

The Australian Greens

Response to Australian Student Christian Movement: October 2007

What is your vision for how government can best benefit the poor?

Australia as a nation is experiencing unprecedented prosperity and we should be sharing our resources, addressing disadvantage and investing in the future by building up our communities and giving everyone a 'fair go'.

The Australian Greens have been outspoken about the growing disadvantage within our community and the failure of short-sightedness in social and economic terms. The way we treat those most disadvantaged in our society goes directly to the values that we hold. It can say a lot about how we define ourselves as human beings and what we are doing to realise the kind of society we wish to live in. We believe as a nation we are in many ways missing the opportunity to make the most of these good times because we are not investing in improving the health, education and living standards of all our citizens. We need to look at how we build, facilitate and support communities and 'social cohesion' as a way of helping to address disadvantage.

We firmly believe that solutions must address the multiple underlying causes of disadvantage, that addressing just one won't help in the long term. That short term fixes don't work, that long term commitment and funding beyond election cycles is needed.

The Australian Greens recognise Australia is facing a housing affordability crisis. The lack of affordable housing including rentals, particularly for people on low incomes, represents a serious market failure as well as policy failure by federal and state governments. There are no simple answers to addressing Australia's housing crisis. Federal, State and local governments all have a role in the housing market, and better coordination together with a comprehensive policy approach is vital to effectively address these issues. The Greens support policies to ensure subsidies and concessions for the provision of private rental accommodation are targeted at affordable housing for low-income households and that there is significantly increased investment in public and community housing and emergency accommodation.

The Australian Greens have long been calling for a national strategy to address poverty in Australia. We support a national poverty strategy that includes better research into poverty, increased income support and a simpler and fairer social security system. There also needs to be more emphasis on providing opportunities for job seekers through education, training and real job creation.

How do you intend to address global poverty? Will you be increasing Australia's aid budget to at least 0.7% of GDP?

The Greens policy commits to increasing our overseas aid budget to 0.7% of GNP by 2010 as recommended by the United Nations, directed to the poorest, which often include women, with a focus on clean water and sanitation, education and high quality accessible health services, including sexual and reproductive health services.

How do you propose to support humanitarian entrants to Australia, including those who arrive informally to seek asylum?

Greens Senators will work to end mandatory detention and have asylum seekers claims assessed while they live in the community. We will also work to end offshore processing and temporary protection visas. We believe that refugees need to be treated with dignity in an open and accountable humanitarian visa process.

How do you intend to address the crisis in accommodation for homeless and low-income Australians? What is your national anti-poverty strategy?

The Greens support increased provision of emergency accommodation and transitional housing for people in need (including women and children affected by family violence, people experiencing homelessness, refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, and people released from detention) with sufficient exit options to long term housing. There needs to be greater diversity in housing to meet the accessibility needs of disadvantaged groups and improved legal security of tenure and reduced discrimination.

The Greens have called for a National Anti-Poverty Strategy. We support developing and implementing a plan to eradicate poverty in Australia, and ensuring social welfare outcomes are evaluated against public policy initiatives.

We support:

- Increasing the aged pension by \$60 a fortnight
- Increasing disability support payments, services and assistance to family carers
- Simplifying pensions and allowances to provide a universal guaranteed adequate income scheme.

How will you ensure low-income earners are supported through the tax and welfare system? Will you be introducing a less punitive welfare system?

The Australian Greens believe in an equitable taxation system that generates the revenue necessary to fund public services at the appropriate level of government. We believe in reducing inequities in the current personal income tax system including by reducing tax breaks for high income earners and eliminating high rates of effective marginal taxation for those on welfare benefits, among other measures. In general, we believe that progressive taxes such as income taxes are preferable to regressive forms of taxation such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

The Greens would remove the punitive assessment and work requirement levels and job capacity assessments introduced in the Welfare to Work Act 2005 whilst ensuring sufficient places for all people seeking training.

Our policy commits to restoring the Disability Support Pension eligibility to the pre-July 2006 criteria as a minimum.

Our Welfare policy seeks reform of the social security system to ensure an adequate income for all. This would include increasing Disability Support Pension payments to adequately cover medical, transport, equipment and accommodation costs.

The Greens want to provide meaningful employment and training opportunities which take into account the specific needs of people with disability, including mental illness.

How does your industrial relations policy protect the powerless, support family life and ensure adequate income for all?

