

Simon Holmes à Court
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2024 Manning Clark Lecture

The Politics of Energy Transition

Punishers and Straighteners

Thank you Manning Clark House for inviting me to address you this evening. It is an honour to stand at this lectern. Some hard acts to follow... imagine speaking after your own mum!

This being the first Manning Clark Lecture since the failure of the referendum on the Voice to Parliament, I wish to acknowledge that Manning himself identified that one of Australia's most profound moral failures was the dispossession, violence, and systemic discrimination faced by Indigenous Australians following colonisation.

Manning argued that the failure to properly acknowledge and address this injustice has had long-lasting consequences for Australian identity and social cohesion.

While a majority of Australians voted No in the referendum, I wonder if more of us had been exposed to a truer history of European settlement and its lasting impact on Indigenous Australians, might we have landed on a different result?

Manning spoke of two groups of Australian leaders... the punishers and straighteners and the enlargers.

The punishers and straighteners see our future as constrained by the chains of our British origins and look askance at any suggestion that we should break those bonds.

The enlargers see opportunity everywhere if only we allow ourselves to match imagination with courage.

Sadly, the punishers and straighteners outplayed the enlargers at the referendum.

I'm sure Manning would have been disappointed that 33 years after his passing, Australia still hasn't found a way for our constitution to acknowledge the 3000 generations of Australian history that came before.

Before going further, let me acknowledge the Ngunnawal (nuh-nuh-wol) and Ngambri (nam-bree) people, their elders and their ancestors on whose lands we gather. I extend my respect to any first nations people present today; we can only be in awe of the resilience of your culture.

Our Kodak moment

I'm here to talk about energy transition — the need, the opportunity, and the politics that will determine our success or failure.

Manning Clark recognised that Australia's phenomenal natural resources have been a fundamental force shaping our nation.

Thanks to this unique land, since the 19th Century, Australia has experienced one boom after another — first the gold rush, followed by copper and tin. Our farmers generated huge wealth from wool and wheat. And our land has kept giving: coal, iron ore, nickel, bauxite, uranium and gas.

Today, Australia is the [third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world, trailing only Russia and the US](#). When Australians scoffed at the UAE — famous as a petrostate — for hosting the UN's 28th annual climate conference in Dubai last year, we failed to acknowledge that [we extract nearly twice as much fossil fuels each year](#).

Coal and gas rank as our second and third biggest exports — making up a combined one quarter of our export income.

Today Australia faces a Kodak moment.

The phrase 'Kodak moment' was once a great marketing term for capturing the special moments in life to be shared later, but has since become associated with the Eastman Kodak Company's fall from market dominance to bankruptcy.

Kodak helped invent digital photography, but held on tightly to its film and processing businesses while the market rapidly transitioned to the better product.

Kodak had everything it needed — brand, technology and cash — to bring a product like Facebook or Instagram to market and to create a lucrative online world for sharing those Kodak moments.

It didn't of course, the world went by and Kodak filed for bankruptcy in 2012, the same year Facebook acquired Instagram.

In Australia's case, we have, for now, a robust fossil fuel export sector, but also a clear understanding that the fundamentals of that trade are deteriorating.

Our major coal and gas customers — Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan and India — are committed to phasing down and ultimately phasing out demand for these imports. But their voracious demand for energy won't subside. Within that there is great opportunity for Australia.

Right now we face a choice as a nation — are we going to have our own Kodak moment?

We can hold on to fossil fuels as tightly as Kodak held on to film, or we can pursue a future in which we increase our prosperity as a leader in global decarbonisation.

Australia's punishers and straighteners are looking in the rear view mirror, their gaze fixed firmly on the past.

Our enlargers are looking through the windscreen towards a richer, safer and cleaner Australia.

We can see an Australia that not only plays a major international role responding to the greatest challenge of our time — global heating — but one that prospers greatly by doing so.

This is Australia's moment to shine.

Science has shown us the direction. Policy turned us towards it and put us into first gear. Economics has put a foot on the accelerator.

We are moving, but not quickly enough. As environmentalist Bill McKibbin says, winning slowly is losing.

We're going to have to move up through the gears, and that's going to require more enlargers. We can't let the punishers and the straighteners slam us into reverse.

The science and the opportunity

First, the science.

