

# Voice questions unanswered

MICHAELIA CASH



Most people reading this have probably bought a car at some point.

There are many ways to go about buying a car, but I suspect there are some common actions that occur. Most people wouldn't buy a car without test driving it to check it is fit for their needs.

You wouldn't buy a house without inspecting it and you wouldn't start a job without knowing the expectations of your role and your pay.

So, it baffles me why the Albanese Labor Government is demanding the Australian people make the biggest change to Australia's Constitution ever, creating a permanent new body, without details about its impact, cost and operation.

Over the past two weeks in Parliament the Coalition has tried to extract more details about how the Voice will work, what it will be able to make representations to the Parliament and executive government about and how much this is all likely to cost.

The answers have been completely lacking any details, the sort of details we know many Australians want. Australians should not be asked to put on a blindfold and vote for a blank cheque payable by hardworking taxpayers.

When asked to explain details of the Voice Mr Albanese has said, "go and have a look at the Calma-Langton report".

Well the Institute of Public Affairs analysed the Calma-Langton report and found that the Voice would likely be undemocratic, unfair, litigious and create an expensive, unwieldy and complex bureaucratic structure at an annual cost in excess of \$600 million.

When the referendum Bill was before the Senate my colleague the shadow minister for Indigenous Australians Jacinta Nampijinpa Price and I asked the Government dozens of questions for more than nine hours until 4am on a Saturday.

Sadly, I can report that we



did not get the answers or the details that Australians are crying out for. On more than 100 occasions Minister Murray Watt, who was representing the Attorney-General in the Senate, deflected the question by hiding behind a standard reply, that the sort of details we were seeking "would be a matter for the Parliament".

What Senator Watt was saying to the Australian people is that his Government is asking you to vote to enshrine the Voice in the Constitution, forever, and that the Parliament (read Albanese Government) will work out the details later.

As I put to Senator Watt during that long night and morning of questions, that is putting the cart before the horse. The Government should give Australians the details of how it will work first and then ask us if we want it in our Constitution forever.

One question that Senator Watt did give a straight answer to was telling. I asked him: "Will the Voice have the freedom to determine the issues on which it makes representations?" His one-word reply was: "Yes."

This answer confirms the Albanese Government intends the scope of the Voice to be unrestrained and without limitation. If it wants to advise the Government that Australia Day should be abolished, it will have every right to do so,

because if you vote Yes you will be creating a Constitutional right that cannot be taken away, no matter what the Albanese Government tries to tell you now.

What we do know is that Labor's Canberra Voice proposal is risky, unknown, divisive, and permanent.

It is risky because it opens a legal can of worms, including scope for High Court challenges affecting government decision-making. The legal experts themselves cannot agree on how the High Court will interpret this change to our Constitution.

The Parliament deals with hundreds of pieces of legislation every year so there is a real risk of administrative delay and dysfunction. What's worse is that the Voice will be able to reach into government departments, agencies, and all areas of executive government and potentially slow down or kill off important projects.

What you are being asked to vote on is unknown because as I've said above, Labor refuses to provide the details. They want you to put on a blindfold and provide a blank cheque for activists. They can't give a straight answer on whether Australia Day is safe under the Voice. Who knows what will come next?

The Voice has the potential to cause systematic administrative gridlock

creating long delays in obtaining approvals leading to uneconomic timelines and lost job opportunities.

Senator Price says it best when she says Australia should be one country united not two divided. We sing "one" and free in our national anthem, but the Voice will not make us "one", it divides us, trashing equality of citizenship.

As Coalition leader Peter Dutton has warned, reconciliation may be set back if the referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament fails, but it will be Mr Albanese who is responsible, having starved Australians of detail.

The Coalition supports constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. We also support establishing a ground-up model of local and regional bodies — as recommended by Professor Calma and Professor Langton — but the PM is hell-bent on proceeding down his divisive and risky Voice proposal.

Mr Dutton has called on the Albanese Government to work with the Opposition to achieve a bipartisan approach that the Australian people will support.

