BACKGROUND NOTE

Queensland election 2012

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Introduction

This Background Note provides a detailed account of the issues and dynamics of the 2012 election for the Queensland Legislative Assembly, along with a summary of its outcomes.

Queensland’s electoral framework

Elections for the Queensland Legislative Assembly are regulated by the *Electoral Act 1992* and managed by the *Electoral Commission Queensland*.¹ There are currently seven political parties formally registered at the state level to nominate candidates for election to the Assembly.

Queensland has a unicameral parliament with three year parliamentary terms. An election is announced usually towards the end of each term. However, there is no minimum period required between state elections, so a government can choose to hold the election at any time during its three year term. Under such an arrangement, voters do not know precisely when the next election will be held until it is announced.² Queensland is divided into 89 electoral districts, and the state has used Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) since 1992.³ This voting system had earlier been used in Queensland—from 1892 to 1942—and was reintroduced on the recommendation of the *Electoral and Administrative Review Commission* (EARC).⁴ An explanation of OPV, and a discussion of its impact on voter behaviour and electoral outcomes, appears at Appendix 1.

The 2009 state election

In July 2008, the two longstanding Queensland conservative parties, The Liberals and The Nationals agreed to a merger, not as a coalition, but as a single, new party, the Liberal National Party (LNP). The LNP held 25 seats in the Queensland Assembly.

In August 2008 the Queensland Redistribution Commission finalised new electoral boundaries.⁵ Eight new seats were created, three of which were new districts in the south-east recognising population growth in that part of the state. Under the new boundaries, Labor notionally gained three seats (Clayfield, Burdekin and Mirani), the [former] Liberals maintained eight, and the [former] Nationals lost two. The redistribution also increased the number of marginal seats held by the ALP from 13 to 14 seats.⁶ However, the swing required for the LNP to win government remained the same (8.3 per

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4. Ibid.
6. This included three seats notionally held by the Labor Party. The number of marginal seats held by the LNP remained at nine following the redistribution. The marginal seats referred to are those held by a margin of six per cent or less.
The most crucial region for the LNP in which to win seats was Brisbane where it held only two of the 39 seats. This effectively meant that the 2009 election would be won or lost in Brisbane.

At the 2009 election, a total of 397 candidates sought the votes of around 2.5 million electors for a seat in the 53rd Queensland Parliament. In what was the first election held since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the ALP defied opinion polls to win the 2009 election with a 4.6 per cent swing against it, and losing nine seats—or ten if the seat of Indooroopilly is included, the seat having been held by Labor’s Ronan Lee, who had defected to the Greens shortly before the election.8

Premier Anna Bligh—who had inherited the leadership from Peter Beattie in 2007—became the first female state Premier in Australia to be elected in her own right.9 The ALP won 51 seats, the LNP 34 seats,10 with four independents also securing a seat.11 Three LNP members later moved to the cross benches. But the LNP took 41.6 per cent of the first preference vote; the ALP took 42.25 per cent.12 The LNP enjoyed a swing of 3.6 per cent in its favour.13 It was only 11 seats away from winning government in 2012.

The Bligh government 2009–11

Notwithstanding her ground-breaking 2009 election victory, Premier Bligh began her new premiership politically encumbered by the consequences of tropical cyclone Hamish, which had reached the mid-North coast during the election campaign. It had caused the ship, Pacific Adventurer, to lose 31 containers of ammonium nitrate overboard and spill over 200 tonnes of crude oil leaving a trail of thick black sludge 20 kilometres along the northern and eastern sides of Moreton Island, north of Brisbane. Bligh was criticised for the Government’s initial underestimation of the size of the problem, its delay in responding and its methods for addressing the issue.14

7. Ibid.
10. The LNP’s Aidan McLindon later quit the LNP to establish his own Queensland Party, which in 2011 merged with Katter’s Australian Party.
12. Ibid.
A few months later Bligh was deeply embroiled in controversy over plans to privatise five major state-owned assets.\(^{15}\)

Voters feel betrayed that Ms Bligh did not announce the rail, road, port and forestry sell-off until after her historic election victory in March. Unions which oppose privatisation on principle are fuming that their members could be sold out...

The latest Galaxy Poll revealed the ALP’s primary vote in Queensland had slumped to 32 per cent, compared with 42 per cent in March. It now trails the Opposition 45-55 on a two-party preferred basis.\(^{16}\)

Opinion polls thereafter revealed a steady erosion of support for both the Premier and the ALP.

Political scientist Scott Prasser identified four key reasons for the decline of Labor’s fortunes during the ensuing two years:

- a declining budgetary situation, the loss of Queensland’s triple-A credit rating, and the fact that Bligh’s massive privatisation program had not been canvassed during the election

- scandals involving a former Beattie minister, Gordon Nuttall, disputes involving a number of police matters—including the death of Cameron Doomadgee while in custody on Palm Island—and criticisms of the government’s record on reforms around corruption and integrity

- infrastructure delays, cost blow-outs and maladministration with seemingly little ministerial accountability, and

- the appearance of a more united LNP as an alternative government.\(^{17}\)

Bligh’s approval ratings continued to slide. But her personal leadership in response to Cyclone Yasi and the disastrous floods that struck Queensland from December 2010 to January 2011 resulted in a ‘massive turnaround’.\(^{18}\) Notwithstanding Bligh’s improved personal standing with voters—along with a dip in the popularity of the LNP’s high-profile (non-parliamentary) leader Campbell Newman, late in 2011—the polls continued to suggest that the ALP would be defeated at the 2012 election.

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The lead-up to the 2012 election

On 22 March 2011, the then leader of Queensland’s Liberal National Party (LNP), John-Paul Langbroek, resigned as party leader within an hour of the announcement by Brisbane’s Lord Mayor Campbell Newman that he would seek LNP preselection for the state seat of Ashgrove, held by Labor’s Environment Minister Kate Jones. The LNP needed a swing of 7 per cent to win the seat.

Campbell Newman had developed a high profile as Brisbane Mayor from April 2004, being re-elected for a second four-year term in 2008. He pursued a vision for Brisbane as ‘a smart thinking and easy living city’ through infrastructure developments, transport initiatives that included a bicycle hire scheme, and energy efficiency projects.

A few days before Langbroek’s resignation, the press had reported that internal LNP polling showed Langbroek could not win the 2012 Queensland election, but that if Newman were leader, victory would seem assured. The LNP subsequently made an ‘extraordinary decision to install Campbell Newman as the leader-in-waiting of the state’s Liberal Nationals’, a decision that history would reveal to be ‘either a great political coup or an infamous own goal’.

Newman declared that upon his election as leader of the LNP that ‘all policies that have been previously announced are essentially null and void’.

A week later, a Galaxy poll showed Newman holding ‘a commanding 51 per cent to 38 per cent lead as preferred premier’. By the end of March, the Queensland press had opined that the first shots were being fired in the election campaign for 2012.
Newman’s presence on the electoral scene, and his leadership of the LNP while not being in parliament and not officially exercising the role of parliamentary Opposition Leader, became a source of considerable controversy. It also prompted speculation about, for example, who would lead the LNP, or indeed be Premier, in the event that Newman failed to win the seat of Ashgrove.27 Headlines such as ‘Newman dominates parliament though he’s not in it’ and ‘Newman leads LNP from parliament sidelines’ conveyed the tenor of the debate about the unorthodox arrangement.28 Newman was reported as saying that he ‘would also in effect be in charge in the chamber’, and be ‘the boss of parliamentary tactics and would assess proceedings from the public gallery’.29 By mid-April 2011 he had re-shuffled the shadow ministry—the first time in Australia that a shadow cabinet had been ‘announced ... from outside parliament’.30

In May 2011, the Bligh Government achieved its promised reforms to political financing and related laws by amending the *Electoral Act 1992* via an Electoral Reform and Accountability Amendment Bill 2011. The bill was passed on a division.31 The reforms included capping electoral expenditure, placing limits on political donations to parties and candidates, and requiring disclosure by parties and donors of the details of donations of $1 000 or more. But support for Labor continued to decline, with a *Galaxy* poll reporting that ‘Labor’s primary vote has slumped to 30 per cent compared to the LNP’s 52 per cent. On a two-party preferred basis, the LNP led Labor 61 per cent to 39’.32

