there was a point to my rambling about Kevin Rudd because there was sort of that, that, that hope that happened after, after 2007. What I detect as I go about my life talking to people, you know, in the wake of the election, is that there's a different sentiment out there. It's relief, which is different to hope. Right. And and people will sort of view allied light through a different prism. Hope is one thing. Relief is another. Right. And, you know, we're sort of getting into ins and outs of the cats. You know what? But I do think there's a difference there in terms of this whole thing. Well, you know how to use your capital. Yeah, for sure. Right. I think very interestingly, we've seen in the opening two months of the New Labour government, a number of things decided early, very early, you know, the return of the Bi-Lo family, for example, the decision to drop the prosecution of Bernard Calleary, for example. You know, decisions like that that, you know, would be much more contested and invoke much more clamour if they were made in the mid-term of the government. Have been made very early in the term of this government. Right. And now we're sort of you know, it's sort of like the new government is coming. It's had a look at a bunch of things that it's needed to transact in its own in its own calculation of estimation. It's looked at a bunch of things it needs to transact almost immediately. Right. And we've been ticking those. You know, I went through all of them in the preamble in terms of, you know, resetting global affairs, resetting the region, getting the climate message out there, doing these things that that progressive people will absolutely love. But but middle Australia may love them less. Right. So get all that out the door. Then we're going to be heading into this period of, you know, of government as attrition because that's what government is now. Right. So this is so now the prime minister is trying to sort of move into this period of consensus building, building, sort of dialling down the clamour, dialling down the contention, looking

**Please note this transcript is automated**

for looking for common ground. Because I think the Prime Minister I mean, I do think that's Anthony Albanese. Yeah. Instincts as as a as a politician, I don't think this is all just calculation. I think that's how genuinely how this guy rolls. But also I think it's a bit of a different face. Do you remember when Tony Abbott came in and he said he wanted to get politics off the front page front? You know, he didn't actually want to get.

**Pete Lewis** [00:20:28] Morrison said the same thing. They want to disagree. They all want to do.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:20:31] They all want to do that.

**Pete Lewis** [00:20:33] Can I take your thing a little bit further? I reckon to quote our great friends at honest government ads that actually got rid of some of the errant shit fuckery of the government and got it, like, you know, dropping the prosecution against Cleary, getting the family back to bow. And it just strikes me there in terms of that relief, the best feeling in the world when you're being sick is not being sick at all. And like it's that the relief is actually about just going back to a normal where you're not feeling totally rubbish. And I wonder if this is the political equivalent of that. We've had this pretty toxic government really for nine years. With a bit of luck, I'll give Malcolm some credit. He didn't really run the show, but the Abbott and Morrison so are pretty toxic regimes. And so just the lifting of that means that your baseline, you don't need a lot of hope. It's just like it's just not crap anymore.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:21:30] But I think that's a good point in terms of the in terms of the timing, Katherine, like all those decisions that could essentially I guess you could see them almost in the context of cleaning up at least, you know, some of those hangovers from the previous administration. And in terms of the timing, as you said, being much more difficult later, it seems very politically smart to get those out of the way in this honeymoon period before any of those other things, you know, that might drag the government down later on have taken hold. So, yes, certainly interesting to look at the timing from that perspective. We'll come back now to the flights and to the next one on COVID deaths.

**Pete Lewis** [00:22:16] So this kind of speaks to what I think is going to be the main complication of this government. So they're not. They're not doing the toxic things the previous government. But the challenge they've got is we are living through a once in a century pandemic and it ain't over. As I left the other week and I threw a number of questions in the field and largely that were replicating questions we've asked previously. Because if you take your mind back a year and two years, the pandemic was all we were talking about. We all became experts seeing whether AstraZeneca was okay. You know, that the gaps between vaccines and the quarantine infrastructure that Australia needed and we were heavily, heavily focussed because our lives had been disrupted by the risk of system failure. And now we're at this point where what seemed incomprehensible 12 months ago is kind of business as usual. And nowhere is this more in-your-face than when we asked people what their tolerance for death through the pandemic would be in August 21. 61% of people said they