Over hundreds of millions of years, natural processes sequestered thousands of gigatonnes of carbon deep underground. But over just a couple of hundred years we've dug it up, burnt it, and dumped 1.5 trillion tonnes of its waste into the air.

As Al Gore puts it, we've used the sky as an open sewer,

2024 marks 200 years since French mathematician and physicist Joseph Fourier discovered that atmospheric gases keep our planet warm, and 168 years since Eunice Foot proved that carbon dioxide is one of those gases.

We have known for decades that our burning of fossil fuels is heating our planet and the impact this will have on nature, security, food systems, health and the infrastructure upon which our civilisation depends.

We have known the hazards.

Our scientists knew, oil companies knew, and our politicians knew.

As far back as 1973, Senator Don Jessop — a South Australian optometrist who chaired the Senate Standing Committee on Science and the Environment — told parliament that "the silent pollutant, carbon dioxide, is increasing in the atmosphere and will cause us great concern in the future."

Jessop stressed the urgency of transitioning away from fossil fuels, and argued that Australia could be a global leader in clean energy.

Over just 200 years we have increased the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide by more than 50% — most of that in the 5 decades since Senator Jessop spoke so passionately.

To arrest warming and maintain a liveable climate, we need to stop burning the carbon under our feet. We've built a mighty civilisation on the back of Prometheus' gift, but now we need to swap fire for elections.

We need to replace coal and gas power stations with wind, solar, hydro and storage.

And we need to electrify everything.

We need to replace combustion vehicles with EVs.

We need to stop using gas in our homes and instead use electricity for heating, cooling and cooking.

We need industry to replace gas with electrical processes wherever possible.

The majority of these conversions are already *entirely* possible and economic.

It will be more difficult to decarbonise aviation, shipping and some industrial processes. For these we need to use 'green' electricity to make 'green' hydrogen and from that 'green' molecules such as ammonia or methanol.

Between green electrons and green molecules we *can* wean ourselves off fossil fuels.

This is what we mean when we speak of energy transition.

Once again the lucky country

Thankfully, Australia is in a better position than almost any country for this transition.

When Donald Horne dubbed Australia "The Lucky Country" it was a sharp critique that our massive natural wealth and isolation had insulated us from the hardships endured by other nations, but had kept us in a state of arrested development.

Horne was warning us that one day our luck might just run out.

But our lucky streak continues — half the lithium produced in the world comes from Australia. We are the only country that has all the minerals required to make the batteries in high demand for electrifying cars and firming the world's renewables for when the wind don't blow and the sun don't shine.

We have phenomenal reserves of all of the minerals required for the energy transition — not just lithium but copper, cobalt, nickel, magnesium, silicon and rare-earths... and also the iron ore and bauxite needed to produce steel and aluminium.

But it's not just minerals.

As Dorothea Mackellar observed, we live in a wide brown land — a sunburnt country — under a pitiless blue sky. This vast, mineral-rich landscape is blessed with the highest per-capita wind and solar resources in the developed world.

This is important because while it is relatively cheap to move energy in the form of fossil fuels between continents, it is much more expensive to move green energy.

In the current world we ship coal and gas to smelters and furnaces overseas.

In a decarbonising world the smelters and furnaces will come to us.

Thanks to our phenomenal natural advantages we can produce far more energy than we need and at a lower cost than most countries. Instead of just shipping off raw minerals, we can use our energy advantage to process minerals and add value in Australia.

Our previous booms have endowed us with the capabilities, institutions and access to capital required to develop this new economy.

In short, in a decarbonising world, Australia is poised to be a clean energy superpower.

Australia has the highest per capita emissions of any major country — and when you factor in our fossil exports, we are responsible for 4.5% of global emissions, placing us 5th in the world.

Thanks to Australia's advantages it will be easier for us than most to slash our emissions, and we're well placed to help others with theirs.

The Superpower Institute, of which I'm proud to be associated, finds that by exploiting our competitive advantages, Australia could reduce global emissions by around 8%.

Not only can Australia make a significant dent on global emissions, we'll be paid handsomely for doing so.

We have a combination of success factors like no other country — but our advantages shrink if others leap ahead. The USA's so-called Inflation Reduction Act is

an ambitious industrial policy attracting capital away from Australia. Meanwhile, developers are scouting for superpower projects throughout South America and North Africa.