Early in June 2011, the maverick independent Federal MP, Bob Katter, announced that he was forming a new political party, Katter’s Australian Party, and reportedly had a ‘plan to “control” state politics through the crossbenches after the next election’.33 The political analyst Norman Abjorensen later assessed this development in the following terms:

> Should the LNP fail to win a majority, it will be forced to negotiate with however many Katterites there are, as well as a handful of independents. If Julia Gillard has had her hands full with minority government, then Campbell Newman, assuming he wins in Ashgrove, and displaces the ALP with the largest number of seats, will have far greater difficulties. Not only

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27.  M King, ‘When the secret gets out, both sides will suffer’, *Courier-Mail*, 2 April 2011, viewed 4 January 2012, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F667896%22](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F667896%22)
will the Katter Australian Party demand a high price for its support, the terms of its support will almost certainly run counter not only to the core policies of the LNP but to its very raison d’etre.34

On 20 June 2012, the ALP Member for Ashgrove, Kate Jones, announced that she was stepping down from the Bligh ministry ‘in an attempt to thwart Mr Newman’s plan to use Ashgrove as a springboard to the premier’s office’.35 According to one press report:

Ms Jones promised to fight the former Brisbane lord mayor “door by door, street by street and suburb by suburb” … Ms Jones has held the inner Brisbane seat since 2006 but recent polls have suggested Mr Newman was poised to snatch victory despite the former minister’s 7.1 per cent margin.36

In July, Newman celebrated his 100th day as LNP leader—apparently including ‘an impromptu dance-off against Labor MP Kate Jones, his opponent for the state seat of Ashgrove’.37 The report continued:

Yet through all the trials and tribulations of the first 100 days, Newman has continued with his renowned energy and enthusiasm. While there have been plenty of problems, there’s no sign yet that the Newman experiment is faltering. Queenslanders seem to want him on the political stage. They want to have a choice for a change and if that means they have to watch him bust out the odd dance move, then so be it.38

In what was to become an election campaign mantra, Newman kept insisting that ‘if he can’t win the seat [of Ashgrove], the LNP can’t win government’.39

In mid-August the Bob Katter returned to the Queensland state political spotlight with his arrival in Brisbane:

... to announce he was joining forces with Aldan McLindon’s Queensland Party. Katter says his fledgling Australia Party is going to win up to 20 seats at the next state election, including electorates in Brisbane.40

36. Ibid.
37. S Wardill, ‘His 100-day highlight reel is studded with stunts and gaffes but the Newman roadshow continues to draw fans’, Courier-Mail, 16 July 2011, p. 15, viewed 4 January 2012, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F925923%22
38. Ibid.
McLindon had defected from the LNP in 2010 to set up his own Queensland Party, and had initially been a critic of Katter’s new party. The joining of these groups introduced a new dynamic into the as-yet-undeclared Queensland election campaign.

There is no doubt a single party makes better sense than two rivals splitting the vote. A strong, unified Australian Party is good news for Anna Bligh if it bleeds LNP support invulnerable Labor seats such as Thuringowa, Mulgrave and even Mundingburra. But Campbell Newman will be hoping the LNP’s rivals on the right of the political ledger will be their own worst enemy. Given the history old and more recent he can almost bank on it.  

August also witnessed a minor brouhaha between the major parties over the likelihood of preference-swap deals with minor parties such as the Greens and One Nation. Meanwhile, another Galaxy Poll indicated that Campbell Newman led Anna Bligh as preferred Premier 55 per cent to 38 per cent.  

By mid-September 2011, seven Labor ministers had announced that they would be retiring at the 2012 election, including Deputy Premier Paul Lucas, who was replaced by Treasurer Andrew Fraser. Campbell Newman found himself under fire for resisting the Bligh government’s demands that he ‘release an up-to-date version of his personal interests’.  

October 2011 witnessed tit-for-tat allegations regarding the use of ‘dirt files’ to discredit and undermine parties and candidates. Treasurer Andrew Fraser referred Newman to the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) following a press report that the LNP leader ‘had not directly declared two luxury north Queensland units owned by a holding company in which he has a stake’. In return:

42. Ibid.
46. S Wardill, ‘$144,000 – the ‘small, modest fee’ the LNP pays its leader in waiting (that’s more than a backbench MP’, Courier-Mail, 23 September 2011, p. 9, viewed 4 January 2012, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F1103070%22
Mr Newman labelled the Premier a “sleaze bucket” and her team “drunks, punks and desperadoes” who had engaged a “dirt unit” to discredit his bid to become Queensland premier. 48

A week later, a press report emerged that ‘Campbell Newman’s campaign team paid thousands of dollars to a Labor figure who delivered an ALP dirt file littered with sex and scandal’. 49 Newman—who was cleared by the CMC over the matter of declaration of interests—said that he would severely discipline, but not sack, the LNP officials involved in the cash-for-dirt affair. 50

With election manoeuvring in the ascendant, and the Katter factor still agitating local political dynamics, Newman ‘ruled out forming government with Bob Katter’s Australian Party, even if it means returning Labor to power’. 51 A late November Galaxy Poll showed that Newman’s popularity had ‘taken a dive after recent controversy’ but that the LNP was ‘still poised for a decisive win over Labor’. 52

On 25 November 2011, Bligh and Newman set the scene for their election campaigns with a live, televised debate hosted by The Courier-Mail on the theme ‘Queensland has emerged from a rough patch but we have a good long-term future that can be made better if we get things right now’. 53 The debate was described by The Australian’s Queensland political editor in the following terms:

It was touted as a battle of big ideas, but the first face-to-face clash of Anna Bligh and Campbell Newman was more about the past than the future. Both leaders focused on Labor’s near-20 years in power with Bligh mining a talent for detail to defend her record and Newman typically short on specifics and sweeping in his condemnation of the government. 54

As the year 2011 drew to a close, the election analyst Antony Green observed:

If polling is right then the Bligh government faces a big defeat when it goes to the polls early in 2012. The July-September quarter Newspoll had the LNP polling 50% of the first preference vote to 27% for Labor, converting to an estimated 61% for the LNP after preferences. That is a

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48. Ibid.
50. M Ludlow, ‘Newman stands by dossier pair’, Australian Financial Review, 14 October 2011, p. 18,
51. S Wardill, ‘No deal with Katter, even if it means Labor retains power’, Courier-Mail, 17 November 2011, p. 7, viewed 5 January 2012,
52. D Giles, ‘Honeymoon over but LNP cantering to election victory’, The Sunday Mail, 20 November 2011, p. 1, viewed 5 January 2012,
swing of around 10% and would deliver three-quarters of Labor’s 51 seats to the LNP, leaving Labor with just a rump of 13 seats in the Legislative Assembly.

Even if Labor halves the swing between now and polling day, a swing of 5% would deliver 18 Labor seats to the LNP, more than enough create the unique situation where Campbell Newman wins an election and is sworn in as Premier before he is even sworn in as a member of Parliament.

On state boundaries the Federal results would see Labor losing 26 seats ... However, federal results have been a poor guide to state results in Queensland for the past two decades. Labor has governed Queensland for 20 of the last 22 years and out-polled the LNP/Coalition on first preferences at seven of the eight elections in the period. The reverse applies at the eight federal elections held since 1990, where Labor has trailed the LNP/Coalition on first preferences on every occasion.\(^\text{55}\)

Green also produced an electoral pendulum for Queensland that noted:

Labor won an estimated 50.5% of the statewide 2-party preferred vote in 2009. A loss of seven seats on a uniform swing of 3.2% would reduce Labor to 44 seats and in a minority position in Parliament. The LNP would need 14 seats on a uniform swing of 4.6% to win majority government in its own right. Opinion polls continue to show the LNP easily achieving the required swing.\(^\text{56}\)

Another election analyst, William Bowe, opined early in 2012 that:

... on the conventional means of plotting the likely outcome of an election ... Labor enters the election with a considerable advantage: it would take a uniform swing of 3.2% and an overall two-party preferred result of 52.3%–47.7% in the LNP’s favour to cost Labor seven seats and their majority, the seat of Whitsunday marking the tipping point on the pendulum. If the election of four independents in 2009 were repeated, the swing required for an LNP absolute majority would be 4.2% and the two-party preferred result 53.3%-46.7%.\(^\text{57}\)

However, Bowe urged a more nuanced analysis of the situation, one that took into account the traditional rural-urban political divide, the potential impact of independent candidates and Katter’s Australian Party, and Campbell Newman’s prospects in the seat of Ashgrove:

The double whammy of a big complement of independent and Katter’s Australian Party members and a tougher job of winning regional seats from Labor could thus require the LNP to look at urban seats much further up the pendulum if they are to gain a majority and govern in their own right.