**Please note this transcript is automated**

would not countenance anything over 100 deaths a year. And the number that thought that more than 5000 deaths a year was acceptable was 3%. Guess what, we've had about eight and a half thousand deaths since Christmas. So this year alone in the first of the first half of this year, the death rate in Australia has been beyond the extremes of tolerance as articulated by the public in August 21. And even when we ask it now in July 22, only 10% would, I would, would, would accept what I would call a reality based consequence of the global pandemic. Now what does that mean. I think it's not just about people will say one thing, but accept something else. I do feel we're living in this dreamlike state at the moment, and I've done a piece in The Guardian today through my own COVID fog, where I think we vacillate between the dream state of the fantasy of back to normal and the nightmare of lockdowns going into the future. Whereas the reality is sit in the middle, that we've got to wake up from the dream and actually look at the challenges the pandemic put before us. And I still think I'm not blaming the new government at this, but I still think so much of our discourse has almost, you know, sugarcoated the reality that we are in the middle of this, once in a century pandemic out of the equation. So we had discussions about budget and the about the tolerance about deficit to deal with Newstart or we talk about get it reopening our labour market as if there's no consequence in terms of national borders in new variants coming in. We don't really seem to be talking about public health orders the way we were in the past. Everyone's kind of over and sick of it, but the reality is it's going to define our politics for not just the next year, but I think the next decade. And I, I don't know how I don't know the answer. I'm just saying, look, this is really interesting, the gap between what people say that tolerate and what they'll actually tolerate.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:25:43] I do wonder if part of that is that, you know, back you know, earlier in the pandemic, we didn't have the vaccines. There was no other means to really cope with it except lockdowns and social distancing and all of that. And now people accept a greater risk or are willing to kind of let all of that stuff slide because.

**Pete Lewis** [00:26:08] You know, you know, hospitals are still in logjam.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:26:11] Yeah, well, that great. I wonder when.

**Pete Lewis** [00:26:13] Those signs all sorts of trouble you know global energy like you know and yeah there are flow on consequences as well of course you know and you know that disruption and then you know what's happening in the Ukraine and what.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:26:31] Katherine.

**Pete Lewis** [00:26:31] Writes, I do.

**Please note this transcript is automated**

**Ebony Bennett** [00:26:32] Wonder if yeah, Pete's got a point there that the way it's going to express itself is really in people can't access elective surgery because hospitals are overrun again. You know, those workforce issues that we've seen in the care sector, as I said, supply issues that kind of feels like dealing with COVID has moved really out of the realm of the emergency phase, and it's little proxy debates and affecting other issues and elements within the national debate. What do you reckon?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:27:04] Oh, definitely. I mean, look, the two things the two things that are really defining as in things outside the new government's control but nonetheless will define this term is COVID and, you know, the prolonged pandemic that we that we are still in and also. Cost of living, inflation, rising interest rates. And that's before we hit whether or not we are actually in the hot zone of geostrategic competition. So there are massive challenges. It's sort of one thing for us to talk about. Anthony Albanese, the aspiration for consensus building, and then you've got to I believe that with events right there are there are genuinely, you know, people, people in policy sort of woke circles talking about wicked problems. Right. Well, there's no there's no shortage of wicked problems that the government kind of got a nut its way through. And in terms of, you know, forget going on the slides or as we do that, there is that point, the take, the sort of try to explicate their I think of yeah, we're in a we're in a different headspace about it but not consistently so. Right. Like we're less worried about this than we used to be, but we'd still prefer that, you know, that mask wearing happen. We'd still prefer that, you know, force booster shots happened. You know, they sort of still that kind of overhang of public health that there's support for in the community. But there's also support at around about the same level for treating COVID as a cold. Right. So this is particularly difficult issue to manage because it's we people, humans, because we're complicated, we have internalised different sentiments about this thing. We want it to be over. We want it to be nothing. But we understand it is something, but we hope it's not really terribly something. And then how that all filters through the political.

**Pete Lewis** [00:29:05] And we don't want people to die, but we're not prepared to do what it take for them not to die. The other thing that I thought was interesting in these findings, Katherine, and this slide in particular was the rubble loss in in the depths of the pandemic. It was like huge consensus on issues. Where is this just that these 25 to 35% now we're don't know. Yeah pretty bizarre propositions so you know we've got majority support for a fourth booster but only.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:29:33] Just.

