

Poll Position

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In conversation with

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Ebony Bennett [00:00:02] G'day everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute and welcome to pole position our fortnightly deep dive into the latest results from the Guardian Essential Poll. Canberra is Ngunnawal and Ngambri country and I'd like to begin by paying my respects to elders past and present, and acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which I live and work here. Sovereignty was never ceded, and it always was and always will be aboriginal land. Days and times for webinars do vary, so please head on over to australiainstitute.org.au to find details for all our upcoming webinars, including one on Thursday that we're having about the latest edition of Australian Foreign Affairs with Allan Gyngell. That issue is called Our Unstable Neighbourhood and will have Allan Gyngell, Kishore Mahbubani and a few other people on that one. So check it out please. I got a couple of Zoom tips here just for housekeeping purposes. If you can, please type in questions for our panel in the Q&A box. You can also should be add to upvote other people's questions as well and make comments. I'm reminded to please keep things simple and on topic in the chat or will boot you out. And lastly, a reminder that this is live and being recorded. We'll put the video up on Australia Institute TV. That's our YouTube channel. And don't forget to check out the Guardian's Australian Politics podcast tomorrow, where the audio goes up for this as well. And if you are listening from the pod, you can find all the results from this week's Guardian Essential Poll at [Essential Report Dotcom Dot AEW](http://EssentialReportDotcomDotAEW). So today is the first day of the 47th Parliament and the first day of sitting for many, many new MPs. The Labour Government has several pieces of legislation on the agenda, including the 43% target aged care legislation and more. The Federal Treasurer, Jim Chalmers, will deliver his first economic statement to Parliament on Thursday and we're expecting inflation figures out tomorrow. And as the Guardian reports today, that economic statement from the Treasurer is widely expected to foreshadow a difficult federal budget in October. One person is of course, missing from this first sitting week and that is the former prime minister Scott Morrison. And to unpack all this and more, please welcome our regular panellists. This week, Katharine Murphy, political editor at Guardian Australia, and Peter Lewis recovered from COVID and Back in the saddle. Thanks for joining us Pete from Essential Media as well. Katharine, first to you, some big expectations for this parliament and beginning with climate change and this 43% target legislation.

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Katharine Murphy [00:03:01] Yes. So that's how we've kicked off in the 47th Parliament, which is which is sort of going through the ceremonial process of opening today. But in the lead up to today's opening, we've seen the Government telegraphing the legislation that it intends to introduce to the House of Representatives tomorrow, and that legislation gives effect to the 2030 emissions reduction target, which it flagged. That's a 43% reduction and also enshrines the possible pathway to net zero. In terms of that framework legislation, I think we sort of we can think about this week in two parts and set that up in her introduction and very seamlessly as we've sort of as we've kind of arrived driven up and arrived at the new 47th parliament, a lot of the focus has been on this climate change legislation because it is actually very important for a whole bunch of reasons. But I think from tomorrow, when the new inflation figures are made public by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the sort of back end of this week will be economically focussed because, you know, the market expectations of the inflation figure is that the headline annual rate will be north of 6%, which is obviously very high. And then Jim Chalmers, economic statement to the Parliament on Thursday, if you are a title politics junkie and you want to watch it live.

Ebony Bennett [00:04:35] None of those here, Katharine, I'm sure.

Katharine Murphy [00:04:37] Of course, none of us care about politics here. Of my current understanding on the timing of that is it'll be delivered at 1230 on Thursday in the House of Representatives. So, yes, so we've got a we've got an opening week in two parts. We've got climate and we've got the economy. But of course, these issues are both linked. And in terms of just quickly set it up, they expect. Stations of the parliament broad that we that, you know, there is this expectation that Australians voted for change. Well, not an expectation. That's a reality. Australians invoke the change and then there's a whole lot of expectations that surround change, how quickly you can achieve it, how radical it is, you know, and what the consequences of of of trying to change the country are. And and I think in some of the ceremonial openings today, there's been some interesting signposts along that road in terms of, you know, how how I guess Australia's new Prime Minister is seeing this opportunity. He gave quite a powerful speech actually early this morning during the welcome to country ceremony about. About not finding yourself on a porch after after your career in politics is over regretting the things you didn't do. His comments in that were were specifically about the voice to Parliament, which we haven't flagged but is also very important. But I think it's it's really interesting because we've got a new government that's abroad that wants to do a bunch of things. There's also a lot of pent up capacity, though, in the country, I think amongst progressive people. We've had a coalition government for nine years. I think there are a lot of progressive people in Australia who just think, God, go at it, get moving, fix all the stuff, you know. And I get that a lot in terms of the of the, I guess the the tone, the attitude that's out there. So and that'll be one of the factors is that the new government's going to have to manage is that sort of pent up level of expectation about what it can or should or, or would do.

Ebony Bennett [00:06:50] Yeah, I can see people alerted us that the chat wasn't working for. Hopefully I've fixed that. But Pete, I wanted to come to you next before we dive into the slides, I've enjoyed your headline from today's Guardian piece. While the ALP searches for

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its hot and the Greens its brain, perhaps what they both really need is courage. Take us through the thrust of that piece you've written there today.

