

# POLICY FORUM

POD

Policy Forum Pod

Rusted off

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Australian  
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**About us:**

Policy Forum Pod is the podcast of Policy Forum.net - Asia and the Pacific's platform for public policy debate, analysis and discussion. Policy Forum is based at Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University.

Our regular podcasts are written for a broad audience of public policy professionals, and those interested in public policy throughout the region.

Policy Forum connects with the Asia and the Pacific Policy Society – a network of thousands of people involved in every level of policy around the region.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Martyn Pearce:** Hello and welcome to Policy Forum Pod – the podcast for those who want to take it a little deeper into the policy challenges facing Australia and its region. I am Martyn Pearce.

Policy Forum Pod is produced at Crawford School. We are the region’s leading graduate policy school. You can find out more about us at [crawford.anu.edu.au](http://crawford.anu.edu.au).

I am delighted to welcome today as my co-host Jill Sheppard. Jill was a previous guest on the populism pod that we produced a few weeks back. She is a lecturer at the ANU School of Politics and International Relations. She’s got expertise in Australian government and governance, Internet politics and political participation, and I am delighted to announce as well that Jill is going to be a regular presenter on the Pod from here on. I feel like I’ve just signed a major player transfer of Lionel Messi of the ANU media world. Welcome, Jill.

**Jill Sheppard:** Thanks, Martyn. I’m not making Messi money, so I don’t know how that analogy works at all, really, but thank you for that way-too-kind introduction.

**Martyn Pearce:** So, what have you been up to since you helped demystify populism for us?

**Jill Sheppard:** Well, we’ve just released a big survey of values in Australia, in which we found that about a third of Australians between the ages of 18 and 40 are pretty happy with the idea of having a leader that doesn’t have to deal with elections in Parliament. I don’t know that I’ve been demystifying populism at all. I think I’m probably throwing some results out into the world that suggest that we are kind-of-happy with this descent into authoritarianism that we are seeing around the world. That’s happy news.

**Martyn Pearce:** That is happy news. Well, we are going to be talking about this changing nature of politics today--

**Jill Sheppard:** We are.

**Martyn Pearce:** -because today we are taking a look at a recent sea change in Australian politics – perhaps I should call it a tree change because it is one that’s happening far from the major coastal cities. Rural Australia cops more than its fair share of stereotypes. People living in the country are often referred to as bogans, or salt of the earth characters or, when it comes to politics, rusted on voters.

Just the other day, actually, I read a tweet which I’ll leave unattributed, which seem to blame rural Australian voters for the country’s inaction on climate change. As we’ll hear today, rural Australians are, in fact, deserting the major parties in greater numbers than their city counterparts and they’re not just abandoning status quo politics but they’re actually finding new ways of inspiring community action and taking policy change into their own hands. What are urban policy makers getting wrong about rural voters and what policy lessons can we take from the countryside and apply to the whole country?

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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I've got a fantastic line-up of guests to help us explore this topic. First of all, I'd like to introduce Gabrielle Chan. Gabrielle is a writer for Guardian Australia, has been a journalist for 30 years, including as a former political correspondent. Her latest book, which is actually the inspiration for this podcast, is called *"Rusted Off: Why Country Australia is Fed Up"*. It was released in September this year. I would absolutely recommend you give it a read. Welcome, Gabrielle.

**Gabrielle Chan:** Thanks, Martyn.

**Martyn Pearce:** Next up is Peter Holding. Peter is a third-generation farmer in South-East New South Wales, growing crops, such as canola and wheat, as well as running sheep for wool. He is on the Board of Directors for Farmers for Climate Action – an alliance of farmers who are working to see the agriculture sector gets support and investment to adapt to a changing climate, as well as be part of the solution. Welcome, Peter.

**Peter Holding:** Thank you.

**Martyn Pearce:** Next up is Carolyn Hendriks. Carolyn is an Associate Professor here, at Crawford School. She's got a background in both political science and environmental engineering, and her research is broadly concerned with how to strengthen citizen agency in the governance of collective problems. She's made substantial contributions to international debates on the practice and theory of citizen engagement, democratic innovation and deliberative democracy. Hello.

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Hi, Martyn.

**Martyn Pearce:** And last, but certainly not least, is Denis Ginnivan. Denis is the President of Voices for Indi – a community organisation in the Victorian electorate of Indi that seeks to encourage citizens to engage and participate in politics and democracy. Voices for Indi is famous, of course, for helping elect Cathy McGowan in 2013 and 2016, twice defeating Liberal frontbencher, Sophie Mirabella. Welcome, Denis.

**Denis Ginnivan:** Thank you very much, Martyn.

**Martyn Pearce:** We're going to dive into the conversation in a second, but before we do, a quick reminder to our listeners, please do get in contact with us. We are really interested to get your thoughts on what we talk about today or on any of our podcasts.

You can find us on Facebook, where we are [asiapacificpolicysociety](#), on Twitter, where we are [APPSPolicyForum](#), or just shoot us through an email – go old school: [podcast@policyforum.net](mailto:podcast@policyforum.net). Stick around after the main discussion, because we are going to be going over some of your questions or comments from previous podcasts or posts that have been up on our website.