As Peter Dutton said: "I think the Prime Minister's at a point where, if he realises that the Voice is going down — and that's what all of the polling is indicating at the moment — then he should make a decision that's in our country's best

interests and say, 'look, you know, I'm going to call it off because it's just going to divide the country down the middle, it's not going to achieve the outcome that we're talking about, and there are other ways that we can provide practical support and consideration to Indigenous Australians'."

Mr Dutton is making a genuine and practical suggestion to Mr Albanese but has been rebuffed outright by a Prime Minister who refuses to listen to anything he doesn't want to hear.

The other Labor leader who is refusing to listen to common sense at the moment is the new Premier Roger Cook. He is hell-bent on implementing the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act, despite being warned about the likely chaos this will cause. These laws are an unprecedented attack on private property rights. The Act is ambiguous and unwieldy and threatens drowning WA landowners in red tape.

It is alarming that it applies to any property over 1100sqm which could bring into play tens of thousands of suburban blocks of land in Perth and the near surrounds. There is real uncertainty about what activities on your own property may be exempt from the Act.

For our hardworking farmers it will be an even bigger nightmare. Last week I called on Mr Cook to postpone the implementation and go back to the drawing board. I still believe he should do that, but he continues to stubbornly refuse to make changes.

What I think is extremely worrying is that this Act gives us an indication of the sort of chaos that a Canberra-based Voice will likely bring if the referendum is successful.

West Australians are practical, hardworking people, who understand the importance of our agricultural sector and don't like laws and governments that put the sector at risk.

We all want better outcomes for Indigenous Australians but hiding the detail and impact and demanding a blank cheque is not the way to go about it.

Michaelia Cash is a Liberal Senator for WA

## It's time 'country town' Perth stopped talking itself down

PAULA ROGERS



When I first arrived in Perth from London 20 years ago with two little boys under five, I couldn't believe my luck.

The skies were enormous and blue. The iridescent light had me at hello. The sun seemed to constantly shine. There were pristine white sand beaches 20 minutes from the CBD which never seemed crowded.

I left behind a fantastic career and a happy, but grey and rainy, life in London and I've never looked back.

My love affair with Perth has just deepened ever since. But I just don't understand why there aren't more people shouting about what a truly incredible place it is.

It's healthy, it's wealthy and spectacularly beautiful. It's a place where great careers can and do blossom.

Now the prestigious Economist Intelligence Unit has declared Perth is in the top dozen cities in the world to live and I couldn't agree more.

But I feel like I hear too many people talking this town down.

"Perth's just a big country town," people grumble to me. To that I say, Perth is a city of more than 2 million people.

I come from Dublin, home to 1.2 million people. But do you hear Dubliners talking down their city as just a small town?

Dublin is like my Jack Russell terrier strutting his stuff around the park thinking he is a big dog, never a small one.

"Perth's the most isolated city in the world," I am frequently told.

When I hear that, I'm quick to point out that Perth is connected with and in the same time zone as 60 per cent of the world's population, including in China, Russia, Singapore and Indonesia.

We have direct flights to Singapore, Hong Kong, London,

Rome, Auckland, Johannesburg and more coming on tap soon.

That does not sound isolated — it feels like we have the best of both worlds with global connection and lots of space.

"Perth's just a mining town." Not just, I always reply.

We also produce top tech entrepreneurs, stage the third-biggest fringe festival in the world and have one of the globe's great wine regions on our doorstep.

We have a laid-back lifestyle in some of the country's most affordable housing and a quicker commute to work than most other Australian cities.

I'm not sure why we don't brag enough about our enviable

lifestyle. Are we too complacent?

Have we got a chip on our shoulders or an inferiority complex? Did we get too used to being an island within an island in our pandemic sanctuary?

Or, as I often hear, do we want to "keep it a secret"?

I think we need a "positive Perth" movement, where we challenge those who trot out the tired old negative clichés and complain about what we don't have. Let's celebrate what we do have. Let's be positive about Perth.

Paula Rogers is CEO of the Committee for Perth