Pete Lewis [00:07:17] Oh, look, it's a shameless reference to Wizard of Oz, which was actually to honour the original metaphor, which was the Blues Brothers, say, to music, the musical movies. I think for most of us who read The Guardian or a part of this podcast, we can relate to the the Country and Western Bar that the Blues Brothers rock into a coma. And the barmaid says, Yeah, we play both kinds of music, country and western. And it feels to me that understanding that there is a bit of nuance between the country and Western, like we want Labour and the Greens both to succeed. We want to see a long term progressive government. But the interesting thing is we have shit. What the 47 Parliament also does is shift the centre of political gravity from the right to that space between Labour and the Greens. And we're already seeing this play out with climate, so. When I try to explain to people that you're, say, Labour and the Greens, I always go back to The Wizard of Oz and say, Well, it's almost like think about, you know, the Labour Party's like the Tin Man. It doesn't have a heart. The Greens like the straw man that has have the Bryan. Imagine if they would could work together but just thinking about through more I think at this moment it's the opportunity for the lions journey to discover their courage. That is probably the sacred place out there. And look, I do have a degree of optimism that there will be a recognition that there needs to be kind of a negotiated settlement outside the election cycle. One of my colleague, Tony Douglas, made the observation to me the other day that that's really stuck with me, which is Labour and the Greens may be competitors for votes, but they're not opponents to government and they're not enemies. And I think we all get that sitting outside, you know, outside the arena. But Katharine will attest to this. The closer you get to the centre of power, the more the tension, the energy between Labour and the Greens is real because they are competing for seats and they are competing for legislation. So this is just a bit of a rumination around a couple of cheap metaphors, to be honest with you. But I hope it does set up the way of looking at this term of government that if if we can say a Labour government that holds the Senate grab the Greens that are pushing it to be more progressive without blowing the whole house up. We've got a decade of progressive government in front of us.

Ebony Bennett [00:09:50] I'm having technological issues here sharing today. My apologies.

Pete Lewis [00:09:55] It's all looking very good. We've got the I don't think we've got the zoomed view, but I'm happy to talk you through it if you want to.

Ebony Bennett [00:10:01] Yeah. Let me try and fix this up. And if you want to just take us through the numbers of the first.

Pete Lewis [00:10:07] Yeah, well what the first question we've got in here is federal government performance. Just checking in on how people think the government's going. The majority of people on most issues are sitting in the middle. So how is the government

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managing the COVID outbreak? Very good. With 36. Quite poor. Very poor. 25. The. You did have it there for a second. There is. Yeah. You haven't got it now I me jump into to.

Pete Lewis [00:10:39] It's perfect so on on climate change 33 good 22 not so good. The one that you're concerned about there is cost of living 23% good, 40 poor or quite poor. It's a real thing. The cost of being prices though. We've got some interesting graphs that we can go into later. So just early report card on most of those things, more positive than negative, but a lot of people just wanting to be convinced. I guess the other data point is, if you remember, there was a big spike in satisfaction with the Prime Minister once he became prime minister and people saw a whole lot of things I hadn't seen before he became prime minister. If you look at that handling of COVID, sorry, go back one if and if you're listening on the pod essential report dot com dot I you and you can go and have a look at all this compared this is the first time we've asked about the federal government's handling of the COVID outbreak since the election. And for those who've been long term followers of Katharine and my blog and we've been following this for a long time, so just before the election, the Federal Government, the Morrison government was rated 40 good, 35 bad, the good is drop four and obviously COVID is everywhere at the moment the bad has dropped ten, so it's 36, 25 there. I don't think we'll be doing this every I hope we're not going to be needing to do this every week, but that shows where we are in terms of the long term trend lines and that if it is to the next one, then that can open up for a bit of a discussion on climate and you'll have to squint because these are quite detailed questions because we were very conscious to be giving a fair representation of the various positions so there's you can dig in deep and squint and read it all. But basically the three propositions we put to people are should labour lock in the 43%? And then there should be a discussion about future targets and energy policy. The second proposition was the Greens should only vie for Labour's policy if Labour agrees to changes that are closer to the grains policy. And the third option was I don't want further action on climate change. And what's really interesting here, 50% say lock it in, Albo, 25% are with those that say the Greens should push harder from the start and 25% say don't do it at all. Now looking at that from a different level, you could say what Labour's got double the Greens support for their proposition. But back to my ruminations on that relationship, 75 to 25% want action, be that the no case to climate has never been lower 25% only. So a grand consensus for meaningful action on climate, which is consistent with the story of the election. And then a second and final question there, just to confuse everyone, and then I'll shut up for a while. We then asked only those who would answer response by saying that they do support one of those positions, Labour or the Greens, whether 43 is or not, and that's pretty much line, Bull said. That is the tension line over the next period. But I think those numbers all point to, I think a consensus that says get the 43 in there and then let's keep talking about what needs to be done on climate. So I guess I'm throwing my colours to the mast there as well. A bit.

Ebony Bennett [00:14:23] Yeah. Look, the Australia Institute has got its colours now to the mast on climate as well. I think we're definitely part of that climate super majority that we keep talking about in the Parliament. But Katharine, coming back to you, I was really struck by your comment on insiders and I know there's not huge amounts of time to go in to everything on that, but it seemed like the panel just blew past it, that ramp. Of 25% of people that don't want action. And going back to Dutton and the captain's call to not back 43%, the huge wipe-out that the Coalition suffered at the federal election. I mean, you made the point

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that the Coalition, it has done the wrong thing on climate change, but I don't see many other people kind of delving into that too much. But how much is that going to cause problems for the coalition in terms of coalition people kind of flagging, crossing the floor and things like that?