**Pete Lewis** [00:29:35] Get masks. Yeah I you know and then that the same people who say they won't tolerate deaths a majority of them say we just need to get on as if it's another form of flu. I guess people die from the flu as well, but it's like we're all muddled headed lot of how I felt coming out of COVID anyway. So I, you know my.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:29:53] Husband well.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:29:55] I wondered too, that cognitive dissonance that we saw, you know, we looked on in horror at the United States and the huge number of deaths that they had there, and how can they tolerate that? But here, it's beyond the limits of tolerance for what people say they will accept. And yet it doesn't appear.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:30:13] Yeah, what's happening anyway?

**Ebony Bennett** [00:30:15] Exactly. The huge issue that you would expect to pay the next one on Australia's response compared to other countries.

**Pete Lewis** [00:30:25] Yes. Um, yeah, I. We think we've done okay. Like, I think better or worse. I'm sorry about the two blues. That does confuse it a bit, but thank God better than this. The US and India, UK, China, New Zealand still hangs out there as somewhere. We'd rather be not quite sure what we put in Sweden, but the Swedes always went by and.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:30:47] Was afraid.

**Pete Lewis** [00:30:48] Because.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:30:49] The Swedes were sort of really bad in terms of debt.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:30:51] So yeah, they were let it rip.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:30:54] Yeah.

**Pete Lewis** [00:30:54] Yeah. Thank you. Yeah. Um, I don't know. Like, again, it's kind of. That sense of ennui.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:05] And hate this last one on the Australian diet. Why don't you check that one in there?

**Pete Lewis** [00:31:09] Oh, I don't know. Somebody in my show is a vegetarian or something, but it's.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:31:13] Nothing wrong with vegetarians.

**Pete Lewis** [00:31:15] Just go. I just love the flexitarian that feels like a swing voter. And I'll sometimes I'll sometimes the vegetable a pescatarian.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:27] Richard Denniss, chief economist, calls them fish and chip recruits.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:31:33] Guilty, guilty.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:36] But that's interesting. You know, there's a big chunk there of people trying to limit their meat consumption and other things and for a variety of reasons as well.

**Pete Lewis** [00:31:46] And more for personal health and cost than the traditional ethical reasons as well, which is perhaps something for us all to chew over.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:56] Yeah, I think you pay and there's a lot better options available now for a plant based diet than they used to be, which I guess means people are flexing out a bit. We're going to go very shortly to questions from the audience. Thank you so much. I can see a bunch in here and Kathryn, the first one for you is from Linda Thalberg. She's asking, will the integrity push extend to restructuring that at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal? We have spoken about this in the past, and I believe a review has been announced based on, in part, some of the concerns that the Australia Institute raised with cronyism in political appointments there. But are we saying I guess there's a really big push that goes beyond an iconic for other measures to ensure integrity, Katherine.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:32:53] Yeah, I think integrity is a big is sort of is part of the plan, part of the government's plan in the sense of sort of it's a kind of adjunct to we've got stuff in common. We can collaborate, we can refresh faith in institutions on a range of fronts. Right? I think it's sort of part of the part of the this sort of too big both for Charlie and practically in terms of the IHT. Yes. Well, look, the Labour was obviously very critical about the number of appointments to the I of basically coalition fellow travellers really, and people who didn't necessarily have law degrees. But you know what would you know about those you know on this both three so and then post election we've had a report I think it was well it must have been a Senate report because of Kim Carr. Kim Carr, an outgoing Labour senator, sort of threw a bit of a bomb into the mix by saying, well, let's just get rid of this thing, let's just abolish it and and do something else. There would be all kinds of practical implications from that. I don't know whether or not the government would then have to pay out the contracts of everybody that was appointed for five year terms. There would be there'd be all kinds