As Australian income from fossil fuel exports inevitably declines, this superpower opportunity is our best chance of maintaining — and growing — our nation's good fortunes.

Unfortunately this vision is not shared by all. The Coalition is actively campaigning against this energy transition, particularly in Queensland, despite the sunshine state standing to attract so much of the investment in this big future.

Labor is more willing to look at the opportunities ahead — but lacks the requisite courage.

How did we get to this point?

From pragmatism to denial

The Federal Coalition has been on quite a journey over the past 35 years.

In 1990, the Liberal Party under Andrew Peacock, took a policy to the election to cut carbon emissions by 20% by the year 2000. This was probably the party's high point on climate, and surprisingly, the Nationals backed them in.

Later, Prime Minister John Howard legislated the Renewable Energy Target. Howard would later confess that he was agnostic on the climate science, but ever the pragmatist, he knew how to read the public mood.

That's not to say his RET was ambitious. The target — to increase renewable share of electricity by just 2 percentage points over a decade — was met years early, and Howard ignored industry pleas and expert advice to increase the target.

As the 2007 election approached, Howard — again the pragmatist — couldn't ignore the public mood — no doubt influenced by the millennium drought and Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* — and went to the election pledging a price on carbon.

While it was almost too much for some in Howard's party room, it was evidently not enough for the voting public.

Kevin '07 had campaigned on climate change like he meant it, and was rewarded with the keys to the lodge.

Under Malcolm Turnbull, the Liberal opposition cooperated with Rudd's on climate. But while Howard had been able to keep the right flank of his party in check, they didn't trust Turnbull, never accepting him as a fellow traveller.

In the face of growing discontent, Turnbull proclaimed "I will not lead a party that is not as committed to effective action on climate change as I am".

Very quickly it became clear that many in his party room were indeed not as committed as he was, and shortly afterwards Turnbull lost the leadership by just one vote.

And thus began the next phase of the Coalition's climate stance — opportunistic denialism.

Abbott brought a new style of politics. The political pugilism wasn't new — Keating too had belittled his opponents to great effect — but where Keating employed wit, Abbott dumbed it down for the politically disengaged.

Abbott and his strategist Credlin found great power in relentlessly opposing everything the government stood for.

Climate science denial wasn't new, but where Howard had kept it in check, lest it alienate voters, Abbott employed it mercilessly to undermine the government.

Australia had once enjoyed a kind of bipartisanship on decarbonisation — yes, a fragile and halfhearted bipartisanship — but Abbott's style was to give no ground, to oppose everything, to smash things up.

In this environment Labor blinked, deposed its leader, and took a beating at the 2010 federal election. Prime Minister Gillard found herself leading a minority government, with a pro-climate crossbench of Greens and Independents.

Despite civil war within Labor, the minority government laid the foundations of the transition — a price on carbon, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

Meanwhile Abbott and his sidekick Barnaby Joyce ran a relentless campaign to undermine the government. Unsurprisingly, their predictions of a \$100 lamb roast and the wipeout of Whyalla never eventuated.

Labor's comprehensive loss at the 2013 election was pinned on their strong support of climate action, yet the real causes were Labor party dysfunction, Abbott's devastatingly effective style of opposition and the unwavering support of the Liberal Party's media arm, News Corp.

Prime Minister Abbott moved in like a wrecking ball. The very first order of business was to abolish the Climate Commission. He tried and failed to kill ARENA and the CEFC. He gave the RET a big haircut and on 17 July 2014 Abbott delivered on his promise to 'axe the tax' when Australia became the first country in the world to remove a price on carbon.

The roadmap

On 28 September 2016 in a once-in-50-years storm, tornadoes ripped through South Australia tearing up transmission towers and set off a cascading series of events that ended in a statewide blackout.

Despite expert advice to the contrary, the Coalition government pointed the blame squarely at renewables, alleging that South Australia went too hard, too fast into renewables. Chief Scientist Alan Finkel was commissioned to review Australia's energy transition.

The Finkel Review found — to the government's great surprise — that the prescription was not less renewable energy, but indeed much more.

Finkel proposed a Clean Energy Target to facilitate the deployment of the necessary generation. The idea lasted only days before Coalition backbenchers ensured the proposal was taken out back and shot.

Along with more generation and storage, Finkel stressed the need for better planning, kicking off a major biennial modelling exercise by the Australian Energy Market Operator called the Integrated System Plan.