Opinion polls continue to suggest that a sufficient swing is more than likely, but there remains another wild card in the deck – the appalling risk the LNP has taken in pitting its prospective leader against Kate Jones in Ashgrove, which the popular incumbent holds with a margin of 7.1%, and the possibility that the wheels might fall off yet another conservative Queensland election campaign if indications emerge that he might fall short. There will be a lot more to say about that when the campaign unfolds.58

In Brisbane, where the LNP had to win seats in order to win government, the party held only four inner city seats leading up to the 2012 election—Clayfield, Moggill, Indooroopilly and Aspley, and held two other seats in the greater Brisbane area—Redlands and Cleveland—in Queensland’s southeast.

A useful overview of the situation regarding seats in Queensland immediately prior to the election can be found at Antony Green’s 2012 Queensland Election Summary.59

### The 2012 Queensland election campaign

#### Pre-campaign jostling

The electoral politics of early January 2012 was muted by the remembrance events honouring the anniversary of the natural disasters that had occurred in Queensland the previous year. Nevertheless, the 2012 election was already eliciting New Year press comment, including the following assessment of the Bligh government’s prospects:

> The forthcoming Queensland election due by March is more than just a test of 23 years of almost unbroken Labor rule in Queensland. If the newly amalgamated Liberal National Party ... wins the election it will be a watershed for state and national politics. Its impact will be as important as when the Bjelke-Petersen Coalition government reduced Labor to a mere 11 seats at the 1974 state poll, which heralded the beginning of the end of the Whitlam federal Labor government.

> The election represents a test for all the key players. First and foremost, it is a test of Anna Bligh... [It] has been a Bligh dominated government. Bligh has done it her way. Ministers, with a couple of exceptions, hardly get a look in. It is Bligh who attends the funerals, manages the disasters and speaks across all portfolios. Following the recent Department of Health fraud issue, it was Bligh, not the Health Minister who took the running. If Labor falls in Queensland, then Bligh must shoulder full responsibility. If Labor hangs on, then Bligh can take the credit.60

In an article in The Weekend Australian on 7 January 2012, former Premier Peter Beattie caused a stir with the statement: ‘Together with an inherited legacy of 59 seats of the 89 in Queensland’s

58. Ibid.
unicameral parliament and with strong majorities for Labor in each of its seats, even my old dog Rusty could have won that election [in 2009]. The remarks prompted speculation about a rift between Beattie and his successor that Bligh brushed aside, insisting that she and Beattie remained friends ‘absolutely’.

On 13 January 2012 Treasurer Andrew Fraser released a mid-year budget review that forecast a surplus of $60 million in 2014–15, one year ahead of the original target of 2015-16. He then ‘challenged the LNP leader [Campbell Newman] to outline his plan to dig Queensland out of deficit, accusing his political opponent of having billions of dollars of unfunded promises’. Newman, meanwhile, unveiled an election countdown clock on a Brisbane billboard anticipating an election date of 24 March 2012.

The press declared that, although the election date had not been announced, the campaign had ‘well and truly begun’. Pledges from both sides were soon forthcoming. The LNP was reported to have prepared 20,000 laminated pledge cards for distribution to Queensland electors ‘so voters can hold the LNP to key election promises’. Premier Bligh issued a statement that ‘she would not resign in the next parliament if her government lost the election’.

As speculation about an imminent election date intensified, Premier Bligh made it clear that the poll would not be held until after the release of the report into the previous summer’s natural disasters


and Wivenhoe Dam management by Justice Catherine Holmes—scheduled for 24 February 2012. It remained theoretically possible to delay the election until 16 June 2012.

**Election date announced**

Matters related to the Commission of Inquiry into the floods proved to be a key factor in Premier Bligh’s announcement, on 25 January 2012, that she proposed an election date of 24 March 2012:

> Ms Bligh says she had originally planned to call a poll for March 3 but has reconsidered now the flood Commission of Inquiry has requested more hearings. The deadline for the Commission’s final report has been extended until March 16. She says Queenslanders have a right to know what the final report says before voting in both state and local elections. Council elections will now be held in late April or early May.

Parliament was proposed to be prorogued on 17 February 2012, with the Legislative Assembly proposing to sit for three days from 14 February. The arrangement was described by political analyst Professor Scott Prasser as ‘unprecedented in Australian politics’. Prasser continued:

> By postponing caretaker arrangements, the government has placed public servants in an unenviable position, with potential legal consequences. They have to follow government orders as if there were no election, but they are in a clear election campaign environment. ... Recalling parliament is an odd decision, given that parliamentary sittings under Labor have been infrequent, that no urgent legislation is listed for debate and that the Flood Commission report will not have been released.

A *Galaxy* Poll taken at the time of the election date announcement revealed that ‘Labor has experienced a small increase in support over the past three months... However, the increase would not be enough to save Labor from a damaging defeat ... that would surpass the rout inflicted on the conservatives in 2001’. The poll showed the LNP leading Labor 59 per cent to 41 per cent on a two-party preferred basis, with Katter’s Australian Party on four per cent. A few days earlier Newman had explicitly ruled out a preference swap deal, or a coalition, with the Australian Party. Katter
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reportedly ‘slammed the Liberal National Party as arrogant and left open the option of doing preference deals with the ALP to prop up Anna Bligh’s government’. 76

Despite ‘a slight leaking of support away from the LNP Leader on the question of preferred premier’ Newman remained ahead of Bligh 49 per cent to 40 per cent 77—although both leaders were ‘almost even on the issues of trust and being in touch with Queenslanders’. 78 Newman’s 49 per cent rating was six per cent lower than in August 2011.

Third party campaigners

Under Queensland electoral law, a third party that intends to incur electoral expenditure for an election may apply for registration with the Queensland Electoral Commission. 79 A third party is an entity that publicly canvasses issues relevant to the election or advocates support for a particular political party or candidate and does so primarily through advertising. 80

Registered third parties are allowed to spend up to $500,000 in total, but not more than $75,000 in any one electoral district. 81 (Under Queensland law campaign spending is capped at $50,000 for each endorsed candidate and $80,000 for a party in each electorate.)

Dependant upon the level of campaign finance activity, third parties may be required to meet additional obligations. This includes the keeping of a separate account with a financial institution for State election campaigns and the lodgement of a disclosure return detailing all electoral expenditure incurred and political donations received and/or made. 82

Early in February 2012, the Courier-Mail reported that 10 unions closely aligned with Labor had registered to campaign in the 2012 election, and that another group, ‘Locals for Locals’, had registered in support of Labor MP Kate Jones in Ashgrove in her fight against Campbell Newman. 83 Newman described the group as ‘a Labor front’—a description that the group reportedly considered offensive. 84

77. Wardill, op.cit.
78. Ibid.
79. A ‘third party’ is as any entity other than a candidate, registered political party or an associated entity (of a registered political party)
82. Ibid.
The public sector union *Together* said it would spend $500 000 on advertising during the Queensland election campaign ‘even though all parties have promised not to sack public servants’:

The LNP, Labor, The Greens and Bob Katter’s The Australian Party have all told the union they do not support forced redundancies, in their written responses to the union’s campaign wish-list.  

**The re-convened floods inquiry**

Bligh had commissioned an inquiry into the disastrous Queensland floods, and it had ostensibly completed its hearings, but it was re-convened in the wake of press reports in *The Australian* and *The Courier-Mail* alleging shortcomings in certain evidence. This event somewhat displaced the election as a focus of media attention during early February—although politics tended to intrude into the related commentary.