**Please note this transcript is automated**

of, you know, of of practical things that would have to be worked through. And I think the Attorney-General is sort of signalling more in the reform space than in the blow it up space. But again, we're not really sure what's happening apart from the fact that obviously Labour has had a view that the appointments to this body have been unbalanced for quite a long period of time. They do want to correct that in some shape or form. I'm sure there there are there would be ways of correcting that, but there's sort of nuclear ways of correcting that. And then there's incremental ways of of of correcting that. And I don't think we have enough information just at the moment to make an informed judgement about whether it's nuclear or incremental.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:35:03] Yeah, but as you said, huge issues there with the appointment of political appointees really escalated in the last years of the Morrison government. It was up to, I think 40% at one point were political appointments and for people I'm familiar, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal is essentially where you go if you've got some kind of beef with the government that you haven't been able to resolve, whether that's with your NDIS payments or anything else, if it's a government decision that you need to be reviewed, it's kind of your final last point. So it is very important for a lot of people to get to seek justice and redress if they feel a poor decision has been made. The next question that I've got is around emissions reductions targets. Trevor Blayney says can the panel make a comment on the various targets afoot? Labour, the independents and Greens. They're not interested in Lambie's target and the question goes to pragmatism and whether the Greens and independents are likely to provide support for the Labour target in the Senate. Katherine, this is going to be almost first up in the the first sitting of Parliament.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:36:22] Yeah, well and truly first stop in the first sitting of parliament and it's a look my gut tells me that that pragmatism will probably be where we end up, but that I think we've got a way to go before we can be confident about that. Just in terms of addressing the question, just sort of, you know, just explaining to people who haven't followed this. Obviously the New Labour Government has a 2030 emissions reduction target of 43%. That is the target that they are proposing to legislate in the Parliament. I think they don't absolutely need legislation in order to do it. They can do it via other means. But they want to legislate it basically to sort of set a framework to, you know, to sort of, you know, send send that signal that. That's that's where we're going. Now, there are as the as the questioner implied, obviously, there is a range of targets amongst representatives in the parliament of moment days. Is the coalition, despite Lou losing, I don't know, ten seats to climate change as climate with climate being a major focus in them. Peter Dutton has said that we're not going to support the legislation of 43%.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:37:46] Katherine just while we're on that, because I think that's really interesting. If you look at past elections where the Coalition got out, there was a huge pressure on Labour to pass tax cuts and other things because of the mandate of the Government and the people have spoken and they endorsed, you know, no action on climate or tax cuts or whatever. Correct me if I'm wrong, but there hasn't really been a huge amount even of internal pressure on Peter Dutton to change that. It's just kind of.

**Please note this transcript is automated**

**Katherine Murphy** [00:38:18] Well, I think there has been some pressure, but I think part of the reason why there hasn't been more pressure is that a great big hunk of the moderate wing was actually.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:38:27] Not there anymore to make the argument.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:38:30] No, no, no. I think I think there is pressure in the opposition on two fronts. One, that Dutton has basically decreed this is a captain's call. So there was no actual substantive discussion before Dutton resolved. That would be the position. So some people are unhappy about it on those grounds. There are certainly people around who and who have signalled, you know, Andrew Bragg, Bridget Archer, some others write that, oh, well, you know, if we like the kind of Labour's jib in terms of this legislation, we may actually cross the floor and support it. So we'll see how that pans out once the legislation hits Parliament. Although, I mean, you know, there has been a catastrophic blow obviously to the moderate wing of the Liberal Party. But yeah. So anyway, but in terms of Dutton's stated position, the Liberal and National Parties are against it. There are the Greens and independents in the Parliament want a higher medium term emissions reduction target than Labour's 43% I think Anthony Albanese is entirely comfortable about. I mean, look, I think he would prefer it be otherwise. To be clear, I think he would prefer to put his 43% in the Parliament and have the parliament pass it right and then work through some alternatives that might sit around that 43% that keep driving ambition. I think that's where the Government's substantive headspace is at. But at a political level I don't think Anthony Albanese minds having a vote on a 43% emissions reduction target where the Liberals and the Greens sit on the other side of the chamber and oppose it.

**Pete Lewis** [00:40:10] I've got the numbers from a few weeks ago on this as well that said that on balance the population supporting to lock in the 43 rather than open up a new thought on targets. I think that's the view that Jo Cox articulated as well over recent weeks, like let's just lock it in and move forward, because it's not just a debate about the perfect, it's also a debate about the good. And just starting to move is really important. I think the other point to make about Labour's approach is because they're building their broader climate agenda from the ground up. It's the target is not the point. The point is more what what's he going to do? It says stop the transition and that's where the rewiring Australia is a really important initiative which is really, you know, an engineering challenge rather than anything else.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:41:09] Yeah. The next question I've got from Allan Polegato, who says given the federal budget is in dire straits, is there any wiggle room for rethinking the planned income tax cuts? Katherine, I might flick that one to you first. Dire straits might be a little bit unfair, but certainly rising inflation, cost of living and a very big amount of debt compared to what it has historically been. And a job summit coming up. I mentioned at the beginning of this webinar that Jim Chalmers has announced it's going to be a wellbeing statement, I think he said as part of the budget papers in October. That's something he's been talking about for a long time. This idea that GDP figures and debt figures are not the only thing that matter in a budget. And actually we need to be better at