The Australian Greens are committed to protecting and enhancing workplace conditions. We will vote to abolish Work Choices and replace it with a fair and equitable industrial relations system that protects the wages and conditions of Australian workers.

The Greens commit to protecting workplace conditions by expanding the safety net of minimum conditions, abolishing AWAs and not supporting any form of individual agreement that can override awards or collective agreements, restoring unfair dismissal laws for all employees and restoring the powers of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to ensure fair minimum wage increases.

The Greens support laws and policies which enable Australian families to lead balanced lives, in caring and friendly communities. We believe this can be advanced by paid parental leave, flexible working hours, affordable and high quality childcare and fairer industrial relations and welfare systems.

What policies do **you** have to support the development of indigenous Australians, including closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians' health and well-being?

The Australian Greens strongly believe that redress is needed for past and present injustices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and continue to call for a treaty that would enshrine recognition of prior occupation in the Australian Constitution. We believe saying 'sorry' is necessary but not sufficient, without reparations to right these wrongs.

We are committed to the call for equality of access to essential services within a decade, and equality of outcomes on all major indicators of health, education and opportunities within a generation (25 years). This will require a major investment in both community and mainstream services. In doing so, we are supporting the calls of many leading Australians to make the health of today's generation of Aboriginal children a priority and use this as a focus around which to improve the opportunities and the well-being of the whole community.

We believe there should be an urgent investment to reduce the gap in life expectancy and rates of chronic disease within a generation as part of a national Indigenous health strategy (a commitment of \$500M/yr).

What is your party's policy response to student poverty and high levels of debt?

The Greens oppose all fees for tuition in Australian public universities for domestic students. Full fee degrees are particularly harmful to equity and accessibility and must be abolished immediately.

The Australian Greens will abolish fees for educational services at public universities for Australian students and forgive HECS debts and FEE-HELP debt incurred at public universities.

The Greens want to see all students financially supported to attend to their studies during term time without having to find paid work. Our policy endorses the introduction of a living allowance set at a level which would allow a reasonable standard of living during term time. The Greens will provide a means tested living allowance for all full-time students.

The Greens support the provision of a text book subsidy and in particular measures to ensure that those students who face particularly high text book bills are not unfairly disadvantaged.

In a higher education setting availability of childcare services is often essential to ensure accessibility for students with childcare responsibilities. The Greens support for adequate funding for student organisations is envisaged to include funding to provide childcare facilities on all campuses.

What is your plan to reduce Australia's negative environmental impacts?

Protecting our environment and conserving the diversity of life are essential for the wellbeing of all life on Earth. Habitat loss and fragmentation, together with the spread of invasive species, pose serious threats. Loss of this biodiversity makes our ecosystems less resilient to climate change.

The Greens have a long-term commitment to protecting our environment. We take a comprehensive approach to conservation that recognises the interconnectedness of land and marine ecosystems.

The Greens will:

- End broad-scale land-clearing and clearing of remnant vegetation
- Fund and enforce recovery plans for threatened and endangered species
- Ensure a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas
- Support landowners to protect and restore nature conservation values on their land
- End the logging of old growth and high conservation value forests
- Introduce an Oceans Act to ensure the sustainable use of our marine and coastal resources
- Support a comprehensive international ban on commercial and “scientific” whaling.

The Greens have recognised that climate change is serious and urgent for more than a decade, but governments and industry are yet to take real action. If global warming of 2°C above pre-industrial levels occurs the impacts will be too severe and the risks of runaway climate change too great. Urgent action to stop the growth in greenhouse gas emissions must start now. The Greens recognise that energy efficiency and renewable energy options present huge opportunities to create new jobs and export dollars in clean technologies.

The Greens are the only parliamentary party opposed to all aspects of the nuclear industry. Nuclear power is directly linked to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Future generations must not be burdened with its toxic waste for which there is no safe disposal. When renewable energy and energy efficiency can reduce emissions faster and cheaper, nuclear power is just a dangerous distraction. The Greens will end the mining and export of uranium and oppose the

establishment of nuclear power plants, nuclear fuel processing, enrichment facilities and radioactive waste dumps.

The Greens will:

- Base all climate policy on constraining global warming to less than 2°C
- Introduce binding, science-based targets to reduce emissions by 30% below 1990 levels by 2020 and 80% by 2050
- Put a price on carbon
- Introduce energy efficiency targets and standards for appliances, buildings and infrastructure
- Significantly increase renewable energy production by boosting the current 2% target to 15% of our electricity by 2012 and 25% by 2020
- Provide a long-term price guarantee for renewably produced electricity
- Redirect massive subsidies for fossil fuels to renewable energy and energy efficiency
- Plan to help coal communities move to sustainable industries as coal use and exports are phased out
- End logging of our old growth and high conservation value forest carbon stores
- Ratify the Kyoto Protocol, and lead the negotiation of a strong, legally binding second phase.