Additional hearings commenced on 2 February 2012, and were scheduled daily until 11 February 2012. The appearance of what Justice Holmes called ‘reprehensible headlines’ in a report by *The Courier-Mail* on 4 February led to her deciding not to call on the services of one of her Deputy Commissioners on the grounds that it was ‘simpler’ and ‘puts everything beyond argument’.

On 11 February, Justice Holmes declared that the public hearings into the floods were completed, and Premier Bligh stated that ‘she had not been asked to extend the inquiry’s final reporting deadline past March 16 and the election remained on track to be held eight days after the recommendations and findings were handed down’. In the event, extra hearings were scheduled for 14–15 February 2012.

**The unofficial campaign intensifies**

With the floods inquiry left to finalise its report, the media refocussed its attention on campaign politics. At a gathering of LNP candidates, Campbell Newman was reported as saying that ‘we will not win this state election if we cannot win seats like Ashgrove’. A report also claimed internal
party polling suggested Newman held ‘a big lead’\textsuperscript{90}, although another said that there had recently been ‘a 5 per cent swing in favour of ALP candidate Kate Jones over LNP Leader Campbell Newman in latest polling’.\textsuperscript{91}

Meanwhile, Bligh unveiled plans for a ‘cost-neutral’ South Bank 2—a 27ha mix of ‘commercial and residential development, as well as large swathes of green space’.\textsuperscript{92} Katter’s Australian Party’s (KAP) campaign featured a London double-decker bus, dubbed the ‘Katmobile’.\textsuperscript{93} KAP also ‘committed to raising the threshold where payroll tax kicks in from $1 million to $2 million’.\textsuperscript{94}

In mid-February, internal LNP polling showed Newman holding a six point lead (53 to 47 per cent) over Kate Jones in the seat of Ashgrove.\textsuperscript{95}

Controversy surfaced again around business interests associated with Newman’s family as Premier Bligh launched ‘a full-blown parliamentary attack’ on Newman and his family’s business interests, alleging impropriety and going so far as to suggest Newman could be jailed.\textsuperscript{96} It was described as ‘a dramatic escalation of the Bligh Government’s pursuit of Mr Newman over his extended family’s business interests’.\textsuperscript{97} Bligh did not repeat her claims outside parliament, and Newman dismissed Labor’s attacks, saying he was not involved in the business dealings to which Bligh had referred. He issued a statement saying that the parliamentary attack showed that the Premier had ‘lost all credibility in her desperate bid to cling to power’.\textsuperscript{98}

Drawing on \textit{Newspoll} results, press reports revealed that the LNP led Labor by a significant margin in both the primary and two-party preferred vote, and that Newman was the preferred premier.\textsuperscript{99} KAP was languishing at 4.8 per cent of the vote—a figure that would ‘puncture expectations whipped up by Mr Katter that it could reprise the shock 1998 state election result that delivered Pauline

\begin{itemize}
\item AAP, ‘Holy maverick MPs, Bobman! To the Katmobile’, \textit{The Sunday Age}, 12 February 2012, viewed 13 February 2012, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F1412646%22
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Hanson’s One Nation 23 per cent of the vote and 11 seats’. Preference swaps between KAP and the Greens were mooted on the grounds that the two minor parties could ‘set aside differences on gay marriage and other social issues to turn the poll into a referendum on coal-seam gas development’.101

On the 19 February 2012, as Premier Bligh formally sought the Queensland Governor’s blessing for the 2012 state election, a Galaxy poll reinforced the Newspoll result from the previous day, showing ‘support for the LNP has increased in the month since Ms Bligh made her shock election announcement, with the margin widening to 60–40 on a two-party preferred basis’.102

The formal election campaign

The campaign’s opening remarks from both Bligh and Newman respectively commended and condemned the ALP Government’s track record. Bligh stressed the Government’s economic achievements, promising more to come, standing by the ‘tough decisions’ she had made, and criticising Newman for failing to explain ‘how he will deliver on his slogans’.103 Newman declared it ‘time for a change’, pledging ‘to build a strong, four pillar economy’ (tourism, agriculture, resources, construction), and committing the LNP to ‘restore accountability to government in Queensland’ and ‘to get Queensland back on track’.104

At the same time, simmering tensions around the federal leadership of the ALP flared, thereby further complicating matters for the state ALP campaign strategists. The press reported Premier Bligh’s response as follows:

“The sooner this is resolved one way or the other the better,” she said. “I don’t have a vote, I’m not going to speculate about it, but I am going to say get it fixed. “I think it’s time to put the whole thing to bed. Frankly, I’d like it resolved.”105

Days later—on the occasion of the ALP federal leadership ballot between Prime Minister Julia Gillard and her predecessor, the Queenslander Kevin Rudd—former Queensland premier Peter Beattie was to lament its ‘undermining’ of Anna Bligh’s re-election chances:

101. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
The ALP is at the crossroads. Today’s caucus meeting and vote on the ALP leadership is a watershed point in the party’s history. Party members I talk to in Queensland are furious that this leadership contest is occurring right in the middle of a Queensland election. They ask one simple question; why now? In my 37 years in the Labor party I have never felt such anger in the community towards the ALP... This is the most frustrating state election campaign in Queensland since the 1957 ALP split.  

Notwithstanding the distracting effects of the Federal ALP controversies, the key issues upon which the Queensland election were to be fought—according to Brisbane’s Courier-Mail—included the usual list of state-based issues:

- education
- environment
- mining and jobs
- economy
- infrastructure
- law and order
- trust
- cost of living, and
- health.

A contemporaneous Newspoll assessment, suggested that it was health and the economy that ‘remain the priority for Queensland voters’, while coal seam gas development was a source of ‘voter hostility ... across political lines, with Labor and LNP supporters opposing it in almost equal measure’.

Barely had the official campaign commenced than the ALP candidate for Southern Downs, Peter Watson, was expelled from the party and disendorsed ‘after admitting to a series of online rants, including anti-homosexual views’ and to posting ‘neo-Nazi remarks ... on the blog Whitelaw Towers’. Bligh was reported as saying that Watson ‘was trying to infiltrate the party to embarrass it from within. But party organisers ... confirmed that his father is a member of the party, a long-time union official and a local ALP branch president’.

Newman—who had frequently come under attack by the ALP for his alleged association with financial and property development matters involving members of his family—again found himself

having to defend the receipt of developer donations into his (then) mayoral re-election fund. The donations—which Newman said he knew nothing about—had been made ‘weeks before city council approved two towers that exceeded height limits and overlooked a heritage-listed church and school’.111 The Electoral Commission of Queensland website showed the developer also made three donations to the ALP totalling $7 750 in 2010–11.112

With four weeks to go until polling day the press quoted Newman as saying that he had a schedule for the first 14 days and first 100 days of an LNP government, including an overhaul of the public service, ‘cut[ting] government waste and streamlin[ing] business approval processes’.113

In an interesting development, on 1 March 2012 Queensland’s major circulation newspaper, The Courier-Mail, castigated both major parties for their campaigns of ‘piecemeal spending announcements tied to photo opportunities’ and announced in an editorial that:

*The Courier-Mail* has decided to devote our journalistic resources to more productive coverage of issues that really matter to Queensland voters rather than wasting time on a very carefully choreographed pantomime that provides more in the way of pretty pictures and short grabs than new ideas and inspiration for the future. Queensland voters deserve some vision. Anna Bligh and Campbell Newman have less than four weeks to provide that basic service to voters.114

ABC News reported that the newspaper’s journalists would not board the Newman or Bligh campaign buses ahead of the election. Political journalist Dennis Atkins opined:

The rules of engagement need to be renegotiated and recast. .. We all know campaigns are harder than hard work and the hardest bit is often coming up with the backdrop and pictures so the nightly TV news beast is fed, but this and the mushroom effect is threatening serious coverage of politics. 115

With the Gold Coast area coming ‘into focus as a key election battleground’ both major parties pledged multi-million dollar initiatives for the area, and Gold Coast mayor Ron Clarke declared he

would run as an independent ‘campaigning on issues including high water prices, a permanent police helicopter and the need to maximise the benefits of hosting the 2018 Commonwealth Games’.116

At the close of nominations on 3 March 2012, 430 candidates were officially listed to contest the 89 seats in the Queensland Assembly.117

Katter’s court action over ballot papers

Early in March, controversy surfaced again around Katter’s Australian Party when KAP came to realise that only its abbreviated name ‘Australian Party’ would appear on the ballot papers. The party said that the name Katter ‘was a valuable “brand”, given the federal independent MP’s high profile’.118

KAP applied to the Supreme Court to have the ballot papers re-printed with the registered name Katter’s Australian Party.