Okay, so let's dive in. Gabrielle, today we are talking about rural Australia, and I want to start with you. We hear all sorts of stereotypes about people from the country: bogans, they support Pauline Hanson, they hate foreigners, they've never travelled outside of their own little parcel of the country, and so on.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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You're a journalist, you've worked in the press gallery, but you live in rural area yourself. Could you paint a bit of a picture for us about the sorts of people who live in these rural areas? Is there any truth to any of the stereotypes?

**Gabrielle Chan:** There is always a little bit of truth to a stereotype. I mean, that's where it develops from but, I guess, as someone who had a totally city-suburban upbringing, I really wanted to break those stereotypes and talk in a little more nuance about what I saw in my little country town, which is about 2,000 people – Harden-Murrumburrah, it's 90 minutes west of Canberra.

The stereotypes that we always see in the media are either, as you said, the red-necks or the salt-of-the-earth types, and obviously there is a lot of people in between. Another key stereotype is that all of country Australia is about farming and agriculture, because of course farmers have been so effective in building the political party that they built – the country party, that became the National Party, and so everything tends to look through that lens of agriculture.

Obviously, there is a lot of people in towns and, increasingly so, where they don't have a connection to agriculture as agriculture requires less and less workers. So, yes, there is all sorts of stereotypes but there is a whole lot of people that run the towns, that run the schools, that clean in the hospitals, that never get a look-in in Australian politics as far as I can see.

**Martyn Pearce:** Carolyn, maybe I could turn to you. What do we actually mean by rural Australia, anyway? Are we talking about satellites to major cities, like Yass, or are we talking about sizeable towns, like Toowoomba, or do we only mean isolated inland areas with tiny populations?

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Yes, that's a good question, Martyn. I guess, this term 'rural Australia' is also something that's full of stereotypes. We often hear about remote and rural Australia, but actually there is large areas of rural Australia that are peri-urban, and then we have lots of coastal towns that aren't agricultural towns but they might be considered rural in sort, so I think the strength of Gabrielle's book is that it really starts to unpack some of these stereotypes and looks at not just these ideas of rural but also what does it mean to be a regional town, and the differences and nuances in those kinds of communities.

**Jill Sheppard:** I think this lends itself really nicely to something that I've heard you talk about before, Gaby, and I wanted to--; I hope I'm not putting words in your mouth, but I've got this theory at the moment that the parties are really badly aligned, that we are just moving ahead of where the parties are, the Liberal Party doesn't make any sense, that's not a cohesive ideology anymore, the Liberal Party doesn't have a cohesive kind of electorate anymore, there is no cohesive remote or rural constituency or stereotype.

Is that why you think rural voters in particular--; Because we know all voters across Australia, "I'm getting fed up with the parties," do you think that's why rural voters in particular are getting fed up, that they don't feel represented by the major parties any more, including the Nats?

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

**Gabrielle Chan:** That's partly, though I think there is a confusion about the role of country people now. Country people have played a very large part in the Australian imagination, and so you get this kind of conflicting signals as someone who lives in a rural area, that you're either totally integral – the backbone of the nation as politicians like to say, but then also that you're red-necks. The message of economic rationalism or neoliberalism has been: if you're too small, get out as a farmer; if you haven't got a job in a country town, move to a city, so there is this conflicting idea in people's minds about where they are.

The other thing is, of course, the nature of the coalition, where you have a liberal philosophy that's all about business and the national party. They are some of the richest and poorest seats in the country, and so how you marry those two interests is really impossible.

**Jill Sheppard:** Well, you have a coalition agreement, but no one's allowed to say a thing –

**Gabrielle Chan:** That's right, yes.

**Jill Sheppard:** -and this is part of the problem. This is lack of transparency, which leads me to ask you, Denis – and I do probably have to lay this on the table at the moment: I used to work for a federal agriculture minister and I thought we did a pretty good job of representing country areas, but obviously not because something like Voices for Indi took off.

Can you tell me a little bit about how that started and what was the imperative behind it? It's easy to not like your local member, it's another thing altogether to round up a group of likeminded people to actually do something about it.

**Denis Ginnivan:** Yes, and I think--; Thanks, Jill. I think the trigger, in a way, was certainly--; part of it was how we were being represented, but it was also a sense of, well, I remember one of my daughters looking me straight in the eye and say, "Is this is as good as it gets? Are you happy with the way this is going?" There was, also, a sense of people feeling, "Well, we are responsible for our own politics" and "Thus we get what we deserve," if you carry that through.

I think there was a trigger in ourselves, when we went, "Well, what can we do to actually improve this, to not have a cynical, a negative view of politics, but rather work towards finding a way where people can get in a conversation, can be respected for having a view irrespective of how it might differ to others, and work towards a sense of what people have in common first, as opposed to what people have got in difference?"