The ISP is an extraordinary body of work. It's a road map showing, with an unprecedented level of rigour, that the optimal path forward for Australia is a

continued phase out of coal, replaced by wind and solar, firmed with storage and backed up with a small amount of gas.

Now in its fourth edition, there are just two types of energy commentators in Australia — those who understand the ISP, and those who are blind to its profound implications.

We're not at the beginning

Despite the fact that more than one-third of Australians sleep under a solar panel, many would be forgiven for thinking that we're at the beginning of the energy transition.

The naysayers and deniers paint a picture that we are at a crossroads — turn left to a renewable future, go straight ahead to continue with coal and gas, turn right for nuclear.

The truth is, John Howard started that left turn when he legislated the RET. We were slow to get going, but the acceleration has been impressive:

12 years ago only 10% of our power came from renewable energy — we're now at 38%.

In the main ISP scenario, in 12 years Australia's main grid is projected to exceed 95% renewables.

In the last 6 years, we've added 46 TWh of annual renewable energy generation to the grid. For those who like to think in such terms, this is the equivalent of building 6 nuclear power stations in 6 years. And most of this was during a period with a federal government hostile to renewables.

Only Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden are currently adding renewables faster than Australia, and no other country generates more solar power per capita than Australia.

Today South Australia generates twice as much renewable energy as it did in 2016 and by 2027 the state is expected to reach 100% net renewables.

And while renewables have been ramping up, storage is also a huge success story.

After a famous wager between Mike Cannon Brookes and Elon Musk, what was then the world's largest lithium-ion battery silently roared into life in South Australia in November 2017.

It took 6 years — to 2022 — to reach a total of one gigawatt hour of storage on the network, about 8 times as much as that first big battery.

Last year we installed another gigawatt hour. This year we'll install three GWh and developers are already building an additional 10 GWh to be delivered in 2025.

We are among the world leaders in transforming our grid with renewable energy — we are playing to our strengths.

Delay is the new denial

So has the Coalition come around? Is it excited by Australia's progress?

Unfortunately not... as Professor Michael Mann, a leading climate scientist, has noted: climate denial has morphed into climate delay.

A decade ago, rightwing politicians, think tanks and media leant into climate denial — casting doubt on the science of climate change, and undermining the scientists.

Fast forward to today and the public's understanding of the science — and their lived experience of a changing climate — have made denial no longer acceptable.

Professor Mann talks of the tools of **delay**... all "D" words:

- **downplaying** the problem.
- **deflecting** to secondary concerns.
- Fomenting **division** among those who want action.
- **deferring** action with future fantasy solutions like geoengineering, carbon capture and storage and small modular reactors.

These lead to **defeatism** — the feeling that it's too late — as well as **disengagement**. All sap the momentum to **double down** on climate action.

In Australia we're seeing the think tanks of the punishers and straighteners systematically undermine confidence in the CSIRO and AEMO, leading Peter Dutton to claim that these trusted institutions have been "discredited".

We're seeing campaigners make bogus claims that offshore wind farms kill whales and solar farms threaten food security.

Unfortunately the Coalition laps it up.

In 2011, then Energy Minister Angus Taylor urged his colleagues to support the passage of a bill to enable the development of the offshore wind industry that would, quote:

“create jobs, strengthen our economy, and facilitate a more affordable and secure energy system.”

The current Shadow Minister, Ted O'Brien, now speaks at rallies opposing offshore wind.

When in state government Andrew Constance was a strong supporter of renewables and warned against 'vocal minorities' undermining the transition, but now as The Liberal candidate for Gilmore, he has joined those same vocal minorities.

Coalition politicians would have us believe that renewables don't work. The problem for them is that renewables are working — during their 9 years in power, despite efforts to slow down the transition, renewable generation increased by 250%.

Over the same period the costs of renewables plummeted. As the International Energy Agency has reported, solar is now the cheapest form of electricity in history.

The gap between the Coalition's world view and reality widens with every solar panel and wind turbine installed.

A radioactive dead cat

Against this backdrop, the Coalition has introduced a debate over nuclear energy.

Consideration of nuclear power is not new. The Gorton government started construction of our first nuclear power station in Jervis Bay in 1969 but in 1971 McMahon's government killed it off.