Sub-section 102(2)(g) of the *Queensland Electoral Act 1992* states that ballot papers must:

\[(g) \text{ ... contain, printed adjacent to the candidate’s name} \]

\[\text{(i) if the register of political parties includes an abbreviation of the party’s name—the abbreviation; or} \]

\[\text{(ii) otherwise—the party’s full name included in the register of political parties.}^{119}\]

Katter’s Australian Party applied to the ECQ in December 2011 to have the name ‘Australian Party’ become the official abbreviation for Katter’s Australian Party:

That was accepted [by the Queensland Electoral Commission] on January 30, so therefore there is an abbreviation and it is clearly set out in the Act that therefore that will be used on the ballot paper.120

The matter was heard in the Queensland Supreme Court on 5 March—by which time pre-poll voting had already commenced. Justice Roslyn Atkinson refused to grant an interim injunction to stop the printing of the original ballot papers, but adjourned the case for two days ‘to give the federal and

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state Attorneys-General a chance to respond to claims there were constitutional issues surrounding the case’.121 According to Bob Katter: ‘If the name K-A-T-T-E-R is taken off the ballot paper, the implications for us are not much short of diabolical’.122 Justice Atkinson referred the matter to the Court of Appeal.

On Thursday 8 March the Court of Appeal rejected KAP’s application to have 7.1 million ballot papers destroyed and reprinted with the full name.123 Katter said that the party was unlikely to pursue further legal action, but made clear his displeasure with the outcome:

Let me tell all the people responsible for this decision, yes you can be judged in a court of a law but there is a much bigger court and that is the court of public opinion.... And it will judge a government, it will judge a judiciary, it will judge bureaucracy and there will be a terrible harsh opinion passed because there is not a single fair-dinkum person that wouldn’t say this is bloody unfair.124

When the judgement was handed down, KAP’s state leader, Aidan McLindon remarked:

You know when the refs took Wally Lewis off the field, it just meant the other players had to play harder and that’s where we’re at. So, we’re not going to whinge and complain when the fact is we’ve just got to chin up and keep at it.125

The LNP campaign launch

Campbell Newman launched the LNP campaign on Sunday 4 March 2012 supported by federal Coalition leaders Tony Abbott and Warren Truss. Newman attacked the record of Queensland Labor in office and listed key LNP promises including:

• a ‘royalties to the regions’ program to inject $100 million a year into social infrastructure in mining areas
• upgrading and flood-proofing the Bruce Highway
• an inquiry into children-in-care and a $4 million trial program ‘Fostering Families’ targeting at-risk families

124. Ibid.
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• enhanced counselling, support and education related to sexual abuse of children ($2.5 million)
• a $170 million Resource Community Building Fund (over four years), and
• ten thousand extra apprenticeships.126

Describing Newman’s speech as ‘both polished and predictable’, the post-launch editorial in *The Courier-Mail* said that, to fund the LNP’s promises, Newman was relying on the ‘magic pudding of future mining royalties’ and ‘the always promised, but often-hard-to-achieve savings from cutting out government waste’.127 The newspaper also returned to its theme of the dark arts of political financing, criticising the LNP’s fundraising activities:

The second, even more fundamental, issue Mr Newman simply ignored at yesterday’s launch was the nature of the LNP’s fund-raising activities. *The Courier-Mail* revealed on Saturday that Queensland’s business elite were paying up to $22,000 to attend events in the company of Mr Newman and other LNP politicians as part of a program called QForum. Mr Newman has disconcertingly defended this latest version of the controversial practice of business people paying for access to politicians as “democracy in action”. Nothing could be further from the truth. The very definition of democracy includes the idea that everyone is equal, with equal access for all, not just those who can afford to pay more.128

*The Australian* was similarly critical of Newman’s speech, saying it was ‘short in detail’ and calling for Newman—with respect to controversies around his relationships with developers—to ‘do more to explain how he operated at [Brisbane] council and to detail his manifesto for state government’.129 Academic political analyst Paul Williams, writing in the *Courier-Mail*, observed that ‘It seems Campbell Newman just can’t shake integrity questions’, adding:

Newman’s concentration on Labor’s failings on Sunday, at the expense of policy detail, keeps alive perceptions of the LNP as a carping Opposition and not a government-in-waiting.130

The ABC reported that ‘Mr Newman will still not say how he will fund his election promises, saying again he will release the details before polling day’.131 The LNP had ‘so far committed to around $3.6 billion over the next four-year budget cycle’.132 Premier Bligh claimed that the LNP’s campaign promises ‘totalled more than $7.5 billion and Mr Newman had yet to show how he was going to pay

128. Ibid.
132. Ibid.
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for them’. The LNP’s Treasury spokesman reiterated the $3.6 billion figure, but that some longer-term commitments ‘went beyond the budget period, such as $1 billion towards an upgrade of the Bruce Highway’. Both parties committed to having their costings independently verified.

Bligh’s subsequent announcement of a $300 million ‘Royalties for our Regions’ scheme prompted accusations that it was ‘a copycat of Campbell Newman’s $170m “Royalties for the Regions” program announced a day earlier [at the LNP campaign launch]’.

The campaign intensifies

On 6 March 2012 a ReachTel automated telephone poll of 742 Ashgrove residents showed Labor’s Kate Jones gaining ground in her contest with Campbell Newman for the crucial seat:

For the second consecutive month Kate Jones has increased her primary vote in Ashgrove. This time she has picked up another 3.4 percentage points and has increased her primary vote 6.8 percentage points since our January poll. Jones’ lift has come almost exclusively from Campbell Newman who has dropped 5.4 percentage points in the same two month period. The sample included 742 voters in the electorate and has a margin of error of +/- 3.5%.

On a two-party preferred basis, calculated using 2009 election results, the poll indicated that Jones was leading Newman 50.7 per cent to 49.3 per cent. Newman was reported as saying that ‘the controversy over his family’s property dealings and the activities of his former campaign fundraiser at City Hall, Greg Bowden, was affecting his vote in Ashgrove’.

Commenting on the Ashgrove situation, Queensland political scientist Professor Clive Bean noted:

It is quite possible the LNP can win government with a swing that would be somewhat less than that required by Campbell Newman to win the seat he is contesting...

Campbell Newman and the LNP generally have steadfastly refused to nominate a so-called Plan B [leader] on the grounds that if they started saying what might happen in the event of

134. Ibid.
135. Ibid.
Campbell Newman not winning his seat then they are opening themselves up to doubts that they are confident he will win his seat, and also the allegation of campaigning on potentially false pretences by promoting him as the leader when the outcome might have him absent.\textsuperscript{140}

While the polls had, for the time being, turned to favour Jones in Ashgrove, many Queenslanders still felt strongly that the LNP would provide the next premier.\textsuperscript{141}

Thursday 8 March 2010—the day that KAP lost its court case—was described as one of ‘high drama’ by the \textit{Australian Financial Review}, a day during which an LNP candidate was cleared of links to a soft-porn website, ‘shots were fired at another LNP candidate’s office and Premier Anna Bligh accused Mr Newman of trying to “buy Aboriginal votes with grog” by promising to review alcohol-management plans for indigenous communities’.\textsuperscript{142}

Claims and counter-claims about the major parties relationships with developers and party donors continued to attract media comment.\textsuperscript{143} This led one commentator to observe: ‘Amid the increasingly excoriating exchanges between political leaders, the big ideas and the big policies that are supposed to be at the heart of an election contest have been forgotten’.\textsuperscript{144} By week’s end, the media’s overall assessment of Newman’s campaign was that it was struggling.\textsuperscript{145}

On the eve of the ALP campaign launch Newman said that ‘a declaration of his personal finances was available online’ and that he ‘had been cleared of any wrongdoing on more than one occasion by Queensland’s corruption watchdog’.\textsuperscript{146} Newman also blamed Labor’s ‘campaign of smear and innuendo’ for the week’s unfavourable poll results.\textsuperscript{147} He later appeared on Channel 10’s \textit{Meet the


\textsuperscript{143} For example, M McKenna, ‘Deputy Premier denies union lunch was a fundraiser’, and ‘Newman critical of his advisers’, \textit{The Australian}, 9 March 2012.