Katharine Murphy [00:15:25] Yeah, look, certainly I think there's a few things we need to pull together in response to that question. I think that in terms of the way the question ended, which is, are we going to see somebody crossing the floor? Possibly. Certainly. Bridget Archer, the member for Bass in northern Tasmania, has flagged consistently since we broke the story, I think probably just over a month ago that she was interested basically in looking to see if she could vote for Labour's proposition in the in the Senate. Andrew Bragg, who is a moderate Liberal senator from Sydney, is also reserving his rights at this point to vote in favour of Labour's proposal. And we have seen that in the past. But now I'm now my God was at the CPRS debate or was it or was it the clean energy payment where we had some Liberals cross the floor to support that as well. So so, you know, to too, I was I was very firm on insiders because that is my considered view, having been at this particular rodeo, this one, the climate one. And since 2006, I do have very strong views about who's acted properly and who hasn't. But the Liberal Party does have a tradition of some people trying to do something different. Malcolm Turnbull lost his job over it twice. There are people in the Liberal Party who understand that, you know, taking action commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis is the right thing to do and have made attempts to do that. So with due respect, paid, yes, the Liberal Party as a group, as a collective over the last decade has done the wrong thing in relation to this issue and Australia is paying for it. And in terms of how we fronted up to the new Parliament, it seems extraordinary that Peter Dutton as the new Opposition Leader, that the lesson he could learn from the 2022 election results where you know, basically the Liberal Party have lost ten or more seats because of this issue over two election cycles, that that that the response to that could be game. Right. But now I just want to put a few points. I want to plot a few points along a graph here. And we started the conversation this week by pointing out that the week started with climate and in line with the economy, and these two things overlap. Now, look, as somebody who has long supported, you know, because I'm into facts, evidence and science, the necessity of climate action, you know, this has to happen. Right. And I'm thrilled to say that even in our latest poll, as Page says, like the constituency for doing nothing on climate is shrinking in Australia. You know, right, as far as I'm concerned, a life of science and evidence. Right. But the thing is, if we go back to the economic indicators, when we asked voters this week about how the government was performing, the big negative is cost of living. Right. That's where people are. That's that is where the sort of crunch of the war in the Ukraine, supply chain issues associated with the pandemic plus local factors are putting people in this crunch. And it's real for a lot of Australians. That hip pocket squeeze is real. We've got rising mortgage rates, so borrowing costs have increased. Everybody who fills up their car knows how expensive petrol is. You know, we've had floods that will further push up fresh fruit, the cost of fresh food, I mean these are real things. So Peter Dutton is making in my view a very cynical calculation that cost of living is going to be extremely difficult for the new Government to deal with in a substantive sense. You know, we don't live in a centralised, perfectly regulated economy where governments have massive control over the economy. We no longer reside in that economy. Although interestingly, and I'm sure I'll point this out, a lot of voters in our sample seem to think that the government does have extraordinary power. Right. We don't actually live in that world anymore. But anyway, it's interesting that people think we do. So Peter

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Dutton is very, very clearly setting up an option for himself that if the cost of living. Stuff really bites. If labour can't get wages to keep pace with inflation and when inflation's running at six and 7%, it's extremely difficult to get wage outcomes to keep pace with inflation. If we're in a rising cycle of rights, what he is, what he has in his mind is I can really weaponize this as a cost of living issue. Every time there's a price increase about something over the next little bit, I'm going to blame Labour's 43% emissions reduction target. It'll be bollocks, it's always been bollocks. But that is the room he's leaving for himself.

Pete Lewis [00:20:21] And the bigger point, Katharine, is the next election will not be won over. Whether or not liable was ambitious enough on climate. It will be whether Shorten can convince enough people who are disengaged with politics but economically vulnerable that that bollocks is actually real.

Katharine Murphy [00:20:38] Yes, exactly. So we need to bear this in mind. I know I sound like a constant doomsayer on these issues, but this is just the reality of climate politics in this country. Right. We have turned a corner. I'm grateful we have, because that's what facts and evidence suggest we need to do and we need to do that quickly. But I can see Dutton's calculation. It is as obvious as the noise on his face. On the plus side, I suppose, of this Dutton calculation, we have seen some Liberal prime ministers in the past, Liberal leaders in the past who are weirdly ideological about this stuff, who have very strange views about climate change, sort of being a front of new socialism or whatever else, right? Peter Dutton is not cut from that cloth. Peter Dutton just sees a simple cost of living scare that he might be able to weaponize in the event it doesn't catch, in the event it doesn't take hold. I think there is there are signs that his party is moving around him already in terms of a reposition. And Susan Leigh, who's the Liberal Party deputy leader in an interview I did with her maybe three weeks ago, basically said we're starting with opposition to 43%, but this is a new term in government. So basically we'll see what happens. But I just want to lay that out for people as clearly as possible because that is that's how I see the political trajectory of, of the next rancid round of weaponisation playing out over the next little bit. Now, our super, super majority suggests that community sentiment has now shifted. If that's true, Dutton strategy won't work. But I want to just keep people's eyes on their cost of living pressure as an issue. So anyway, this does end my sermon.

Ebony Bennett [00:22:19] Yes, but extremely well observed, Katharine. And I'm so glad that we get the benefit of your pain over at least a decade of war.

Katharine Murphy [00:22:29] So go to the.

Ebony Bennett [00:22:30] Front line and Pete shall we come back to the slides? Now, if I can make work again, we.

Pete Lewis [00:22:40] We shall, because it kind of follows through on where Katharine was.

Ebony Bennett [00:22:44] Exactly.

