

6 February 2006

ICAN Canberra conference generates national interest

The coincidence of the National Party's current woes and the weekend conference (Saturday February 4) of state and federal independents was not planned, but certainly fortuitous.

Twelve independents from Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and NSW attended the meeting at Parliament House.

Apart from an opportunity to launch this website, it enabled independents to discuss campaign strategies, compare approaches to various issues, swap ideas on newsletters and corresponding with constituents and importantly, develop ways of encouraging new independent candidates.

The Australian Electoral Commission sent three senior staff to discuss the distribution of preferences and explain the most recent Senate outcome, where the balance of power has been transferred to one Queensland senator and a Victorian Senator who achieved not quite 2% of the primary vote.

The disturbing fact is, a true independent cannot run above the line for the Senate, because he or she has to lodge a How-to-Vote card with the AEC in order to appear as a 'group' above the line.

The meeting decided to explore ways of highlighting this inequity and to seek amendments to federal legislation to enable an independent to run above the line without having to direct preferences. Federal Independents Peter Andren and Tony Windsor will be drafting amendments to the so-called Electoral 'Integrity' bill to be debated in the first week of the new parliamentary year.

The meeting also decided to push for other reforms to the voting system, and there was condemnation of the new bill's aim of increasing to \$10,000 the amount that can be donated to a candidate or party before disclosure of the source of the donation is required.

Tasmanian Upper House President Don Wing explained his views on the ideal Senate ballot paper which would, like that for the Tasmanian Legislative Council, allow voters to only nominate – **below the line** – the number of candidates required to fill the vacant seats rather than preference **every** candidate.

Below the line is the only fair way of voting, but with only 5% of voters choosing to vote that way much work needs to be done to achieve that ideal outcome.



the independent candidate advisory network

Overall the ICAN meeting determined to do whatever individual MPs can do through their own parliaments, media contributions and interaction with their electorates to get the message out to the community that independents are seriously disadvantaged by current laws.

Independent MPs determined to go back to their electorates and seek out potential candidates from their region and encourage them to access the ICAN website and start thinking seriously about running for upcoming state or federal elections.

While ICAN won't endorse candidates, it is there as a back-up; a 'How To' guide.

Individual MPs may very well choose to actively support new candidates they know well, as Tony Windsor (New England), Peter Andren (Calare), Richard Torbay (Armidale), Peter Draper (Tamworth) and David Barr (Manly) did when Dawn Fardell successfully contested the Dubbo by-election to replace the late Independent MP Tony McGrane.

As Peter Andren told Glen Milne, he can envisage a scenario where sitting state independent MPs could move to federal politics in the Tony Windsor model, with an Independent MP replacing them at a state level. But it is also important to look at winning the **balance of responsibility** (not power) in upper houses, particularly the Australian Senate, as well.

Those attending the ICAN launch and conference were: Tony Windsor, Member for New England, Peter Andren Member for Calare, Craig Ingram Member for Gippsland East (Vic), Russel Savage Member for Mildura (Vic), Robert Such Member for Fisher (SA), Dawn Fardell, Member for Dubbo (NSW), Richard Torbay Member for Armidale (NSW), Peter Draper Member for Tamworth (NSW). Chris Foley Member for Maryborough (QLD), Dorothy Pratt Member for Nanango (QLD) Liz Cunningham Member for Gladstone (QLD) and Don Wing MLC, Member for Paterson (TAS).

The ICAN conference and web launch has received good media coverage. Most participants did radio and newspaper stories with their own local, regional or state media. The 10 Network gave brief pictorial coverage on the Saturday evening. The AAP wire service ran a story picked up by various radio and newspaper, including Sunday city newspapers. Peter Andren was interviewed across the new Charles Woolley radio show network on Monday 6 February.

The strongest and most widely read coverage came in Glen Milne's column in The Australian on Monday. Click [here](#) to see an article that sums up exactly what ICAN is about.

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