\textsuperscript{144} M McKenna, ‘LNP leader buckling as the pressure rises’, \textit{Weekend Australian}, 10 March 2012, p. 8, viewed 13 March 2012, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F1488784%22


\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
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Press ‘to redress concerns about his personal and family’s financial holdings’ and ‘to address the issue of who would be leader if he can’t win Ashgrove’. 148

Newman promised to sell his business interests within 90 days of being elected149—a pledge that was said by The Courier-Mail to have ‘backfired badly’. 150

The ALP campaign launch

Anna Bligh reportedly ‘delivered a rousing performance’ at the Labor campaign launch held in the Brisbane Convention Centre on 11 March 2012, continuing her attacks on Newman’s business interests and the uncertainty of his election in Ashgrove.151 Policies announced by Bligh included:

• extending an education trust funded from mining royalties to finance 1000 scholarships for study in an Asia-Pacific country

• mandating immediate disclosure of political donations in excess of $1000

• increasing by 3000 over three years the number of doctors, nurses and other health professionals

• freezing vehicle registration fees and making permanent the temporary 25 per cent payroll tax rebate, and

• $81 million in financial incentives for apprentices and businesses who employ them.

The Courier-Mail’s state political editor declared: ‘Between the politics and the policies, this was a near perfect launch for Labor’. 152

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The KAP campaign

In Townsville on 11 March 2012, Bob Katter launched his party’s campaign, introducing the KAP state leader, Aidan McLindon as ‘the next premier of Queensland’. Katter’s speech was described as ‘a medley of Katter’s favourite topics—the need for an ethanol industry in north Queensland, the stranglehold of Coles and Woolworths on primary producers, and how the big parties have betrayed their roots’. The party promised ‘to scrap the $8 billion Brisbane light rail project and instead spend the money on major road projects in rural Queensland’.

Meanwhile, the party was fending off criticisms—including from Katter’s gay brother Carl Katter—arising from KAP’s launch of an allegedly ‘homophobic’ campaign video claiming that Campbell Newman supported gay marriage. Both Newman and Bligh condemned the video ad. A subsequent anti-gay graffiti attack on a Labor minister’s office was alleged to have been prompted by the ad campaign. An ABC Radio weekend presenter from Western Australia, who had recorded the voice-over for the ad, was stood down for failing to obtain her employer’s permission to do the work.

The ad campaign caused ructions within KAP itself, with four of its candidates publicly criticising the ads, including calling for their immediate withdrawal. Bob Katter reportedly ‘dug in, saying he did not resile from the ad’s content “one iota” and it would continue to run despite the backlash’. In response, Katter’s gay brother, Carl—with support from activist group GetUp—launched his own ad, with Carl Katter speaking ‘in front of the original commercial, condemning it for vilifying gays and lesbians, particularly youth’.

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154. AAP, ‘Katter fires up his “army on the march”’, Brisbane Times, 11 March 2012, viewed 13 March 2012,
159. Ibid.
161. Ibid.
Bob Katter also found himself the target of criticism from some federal MPs who claimed that his absence from Federal Parliament in order to campaign in the Queensland state election was a breach of his responsibilities and that this warranted the withdrawal of his salary.\(^\text{163}\)

**KAP and the Packer donation**

In what was described as a 'highly unusual splash into Queensland politics', billionaire James Packer donated $250 000 to KAP. Advertising magnate John Singleton also donated $50 000.\(^\text{164}\)

Mr Packer’s donation is one of the biggest recorded from a single donor in Queensland and was made on February 24 through Treysta Pty Ltd, owned by his private company Consolidated Press Holdings. The Electoral Commission of Queensland was advised of the transaction last week under requirements for donations of more than $100,000 to be registered within 14 days.\(^\text{165}\)

In a statement reported by *The Australian* concerning the gay marriage ad controversy, Mr Packer said that Bob Katter:

> ... had done “enormous work for North Queensland and Indigenous Australians”. But that admiration did not extend the party’s attack ads targeting LNP leader Campbell Newman. “I admire his passion for this great country and that’s why I donated to him,” Mr Packer said. “But I don’t agree with all his policies and views and I certainly don’t support this advertisement or his attack on Campbell Newman.”\(^\text{166}\)

**The Queensland Greens campaign**

The Queensland Greens—fielding candidates in every seat—built their campaign around five major policies:

- health
- accountability and integrity in government
- the economy
- coal seam gas

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165. Ibid.

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- coastal protection.167

At its campaign launch on Friday 9 March in Brisbane—attended by Australian Greens leader Senator Bob Brown—the Queensland Greens’ commitments included:

- reinstatement of Section 57 of the Criminal Code Act to make lying to parliament a criminal offence.
- reinstatement of an upper house in Queensland, and
- cessation of coal seam gas mining until further environmental, social and economic impact studies had been conducted.168

Greens candidate for the seat of Mount Coot-tha, Adam Stone, said also that the Greens would establish a $20 million Queensland health promotion foundation, based on the Victorian model of preventative healthcare, and a further $25 million for community mental health services.169

The penultimate week of the campaign

As the Queensland campaign entered its final stretch, the editorial in The Courier-Mail expressed frustration with the campaigns of both major parties:

Queensland voters are being poorly served by the campaigning seen in the state election so far. Led by an increasingly desperate Labor Party, the tone and tenor of the messages being sent to the electorate is one of negativity, personal abuse, character assassination and debased cynicism. ... The LNP, feeling under pressure and placed on the defensive by an aggressive ALP, has decided to respond in kind with advertising that puts Ms Bligh personally in the frame as the architect of Labor’s many perceived policy and service delivery failings.

Just eleven days out from polling day, voters are being given plenty of reasons why they shouldn’t vote for the other side but precious few reasons as to why Queenslanders should cast a vote for either Labor or the LNP.

With Newman still being considered as possibly failing to win the seat of Ashgrove—and with no ‘Plan B’ settled to address that potential outcome—one opinion writer argued that ‘Campbell Newman is essentially fighting two separate election campaigns, to two very different audiences.

How he rectifies this over the next 12 days will determine who is the state’s premier in a fortnight’s time’. 170

Labor’s attack on Newman’s credibility and business interests continued. Although Bligh admitted she ‘did not have enough evidence to refer the donations by Mr Usher to the CMC, despite vowing to seek an investigation’, The Australian newspaper reported that the Crime and Misconduct Commission had ‘seized Brisbane City Council files concerning a residential development’ and was ‘assessing whether $72,000 in donations by a developer to Campbell Newman’s former mayoral election fund could amount to official misconduct’. 171 The Australian Financial Review reported that:

The CMC said it began the review on February 29 independently of a reference from any political party. It also contacted Brisbane City Council in early March to access documents in relation to the development in East Brisbane. 172

The ABC News reported Newman saying he had ‘received an email from the CMC saying he is not personally under investigation over the matter’:

“I actually have news just this evening from the CMC who actually have said that they’re not actually investigating me,” he told Lateline last night. “They are investigating the matter, but they have not decided at this time to actually investigate me.”