Nothing significant happened in nuclear power in the 27 years until John Howard banned the energy source in 1998. During their next 18 years in Federal government, the Coalition left the ban in place.

So why has Dutton put nuclear back on the agenda?

Partly it's a false solution — just like CCS and “clean” coal before it — it delays the energy transition. It's a distraction that buys the coal and gas sectors a little time while we engage in pointless debates.

But there's another reason — what political analysts call a “dead cat”. When politicians want to shift your attention, one solution is to throw a metaphorical dead cat on the table. You'll drop the current topic and ask why there's a dead cat.

Let's first consider the March 2023 by-election in the outer Melbourne seat of Aston. The Liberals should have retained the seat... not since 1920 had an opposition lost a seat to Government at a by-election.

When members of the party would have been questioning his strategy to forgo inner city 'Teal' seats, and focus on taking outer-suburban battler seats off Labor, he had to act.

His bold 'captain's call' to oppose the Voice was the “dead cat”.

In that moment, the referendum was as good as lost. No referendum has ever passed when opposed by the leader of the opposition.

A year later came the Dunkley by-election — another one of the outer suburban seats Dutton needed to win.

This time Labor's honeymoon was well and truly over. After the referendum loss, a painful cost of living squeeze with 12 interest rate rises in a row, the Libs would surely be competitive.

Despite a raft of tailwinds, including a [\\$300,000 campaign run against Labor by the right wing campaign group Advance](#), the Libs lost yet another by-election.

Dutton again knew what to do. Two days after the by-election he announced the Coalition would take a bold nuclear policy to the election.

Another dead cat thrown onto the table. Another captain's call, again cutting off discussion about the failure of the leader's strategy.

While we could debate the Voice for the next 100 years and sadly get nowhere, Dutton's nuclear plan faces strong economic and technical barriers that cannot survive contact with reality.

Maybe we have got to the place in the enlightenment project where there really are facts and alternative facts — but I don't think we're yet at a point where you can fool most of the people all of the time.

The strong man

If we ever see nuclear power in Australia, it won't be under Dutton — but in the meantime it gives Dutton a chance to show that he's bold — and some voters really like boldness.

When Dutton announced the proposed sites for his nuclear reactors, 3 challenges were put to him:

- What if communities are opposed?
- What about state legislation banning nuclear?
- What if the owners of proposed sites don't want to sell?

Dutton gave “strongman” responses:

- If communities oppose, they're going to have to abide by the national interest.
- For the states where nuclear is banned, the Commonwealth will exercise its powers.
- If a site owner refuses to sell, there's always compulsory acquisition.

All of this would be messy and none of it will happen... but Dutton gets to show us he means business.

It reminds me of Donald Trump committing to build a big beautiful wall across the entire US-Mexico border — and make Mexico pay for it. It showed Trump is a tough guy. That he'll do hard things and at no cost to you.

Interestingly, both major parties appear to be relishing the nuclear debate.

The Coalition has found an energy policy — or rather policy shaped object — that, to the disengaged voter, sounds like a solution.

The public have seen their electricity bills going up and they are hungry for simple solutions to complex problems.

The Coalition wants them to believe that adding the most expensive form of generation some decades from now will help address today's cost of living crisis. It can't and it won't.

For its part, Labor believes the Coalition has made a huge strategic mistake, and wants the Coalition to speak about nuclear every day until the election.

One of the Coalition's arguments would have driven Manning mad:

Dozens of other countries have nuclear power, so why shouldn't we?

The punishers and straighteners turn their back on our bounteous gifts, and instead look abroad for a country to copy. It's the energy equivalent of the cultural cringe.

Our big mistake

We can blame the politicians, but I believe that many fighting for the transition have made one big mistake.

We have allowed the energy transition to sound hard.

We have talked about energy transition as if it's going to be a great disruption.

We've allowed the energy transition to be framed as optional, expensive and a sacrifice.

I take issue with the experts who claim that this will be our most difficult transition ever.

The reality is that for most Australians the energy transition will pass largely unnoticed.

Cars, planes, radio, television, personal computers, the internet, mobile phones and AI — just to name a few of the transitions of the last century — have all impacted our lives more and faster than the energy transition will.

Right now not even half a percent of Australians work to supply the energy for our domestic and export sectors. In 2050, if we grow our economy to be a clean energy superpower, maybe it'll be as high as 2%.