That's what happened. We did start this process. We got lots and lots of people involved in discussions that were facilitated. We had someone who was in charge of the discussion, so it didn't turn into, "Look, you need to all stop because I'm right and therefore you must be wrong." We weren't going to go to that sort of space, but rather to respect everyone who would make a comment about their view on something. We'd record it and it ended up in a report that captured what everyone said. That report had prices all through it that actually captured what everyone said in broad terms.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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That's what we did. We put that report together and then gave a copy of it to everyone who was standing in the 2013 federal election, as a way of saying, "This is what people in Indi are talking about," if you--; particularly those who don't have input into a party structure. That's the start point, I guess, Jill, to what happened there.

**Jill Sheppard:** Then, Cathy McGowan responded positively to that.

**Denis Ginnivan:** Well, Cathy who, from that process--; When we started it, all we were thinking was, "What can we do to engage?" and then we started to get a sense that there was maybe an opportunity, or people were suggesting, "If we can't find a representative who would respond or capture what it is that was being said, let's find someone."

We called for people to express an interest in standing and Cathy got the gig, so to speak, and she has carried that idea in her style of representative community, representative politics I believe quite strongly through two terms now, and so Voices for Indi we're not the campaign team nor are we playing party politics or anti-party politics. We're trying to be pro-community.

**Jill Sheppard:** Caro, we study this stuff — you probably more so than I do public opinion, but this is like best practice politics. What's it like being in Indi on the ground, seeing it as an insider, because we are, you know, ivory tower [ed. 0:13:22] academics. We don't need to see this stuff play out in real life.

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Yes, that's why I found the Indi electorate so fascinating, because on one level they're actually just doing what representative democracy is designed to do. They're actually strengthening the linkages between the constituents and the elective representative, and it's amazing how much we just take that linkage for granted in the way of representative systems of democracy work.

When you dig deeper — and some of our colleagues have, about what this constituency relationship actually involves, for many of our MPs it's a very shallow form of public engagement, and when you compare it to what the public sector does — and indeed the corporate sector, it's quite revealing that our MPs are probably not as professional at doing public engagement as you might think.

Someone like Cathy McGowan, in my interviews with her and also following the work of Voices for Indi, has basically just revealed that this kind of participatory constituency relation is not rocket science and, in fact, the simplicity of it and the replicability of it is what is magic, because it actually doesn't rely on elite consultants coming and running participatory processes. It's community driven, it's community-led and it's not all about processes.

I know that being very important, but there is [sic.] other things, particularly that Cathy's been doing, which is to bring her constituents to Canberra. She's tried to unlock the mystique of Canberra by actually saying, "Well, if you're interested in this issue, come to Canberra, come and see how Parliament works. Let me introduce you to the people that might be able to help you with that issue." It's actually a full model of empowerment, actually.

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**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Martyn Pearce:** This is not rocket science, but why is it that the major parties aren't doing it if it's so simple?

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Well, I think there's a big elephant in the room, which we haven't really got to yet, which is the party – the party machinery – and the fact that people aren't joining as members to these parties.

The parties are the major institution of collective representation in representative democracy. At the moment, what we have is more people joining football clubs in Australia than formally belonging to a political party, so there is this very small number of those that vote, actually formally members of parties, and so parties have to rely on other ways of understanding those they represent.

That can either happen, I guess, through MPs and their constituencies, plus parties doing more to actually connect with those [ed. 0:16:01] who vote for them. One of our colleagues, Anika Gauja, she's doing some interesting work on how parties are trying to reach out and do more participatory work, but I think there are a long way from the very ground- and grass-roots options that you see in places like Indi and in other parts of the world, in Spain, where citizens are driving and bringing inputs to those that are representing them. I think the parties are still trying to win elections, as opposed to listen.

**Martyn Pearce:** Peter, I'd like to turn to you – and we'll talk about climate change in a minute, but I'm interested in your thoughts on any other reasons why you think rural voters are turning away from the major parties.

**Peter Holding:** I think possibly many of us have got the same aspirations in the rural area, whether you're on the land, in a farm, or running a business in town, or whatever you might be doing in small country towns. I think a lot of the problem, from my point of view, is there isn't enough communication going on between people.

Everybody's busy these days and a lot of the media you get is heavily biased one way or the other, so it's hard to find common thoughts and to be able to discuss them, but I think that in the end leads people to become frustrated. They feel they're not being listened to. They know for a fact that their small country towns are shrinking.

They see that happening every day – businesses closing. They see farmers packing up. The drought's impacting on everybody, so I think at the end of the day they become just so frustrated they tend to switch off, which is unfortunate in that they just refuse to participate. That leads them into, as we all know, "We all have to vote," so they vote for anybody or anything.

We're trying to provide a pathway – a bit like the Indi model, where people can discuss issues. Obviously, we are interested in climate change, but part of that is just how we released a report looking at what we see is the future of rural Australia and we'd like people just to discuss it. It doesn't have the answers in it.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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It doesn't really have a lot of information about what we think the answer is, but it gives you discussion points on where we think the discussion should go. We would like to have that discussion, because we could end up with a completely different model of rural Australia if we just all continue going the way we're going.