**Please note this transcript is automated**

measuring what matters, what counts to people, whether that's health indicators or other social wellbeing indicators, or New Zealand I think has a model that takes into account natural capital. Can you just talk to us about what we're expecting, Katherine, from the Budget based on what Labour's talked about so far?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:42:26] Sure. Look at the point of the question is it wait, why are we why is the Government implementing tax cuts that wealthy people don't need in the Budget can't afford.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:42:37] That legislated well before we had a global pandemic?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:42:41] Exactly. There's the eternal Y right there. Obviously, you know, these tax cuts shouldn't shouldn't proceed. But if if these tax cuts don't proceed, then Labour's broken election promise and everybody who, you know, is slated to get a tax cut doesn't get it. So from a political perspective, the new government is really jammed on that. And I did in a recent podcast with Jim Chalmers ask him whether or not he intended to still deliver these tax cuts in light of circumstances. And he basically says, well, yes, I mean, that's what we said we do. We have to we have to go on and do it. You know, it's sort of seems ridiculous. So it's it is ridiculous, quite frankly. But, you know, but also, you know, nothing harms a government more than breaking election promises. So. So there's two sort of there's two things that have got to be weighed up there. But in general, the other one, I can still wrap my head around it as somebody who just filled up their small car the other day and paid 100 bucks to fill up her small car. It's just that they that the that the fuel excise holiday is going to end in September. I think politically that's incredibly hard decision for the government to make, even though that's been well telegraphed. But, you know, to the broader sort of budget questions, you're absolutely right. I think there's sort of some interesting trends going on with budgeting per say with this new government. One is the sort of wellbeing index which does contain contextualised budgets in a broader perspective. The other is Katy Gallagher is going to work out sort of, you know, budgeting with a with a gender lens as well, like serious systemic budgeting with a gender lens. Now, I don't think that can turn that around entirely by October. I think that's that's too soon. And sadly, the capacity for that in the public service has been well and truly watered down. But that's as well as the wellbeing index that the sort of gender specific budgeting analysis I think is actually really important. And so I think they they've got to try and basically bring that up to speed between the October statement and the my statement. So look, I mean, obviously, you know, generally I'm just speaking very generally here. Inflation improves budgets. So, you know, the budget is likely to be less dire than than perhaps it might have been. And perhaps that gives the government a little bit of room to move. But they're not acting at the moment like a government with a lot of room to move. Yeah. And there's, there's the difficulty that, that, you know, there's a there's a proportion of people in the community that will have voted Labour or voted Independent in this election because they just literally couldn't stand this the sort of Scott Morrison anymore. You know, Labour doesn't want to send those people hurtling back to the Coalition either. So, you know, there's a bunch of a bunch of calculations to be made over the next few months, substantive political, national interest, dare we say, lots and lots of calculations there.

**Please note this transcript is automated**

**Pete Lewis** [00:46:09] This kind of goes back to my comment on the dreamlike nature of our political discourse at the moment, like how can you even discuss the budget when it's been blown up to such an extent that, you know, it's it's it's it's not even a thing that can be contemplated. The size of the deficit. So I think part of the strategy of broadening out your criteria for what a good economy looks like is just actually moving beyond that number that you can't conquer and start saying, well, what good can we do? Which is where the sort of ideas around building and wellbeing measures probably make sense now. Yeah. Should the government, you know, walk away from the tax cuts for high incomes like that? I think there is a scenario where if you decided that was going to be a hill to die on, you could build a consensus to defend that decision. But I think it is still just a drop in the ocean in terms of the bigger budget challenge that. Is it worth that effort?

**Ebony Bennett** [00:47:15] I'm not sure I'd characterise it as a drop in the ocean at \$180 billion kind of a calculation for the cost of them. But I think the point.

