



## Human cloning is banned in Australia but that hasn't stopped ministers musing about a double dissolution - Peter Jean

**A**IMING a cloning gun at the Senate crossbench would be a dangerous political gambit by the Federal Government.

Human cloning is officially banned in Australia but that hasn't stopped government ministers from musing about the possibility of an early double dissolution election.

A double dissolution could help create a new Senate with additional Nick Xenophons, Jacqui Lambies and Christine Milnes. It might be a PUP-free upper house but the Senate could be twice as unwieldy as it is now.

Senators representing the tiny Bullet Train and Cyclist parties would jump on locomotives and bikes to Canberra.

Sadly for the Pirate Party, the capital is landlocked.

It's easy to understand why a government frustrated by its inability to win Senate approval for university fee deregulation and other reforms would like to have the option of a double dissolution in its back pocket.

Senators representing the states are normally elected for six-year terms.

If a double dissolution was called, all of the Senate seats would be declared vacant.

After the election, disputed "trigger bills" could be sent back to the Senate for reconsideration. If the Senate still rejected the disputed bills, a rare joint sitting of the House of Representatives and the Senate would be held to resolve the deadlocks.

But once those contentious matters were dealt with, the government of the day would be left dealing with an even more splintered Senate than we have now.



Senate candidates competing for one of six state seats at a normal election need 14.3 per cent of the statewide vote to win. At a double dissolution, this is halved to 7.7 per cent.

Senator Xenophon secured almost 25 per cent of the Senate vote in South Australia at the last election.

At a double dissolution, he would almost certainly see one of his running mates elected.

If he succeeded in finding credible, high-profile candidates to run in other states, there could be even more Xenophonites in Canberra.

Tasmanian independent Jacqui Lambie thinks that if she ran a ticket at a double dissolution, two or three of her running mates could become senators. That is a little hopeful but Senator Lambie would win another term.

The only remaining Palmer United Party Senator, Dio Wang of Western Australia, was elected with 12 per cent of the vote at a special Senate election last year but would be lucky to do so well again.

Calling an early double dissolution election takes political courage.

Kevin Rudd wimped out in 2010 on calling a double dissolution on the emissions trading scheme.

Mr Rudd's lack of nerve helped sow the seeds of the Labor Party coup which brought him down.

At the time he ruled out a double dissolution, Mr Rudd was a lot more popular than Prime Minister Tony Abbott is now.

The government needs to do a lot more work to win back the support of voters before it

contemplates any sort of election.

Otherwise a double dissolution would simply deliver a dysfunctional Senate as a nasty gift for an incoming Labor government.

Many Australians vote for minor parties in the Senate to put a brake on the government with a majority in the House of Representatives.

However, the complex preference deals among political parties can distort the process.

Election law reforms which ensure election results more accurately reflect the wishes of voters are long overdue.

Ideally, all the serious players in the Senate would agree on a reform package.

But political consensus on big issues is something that has rarely been seen in the current parliament.

**PIGS FLY:** President of the Bullet Train for Australia Party Tim Bohm launching the party's campaign.

## Democracy means telling us the truth



DAVID M. PRITCHARD

IS democracy good for balancing a budget?

For many today, the answer is no. This is understandable. In the birthplace of democracy, Greece, the budget is a mess.

For too long the politicians of modern Athens feared that voters would not tolerate the truth. To pay for unaffordable promises they borrowed irresponsibly instead of raising taxes. They lied about the ballooning public debt. It all ended in a huge crisis.

Even in the midst of this crisis, politicians were afraid to tell voters how the country could escape it. They left it to Greece's creditors to dictate harsh austerity policies that have caused enormous suffering. Greek voters did not vote

for them. They are incredibly angry with their politicians.

The problem is not unique. Two other modern democracies, Australia and Britain, were also forced to take drastic budget measures in response to the global financial crisis.

In each, centre-left politicians borrowed heavily to prop up banks and to maintain demand. In each democracy, expansionary policies minimised the crisis's human impact.

But in the elections that followed the politicians who had introduced these policies refused to justify them. They feared that voters would not tolerate frank public debate.

The centre-right politicians who opposed them were no better. In these elections they promised to bring budgets back into surplus without new taxes or major public sector cuts. But these promises again turned out to be lies.

In office, these conservative politicians have introduced

austerity policies without clear mandates. They continue to face the wrath of their electorates. Voters of Australia and Britain have understandably lost a lot of trust in what politicians say about public finances.