**Martyn Pearce:** We've heard from Denis about what inspired the setting up of Voices for Indi, but what about Farmers for Climate Action? What was the inspiration for that?

**Peter Holding:** Pretty much self-interest, I suppose. I mean, that drives most things. I got into this because I've been interested in where the environment is going for a long time, and farmers are pretty innovative.

I always find it amusing when they say farmers need to adapt, because I don't think they can adapt any faster than what they're doing. We've gone from, in 1980s, when I started farming tearing up land, and ploughing it, and cultivating it, and harrowing it, and then sowing it – many workings and lots of diesel, to now. I cannot think of anybody that doesn't direct-drill, and quite a few are stubble retaining, and rotational grazing – all sorts of techniques, or using satellite GPS tracking and working the machinery.

Farmers are going as fast as they can, but I could still see that we were [*ed. 0:19:25*] losing the battle, and so as a vested-interest I started working on that. I got invited to become a climate champion and that was a bit of a junket. We went around the country and looked at people's farms. It was great fun, but we were looking at innovative ways of bringing ideas back to our community or trying to do it.

Anyway, we got too big for our boots and suggested to the Victorian Liberal Party that they should do something about climate change – and promptly we had our funding cut, as you do in politics in Australia these days, but a good few of us then decided, "Well, that's not really the end of it," so we held a meeting and formed Farmers for Climate Action.

We're just trying to be scientifically evidence-based and provide education and knowledge out there for people about what's likely to happen or what could happen, and see if we can get a response, and drive something forward.

**Jill Sheppard:** Well, this is breaking all kinds of stereotypes and we're talking about archetypal farmers, but you're talking about science and innovation, and that's not what we would expect. I think we have this view that, in a lot of ways, rural Australians are behind the times. This is absolutely no disrespect on my part. I think it's a broadly held view.

I think, increasingly though, constituents, voters, citizens – whatever we want to call them – across the country are moving rapidly ahead of politicians, that we are just decades ahead. Are you seeing this particularly with regard to farmers and climate change?

**Peter Holding:** Oh, absolutely. We used to worry about trying to get the government to change policy on climate change, so we could have--; We still would like a price on carbon, but it's gone

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**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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past that. People are just putting in renewable energy as fast as they can. It doesn't really--; And they're not doing it because they want to save the world. They're doing it because they want to save their bills, and it's pretty obvious that that's the way it's going to go.

I have some issues with how that leaves the poorer parts of our community, where they end up in this debate, but the governments are trying to catch up, I think, or they will be. I expect the next election to be a climate change election – a bit like Wentworth was. There will be other issues, but this drought isn't gone and by the time we get around March, April, May it's likely to be very severe. And so, who knows. I'm hoping that people won't abandon everything and vote for what I would call a lunatic fringe, but we need to find good, honest people like Cathy McGowan.

I mean, I find what she does with taking some of her constituents and letting them work in her office for a couple of days or however long they'd do it for. I mean, I think people just don't understand how politics work in this country and how they can have influence if they get themselves just a little bit organised.

**Jill Sheppard:** Denis?

**Carolyn Hendriks:** That's such an interesting point that watching political parties for as long as I have--;

**Jill Sheppard:** Too long.

[laughter]

**Carolyn Hendriks:** -they hold their cards very close to their chests. There's no sharing. They jealously guard all their information, as you would know with polling and any other strategic information.

The weird thing about the Voice's mob was that they came out, did this thing, got McGowan across the line, and then said, "Okay, who needs information? We'll share all of this," and they've run how many workshops, Denis, now?

**Denis Ginnivan:** Oh, I'd say 10.

**Carolyn Hendriks:** And this open kind of –

**Denis Ginnivan:** Open-source, yes.

**Carolyn Hendriks:** -open-source model, where you share like, I think, the National Party were at one stage going to come to the first workshop but they decided that was a bad look, but the idea that you would welcome all political parties, I think, was a really, really innovative way to think about politics that hadn't been thought – it hadn't happened.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Jill Sheppard:** Well, there's a theory in political science that parties are starting to act like cartels, so the Liberal and Labor Party are just like Mobil and BP, or they're just like Woolies and Coles, and they're a closed shop. You've obviously found this, Denis?

**Denis Ginnivan:** Well, yes, I think from the ground-floor up, from a community – I mean, you could possibly say that's the top of the tree and not the ground-floor, a lot of people don't care about that. People are living a life, living in a community, they need resources and capacity to do what they want to do.

But, if you don't mind, Jill, can I just go back to the energy thing for a moment, just following on from what Peter said, and that was in relation to community? I'm involved with a group, called Totally Renewable Yackandandah – Yackandandah is a town, it's not a Vistabule or something like that –

**Jill Sheppard:** [*I moved* 0:24:08] from Victoria.

**Denis Ginnivan:** Anyway, the thing is that they've actually decided they've got a goal to be a hundred percent renewable by 2022 as a town, so they'll be generating more power in that town than what they're using, via renewable.