**Pete Lewis** [00:47:24] By now, you know.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:47:25] Yeah, I see your point also. If Katy Gallagher were to run the gender lens over the tax cuts, I think they go about 2 to 1 to blokes compared to compared to women. But yeah, the wellbeing budget, as I said, an idea that Jim Chalmers has raised before and if anyone is interested in our webinar yesterday where we talked to Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz, that's an idea that he has championed in the past and write a book about. Talked a little bit about that. You can find that on our YouTube channel. We've got here a couple of other questions to get through a couple here, Katherine, on the difference between, I guess, the divergence between managing COVID from a political level compared to, you know, the cases going through the roof and those impacts that we were talking about that people are, you know, very much beginning to notice. Do you think that's going to be resolved any time soon? Katherine.

**Katherine Murphy** [00:48:29] Hmm. Well, I think it's, uh. The problem is that it is a bit hard to resolve it. Look, obviously, we could we could stop we could stop the sort of, you know, absolute exponential rate of case numbers by imposing lockdowns again. We could we could do that. But I think the appetite for state governments to do that and and the commonwealth, you know, carrying the big fiscal support associated with that is not where it was 12 months ago. So now we're sort of into pandemic to endemic and and management of these issues. I think some things that don't make a lot of sense to me and that sort of it kind of ties back into the the last question about budgets. Right, and priorities. You know, like the government's winding down telehealth support, for example. I think I think the sort of period of free rents such as it's been, is also coming to an end. There are sort of expenditures that have that have sort of been outlays during the pandemic that have been trying to sort of manage exponential case loads without resorting to the really sort of full on lockdowns. Right. And for budgetary reasons, some of those things appear to be being wound back. Now, that's really not consistent with sort of exponential growth in case loads. So I think the government, you know, it's they're going to have to do something quite difficult, which is sort of standstill in the middle of a maelstrom and work through some priorities. Right. And that's quite

**Please note this transcript is automated**

difficult at the moment because, you know, they've been elected, they've come in, he's the transition, but he's our immediate things. You know, they've they've definitely said COVID. We need to reboot a strategy here. We need to work out what we're doing and reboot the whole approach. And and that's sort of that thinking continues. But it's sort of like, you know, some of the yeah, I think they're going to have to think a bit more. Broadly about what expenditures might be necessary in the event that we're not you know, we're not going to sort of do massive things to curtail expenses.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:50:59] I've been wondering about public health campaigns in terms of, you know, like a slip slop, slap bet for wearing a mask indoors or, you know, seen some of those campaigns make their way through social media here. That seems to be, you know, a fairly obvious thing that we don't seem to be doing as much at the moment. The next question I've got is from Jennifer Manson, and it says, Is there any movement on the whistleblower prosecutions of Richard Boyle and David McBride? So obviously, we've talked about the attorney general dropping the prosecution of Bernard Collaery, the lawyer for Witness K, who blew the whistle on the illegal bugging of East Timor's cabinet discussions during those negotiations. But there are, as they've said, a couple of prosecutions of whistleblowers on the books. Katherine, any movement on that?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:51:48] Not that I'm aware of, but please don't take from that answer that that that tonight's my perfect knowledge of those matters, because I haven't really gone looking for information on those two cases specifically. So, look, I mean, a press release could be coming tomorrow saying all is forgiven. But I've not detected that to date. And I'm not I'm not really aware substantively about where those two things are up to. But it's a very good point, obviously, that the question arises.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:17] Yeah. And strong interest and and I think a push from civil society to really strengthen whistleblower protections of part of, you know, looking at integrity measures more broadly. Do you think that's something that the independents might try and pick up now that we've already got agreement around an icon? Not necessarily the detail of it, but, you know, they run on platforms of integrity. Whistleblower protection seems an obvious one for them.

**Pete Lewis** [00:52:48] You're assisting in integrity, doesn't begin and end with a federal archive. And I think the you know, the rich find that the independence tapped was not just about a body, but about a different way of doing politics. I think whistleblower legislation is fertile ground. The other one that I'd just put on people's radar are the privacy laws. There are some quite the privacy laws that are sitting on the IG's desk at the moment. There was there was quite a long process. It's a discussion paper on the desk, one of the. And one of the key issues is there's a whole bunch of exemptions for coverage from privacy, which really limits the amount of data you can collect from somebody else. But so you've got small business. You've got sort of law enforcement, but you've also got political parties. And I think this is a real sleeper issue. Will the political parties take away their exemption to collect a huge amounts of information about us in order to build a system of integrity on the way that our personal data is stored and managed in more general terms? And I

**Please note this transcript is automated**

think it'll be a really interesting bind for that, for the tales to run on, who probably don't have quite as sophisticated an engine for harvesting data as the major parties. But it's definitely going to be one where I say a really vibrant debate on the sort of integrity in the political system.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:54:20] And good to say, I thought I saw this morning or heard on Radio National an announcement around cracking down on SMS scams, which seem to have gone through the roof during the pandemic. I guess linked to data and personal information.