As our customers phase down demand for our fossil fuels, there will be job losses. The disruption will be far less and far slower than the collapse of our car and textile industries, but there's absolutely no reason we can't look after every affected worker.

Few urban Australians — and that's 90% of us — will notice any changes. When you flip the switch, the lights will turn on. When you turn the hot water tap, hot water will come out. If you drive a car, you'll drive a better car — one with better torque, less noise and no need to be regularly gouged at the smelly bowser.

You will use energy more efficiently, and it'll cost less than the alternative.

Some parts of the economy will move faster than others, but for most people the changes will be imperceptibly slow.

Most rural and regional Australians will likewise be unaffected by the energy transition. There'll be wind and solar farms dotted here and there — just as there are now. And some areas — those with exceptional wind or solar resources — will attract significant development.

In many ways it will be like mining. There are communities around the country oriented around significant mines, but the vast majority of Australians had no direct interaction with the mining boom.

Most Australians have never visited or worked in a mine and rarely give the sector any thought. The same will be true for our superpower industries and the communities built around them.

Maybe some will be concerned that I'm not projecting a sense of urgency. Believe me, I feel it, acutely. We're now at the position where the transition is inevitable, it's just a matter of speed.

Audrey Zibelman, the CEO of the AEMO who brought us the first ISP, used to say that we know where we are, and we know where we're going — but there are two ways to get there: a managed transition or a chaotic disruption. If the path is too slow, or too chaotic, people will get hurt.

To thread the needle, we need our governments to create the regulations and incentives to ensure this transition happens at pace, protects the vulnerable and captures the significant upsides for our nation.

The old politics is broken

In a recent interview, Paul Keating described leadership as founded on imagination and matched with courage. He spoke of imagination coming from the ‘bubbling cauldron’ inside us, which gave what he called ‘the rise’ to go beyond the ordinary.

But the old parties are stuck in the doldrums of the ordinary — which helps explain why one-third of Australians have deserted them over recent decades.

Instead of igniting their bubbling cauldron, every day the Liberal Party inhales bad advice from News Corp commentators, encouraging them to move further and further to denial. Peta Credlin — the architect of Abbott’s electoral win but also of his failed Prime Ministership — preaches on Sky News that Morrison lost the election because he was “too woke”. Many MPs and the dwindling Liberal membership lap it up and follow the advice.

Peacock’s commitment to climate action was a reflection of what the Liberal party once was, Howard’s a politically pragmatic response to the public consciousness.

Morrison’s contemptuous failure to “hold a hose, mate” during the apocalyptic bushfires of 2019-20 mirrored his inaction on climate during his almost four years in office.

Dutton’s nuclear distraction and opposition to Australia’s Paris Commitments show a leader even more dismissive of climate action and of our natural advantages than any of his predecessors.

Although they sit in different party rooms and lead different parties, both Dutton and Littleproud are members of Queensland’s Liberal National Party.

There are now more parliamentary members of the Queensland LNP than there are Liberal MPs and Senators from NSW and Victoria. The broad church is long gone, the Liberal Party of Menzies is long dead.

For its part, Labor has made plodding progress on climate — stronger targets, fuel efficiency standards, an embryonic clean industry policy and an investment framework to help usher in the necessary investment in renewables and storage.

But on the flipside, Minister Plibersek gives environmental approval to coal and gas projects and the government subsidises fossil fuel exploration.

The government thumbs its nose at the message from the International Energy Agency and IPCC that we cannot open any more coal, oil or gas projects if we are to keep warming to 1.5 degrees.

Resource Minister King's Future Gas Strategy — a plan for the expansion of the gas industry to 2050 and beyond — demonstrates Western Australia's power over this government.

Gas is king in WA. The state is totally captured by the industry — gas sponsors their arts, gas sponsors their sports and gas sponsors their politicians. Former Ministers and Premiers go to work for the industry, and the proprietor of the town's only big newspaper has big gas interests.

Labor holds nine seats in WA — having won four at the election, aided by the halo of now-departed premier Mark McGowan.

A Labor majority runs through WA — the loss of any seat in WA will push the party towards minority. This explains a good deal of Labor's timidity around gas and gambling reform.

Neither party wants to wrestle with our export emissions. On the contrary, Australia often plays an unconstructive role in global negotiations in order to protect our trade in coal and gas.

