



In the four weeks since the election I have been considering the electoral and financial performance of our Party.

It has been a deliberately measured process so that any decisions emanating from the review would be free from the emotion attached to our disappointing electoral performance.

The feedback received by many members has been appreciated and valued.

## **Electoral Results**

We are all disappointed by our Party performance at the last election.

Our candidates, members and volunteers all did their best but as a Party we received a tiny fraction of the votes we needed to be successful. We can make all the excuses in the world for the result but it is clear that many of our potential voters returned to supporting the Coalition when Malcolm Turnbull was replaced by Scott Morrison.

Although we made it clear in the lead-up to the campaign that we were only running in the Senate so as not to be the catalyst for a change of government, our message didn't get through.

This is demonstrated by the hundreds of emails from Party members detailing that they voted for the Coalition first and then the Australian Conservatives in a bid to avoid a Shorten government.

Many also said that I needed to deliberately court controversy to gain media attention during the election campaign. While that may have worked, it would have undermined the very premise of what we offered to the Australian people – a credible and principled alternative to the political fringe.

Unfortunately steady and sensible didn't work and it was frustrating that some single interest parties gained more votes than we did despite having next to no electoral presence or campaign resources.

However, some solace can be found in the fact we never compromised on our principles in pursuit of political sugar hits.

## **Party Administration**

Over the past two years, we have worked hard to run a professional Party to ensure full compliance with electoral law and establish a firm foundation.

Our administrative team has done a first-rate job handling nearly 200,000 individual emails, processing tens of thousands of individual donations and assisting in election preparation.

For a small team they have worked incredibly hard and done an amazing job.

Many more people have contributed through volunteering their time and energy to give our Party the best chance of success.

It is important to note that our State Directors and campaign teams have operated in an entirely voluntary capacity with each doing what they can, when they can. My sincere gratitude and appreciation for their efforts cannot be overstated.

The Party invested considerable amounts of money to provide arguably the best campaign, communication and database technology available to give us a professional political edge. While some of these resources were ultimately underutilised or not as effective as anticipated, all our members had access to these state of the art political resources.

None of this could have been provided without the financial generosity of our members and supporters.

So many chipped in whatever they could to support our electoral efforts but regrettably the level of investment needed to maintain our existing personnel, facilities and technology is no longer sustainable.

The Party's remaining resources are now being utilised to finalise existing financial obligations prior to 30 June 2019.

## **The Future**

When I started the Australian Conservatives in February 2017 the times were very different.

Malcolm Turnbull was leading a Labor-lite Coalition into political oblivion. As they abandoned their supporter base in pursuit of green-left policies, major party politics became an echo chamber rather than a battle of ideas.

The fact that over 22,000 people formally joined the Australian Conservatives in our first year

demonstrated just how badly the Coalition were haemorrhaging supporters who wanted their enduring values and traditional principles upheld.

However, the decision to make Scott Morrison Prime Minister truly changed the political climate and our political fortunes.

Rather than punish the Coalition for another new leader, many Conservatives breathed a sigh of relief that a man of faith and values was leading the Liberals back to their traditional policy platform.

There were equal measures of satisfaction and frustration, as much of the Australian Conservatives policy agenda was adopted by the Coalition.

It was heartening to hear the government promise to 'burst the Canberra bubble', acknowledge immigration and taxes were too high, push back against the PC brigade and stick up for Australia's interests over the internationalists.

Our supporters and members cheered on those changes, leading many to return their political support to the government. While the election result was great for the country it also served as a hard-marker on which to assess the progress of our Party.

The inescapable conclusion from our lack of political success, our financial position and the re-election of a Morrison-led Government is that the rationale for the creation of the Australian Conservatives is no longer valid.

Accordingly, I will shortly begin the process of formally deregistering the Australian Conservatives as a political party.

No doubt this will come as a disappointment to those who have shown so much support over the past two years but in light of the circumstances, it is the wisest course of action.

On 7 February, 2017 I told a journalist that political success for the Australian Conservatives could be loosely described as being no longer necessary because the Coalition had returned to its traditional policy roots and would once again win back the confidence of the Australian people.

If that happened I said, "I'll be gloriously fulfilled and I'll go fishing at Coffin Bay."

I am not quite ready for the fishing but the Morrison government victory and policy agenda suggests we are well on the way to restoring common sense in the Australian parliament. That is all we, as Australian Conservatives, have ever sought to do.

Thank you once again for your support,

**Senator Cory Bernardi**