Pete Lewis [00:22:45] So we firstly, this is interesting. So at the moment we ask people regularly to self nominate whether they feel financially comfortable just managing or feeling the pressure. And as you can see, 41% at the moment saying financially comfortable, 38 can manage household bills and 17% feeling the pressure. Now, albeit this is wave before interest rates have really gone higher. But it's with high petrol prices, high grocery prices and relatively low wage increases. So I'm not quite sure what to make of that. That skews our older people feeling financially comfortable but not exclusive. So maybe the maybe the ground isn't as fertile yet for that economic scare, but it is something to watch. If you go to the next one that this is probably the most concerning slide, if you're in labour, how much influence do you think the Federal Government has on the following our day? 75% a lot of their unemployment. Sky combining that a lot and fair inflation, I'm going to say 64 because I'm adding up how much they pretty much the same on fuel. Workplace supply is a bit lower and interest rates a bit lower. But there is still this sense that we're being buffeted by a global pandemic, a war in the Ukraine. You know, pretty dysfunctional systems of government in a lot of the world, really broken supply chains. And people are basically still buying the lie that the government has some sort of set of dials that can influence the outcomes. That's kind of in my. On my rating. Bad news for the Labour Government because I think part of the challenge is expectation management here is to explain what government can do but also what they can't do. And that's sort of not what we're used to hearing from humblebrag regimes like the previous one.

Ebony Bennett [00:24:50] And just let's finish up. I think this is our last slide on in particular inflation.

Pete Lewis [00:24:59] Yeah. So this was just an interesting correlation that Vanessa from our team did that basically saying those who believe the federal government has a lot of influence on inflation and much more likely to give it a poor rating on cost of living. So just in terms of sort of two points making align, so that's where expectation management is really, really important. And you look in the states, Biden's having exactly the same problem. Cost of living is not a political issue. It is not some esoteric thing that people debate in wine bars or coffee shops. It is people's lives. And if prices start going up and people are struggling, it inevitably has a political consequence, if left to its own devices.

Katharine Murphy [00:25:43] Mm hmm.

Ebony Bennett [00:25:45] Yeah. Katharine, you were talking about kind of the back half of this week is going to end up back with cost of living. I think that's really hit the nail on the head there with I mean, it's very logical that if you think the government has control over those things, if they're not going well, you know, you'll be writing them poorly. But, you know, let's be clear about what the government inherited and what the Morrison government was

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dealing with, you know, prior to not getting re-elected. We do have a lot of hangovers from the pandemic supply chain problems. I've seen a lot of commentators want to blame wage wage increases for inflation, but we know it's really profits that are driving that. And some of those other things are external. And as I mentioned, not things that the government has control over picking up its point of that expectation management job. I, I hear the Treasurer talk all the time about the inherited debt, but are you expecting in this economic statement that, you know, they'll be sheeting the blame home to the Morrison government for by spending and other things, or are they trying to project, you know, just that the adults are back in charge and will fix it up now?

Katharine Murphy [00:27:02] I think a bit of both is the truth. I think Jim Chalmers is a very clear political communicator, has been sort of setting up this bad news really since the moment that that sort of Treasury portfolio switched again from the moment the new government was sworn in. And obviously, there is a fine tradition of blaming your opponents for the mess that you inherit after you take office. And obviously, if we're talking about a genre, this will be in that genre. This will be a continuation of that. But obviously, in terms of the budget that, you know, there are grounds for that. There are, you know, Labour's not being in government for nine years, right. I mean they are actually literally inheriting a budget position that they have had very limited control over for the last decade. But in terms of then how that. But but I think also Chalmers is pretty keen to try and project some different conversations here as well. I mean, obviously, I think we'll see, you know, what's his what's his locution that heaving with heaving with ever again? He's sort of thrashes that. And I quite like it as a as a as a sort of visual that portrays this as, you know, the budget's having difficulty because of, you know, decisions taken by the previous government. And a lot of that's why some rorts and all that sort of stuff. Now, look, there are ways towards that for sure, but the main reason we're sort of in the position that we are in a budgetary sense is obviously the impact of the pandemic. And we did actually want the previous government to spend to protect lives and livelihoods. And there are people around the country who are the beneficiaries of that decision. So but it's sort of, I guess, in terms of the complexities of it, if that makes sense. You know, like the government. When was that? Two weeks ago. Thought it might be able to get away with not continuing pandemic leave, for example. And that was just a pure budgetary decision. Right. That let them all inherited priorities. We deal with the less room we've got fiscal fiscally for our priorities. Right. Obviously, that was unsustainable for public health reasons and the government shifted. So that's the sort of difficulty Chalmers is going to have to deal with. Everybody in the country wants us to be post-pandemic. We're not. Pandemics are expensive from a public health sense. If you want half decent outcomes, even if you are starting to wind back some of the mandates and all of that sort of stuff. Right. So he's got a lot of pressures and obviously the international factors Australia has next to no control over. So then that brings us back to hip pocket and take you through those percentages. People who are feeling. You know, comfortable now and people who are not. Couple of things that were of interest to me in that I think there's a slight majority in terms of where the percentages sit from memory, although I don't have the figures in front of me that people who are they're saying at the moment I can pay the bills but nothing extra or I'm feeling financial distress. I think they are in slight majority over the. I'm okay, Bob. Now we know there is no camel in the country. We know we know that the Reserve Bank has told us that in relation to interest rates, right. People saved during the pandemic, people insecure work in middle class jobs who could work from home. People saved because they didn't go out much. So people have

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some some savings to draw on. And it's also still quite difficult to travel overseas and other places. Right. So there is a constituent agency in Australia that's emerged from the pandemic in reasonable shape, right, because of government support, because of the circumstances of their professional lives. But you know, the cohort that's there, there's also a pretty big cohort there who are living hand to mouth and who will be very, very sensitive to increases in interest rates. And also, there's a whole bunch of young people who are being flogged every which way.

