

# Increasing Independents

David Barr

For too long the Parliaments of Australia have been monopolised by the major parties.

But the tide is changing.

On current polling, the coming state election will continue the trend which is seeing a shrinking vote for the Liberal, Labor and National parties, while the vote for independents is on the rise.

People are disillusioned with the major parties because they are not reflecting the aspirations of their communities. Politicians are frequently seen to be more interested in protecting their parties than giving voice to local people's values and concerns.

Independents, on the other hand, are directly accountable to their community. Winning a parliamentary seat without the resources of a major party is no easy feat and can only be achieved by being highly responsive to an electorate's needs.

Once elected, an independent MP is free to judge each issue that comes before Parliament according to its merits. Independents are free to move amendments and introduce legislation without deferring to a party machine or its corporate donors.

In times of minority governments, the power of independents can be very great and has been used to make changes to Parliament that have made it more open and accountable. In the early 1990s,

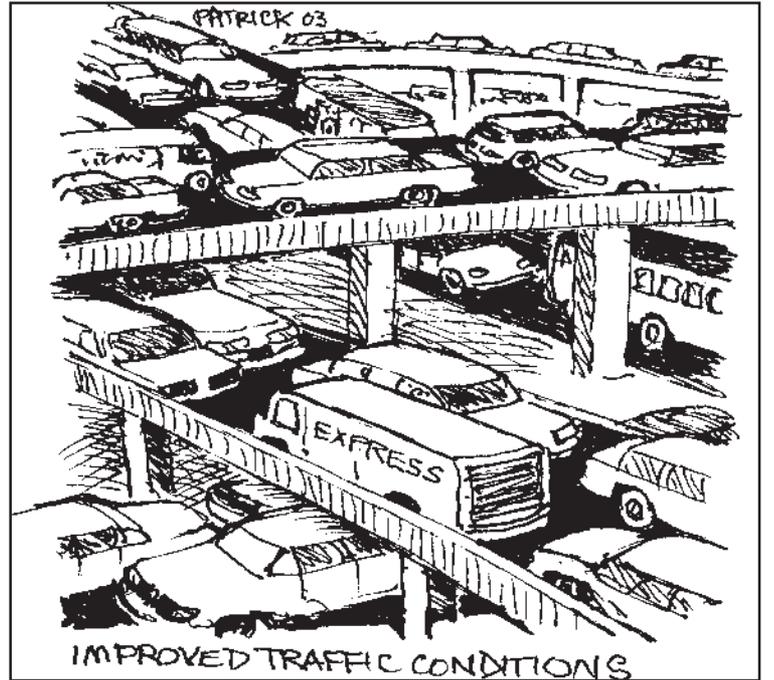
independents in the NSW Parliament were able to demand changes that led to fixed 4-year terms, strengthened committees and installed parliamentary oversight of cabinet appointments to important public positions like the Auditor-General, Ombudsman, and the Director of Public Prosecutions.

But it is not just on the floor of Parliament that independents have made a difference.

Being a good MP means being an effective advocate for your community when dealing with the bureaucracy. Too often, a government MP's party allegiance can make them reluctant to criticise a government department in case it embarrasses the Minister in charge. On the other hand, opposition MPs can be seen as simply playing politics and find it difficult to be effective.

In short, being independent means being able to put your community first and getting the best result for the electorate free from party constraints.

*Editors note: David Barr is MP for Manly*



## Growth crisis

Andrew Little

Sydney over the past few years has been absorbing 40% of Australia's population growth. At the current rate of migration into Sydney, each year in excess of 28,000 dwellings, equivalent to 3 suburbs, must be built just to maintain the status quo.

If this level of growth persists, Sydney as we know it will be irreversibly damaged. Already some councils in the Western Suburbs are complaining of the destruction of their areas. And increasing air pollution: due to the poor air circulation in the Sydney basin and the resultant photochemical smog, these areas have the highest incidence of asthma in Australia.

The excessive growth rate has put enormous pressure on our planning resources. Poor building compliance procedures, for example, have resulted in an estimated 30% of new buildings being defective. The Government had to intervene when insurers were forced to withdraw builders' warranty insurance.

Councils in the implementation of their Residential Strategies were not allowed to stage areas for release. Instead of Councils having control of the take up of these sites for development over a period of time, market forces determine the rate they are developed. For example, Sutherland's residential strategy provided for a population increase from 1996 to 2001 of 4,262, whereas the actual increase was 10,627 – roughly in line with

that expected from Sydney's current growth rate. Small wonder many councils found their 20-year residential strategy provisions were consumed in a few years. Had the true figures been presented at the time, it is doubtful there would have been community acceptance.