**Jill Sheppard:** And are the town's people happy with this?

**Denis Ginnivan:** Yes, they're very and they've come along way. It's all happened both voluntarily and then in partnership with a corporation, but government has not been part of this thing, and we would argue they're sort of way behind where it is that people who think about this stuff are at and what's capable of being undertaken. In our case, we've formed a cooperation with an entity called AusNet Services, which is the big poles and wires corporation in our region and are our partner to deliver the community goal of being a hundred percent renewable by 2022.

I'm just saying that in relation to Peter speaking about the farmers and their capacity to do this. Some communities are also getting there and there are also strategies with what we call people who are either renting or social housing. They have a different capacity to go renewable, and so [*ed.* 0:25:26] I think lots of other people are trying to find ways in which we can ensure that people who don't have a lot of income don't get left behind in this transition, and it's really pretty positive.

It's a good story, and I should say just following and linking it back to the politics thing for a moment, but within Indi, the federal seat, there is about 20 towns that have community groups that are now part of an Indi-wide connectivity, some of more advanced than others in their renewable energy goals, but Cathy McGowan has proposed a totally renewable Indi. She's not actually doing all the work to make that happen, but she's certainly providing leadership and talking to Parliament about what is possible in rural communities. That's, in some ways, ahead of the pack in relation to urban settings.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Peter Holding:** I was just going to add to what Denis was saying about leadership. I think that's part of the problem we're having in rural Australia, in the sense that we've lost a lot of our better leaders. The younger children, young adults are leaving to go to university and quite a few of them don't come back and, therefore, we lose a generation of innovation and leadership.

I think a lot of the problem is just that some of the people trying to lead us now are just not leaders. They're just the mouse pieces for whatever the organisation they're working for, but if we can find some good, quality leadership, I think the situation is right for people to fight for their towns and their communities.

**Jill Sheppard:** Carolyn, do you think that's a lesson for Australian politics and have you got any other suggestions?

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Look, I think that's actually a really important point, this whole building leadership capacity. Actually, if you look at the region of Indi, there are some seeds that were planted 30, 40 years ago with some Alpine young leadership programs.

**Denis Ginnivan:** Yes, Alpine Valleys--

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Alpine Valleys?

**Denis Ginnivan:** -community leadership program – I get the plug-in there.

[laughter]

**Carolyn Hendriks:** These are programs that are aimed at both youth and also the broader community around building leadership capacity, and that's--; In other words, you're not generating leaders overnight. This is something that's a long-term process, but through those leadership programs people form networks, they realise there is resources in the community.

I know the seed was planted in 2013, but actually these leadership seeds were planted decades ago, and I know there is programs in Melbourne to do the same sort of thing in leadership building female capacity and getting women into politics, but we need to think about this beyond rural towns, beyond women and actually in the whole community of Australia, how can we build leaders that actually have the capacity to lead and not just win elections or win party battles.

**Jill Sheppard:** Well, I mean it's tied up very closely with civil society, isn't it, and when we see civil society institutions breaking down then, yes, opportunities to lead and to, I guess, plug yourself into politics without being a staffer kind of disappear. What do you think about this, Gaby?

**Gabrielle Chan:** Yes, I think the most exciting trend in this area is actually around women's leadership. That capacity building that's been happening in the last couple of decades has really taken hold now amongst rural communities that I see, and their networks that include things like the Australian Rural Leadership Program and the Rural Women's Awards, talk about six degrees of separation – they're like half a degree of separation between those country women.

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**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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They are the ones that are going outside the traditional advocacy groups in rural areas to just break the rules and say, "You know what, if you're not going to work with me, I'll build my own model." You saw it happen with the Victorian Women's Trust in Victoria that got a lot of advocacy going, and I just think it's the most exciting thing. I don't think it's any--; It's not a coincidence that people like Cathy McGowan have come out of that model. They're inspiring other women also in metropolitan areas.

I think Karen Phelps would have looked at McGowan's example pretty closely, and you've already seen a rush of rural women independence in the Victorian state election. I think it will happen in New South Wales and I think it will happen in the federal election in 2019.

**Jill Sheppard:** I think those links between, say – and it's tempting to tie everything back to Wentworth, but there is *[sic.]* common threads here, absolutely.

[everyone]: Oh, absolutely.

**Jill Sheppard:** One of it is women getting things done, but I think the big thing is just people turning their backs on the parties.

**Gabrielle Chan:** Yes.

**Jill Sheppard:** And it's this dream that is sort of holding us all together at the moment.

**Gabrielle Chan:** And you go back to the beginning, where we started with 'why are people rusting off?', those integrity issues, the trust issues are the things that are actually uniting the crossbenchers, minor parties and independents. They all agree pretty much on federal corruption commission. They all agreed on the bankroll commission well before Labor came on board. Those issues around integrity and trust are a really big *[crosstalk 0:30:44]*.

**Martyn Pearce:** We've heard a lot about some of the changes that are happening, both positive and negative, in these communities. Where is all this going? How is this going to play out over the next few years, particularly in the area of federal politics?

