



Tony Abbott crosses the line at the Pollie Pedal in North Head.

## **Tony Abbott: Ride reveals the road polities need to take**

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FOR the past 20 years, I've done an annual long-distance charity bike ride, the Pollie Pedal. It's raised more than \$5 million for numerous good causes (Soldier On this year) as well as raising awareness of cycling as a good way to see the country and to keep fit. It's also been a yearly "listening tour", enabling me and my companions (in 2017, Angus Taylor, Kevin Andrews, Dave Gillespie, Andrew Hastie, Andrew Wallace, Zed Zeslaja, and Sussan Ley on the Coalition side) to get to parts of Australia that politicians don't normally visit.

### [LAURIE OAKES: NEW THINKING IS LOST ON LIBERAL PARTY](#)

This year, we overnighted in Albury, Wagga, Talbingo, Cooma, Canberra, Goulburn, Mittagong and Camden, stopping in nearly all the villages in between, before finishing at the old School of Artillery barracks at North Head in my electorate, which Soldier On hopes to turn into a respite centre for veterans. There weren't too many pubs or coffee shops along the way that we didn't drop by to see what was on people's minds. In most of the towns, there was a meeting of Liberal or National Party supporters, too.

As well as MPs (Labor's Luke Gosling rode, too) and regular riders who have become friends, this year's trip included veterans from all the services. Between the riders, the sponsors, and the passers-by, I reckon I spent the best part of eight days listening to a pretty good sample of middle Australia.

People aren't happy.

There's the usual grizzling about poor roads, not enough services, and out-of-touch government. There's the now-common anxiety about selling the farm to foreigners.

But there's lately an added dimension of frustration with everyone in politics: with governments that don't deliver, with Oppositions that oppose just to score political points, and with minor parties that are all grievance and no solution. Inevitably, when people are unhappy, it's the government that gets blamed first but people seem to be working out that Labor is at least as responsible for our problems as the government.

In fact, not only did Labor create the debt and deficit disaster and the political correctness epidemic but it's now making it impossible to fix, through its intransigence in the Senate. Of course, people are disappointed with the government but there's little enthusiasm for Bill Shorten either, or for his union-controlled, Greens-influenced Labor Party that still thinks Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard had good policies. Nonetheless, on the grounds that "Oppositions don't win elections, governments lose them", there was an expectation that Shorten could soon be in the Lodge. Being prime minister is the hardest job in the country and the incumbent, whoever he or she is, tends to be "damned if he does and damned if he doesn't". The Greens-influenced Labor Party still thinks Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard had good policies.

In fact, the best way to keep Shorten out is not to sack an elected prime minister yet again but to ensure that the government does its job better.

Invariably, the public — even those who follow politics — are better at expressing unease than putting their finger precisely on what's the matter.

My "take" from hundreds of conversations on the road is that people are sick of politicians that are more talk than action, and are especially sick of politicians who change their policies to suit their political convenience.

I think people — or at least the people who talk freely with Coalition MPs — have finally realised that the Senate has become a real obstacle to good government. People are happy to see greater use of renewable energy, but not if it makes their power supply unaffordable and unreliable.

The best way to keep Bill Shorten out is not to sack an elected prime minister yet again but to ensure that the government does its job better.

At least in country areas, people bridle at political correctness; they don't see what's wrong with boys being boys and girls being girls and don't see why much-loved fairytales have to be banned or rewritten. People accept that Australia is an immigrant country but want all immigrants to join Team Australia like everyone else.

And yes, they know that Budget repair is hard because people don't want the government to improve its situation by worsening theirs, but a government that avoids new spending and cuts rorts would at least be taking it seriously. After eight days on the road, I'm more convinced than ever that measures like the following would get Australia working again:

REFORM the Senate so we have government, not gridlock;  
STOP subsidising new wind power to take the pressure off power prices;  
DE-FUND nanny-state bureaucracies that persecute journalists but do nothing about Muslim extremists;  
PROTECT existing beneficiaries and existing employees but make it easier for future generations to get work; and  
DON'T apologise for Australia; celebrate it.

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