However in the email, the CMC says it is still yet to decide on whether there needs to be an investigation. “We are currently assessing whether this matter involves suspected official misconduct on the part of any councillor or officer of the council,” the CMC email said. “While Mr Newman falls within our assessment considerations, we have not determined to conduct a formal investigation at this time.” 173

In the event, the CMC ‘said it would not conduct formal investigations’ and that there was ‘no evidence of official misconduct against Mr Newman’, although investigations into a developer would continue. 174

On 15 March 2012, at a ‘People’s Forum’ organised by The Courier-Mail and Sky News, Bligh and Newman faced undecided voters at the Broncos Leagues Club in Red Hill. Issues canvassed included:

• Newman’s contingency plans should he fail to win Ashgrove

• Bligh’s ‘dirty campaign tactics’ attacking Newman’s business interests

• Newman confirming that the LNP would look at repealing the legislation on civil unions despite his personal support of gay marriage.175

At the time, academic Gary Johns assessed the potential electoral outcome for the LNP in the following terms:

Of the 12 seats the LNP requires to govern in its own right, the likeliest are five from north Queensland, five from Brisbane and two from the Gold Coast. A bare LNP majority would consist of 18 Nationals, 17 Liberals and eight Gold Coast members. Should the swing be greater than the minimum required, say up to 6 per cent, a further eight seats are likely, six of which are from Brisbane, one from the Gold Coast and one regional. The greater the swing, the more Liberal will become the LNP. Nevertheless, a new LNP party room of 51 members would represent 24 Brisbane (five Sunshine Coast) seats, 18 rural seats and nine Gold Coast seats. Katter’s Australian Party holds two seats (LNP absconders) and there are four rural independents.176

The final week of the campaign

A week out from polling day, Newspoll figures indicated that in Ashgrove, Newman was ‘on track for a slim victory (52 per cent to 48 per cent, two-party preferred)’.177 Private LNP polling suggested that Newman would ‘fall over the line’ in Ashgrove; that the LNP would win 65–70 seats; and that three or four seats would go to KAP or independents.178 Meanwhile, election analyst Antony Green reminded his Twitter followers that: ‘Even best poll for Labor in last 6 months gives it only 26 seats’.179


179. @AntonyGreenABC, tweet, 2:59pm, 18 March 2012, Twitter, viewed 19 March 2012, https://twitter.com/#!/AntonyGreenABC
The Greens decision to preference Jones in Ashgrove in return for Labor preferences in Mt Coot-tha was described as a ‘crucial boost’ for Jones. The deal did not involve Green preferences going to Labor in Mt Coot-tha, where ALP incumbent and Deputy Premier Andrew Fraser was under serious challenge from LNP newcomer Saxon Rice.

In its final editorial before polling day, The Sunday Mail said that Anna Blight had been ‘the best choice in 2009’, with the LNP then being ‘unelectable’, but that it was ‘a different story in 2012 when the LNP is not only a credible choice but the only choice for the state’.

With the first and only leaders’ debate between Newman and Blight about to get underway Monday 19 March 2012, Newman told a press conference that ‘we’re not taking people’s vote for granted’, but that he sought to ‘demonstrate to Queenslanders that we have a plan’:

On the very first day we’ll do three things. The first thing is that we’ll convey to all government departments and agencies our 4 per cent unemployment target in the next six years. The second thing we will be doing on day one is to direct the Treasury to get on with the legislative and regulatory changes to cut the cost of living for families and businesses. ... And we want to see those changes implemented as soon as possible. And the third and final thing is about accountability. I’ve been talking about accountability all the way through the campaign and we are going to restructure government.

In the afternoon of Monday 19 March, Blight and Mr Newman engaged in the leaders’ debate at the Queensland Media Club in Brisbane. It focused on the Queensland economy, jobs, taxes and political leadership, ‘with both leaders showing little emotion’.

Despite Mr Newman drawing most of the applause from the 850-strong crowd, loaded with business and industry representatives at Brisbane’s convention centre, the Nine Network’s contentious “worm” gauging the response of a panel of undecided voters gave the debate to Ms Blight by an overwhelming 76 per cent to 24 per cent.

As the grind of the final week’s election politics occupied the column inches in the mainstream press, at least one commentator was lamenting the lack of focus by politicians on Queensland’s ‘potentially paralysing problem: the spectacular growth in state debt’.  

Queensland’s public debt quadrupled from $21 billion in June 2004 to $85 billion in December 2011. Today, public debt is around $90 billion and on track for $92.5 billion by July... The deterioration is even more marked when it is recalled that $15 billion was recently obtained from asset sales, with no evident effect on outstanding debt.... The mortgage on the state is set to increase, with all parties promising more major infrastructure projects.

By the middle of the final week—which also happened to mark the anniversary of the 2009 Queensland election—media reports suggested that Labor was resigning itself to a serious defeat: 

Even the forever optimistic Premier Anna Bligh looks deflated and has abandoned any pretence of a come-from-behind ALP victory. ... By contrast, Newman has more of a spring in his step as the campaign enters its final days.

In the light of the opinion polls, Premier Bligh admitted that Labor faced ‘a very uphill battle’ and said that the expected outcome ‘would...see a government with an unprecedented level of unfettered power...more power than any government in Queensland’s history. ... An unfettered power is not a healthy thing in a democracy, this kind of power would be more than we saw Joh Bjelke-Petersen have in his hey day.’

Notwithstanding Bligh’s concession of likely defeat, when a wild storm ripped through Townsville, a Courier-Mail editorial described her as being ‘at her leadership best ... walking the storm-stricken streets’. The editorial went on to observe:

The Labor Party has a sorry record of burning good female political leaders. We have seen in Victoria, Western Australian and New South Wales where the best and the brightest were sent in at the death watch of their respective governments and wasted on the electoral pyres.

The state electorate of Mansfield is a bellwether Queensland seat, comparable in its significance to Eden-Monaro at the federal level: ‘If Mansfield falls early and hard to the conservatives, chances are

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187.  Ibid.
there’ll be a Labor Party rout’. A 4.4 per cent swing in Mansfield was needed to unseat the Labor incumbent, Sports Minister Phil Reeves, and three days out from March 24 his LNP challenger, Ian Walker, was reported to be ‘confident of victory, but not overconfident’.

Deputy Premier Andrew Fraser and Education Minister Cameron Dick were also considered to be ‘in some danger of losing their seats’. With opinion polls suggesting Labor could be left with only a dozen MPs, former Premier Beattie was warning that ‘anything less than 20 seats could relegate the Labor Party to nine years in opposition’.

A special telephone Morgan Poll of 205 Queensland electors conducted over the nights of March 20–21 showed primary support for the ALP was 28 per cent, LNP 51 per cent, KAP 8.5 per cent, Greens 7.5 per cent, Family First 0.5 per cent and Independents/Other 4.5 per cent.

Although Anna Bligh won the hearts of many in Queensland for her personal engagement with the floods and those affected by the floods last year there is a clear groundswell of frustration in the Queensland electorate about economic issues — such as the loss of the State’s Triple A Rating; asset sales, also the negativity felt towards Julia Gillard and Federal Labor appears to be rubbing off on the Queensland ALP; and there is also a sense that 20 years is enough.

On the other hand, while Campbell Newman gained some positive comments for his work as Brisbane Lord Mayor, the special qualitative research conducted by Roy Morgan of 205 Queensland electors does suggest that the swing to the LNP and Campbell Newman is more rooted in disappointment with Labor rather than huge positive regard for Campbell Newman or the Queensland LNP.

A March 21 ReachTEL poll in the key seat of Ashgrove saw Newman’s primary vote grow to 49 per cent from 45.4 per cent two weeks earlier, with incumbent Kate Jones dropping to 40.8 per cent from 44.4 per cent.

Meanwhile, Deputy Premier Fraser had released details of Labor’s independently audited costings for its election promises—a total of $1.792 billion with $1.046 billion of new spending to be funded.

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192. Ibid.
194. Ibid.
196. Ibid.
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from additional GST revenue.\textsuperscript{198} The following day the LNP released its election promises costings—previously mooted to involve expenditure in the order of $4 billion.

A published summary of the LNP costings showed:

- $2.8 billion in new spending initiatives over the next three financial years ($4 billion over four years)
- proposed offsets of $4 billion over three years, providing total saving of $1.2 billion over three years and $5.7 billion over four years
- projected budget surplus in 2014-15: $524 million
- cuts to “redundant” state based carbon schemes to save $650 million over three years, but solar feed in tariff to stay
- deferral of $35 million in spending for land acquisitions for Brisbane’s Cross River Rail project
- other measures include making convicted criminals pay fees for court administration costs, increasing fines by boosting penalty units to $110 and a new trial program to recover outstanding fines.\textsuperscript{199}

Election eve

On Friday 23 March, as the election campaign limped towards its close and every opinion poll spelled disaster for the ALP, \textit{The Courier-Mail} published a strongly-worded editorial:

The punishment Queensland is ready to mete out to its long-term Labor Government tomorrow will be harsh and conclusive... a deserved response to an incompetent administration that has spent too long putting politics above policy. The state deserves better and will be looking for it in abundance from the LNP team led by Campbell Newman.