In these democracies there has been a common problem. Politicians do not believe voters can tolerate the truth.

### Voters have understandably lost trust in what politicians say about public finances

As a historian of ancient Greek democracy, this assumption strikes me as plainly wrong. Athens was successful and balanced its budgets.

Athenian voters expected a politician who supported a policy to accurately estimate its cost. He had to demonstrate that the state could afford it. Athenian voters regularly put the collective good ahead of their own personal interests.

From ancient Athens

today's politicians can draw three vitally important lessons.

Firstly, rigorous debate is essential. In Athens, debate weeded out unaffordable policies and laid the groundwork for necessary tax increases.

Modern politicians, secondly, should not fear telling voters the truth. It helps build consensus for tough reforms.

Thirdly, and most importantly, ancient Greek democracy was surprisingly good at resolving budgetary crises. As long as our politicians are brave enough to speak candidly about public finances, there is no reason modern democracies cannot do the same. **DR DAVID M. PRITCHARD IS AN ANCIENT HISTORIAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AND THE AUTHOR OF PUBLIC SPENDING AND DEMOCRACY IN CLASSICAL ATHENS.**

## THE LAST WORD

WITH MARTY SMITH



### MOUTHING OFF

(1) Useless invention: Dictionary index. (2) Overheard: "How much is the \$1.99 popcorn?" (3) Riddle: What happens when you walk under a cow? You get a pat on the head. (4) In the Twittersphere: "At Indian restaurant. Waitress brings out our vegetable filled pastry starters. I say 'You're the hostess with the samosas' No laughs." - Australian comedian Andy Lee. (5) I am not making this up: The first jigsaw puzzle was a map of the world.

### INSIGHT

"Poverty sucks." - bumper sticker on a Porsche.

### QUOTE, UNQUOTE

"If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two mouths and one ear." - US author-humorist Mark Twain.

### KEEPING COUNT

7005 - the postcode of the University of Tasmania, Churchill Ave, Sandy Bay, Hobart.

### JUST A THOUGHT

Chic is an adjective for anything with a hat to match.

### REMEMBER WHEN

Today is March 20, International Day of Happiness and the 79th day of the year. There are 286 days remaining until the end of the year. On this day:

**1828:** Playwright-poet Henrik Ibsen, who kept a pet scorpion on his desk for inspiration, was born in Norway.

**1908:** Actor Sir Michael Redgrave, who died in 1985, was born in Bristol, England.

**1934:** The National Academy of Arts and Letters in Havana, Cuba, presented a special diploma to Walt Disney.

**1946:** Metropolitan outlets for Proccera bread included Golden Crust Bakery (North Adelaide), Michelmore's Bakery (Allenby Gardens), W. R. Badenoch (Henley Beach), G. A. Tibb (Colonel Light Gardens) and W. V. Daebler (Glandore).

**1954:** Regular visitor to Adelaide and South Australia, Ashton's Circus and Zoo visited Victor Harbor.

**1956:** In an advertisement in *The Advertiser*, Mrs. E.D. Leslie, 31a Brunswick St, North Walkerville, was named the winner of Hoopers Easter Bride Talk competition No 4 with her entry "I'm no April Fool! I'll furnish at Hoopers and marry at Easter."

**1968:** From the Social Roundabout column in *The Australian Women's Weekly*: "Hectic life for actress Marjorie Irving, who has just returned from an exciting tour of the United States and has gone straight into the lead of *The Anniversary*, currently performing at Theatre '62, Hilton, for the duration of the Festival."

**1971:** US pianist Peter Nero performed at the Adelaide Town Hall.

**1988:** The Australian Record Industry Association listed *I Should Be So Lucky*, by Melbourne-born singer Kylie Minogue, as Australia's No 1 hit single.

**1995:** From the front page of *The Advertiser*: "The 1995 Australian Formula One Grand Prix - the last to be held in Adelaide - is facing a potential financial crisis, with fears major sponsors are set to bale out in favour of Melbourne's first race four months later."

**1997:** From the front page of *The Advertiser*: "Port Adelaide captain Gavin Wanganeen will miss the Power's AFL debut at the MCG on Saturday week after being suspended last night for striking."

**2002:** A Law Careers Fair was held at the University of Adelaide.

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### TODAY'S THOUGHT

So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

John 16:22 Bible for Today