

Australians want their democracy to be fit for the ages

New research shows Australians are up for the challenge of rebooting the political system

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A discussion paper released today by the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) concludes Australians have an appetite for democratic renewal and substantial policy reform. Not only that, they broadly agree on the way forward.

The paper, *“What do Australians Want? Active and Effective Government Fit for the Ages”*, draws on a detailed survey of Australian attitudes to democracy and government. It is also informed by input from about 30 eminent Australians from diverse backgrounds who gathered in Melbourne last month for a special roundtable on democracy.

The survey reveals almost three-quarters of Australians think politics is fixated on short-term gains and not addressing long-term challenges. It shows Australians strongly back reforms such as a federal anti-corruption commission (77% support), a tougher code of conduct for MPs (79% support), putting citizens on parliamentary committees (68% support), fixed four-year parliamentary terms (58% support), giving public agencies more independence (55% support), and a constitutional convention (57% support).

The survey also showed most voters are willing to pay more tax in return for better services and improved infrastructure, and are highly sceptical of outsourced human services.

“It’s time to respond to a clear community desire to reform our democratic system and for fresh policies driven by better ideas, not ideology”, said CPD’s CEO, Travers McLeod. “Love won last week, as it should have, but the system lost. The painful and drawn out process of achieving marriage equality showed politicians underestimate Australians’ appetite for engaging in reform.”

“Our research shows Australians see democracy as a force for equality and would throw their support behind changes that get government and the economy working better for the community.”

“What’s clear from CPD’s research”, said CPD’s Chairperson, Terry Moran AC, “is that Australians think reinvigorating our democracy is a pressing and overdue task. This is about improving the way the system works and ensuring that the best contemporary policy ideas rise to the top.”

“Australians are hungry for democratic and political renewal,” said McLeod, “and are frustrated by the lack of an agreed vision and purpose for our country. The community can lead the way in finding agreement on new ideas to drive policies for Australia’s future. Our latest research points the way forward.”

“Australians want a rejuvenated public sector that plays an active and effective role in policy development and service delivery. They want business to invest in building shared, sustainable value. They care about the wealth of nature, not growth at all costs. They want stable democracy, but not a static one that refuses to change with the times. They want programs that work and are rigorously evaluated by government. Above all, Australians believe we can and must do better if democracy is to deliver for all.”

The discussion paper and attitudes research are the latest outcomes from a series of events and projects to mark CPD’s 10th anniversary. CPD partnered with Professor Glenn Withers AO from the Australian National University and Essential to replicate two previous studies on public attitudes to government. Professor Withers was the lead researcher on both these studies, and advised on the third study conducted exclusively for CPD by Essential in October 2017 (online survey based on 1,025 respondents).

Travers McLeod and Terry Moran AC are available for interview.

Full CPD paper: <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/discussion-paper-what-do-australians-want.pdf>

Details on CPD special roundtable: <https://cpd.org.au/2017/11/cpd-roundtable-australias-democracy-past-event/>

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