**Pete Lewis** [00:54:35] Well, it's still the Wild West in Australia. We don't even have the basic right of entries that are, you know, enjoyed in countries like the under the European Union or, you know, parts of America for that matter.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:54:48] Yeah. Katherine, I just want to exercise my discretion as host and ask a personal question that I'm interested in, around the debate, around the merger, Sugar Rock art and the project development of a gas hub there. That's really put that at threat for a number of years already. But looking to extend and expand, they're one of a number of fossil fuel projects that are slated that are really directly in conflict with the government's stated climate aims. But I think overlaying that is obviously this issue of 65,000 years of Australian heritage. We would look at it very differently. I think if it was the Opera House that was going to, you know, have acid rain and all sorts of things against it. How important are these types of battles where we see traditional owners and really the heritage of Australia coming into play as much as we see the environmental impacts and climate impacts?

**Katherine Murphy** [00:55:53] MM Well what's important part of the, of the, of the piece isn't it. I mean yeah there's obviously we, we talk a lot about the climate impacts of those developments and correctly so and but also, you know, heritage is incredibly important obviously in preserving as much of that as possible is something that any decent country should be in the business of doing. It's sort of like I guess it's a question that that sort of sets my mind in this direction a bit. And I think it actually will be really interesting to see how Tanya Plibersek, Plibersek as sort of plays is the wrong word. Sounds like, I mean she's conniving or something, which is not what I mean, but how I guess how assertive she is in, in her portfolio because obviously she's been given some of the responsibility for the environment. Right. She's obviously very high profile Labour person. She holds a progressive in a city seat. We've we've had a period, obviously, where there's been a lot of concern amongst civil society that, you know, we've had people occupying space in that portfolio rather than really trying to push protections forward. Look, I don't know how Tanya Plibersek will play her time in the portfolio, but I, I know her well enough to say she's a serious, thoughtful and considered person. So I just think that's one of the dynamics about the new government that might be really potentially interesting because there are these obviously, you know, there is there is a desire from the prime minister down to to really genuinely turn a corner here about managing existential risks that climate change or environmentally related. And then there's the overlay of our heritage, which again, I think is actually really meaningful to this prime minister. I think he's I think some sort of advancing the sort of recognition and reconciliation agenda is actually really important to this guy, the prime minister,

**Please note this transcript is automated**

as an individual. And he's giving the voice a lot of attention, too. So there's sort of a you know, can you see what I'm saying? This there's a number of different moving parts there that are. Some of them. Some of them. Some of them are in sync. Some of them contradict each other. And then you've got some really interesting personalities, too, who have had the opportunity to turn to government after a long period in opposition. And then it's like, What do you do with that time? How do you make that time meaningful? And how does that sit with the broader objectives of the government? So it's a bit of a woolly response, but I don't mean it to be woolly. I'm just saying watch that space. I think that'll be interesting. I just think it'll be interesting.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:59:01] Yeah. And I will say, for anyone who hasn't heard of merging and the Burrup Peninsula, sometimes it's known as the Dampier Archipelago. I would encourage you just to look it up. It should be as well known as the Sydney Opera House or any other number of important items of cultural heritage. It is an amazing collection, the biggest outdoor rock gallery in the world. Sometimes it's called it back dates back to before the last ice age when Tasmania was connected to the mainland. It is just an amazing piece of Australia's heritage and culture, so do check it out and look at what's at stake there. I thoroughly recommend knowing a little bit more about it. It's fabulous. That's all I've got time for. Thank you so much for a wide ranging discussion today. And Katherine, I feel that we touched a lot of different areas. And thanks again to everyone who has joined us. We appreciate you coming along. Don't forget to check out the podcast and that's my alarm going off to something else. Don't forget to check out the podcast that got in. All of Katherine's analysis and Pete's opinion are up today on Guardian Australia relating to the poll results. And head on over to Australia Institute dot org dot au for future webinars. Stay safe out there. Everyone mask up if you can and we will see you in a fortnight. Thanks very much. I.