It's abundantly clear that neither the Coalition nor Labor will spontaneously step up to the superpower challenge.

One wants to go backwards, and the other is too timid to get us out of first gear.

We need a new form of politics. We must take it upon ourselves to find 'the rise' needed to recast Australia's economy.

A new hope

For many in the climate movement, the 2019 election was supposed to be the climate election. But it wasn't to be.

On election night a victorious Scott Morrison stood before the nation and proclaimed "I have always believed in miracles". Victory was more likely due to a string of Labor missteps and Clive Palmer's \$94m advertising blitz.

In 2022 we finally got the climate election we'd hoped for, and the most fundamental realignment of Australian politics in a generation. As well as losing 10 seats to Labor, the Liberal Party lost six of its most prized seats to the community independents along with another two to the Greens.

The community independents — labelled the "teals" by the media — tapped into the zeitgeist with a commitment to :

- a science based response to climate change
- restoring integrity to politics
- safety and respect for women.

Personally, I have never believed in miracles.

Credit for the success of the independents goes to the tens of thousands of Australians — most of whom were new to politics — who shared the common values, felt the thrill of possibility, worked hard and loved the journey.

They were assisted by Climate 200, the 11,200 person strong crowdfunding group I convened, but helped even more by Howard, Abbott and Morrison whose collective legacy was a vacuum ready to be filled by a hopeful, centrist movement.

Moreover the independents were helped by Zali Steggall and Helen Haines who struck a chord with Australians through the 46th parliament. Without Steggall's relentless pursuit of action on climate and Haines' dogged advocacy for a national integrity commission neither climate nor integrity would have been issues on which the last election was fought.

Together the independents have shown us a hint of a new kind of politics.

Unencumbered by the weight of party allegiances, uncompromised by the ugly process of advancement through the ranks, each independent has given their community a genuine voice in Canberra.

The independents take expert, evidence-based advice and put issues on the agenda. They bring new ideas. They hold the government to account, but instead of reflexively opposing everything as the Opposition does, they push the government to be better.

Shortly before he died, Malcolm Fraser was helping a small working group develop a plan for a new political party — I was privileged to attend a few meetings. In his post-parliamentary career he had become friends with Barry Jones. Barry suggested that the new party be called the Courage Party.

The Courage Party never eventuated, but now we have something better I think — true independents with courage.

Instead of doing the easy thing and sticking to careers they loved and excelled in — they did something hard and uncomfortable and answered the call of their communities.

Each connected their community's imagination with courage, and took it all the way to Parliament House.

This all happened in the context of a changing electoral landscape. For the first time in decades Baby Boomers are no longer dominant.

In 2013 Boomers made up 54% of voters, outnumbering Millennials and Gen Z by 2-to-1. Within one electoral cycle the ratio will be reversed.

Only 52% of the younger cohort reports any party loyalty, compared with 85% of Boomers.

The younger cohort is frustrated — no, angry — that it is no longer realistic to aspire to home ownership, angry to be carrying education debts through life, angry that older generations are leaving them with a damaged planet.

The demographics of 21st century Australia and the consequent fracturing of traditional party support make it more likely than not that the crossbench will grow.

Smart independents, drawing on experts and evidence, beyond the reach of vested interests, are the enlargers we need to ensure the government does its part to secure our superpower future.

The time is now

As I stated earlier, Australia is facing its own Kodak moment.

Kodak was eventually run out of business by the technology it helped invent.

It'd be ironic if Australia, which played a major role in the development of solar photovoltaics, suffered a similar fate. But there's a very real risk that the punishers and straighteners will have us turn our back on our natural advantages, leading to our own Kodak moment.

Alternatively, with a supermajority of enlargers, we can seize the superpower opportunity, and with it great prosperity.

Australia can graduate from a 'dig it up and ship it out' quarry to a leader in the global transition to clean energy. Our vast array of minerals-in-high-demand processed with our low-cost clean energy can secure prosperity for generations of Australians.

An exciting future beckons. The urgency of the transition propels us forward, and with our ingenuity, resources and the new political landscape, we have everything we need to grasp this opportunity.

If we do so, we'll not only be doing our fair share of securing a safe climate, we'll be helping others to do theirs while enriching the lives of Australians for generations to come.

If there was ever a time for enlargers, that time is now.