**Gabrielle Chan:** Ah, well, who would I--; I would not be game to predict, given what's happened in the last decade in politics, but I actually am optimistic about the future. I think all of these examples of positive engagement are a good thing.

I wouldn't discount more hung Parliaments, even though obviously the polls are pointing to a bit of a landslide for Shorten. I think there is still a capacity for people to just go with independent, minor parties more and I think there is a lot of people in that space who Peter referenced to earlier, who are thinking about how to make this a positive--; think about positive representation rather than the protest vote.

There is a group called Anyone but Nats – the idea that anyone would be better than the current. Sometimes it's not the case, as we've seen in America, so will we get multi-party coalitions European-style, where if you've got hung Parliaments – Jill's shaking her head--;

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**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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[laughter]

**Jill Sheppard:** [crosstalk 0:32:13] No, I'm going to give you the very kind of hard-line political science answer.

**Gabrielle Chan:** No, we're not, because we're just not set up that way institutionally, but we are going to see more independents, absolutely, and I don't think it's a protest vote. I think it's a you are genuinely better than the major parties at the moment.

**Jill Sheppard:** Yes.

**Peter Holding:** I look at women coming to the fore — because I get around a fair bit in lots of different committees, and interestingly enough, being an old guy, I think what I find is that the women are not part of the old boys' group — I don't know why that is, I just cannot figure it out.

[laughter]

**Denis Ginnivan** [*possibly*]: Let's workshop that.

[laughter]

**Peter Holding:** But that just opens up the discussion. When you bring women onto a board into a group, especially some of the old rural groups that have just all been dominated by men, it really opens up. It's like fresh air, like springtime. I think that is going to change things.

The girls these days just will not tolerate being put down and I rightfully agree they need to stand up. They need to learn to fight a bit harder, I think. I mean, I see so many good women being dominated, and they need men to fight for them, too, I think, to stop some of the crap that's going on, but if we can get those women through that sort of jump, I don't think you'll recognise the country.

**Jill Sheppard:** I think you've nailed that, Peter. Denis?

**Denis Ginnivan:** Well, I think I'm in agreement with Peter. One of the projects we undertook a few months ago was a weekend workshop called Getting Elected to Represent Your Community — there is an idea.

What it was it was a weekend, we did it like a three-sixty around water, like the top 15, 20 issues that a person considering standing in politics we'd suggest may need to be good at, to have access to be able to think about some of those issues, and also people who are supporting someone close. It could be maybe a campaign manager or a partner — people who want to support someone else to stand.

We did all sorts of topics like ethics, and campaigning, and working with media, and what's it like for a federal, state or local politician, young people to handle all those presentations, which we were able to put on a website like this podcast, like this, but to actually create opportunities for people. And I should say, of all the people who went to that thing, there is [*sic.*] now about

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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nine women who are standing for state politics in Victoria or in New South Wales now and one who is supporting a group that may lead to someone's stand.

I guess – when you were asking, “What does the future look like?” – we're going to be able to convince people that we've got their back. As a community, it has a responsibility to support someone to stand, irrespective if they're in a party or not, but certainly when they're not in a resourcing party there's going to be a community capability to bring them along, support them along the way.

**Jill Sheppard:** Carolyn?

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Absolutely. I was at that forum and it was really inspiring. I think one of the women that I met, an emergency doctor who had decided that she was seeing a lot of failures of the health system presenting at the emergency department and she decided that actually the best way to address those was not so much to be in the emergency department full time, but to split her time as a local member on the council and also work as a doctor.

I mean, these are the sorts of things that people are realising that they can step into politics. She is 26 years old. I mean, it's amazing. So, these are people – and young men, as well, who are just deciding that they can actually step forward, and there is community resources and capacity building opportunities for them to do that.

**Martyn Pearce:** Well, we are almost out of time, but I just wanted to ask one final, quick question to all of you. If you could afford one piece of advice to Australian politicians, beyond the obvious one of 'don't ignore rural Australia', what would it be? Perhaps if we start with you, Denis?

**Denis Ginnivan:** I think it's in their interest – in our politician's interest – to harness the energy and capability of their own community – our national community, because to not listen to that is to really short-change our national direction and strategic position. That would be my in-a-summary-nutshell answer to your question, Martyn, but thank you for that.

**Martyn Pearce:** Great. Carolyn?

**Carolyn Hendriks:** Yes, I think the word 'listen' for me is key here, to not be afraid to connect with the community, and when you do connect be willing to listen.

**Martyn Pearce:** Peter.

**Peter Holding:** Well, I'm looking for more wholesale politician and get rid of the clowns in the place. I really think what we need is more honesty and more ethics. I just cannot believe some of the blatant mistruths that they think the public will swallow, and I don't think the public swallow them. I just don't think the public has quite yet worked out how to deal with them.

**Gabrielle Chan:** I was asked by someone in government about this question and I'm thinking of all these complex ways that government could engage with community and there could be this link between government and community, and then I thought, “Hang on, that's your local MP.”