How will you ensure universal access to high-quality education and health care?

The Greens believe that a strong public education system is the key to creating a fair, successful and cohesive society. Everyone has the right to free, high-quality public education and training.

The Greens will:

- Increase funding for all levels of public education, including TAFE and university
- Fund at least two years of public preschool education for all Australian children
- Freeze current private school funding and review current inequitable arrangements to prioritise public education.

The Greens believe everyone has the right to timely, high quality health care.

The fairest and most efficient way to achieve this is through a strong and well-resourced public health system. We would abolish the private health insurance rebate and redirect funds to the public health system, including public hospitals. The Greens support Medicare as a universal health insurance scheme funded from progressive taxation.

We would introduce and fully fund a Commonwealth Dental scheme for low income earners and their families to provide essential dental care and a full dental examination every two years and adopt mechanisms to increase access to primary dental services through Medicare (Denticare).

What is your position regarding the loss of civil rights brought about by recent anti-terrorism legislation?

Substantial legislative changes are needed to reaffirm Australia's commitment to universal human rights and the rule of law. The 'war on terror' has undermined the civil rights of all Australians. The Greens oppose laws that allow people to be detained indefinitely. The Greens will replace Australia's 'counter-terrorism' laws, with laws that respect universal human rights and repeal sedition laws.

How do you intend to work for peace, especially in Iraq and in our region?

The Greens believe that global governance is essential to meet the needs of global peace and security, justice, human rights, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. We call for a renewed commitment by Australia to multilateralism as the means of addressing world problems.

Genuine security rests on cooperation, fair economic and social development, environmental sustainability, and respect for human rights, rather than on military capabilities. The Greens hold that non-violent conflict management is the most effective means of promoting peace and security in the international arena.

The Greens would push for extensive structural reform to democratise the United Nations (UN) and work for a stronger UN capable of dealing with threats to international peace and security.

The Greens support the establishment, by the UN, of an international crisis prevention and response centre to address threats from terrorism and other conflicts, to provide rapid response peacekeeping forces, and to rapidly respond to humanitarian crises.

The Greens believe Australia can play a positive role in making Iraq safer by removing its troops. There should be an immediate end to the occupation of Iraq and the expropriation of its resources.

As Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said earlier this year: "The lesson we should be learning in Iraq is that we cannot impose western style peace and stability through the barrel of a gun, in fact heavy handed military operations create rather than cure an environment of violence.

"The Greens continue to call for the withdrawal of Australian and US troops from Iraq."

With regard to our region,

The Greens want

- development models in Pacific countries based on sustainable, environmentally sound local development, with the participants determining the pace of change.
- closer involvement and cooperation with the countries of South East Asia.
- the continued strengthening of the process of democratisation of Asia and societies throughout the world .
- self determination for the people of West Papua.
- Australia, the international community, and the UN to work cooperatively with East Timor to complete the development and nation-building tasks.

The Greens will

- support the growth within our region of localised participatory democracy that can strengthen social cohesion and foster the active participation of disenfranchised communities, particularly women and young people, in decision making.
- require trade agreements to be multilateral and reviewable by Parliament, and include clauses on the observance of human rights and labour laws, health and safety standards and environmental standards, to ensure that trade is not conducted at the expense of manufacturing and rural workers' or consumers' rights or of environmental sustainability
- provide ongoing commitment to the Regional Non-Aggression Pact.
- in conjunction with regional partners, develop a regional environmental protocol to protect the environment.
- increase the number of places within the Humanitarian Migration Program to include environmental refugees
- provide access to Australia's labour market for Pacific island workers.
- engage with the ASEAN group and Pacific Forum to work towards economic and health solutions for the region to assist those living in poverty and to improve their health care.
- provide support for the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the work of regional and national human rights organisations, including Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM).
- seek support within the United Nations for a democratic process of self determination under autonomous governance in the West Papua Region.
- continue to provide aid for the task of reconstructing East Timor.
- support the right of developing nations to economic independence and their sovereignty over natural resources such as oil, including East Timor's sovereignty over oil and gas in the Timor Gap.