Pete Lewis [00:31:15] Right. Just to break those stats down there, of course you're right. So financially comfortable 41 and then you've got the combination of can manage it and under pressures 46 but it's only 37% of under 34 as well. It's 47% of over 55 said classify themselves as financial comfortable. So you're right, there's a few little things going on under the surface that means you just can't glibly say things are okay.

Katharine Murphy [00:31:47] No, it's sort of that you understand. Sorry, I'll wrap this up quickly because I am raving. Sorry, the but you understand sort of at that macro economy level why the RBA is saying that there's people with buffers and that's sort of reflected in obviously what our people and what our voters are telling, you know, telling the poll or contributing to the poll this way. There are people in reasonable shape, but there's a there's a bunch of people in not reasonable shape to it's so you know anyway.

Ebony Bennett [00:32:19] Yeah, it's a good point. And before I come to questions from the audience, just a couple of things I wanted people to keep in mind. One is also that in terms of expectation management, the RBA has a pretty blunt tool in terms of interest rate rises to manage inflation and actually interest rate rises can't do anything to fix some of the problems that we've identified in the economy. Are vegies being more expensive because of floods and droughts and storms and things? Interest rate rises won't do anything to cope with that, nor will they help with gas prices rising because ten years ago we stupidly linked our domestic gas market to the international market. And now, because of the Russia's war in Ukraine, those prices are going up. Interest rates aren't going to magically put the price of oil or gas down, for example. And some of the tools that do help will require spending, which now looks more difficult. So things like making childcare more affordable or free, some of those measures that directly help lift the cost of living pressures for people. It's just a much more difficult political climate to to work in. I've noticed a couple of people in the chat mentioned a windfall profits tax. That was something that Professor Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate, economist and former World Bank chief economist, mentioned on his tour of Australia recently. He was visiting as a guest of the Australia Institute. And Katharine, I'll be interested if you I know they haven't kind of gone for that now, but it does seem like multinational taxes and reforms in that space does seem to be where labour feels like that might be a bit of room to move. I'm not sure if we can sneak a windfall profits tax in there somewhere, but we can live in hope of moving. Now to the questions from the audience. Thank you so much. I think we've got more than 600 people on the line with us today. Thanks so much for joining us. The first question I've got is from John Knox and he says, could the rewriting of the environmental protection laws, that's the APEC act for those playing at home be the saviour of both Labour and the Greens by encompassing a climate trigger. Katharine Save you might be a strong word, but you wouldn't do that.

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Katharine Murphy [00:34:42] I think it's a I think it's complicated. But no, look, the the questioner is exactly right to put their finger on that, because that is definitely a moving part in these negotiations. If you've been following the whole discussion between the progressive forces in the Parliament ahead of the introduction of this bill, you will know that there are differences between Labour and the Greens, both in ambition in terms of the target and also the Greens want and want an oil and gas tourism as well and have injected that into this discussion. The problem the Labour Party has is that it has no electoral mandate for such a position. It did not tell voters ahead of the election. That's what it intended to do. So it's quite difficult for them. And and we've done in previous shows, if you're a regular, you'll know that we've discussed the sort of pathway to victory that Labour was able to craft, didn't involve holding its traditional blue collar territories, as well as picking up progressives to a tree in the city, which is a bit of a preamble which says Labour has no electoral mandate to come out and say, yeah, let's just stop oil and gas tomorrow. Right? That was not that was not put before voters. The Greens certainly did put it before voters. So the Greens have a mandate for that. The Greens have increased their representation and told voters before the election that's what they wanted. Now we're trying to square the circle in the in some of the discussions around climate. So one way that it is possible to do that is because Labour is running a separate process for the environment laws as well as the climate laws. Right. Climate, CO2 in the atmosphere environment is our built well, our natural heritage and all of that sort of stuff. Those laws have been terrible as well. Labour has telegraphed that it will rewrite those laws. Now Labour did not, you know, tell voters ahead of the last election that it would not introduce a climate trigger right there. But the Labour Party has some room to move there because I don't think any explicit promises were made on that. One way or another, you know, obviously putting a climate trigger in environmental assessments is not the same thing as a moratorium. Obviously a moratorium says that's it, you're done. Pack up and leave. Write a climate trigger or something equivalent in a legislative sense. All that means if you guys aren't following, there might be some people here who aren't following this closely. All that means a climate trigger just means that when you've got a major development that'll be assessed under environmental law, that the impact of that development on the climate is assessed as part of that, as part of that sort of regulatory process. So, look, I see some room to move there, right? I don't know whether it will end up being Labour supporting a climate trigger or whether Labour will support a variant of that. But that basically makes the climate impact of new developments explicit. For example, look, there's a way to go with all of that, and that's not going to be resolved definitively quickly, because the government has committed to a process of consultation about the environment laws. Right. So this one's going to roll a bit, but it's sort of in terms of that that oil, gas, fossil fuels nexus where labour and the Greens are having trouble coming to terms because of their respective electoral mandates. Have a look at the climate trigger or equivalent as that rolls down the road for another 12 or 18 months. Because it seems to me to be an obvious place where if there's goodwill on both sides and an understanding of people's respective mandates. And, you know, I think I think there's some territory where we can see, you know, some coming together. I just don't know exactly what that moment is. It's too soon to say.