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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I would say to them, “Choose your community over your party and, if you do that, the community will actually choose the party, if the member reflects that,” but too often they are scared, as Peter says, to choose their community and stand up for their community and, in the process, they lose the loyalty of the voter, because the voter says, “Well, if you’re not looking out for me, I’m not going to look out for you.”

**Jill Sheppard:** I mean, one shame is that we, is that Barnaby Joyce has ended in – probably not ended, but is in such bad form at the moment, because that was what he built his career on, crossed the floor 27 times or something. No one else is going to do that for a little while, we’re all gun-shy again.

**Martyn Pearce:** Well, there is plenty of positive notes to be ending on there, so I’d like to draw this to a close and say thank you to all of you for a really fascinating discussion. It’s great to have such a broad range of perspectives on this really important issue, so thank you all.

[collectively]: Thanks, Martyn.

[interlude music 0:38:40]

**Martyn Pearce:** Thanks once again to our guests. It was a really fascinating discussion, I thought, and we are really interested to hear your thoughts about what we talked about today. You can get in contact with us, of course, on Twitter – [APPSPolicyForum](#). Find us on Facebook, where we are [asiapacificpolicysociety](#), or just shoot us through an email – [podcast@policyforum.net](mailto:podcast@policyforum.net).

Regular listeners will know that at the end of each podcast we answer some of those questions or respond to some of those comments that have been sent in, and I want to do that now. I’ve still got Jill with me. Before we get onto those comments, what did you think of that discussion, Jill?

**Jill Sheppard:** Well, last time I was here, we were talking about populism and it was grim and then, in the meantime, I’ve done the survey work and all the findings are really grim. That was really positive. Wasn’t it great?

**Martyn Pearce:** I thought it was really exciting and quite empowering to hear some of the stuff.

**Jill Sheppard:** Yeah, I feel empowered. I feel like I need to go and yell at people to start organising community groups. I know they are not going to listen to me, but it’s what we think about when we think about democracy – it’s exactly what should be happening, and it hasn’t happened.

Well, I guess it is happening – that’s the moral of the story, just that we don’t publicise it, we don’t talk about it. We need to get better at getting around people and telling them these stories.

**Martyn Pearce:** It’s interesting – the political conditions that must have caused this.

**Jill Sheppard:** We needed the parties to be dreadful. They’ve ponied up and done that, and it’s worked. If we totally pull out, if political parties totally vacate the field, people will step up.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Martyn Pearce:** Do you think that political parties can regain this foot, because judging by our discussion today they've obviously lost a lot of ground.

**Jill Sheppard:** I used to be really optimistic and I'm losing it. I think the parties at the moment are really confused. They are groups of factions that don't quite know how they fit together and until they sort that out I don't know that they can actually go out to anywhere, let alone rural and regional areas in Australia, and tell them what they stand for and promise them that they can represent them meaningfully, because they're not physically able at the moment.

**Martyn Pearce:** Well, there you go, you've heard our thoughts on it. What are your thoughts? Let us know on all of those ways to contact us that I spelled out before. Now, let's dive into some of those comments that we have received over the last week or two.

The first was a comment from Beau and he was responding to the podcast that we put out, called *Sanctioning Myanmar*. It was Edwina Landale's Brief podcast and she interviewed Trevor Wilson. Beau writes, "Hi. Congratulations on bringing someone with real knowledge of the situation. I've been in Myanmar for a few decades. I met Trevor when he was an Aussie Ambassador and I've worked in Rakhine since 1995 as a consultant with the UN, Red Cross and NGO organisations, setting up safe and efficient marine transport operations. It was truly refreshing to hear someone with actual knowledge on the situation, making clear commentary on what is going on at present. Thank you."

Well, Beau, I am really glad you enjoyed it. I was enjoying listening to Trevor Wilson talk about the situation in Myanmar, as well. I think he is a terrific analyst.

The next one I want to go on and touch on is the podcast that we put out quite recently, where we spoke to Glyn Davis and Helen Sullivan. It was called *Is Australia's policy machinery fit for purpose*, and in it we spoke about how Australia can future-proof its public sector for technological and social change.

There was a comment from Rick on Facebook, and he wrote, "Until it regains independence and the ability to provide frank and fearless advice, unimpeded by ministerial advice and politically appointed department heads on contract it doesn't matter how good the motor or the parts are." What do you think about that, Jill?

**Jill Sheppard:** I think Rick's spot on and I don't have any solutions whatsoever. I think this is a genuine problem that a lot of formal public service have talked about, but it's really hard to articulate. It's this idea that bureaucrats in Canberra aren't necessarily left-wing or right-wing, but that they're trying to get promoted, like we all are — we're ambitious, and we thought that this would improve the quality of advice that ministers and departmental secretaries are getting.

I think what we're finding instead is that everyone just tells they're superior, that they're doing a great job, boss. That's the problem, but it's really hard to incentivise against that. I think Rick's bang on, but I don't know how we get around it.

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Martyn Pearce:** That's the frank and fearless part I saw there.