What is being done about the excessive population growth rate of Sydney at State and Federal levels? It would appear very little. The 2002-03 Migration Program, at between 100,000-110,000 places, will be some 12,000 places higher than the 2001-02 Program.

Very few councils are going to voluntarily promote urban consolidation of their areas to the levels demanded by current population growth. Thus the Liberals' proposal to eliminate SEPP 5 and SEPP 53 is no real answer, as these would need to be replaced to achieve a similar end – enforced urban consolidation!

SOS is the only party that has shown a strong commitment to correcting the deficiencies of 'urban consolidation' and reducing the growth rate of Sydney to sustainable levels.

*Editors note: Andrew Little is a Ku-ring-gai councillor.*

## Michele Adair

*...doing more for St. George*

What have the major parties really done for local communities? Independent candidate Michele Adair has proven herself as an able and effective champion.

Habit voting and desperately-busy lives allow Labor and the Liberals to be smug and indifferent to community needs. Their power invites corruption. Party rules crush democracy.

Parliamentary conduct is so bad that school children leave the chamber in disgust. Once home, most parents say in despair, "They're all the same". But that can change – it must! The solution is electing enough independents and smaller parties to bring about change.

Michele's track record is broad and effective. She is fighting for Oatley Park to be added to the heritage register and to save open space in Rockdale. Her action 15 years ago preserved old Kogarah homes from high density rezoning.

Last June she challenged every councillor in Hurstville, Kogarah, Rockdale and Sutherland to adopt ICAC's recommendations on political donations by developers. Not one Liberal or Labor councillor agreed.

As a founding member of the Georges River Community Bank committee, Michele is also very protective of local shopping villages. Small residential centres like Lugarno and Peakhurst need character plans. Transport and commercial hubs like Hurstville need integrated developments that comply with strict height and density guidelines.

Michele's not afraid to take a stand on sensitive issues. At the Lions Festival she circulated a petition against war in Iraq without the UN – months before Labor took the position. She supports the authority of living wills as an alternative to euthanasia, and opposes embryonic stem cell research without consent laws similar to those used in organ donation.

MPs confront broad and complex issues. Michele's principles, life, career and educational experience has been excellent preparation.

Visit [www.micheleadair.com](http://www.micheleadair.com) Phone 0412-706-123.



## Tracie Sonda

*Change can be achieved!*



"It's time for a change, and only Independents can make it happen" said Tracie.

"The major parties have pushed Sydney to its overcrowded and traffic-congested state. Cronulla electorate is a prime example of high-rise overdevelopment and absurdly inadequate public transport."

"I've worked with some success in Council to check the forces of developer-driven overdevelopment. I've also increased policing at trouble spots. And I'm into improvements in health and education."

"As an Independent, I'll carry more weight than a backbencher of a major party. As to preferences, I won't favour either major party."

## Clover Moore

*Independent Member for Bligh*

It's not surprising that developers are, by far, the largest donors to the major political parties.

Successive State Governments have made it easier to get development approval and degraded the protection provided by planning controls. Provisions in the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act for public input into the development process have become virtually meaningless.

Council development controls, often established in consultation with the community, now have no legal force or can be radically varied under a Government regulation ironically called "State Environmental Planning Policy 1" (SEPP 1).

The Government quietly dropped the original limit on SEPP 1 that required variations over ten per cent to be referred to the Department of



Planning for review. If a Council does reject a proposal, it can be referred to the Land and Environment Court where developers with deep pockets often have the upper hand.

The Government and Opposition have rejected my calls to reform this discredited development approval process. The recent inquiry into the Land and Environment Court essentially maintained the status quo. The ICAC "corruption proofing" inquiry resulting from the Rockdale scandal has not put any checks on development flexibility. Private certifiers, rather than public officials, can still sign off on new buildings, despite last year's inquiry into building quality.

With Government urban consolidation policies (fuelled by a property boom) pushing up Sydney residential densities, the quality of our life is an important election issue. Residential amenity standards must be protected and sustainable living environments promoted in the future.

## Protectors of Public Lands (PPL)

PPL is a recently formed coalition of community groups, environmental organisations and local councils, whose charter is to protect and preserve significant public lands in public ownership for present and future generations.

PPL insists that public lands belong to the people, and is credited with influencing the Carr Government to reverse its decision to sell off Callan Park, Hunters Hill High, Erskineville Public School and Erskineville Village Public Housing Estate.

For more information see the PPL page at the National Trust of Australia (NSW) website.