Pete Lewis [00:38:39] It also speaks to the different theories of change between the two political parties. Labour is a party that seeks government. The Greens are a party that seeks change and they are different. And finding a way of those two operating side by side, you're right. Is is the trick on labour. The idea that Labour would introduce a new tax that was that

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was outside mandate or introduce new measures on energy that are outside mandate will would be disastrous. It would blow the government up. It would create the the pressure points for the coalition to make it a one term government. But there is the opportunity through legislation like the environment legislation to but the gate since it's called the Overton Window. So creating the space that the policies that will end the situation is right there is a consensus ready to roll. And I just think that is the opportunity. And so there may be, you know, you've got to think about government as a sprint, like not as a sprint, but as a marathon. And if your objective is two or three times of Center-Left government, then what are the markers along the way? Now I get the urgency of the climate crisis, but just because it's urgent doesn't mean that you can speed up politics beyond what its tolerance is. Because, as we saw. In 2013. If you get it wrong, the blowback is, is disastrous. Mm.

Ebony Bennett [00:40:06] Just adding on to that, I feel like this has got a lot of legs, at least not the least because of the Greens mandate that Katharine mentioned you referred to. I think they've done a very good job at kind of pointing out, sure, we've got all these existing ones, but at some point we've got to talk about why we keep opening new ones. We can't keep making it the problem worse, which I think is just a very logical argument that's hard to refute despite the politics. And I know it does look like there's no hope of that federally in in any. A kind of urgent sense or any immediate sense, but it's not unheard of for governments, state governments at least, to impose moratoriums on fracking. We've had a couple in the past that were have last now or been overturned, but there certainly has been precedent. And I think if we start seeing some of these projects go ahead. There's actually very fierce on the ground opponents to these types of projects that do come up and change the politics a bit. Kathryn, can I say.

Katharine Murphy [00:41:19] You want to add one thing at the risk? Because obviously there's more questions and I don't want to keep I don't want to crowd out more questions. But just in relation to Webb's point. Right, that there are precedents for moratoria. That's absolutely true. But a little bit lost in this. A little bit lost in our conversation today, because we're dealing with the mechanics of the parliament is just a very obvious point, that global capital has already made their minds up about what's happening, about what this transition looks like. There is a short term set of demands for for coal, gas, you know, other other fossil fuels as we sort of ride out the tail end of the fossil fuel economy. Right. It's sort of weird in a market sense. It's got to go up and then it's going to go full ride. So regardless of what governments do or don't do in terms of regulation or moratoriums and the like, we already see that it's extremely difficult for some of these fossil fuel projects to get finance, for example, because the banks don't want to lend to them. So we we obviously need to be very attentive to what happens in the parliament. But we also I don't think people should lose sight of the fact that the bigger the bigger things happening out sort. Right. And that that bigger thing happening outside is what caused the Morrison government to shift rhetorically in favour of net zero. That's that big thing outside. But that's that's huge what's happening there. So while it's sort of like, you know, politics is like a big tanker slowly turning around. But but the fact of the matter is, things are escalating in this space quite rapidly because of, you know, because of money, basically, and the bits big money is making. So anyway, I just want to put that little bit of optimism out there for people is that there is a lot of and in the background, it's not all contingent on what happens in the Parliament. I mean, bloody important, don't get me wrong before and these targets, Bill, is seriously important for people

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who say it's just all it's all symbolism or whatever, complete bollocks. This is a really, really important statement that this parliament should needs to make. Right. But there's there's a lot more going on in this space than just what politicians are doing at this point in time.

Ebony Bennett [00:43:44] Yeah, no, that's a really good point. The next question I've got is from Michael Watt and he says, does the recent tax win against Rio Tinto indicate that the Labour Government can chase big companies with bigger who are avoiding paying their fair share? What do you reckon, Katharine?

Katharine Murphy [00:44:01] Just short, because I'm conscious of the amount of driving I'm doing. As I said a minute ago, that whole sort of multinational tax base is sort of genuinely open territory. I know that's a slightly separate issue to the specific question, but I'm just saying this territory there for them to work with. And in terms of, you know, and again, in in the in the global sense, in the big picture sense that democracies all around the world are sick of, you know, profit shifting and other activities. Right. We're talking about minimum rights of corporate tax and all of that sort of stuff, which is really important. Right. And important to be rolled out in jurisdictions. So, you know, there's some room to me. That's the quick version. Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:44:41] The next question is from Eva Cox, who says, where are the debates and questions on trust and social wellbeing to broaden the debate to more than economic complexities to what is a good society? A really good point. Pete Lewis, I'll come to you on this one. We've got obviously the Treasurer and on Thursday he's going to be doing this economic statement, but he's already flagged in October at the budget that one of the statements will be looking at that idea of wellbeing in the budget and measuring what matters that GDP, you know, famously measures, you know, nothing that matters. And one very specific thing that's, you know, not really designed to measure the wellbeing or the social health of of society, just a narrow economic indicator. How important do you think that kind of message is going to be for Labour's economic narrative over the next couple of months as we lead up to the budget?