**Jill Sheppard:** Absolutely.

**Martyn Pearce:** But is it fair to say: "until the public service regains independence"? I mean, that's kind of damning everyone, isn't it?

**Jill Sheppard:** Absolutely, and I don't think the problem is necessarily independence. It's just the sense that the public service should be held aside a little bit. It's something a little bit special.

Now, I don't know how we instil that in people because it's just a job like any other job, but it's very hard to make people excited about their jobs but, traditionally, the civil service was seen as something that was nation-building and I don't know how we get that back apart from, I don't know, cultural education or something.

You cannot teach that kind of stuff and I don't know how we can make policies that instil that kind of nation-building sense of duty, I think.

**Martyn Pearce:** These are big questions and I'm sure they are questions that will be addressed in the public service's review reporting shortly.

**Jill Sheppard:** Absolutely.

**Martyn Pearce:** The next one I want to go to is another podcast. It was the podcast the Quentin Grafton and Sharon Bessell did, where they interviewed Peter Yu, and it was called *A vision for the North*. In it, we heard from Peter about the challenges facing Northern Australia and how to add some cultural substance to the somewhat vacuous policy history when it comes to the development of the North.

There was a comment from Susanne, and she writes, "Why can't we just leave it be? Why does everything have to be developed?" Where do you stand on that?

**Jill Sheppard:** I thought I was pro-development, and then I saw this comment from Susanne and I thought, "You know what, I'm sick of hearing about Northern development," and it's not that we shouldn't be encouraging ideas, but we've been talking about this for as long as I can remember.

There is a trade-off here. At what point do we think maybe something isn't not a great idea? I don't know. I'm going to play the host prerogative and I'll just throw questions out there. I don't know if we should still be trying to develop the North. It seems--; I've been up there. It's red. It's dry. It's tough. It seems like an insurmountable problem, but we are obsessed with it as a nation.

**Martyn Pearce:** Uh-hm. I mean, it should also be said that we sat here in a studio in Canberra commenting on this. I mean, really, this is a decision for those local communities in Northern Australia, right?

**Hosts:** Martyn Pearce and Jill Sheppard

**Guests:** Gabrielle Chan, Peter Holding, Denis Ginnivan, Carolyn Hendriks

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**Jill Sheppard:** Oh, absolutely, and we tend to have this problem. It's the curse of being centralised in Canberra that we do control the Perth strings and the Federal Government. We do try to tell the rest of the country how to run its life.

That's not always a problem, sometimes it works quite efficiently, sometimes – and we're talking about northern development – yes, it's absolutely a problem.

**Martyn Pearce:** Oh, it was a great comment, so thanks very much for that, Susanne. I see here you definitely got us thinking.

The last one I want to touch on is a comment from Jim, and Jim was talking about an article that went up on PolicyForum-dot-net. It was called *Crowding out the Pacific*. It was written by Matt Dornan, Richard Curtain, Stephen Howes. In it, it looked at how Australia should look to follow New Zealand's example in ensuring its seasonal worker program isn't crowded out by underpaid backpackers.

Jim wrote, "If Americans can start to think of immigration and labour policy as being connected, they should look here to see who Aussies and Kiwis get to pick their fruit and vege, and how decent wages, visas, unions, regulation, and government oversight play and, yes, it adds up to more expensive spinach." What do you reckon about that, Jill?

**Jill Sheppard:** Well, bless the US for always providing some kind of example by which we come out favourably. If it wasn't for the US, I wouldn't be able to teach my Australian born students how great their political institutions are, because I can always say, "Hey, look at Washington, we're doing great."

Jim's got a good point. I think spinach is expensive. I'm not going to lie, and I know you've told me that I should grow my own.

**Martyn Pearce:** It is very cheap and very easy to grow spinach.

**Jill Sheppard:** But Jim makes a very salient point here, a very important and profound point, Martyn, about labour regulation and how good we do have it here for the most part. Even the fact that we worried about the conditions of visiting workers, I think, speaks well of our industrial relations regime.

We hand-wring about this stuff a lot and it's good that we do, because we don't want underpaid workers in Australia, whether they're Australian or temporary labour. This is a nice problem to have, but it's an important problem.

**Martyn Pearce:** Well, a big thank you to everyone who has commented. I'll remind: just keep sending them in. That includes suggestions for future episodes of Policy Forum Pod as it's interesting to hear your thoughts on that. You can reach us at [APPSPolicyForum](#) on Twitter, [asiapacificpolicysociety](#) on Facebook, or just drop us a line – [podcast@policyforum.net](mailto:podcast@policyforum.net).

If you enjoyed today's episode – I really hope you did; I did, then perhaps you might want to leave us a quick review on iTunes – and why wouldn't you, it only takes 30 seconds. All you need to do is find that fifth star. It would be a huge help to us in getting word out about this podcast and reinforce to my bosses that I deserve to be paid.

We will be back next week with another Policy Forum Pod, but until then from me, Martyn Pearce, cheerio.

**Jill Sheppard:** Thanks for listening.