Pete Lewis [00:45:41] Well, not just to message, but in reality, because if you don't. Measure it. You don't own it. And for too long we've been very narrow in what we measure. I helped Sydney Policy Lab at the union's Sydney launch, a report yesterday which was calling for exactly this a wellbeing indicator. And also people might say Nick Bryan's piece in the Herald yesterday, but also that rather than just have the budget, the federal budget as the centrepiece of national leadership each year, which is almost like a reconciliation of the housekeeping bills, whereas Australia's version of the State of the Nation report. Where is the piece that sets out where we are taking each other through our government? So I love this question, I think, but it's not just about coming up with another set of technocratic outputs. If you're really judging things like happiness and wellbeing, how do you measure it? You've got to start talking to people. I think a lot of Andrew Lane's work about reinvigorating civil society and getting communities talking to each other is all part of that mix. So I think there is a really optimistic piece in there and I do think it starts with asking different

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questions, but I don't quite know if we've even thought through what those long term benefits can look like, but it'd be a be a pretty edifying process to think of to go through it.

Ebony Bennett [00:47:09] Yeah. Katharine. Jim Chalmers has kind of been on that bandwagon for a long time. He talked to the Australia Institute about it two years ago in 2020, just before the kind of the pandemic hit. And obviously a student of people like Professor Joseph Stiglitz, who we mentioned earlier, he's done a lot of work for the former French president on. Yeah, measuring things that practically matter to people's everyday lives a little bit more. I get the sense that Jim Chalmers, you know, is very good at explaining this kind of stuff by now, but you would expect it would be fairly well advanced by the time you get to, you know, a budget statement after so long thinking about it.

Katharine Murphy [00:47:54] Yeah, yeah. Well, they definitely rolling down the path of this. I think the wellbeing budget's really important actually, and I for one really look forward to seeing how that all kind of spits out of the treasury and, and spits out of the cabinet in terms of how they have a structure. That the other thing that's a moving part too, and is not certainly not irrelevant to the broader measures that we're talking about. Katy Gallagher, who's the finance minister, has signalled that, you know, that Labour will introduce some sort of serious gender budgeting as well. Now they're not going to be able to turn that around by October, I don't think. I just don't think that's possible, although I think we'll see some sort of a down payment on it. But I think this element of the government's agenda is is really important. And that's what I was sort of trying to say a little a little bit earlier that, you know, Chalmers as well as sort of, you know, kind of surfing the old genre of, oh, look, look, look, look what terrible things my opponents have visited upon me and how dreadful is all of this? Right. I do think he's actually asking different or trying to try to pose different questions, actually, and get answers to different questions. I mean, it's quite difficult, but difficult to do that politically in an environment where inflation could hit seven per say, that interest rates are rising and people are worried about whether or not lettuce is ten bucks. But it's sort of but that's that's where they want to get to. And I think it's important. I've always thought that this is an important element of their agenda.

Pete Lewis [00:49:24] But also for an economy tanking. And you've actually got other indicators as well to guide you, such as, you know, caring for others and and wellbeing. It actually is a really important counter-narrative because let's face it, the numbers are going to be brutal over the next couple of years.

Katharine Murphy [00:49:42] Well, just quickly, I'm sorry, does just points to the future in the sense that, you know, one of the big challenges that we've got in Australia obviously is demographic change and the care workforce is absolutely critical to, you know, how how we pass the next few decades in terms of our collective wellbeing as a society and an economy. So again, I think this government is aware of that, that there's a big challenge there to try and sort of anticipate what what the sort of economic and societal needs are in terms of that sort of demographic transition that's coming at us. So anyway, look, we can do a whole show on this, but anyway, let's shut up because there'll be another question.

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Ebony Bennett [00:50:23] Yeah, I did just want to touch on I've got one question here from Ken about Mars and not rushing up in this first week, which I know has got some coverage today. I'm not sure if the press gallery has found out what he's actually doing. And the other question along similar lines is going back to integrity and I can take and kind of holding. Members of the previous governments to account for rorts and things like that. Climate is the focus, but integrity, obviously it was the integrity election. It was one of the key issues for a number of people who are now in Parliament. First to Morrison, Katharine, where is the former PM?

Katharine Murphy [00:51:07] Isn't that an interesting question? No, he's heading off to Tokyo. He may already be in Tokyo. I'm not sure where he physically is at this moment, but he has a speech that he is going to deliver in Tokyo with a bunch of other former PMS. I think David Cameron and maybe John Key and some other folks are involved in this in this conference.

Pete Lewis [00:51:27] So the Boulevard of Broken Dreams confess.

Katharine Murphy [00:51:31] Oh, God, do I do? Yeah. Anyway, to be sort of people would be at different points along the pathway of grateful, whatever it is. Anyway, sorry, I'm not saying that in a, in a you know, in a human way, but anyway so yeah, he's doing that. He's not in the Parliament this week, although I can say at the opening of the new Parliament, the ghost of Scott Morrison is certainly well and truly about the place in that the sort of tone of the opening of the new Parliament is a sort of direct reference against that sort of politics of the last three years, which is a really, really interesting dynamic, really to be setting yourself up quite differently. So perhaps it's a bit of a mercy that the former prime minister is not walking amongst his former colleagues, you know, watching, watching basically the complete repudiation of his style of politics. I think that would be quite hard, actually, at a human level. And believe it or not, Scott Morrison is a human being. He is a human being. But anyway, look, I think there's been there's certainly a if for people who want to know more specifics about these, I think there's a story on The Guardian at the moment which steps through what these conferences and what he's doing. So if you are interested in that, go and have a look at that. And in terms of integrity, more generally, would yes, we sort of only in this show today, we're just really dealing with the next few weeks the integrity proposal, the be all that it will all check is still going through consultations with the crossbench and Mark Dreyfus and and external experts. The Government basically wants it done by the end of the year, it wants it legislated and then it'll be interesting to see what happens as a consequence of that.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:18] I did want to ask specifically, although it's not really a question from the audience, it's just me personally. But the the revelations that came out about how the government handled the arrival of a boat during the election. And I think it was Karen Andrews kind of saying the Prime Minister told her to release the information, so she tried to make the department do it. I mean, that's extremely recent kind of I'm not sure if anyone can

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say it amounts to the level of corruption, but. It smells very bad and it's not the way government should be handled by any means. Is there a sense that. Karen Andrews should step down. Is there going to be any sanctions for that kind of behaviour?

Katharine Murphy [00:54:08] Any consequences? Yeah. Look, it was genuinely a dreadful a dreadful episode. And public servants were treated appallingly and put in a really difficult position. But I guess on the plus side, you know, we should recognise that those public servants behaved appropriately and within the spirit of the caretaker convention. So, you know, there's a lot of concern around about the health of institutions for obvious reasons. We can say in this instance that the public sector did what it did, what it is required to do, which is not an exoneration of the behaviour. I'm just saying on the plus side, you know that they acted back and they did it by the book, right, despite being under a lot of pressure. Obviously Karen Andrews felt pressure herself from Morrison and or his office in order to disclose the. Well, I don't think it had actually even properly arrived yet, but it just disclosed its operation on Election Day. People who remember the text messages that were sent out geo located to marginal sites. Pretty grubby bit of campaigning, really. It's obviously, you know, it's sort of, I guess underscores that dreadful last day where, you know, people in Morrison and people around him, you know, it thought we're either going to lose here or somehow we could launch, we could pull out some, you know, rabbit out of a hat that might turn that tennis around. So, look, the whole thing was, you know, really unedifying and and and a sort of. You know.

Pete Lewis [00:55:48] Jokes are symbolic of the fact I still thought that was the issue that was going to tent. That was the bizarre thing. These guys now how politics works. Most of the votes are locked in. The national security stuff had not worked at.

Katharine Murphy [00:56:01] All where.

Pete Lewis [00:56:02] We'd been locked up for two years. It wasn't like people were stressing about porous borders. So what would I like? It was almost like Pavlovian. It was like, Oh, I would just try this. It was just bizarre.

Katharine Murphy [00:56:14] Well, not a bit that final way. I mean, it was a matter of just try this. It was a matter of right class and get out various options that might turn the contest. And and that is what desperate like late stage governments do. All of this this example is particularly egregious. You said about, you know, this corrupt. Oh, my God, I'm not I'm not going to express a view about that at all. You know, I'll certainly say that it was that it was gross and it shouldn't have happened. And we're lucky that our institutions rise to the challenge that was presented to them on that day. But whether or not those instances become the purview of Ike, I to be honest, I'm not really sure at this point as we stand here. So. But anyway, it was it was certainly a certainly a really. Yeah.

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Ebony Bennett [00:57:04] And I just reading a lot of the the reporting coming out of the United States from Jonathan Jonathan Swan and others about, you know, how Trump has tried to put key people in the public service to would imagine.

Pete Lewis [00:57:20] Democratic.

Ebony Bennett [00:57:20] Will and yet but like you know that stuff.

Pete Lewis [00:57:24] Even trying not even.

Ebony Bennett [00:57:25] Trying if he just let it go and there's no sanction, then it becomes the convention. That's what I worry about, essentially.

Katharine Murphy [00:57:33] That's the point when when I said a minute ago story about don't manage to talk to you. But just on that point, you know, when I said a minute ago that the opening of parliament today has been really interesting for it's sort of repudiation of Morrison's. I mean, that in an institutional sense, I don't mean like in some gratuitous personal sense. Obviously, you know, the prime minister did the former prime minister did some important things, as I've acknowledged in in this conversation, particularly in 2020. Right. People are just sort of out there, you know, sort of gratuitously smacking him down. But there is a real sense of repudiation of that style of politics on the opening day of a new parliament, which, look, maybe we'll in three years time, it'll this all feel like a lie, I don't know. But today it feels pretty important at that point that Abe's trying to get to about institutions and situations. Honestly, what stands between us and chaos? And there are people who value institutions in public life, and there are people who seek to subvert them. And we've seen the worst case example of that in the United States and the appalling thing that happened while the appalling term followed by the appalling thing in Australia. You know, as Peter says, we're not even trying. Right, but we are sort of we are nonetheless in a continuum which is, which is bad. And we do actually need the defenders of this institution that I've worked in for 25 years, the Australian Parliament. We need people who will stand up and say this institution matters and you know, and we got to set about trying to value them. I think that's very important. Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:59:18] I'm afraid we're going to have to wrap it up there, but thanks for summing all that up, Katharine. It's just an ongoing concern of the Australia Institute, democracy and accountability. But personally I feel like I've been reading a lot of deteriorating institutions and yeah, what's on my mind a lot this week. So I thought that was a very good summary. And again, thank God for the public service that that did its job. Thank you so much, everyone, for your wonderful questions. I'm sorry, as always, that we can't get to all of them, but please thank our panel. Katharine Murphy, you can find her at Murph ARU on Twitter. Pete Lewis is at Peter Lewis, AMC, and you can find me at Ebony Bennett. Don't forget to check out the podcast tomorrow from The Guardian and head on over to the

Transcript: Poll Position
Recorded live on 26 July 2022

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Australia Institute to register for our webinar on Thursday for a bit of foreign policy chat, if that is your thing. Thank you so much for joining us today. We'll see you in a fortnight. Stay safe out there and we'll talk to you soon. Thanks, everyone. Bye.