\textit{The Courier-Mail} endorses Mr Newman and his team in this election in the belief it is the only way in which the state can recapture the spirit of optimism that has driven its success over the past half-century. We have high expectations of Mr Newman and, on behalf of our readers, will hold him to them...

Every area of public administration has been tarnished by Labor’s incompetence over the past decade. The supply of power, water, transport, care for vulnerable children, health and justice, and our financial credibility have all suffered. Two ministers have ended up in jail. Only education is relatively unscathed and it is one area where Anna Bligh as Education Minister and Premier deserves credit. Just as she merits credit for her calm leadership in last year’s natural disasters.

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
Labor has been lucky for almost 30 years not to face a viable, united conservative force. The formation of the Liberal National Party, under the leadership of Lawrence Springborg, created that force and has laid the ground for the first election of a conservative government in more than a quarter of a century...

The Courier-Mail has already lamented that the state has not been offered the campaign it deserves. ... Throughout this manufactured campaign, Labor has tried to scare voters about the negatives of the LNP, rather than chronicle any achievements and map a future for the state. The LNP has attached too little detail to policy but the direction it has outlined is enough to satisfy the electorate. Overwhelmingly, its main positive, however, is that it is anything but Labor.200

Queensland election 2012

The outcome

Overview

In the largest recorded swing in Australian political history—15.7 per cent against the ALP—Queensland Labor was reduced to seven seats out of the 89 seats in the Legislative Assembly, and forced to ‘rely on the mercy of Mr Newman for it to retain official party status’. The LNP captured a record 78 seats, KAP secured two, and the Greens none. There were two independents elected. Labor lost 44 sitting MPs.

Campbell Newman won the seat of Ashgrove with nearly 52 per cent of the vote, and became the first premier in Australian history to attain that post from outside the parliament. He also became the premier with the largest parliamentary majority in Australian history. The major Brisbane daily, The Courier-Mail, had championed a Newman-led LNP and welcomed the change of government:

The state has strongly put its faith in Campbell Newman and his Liberal National Party team to reinstate the “can-do” mentality that defines our character. Voters have delivered him a mandate granted no other politician, a privilege he acknowledges and a responsibility he must honour ...

There will be missteps for sure. New ministers will overreach because of enthusiasm or inexperience. New MPs will blunder because of ambition or simply because they were poor choices in the first place. But this must be seen in the short term, at least as a necessary cost of changing government. No administration can arrive perfectly formed and the electorate will be patient if they see a government focused on serving the community with diligence and humility. Indeed, voters may enjoy the contrast ...

Ms Bligh’s resignation from the once-safe seat of South Brisbane paves the way for a future leader to enter parliament immediately. She deserves credit for helping this happen and the party needs to quickly identify and install a quality candidate. Its failure to do so will demonstrate that it has learnt nothing from the most overwhelming show of support ever given to any political party. The voters have spoken and the LNP clearly deserves that support. Equally, the supporters of Labor deserve some hope that their party has a future.

Describing the rout as ‘Labor’s ground zero’, The Age opined that it would take decades to rebuild the state party’s fortunes, saying that Bligh’s program of asset sales and her personal attacks on

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203. Ibid.

Newman’s credibility were the two key miscalculations that contributed substantially to Labor’s defeat. 205

Labor never reached 50 per cent of the first preference vote in any seat, and was below 40 per cent in all but two seats, Woodridge and Inala. The LNP achieved more than 50 per cent of the first preference vote in 44 seats—that is, in 56 per cent of the seats that the LNP won, it won on first preferences. 206

Bligh retained her seat of South Brisbane, having led by a whisker on first preferences (38.6 per cent to the LNP’s 38.1 per cent) and winning 55.0 per cent of the two-candidate preferred vote. 207 She survived a swing of 9.8 per cent against her. 208 Notwithstanding her earlier promise to remain in politics whatever the election outcome, Bligh decided to resign, saying that ‘her continued presence would prevent Labor rebuilding’. 209 With ten senior Labor ministers having lost their seats—including Deputy Premier and heir apparent Andrew Fraser—Labor’s options in terms of electing a new parliamentary leader were very limited. In the event, Annastacia Palaszczuk, the Member for Inala, was elected unopposed as Labor leader. 210

A by-election for Bligh’s seat of South Brisbane—the loss of which would reduce Labor to six seats—was eventually scheduled for 28 April 2012. The eight candidates included Labor’s Jackie Trad, the LNP’s Clem Greham, the Greens’ Jo-Anne Bragg, and KAP’s Robert Wardrop. 211 The South Brisbane by-election proved a close tussle, with the LNP securing 38.02 per cent of first preferences to the ALP’s 32.91 per cent. 212 But Labor’s Jackie Trad took the seat on preferences.

Women in the 2012 Queensland election

The 2012 Queensland election was notable for the changes in the numbers of female candidates and MPs. Sixteen Labor female MPs lost their seats, and four were re-elected. Only one independent female MP was re-elected. Five sitting LNP female MPs were re-elected and eight female LNP candidates were newly elected.

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208. Ibid.
209. Ibid.
In the previous parliament there had been 32 female MPs—25 Labor, five LNP and two independent MPs. After the election, the number of female MPs sitting in the Queensland Parliament was reduced to 18—a decline of 44 per cent.

Of the female MPs in the previous parliament, one independent (Dolly Pratt, Nanango) and five Labor women had announced their retirement. To contest the seats of the five retiring Labor female MPs the ALP pre-selected two females and three males. To contest Dolly Pratt’s seat of Nanango both the ALP and the LNP nominated a female candidate; the Greens and KAP nominated male candidates.

Of the 89 candidates nominated by each of the major parties, the ALP nominated (including the 20 women who were re-nominating) 31 female candidates (34.8 per cent of Labor candidates); the LNP nominated (including five women who were re-nominating) 16 female candidates (18 per cent of LNP candidates).

Of the 76 candidates nominated by KAP, nine were women (11.8 per cent). Greens candidates stood in all 89 Queensland seats. Of these, 32 were women (36 per cent).

As a consequence of the 2012 Queensland election, the total number of female parliamentarians across all Australian legislatures dropped by fifteen. The proportion of female representation overall has dropped from 30.3 per cent to 28.5 per cent.\(^\text{213}\)

Campbell Newman’s first ministry of 19 contains three women (15.8 per cent). Of 11 assistant ministers, all newly elected MPs, three are women. Fiona Simpson, the Member for Maroochydore, and the LNP’s longest serving female MP was to become Queensland’s first female Speaker.\(^\text{214}\) Given the LNP’s huge majority, the new Speaker will never be in the position of having to make a casting vote.

**Minor parties**

Of the minor parties, the Queensland Greens won no seats, and recorded a vote slightly lower than in 2009. KAP won the seats of Dalrymple (Shane Knuth) and Mt Isa (Rob Katter). Independent candidates were returned in Gladstone (Liz Cunningham) and Nicklin (Peter Wellington).\(^\text{215}\)

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\(^\text{213}\) Calculation by Janet Wilson, Parliamentary Library. For a complete table showing representation in parliaments by gender see 'Composition of Australian Parliaments by Party and Gender, as at 8 May 2012 http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Browse_by_Topic/~/media/05\ About_Parliament/54\ Parliamentary_Depts/544\ Parliamentary.Library/Browse\ by\ topic/Currentwomen.ashx


First managed just under 1.5 per cent of the first preference vote, and the One Nation vote was barely visible at around one-tenth of one per cent.216

The vote for KAP

Katter’s Australian Party captured a sizeable slice of the vote in regional electorates, especially in Far North Queensland:

It was 22 per cent of the primary vote in Cook, nearly 19 per cent in Cairns, 16 per cent in Barron River and 30 per cent in Mulgrave, just behind the LNP... In Dalrymple, KAP scored 55 percent through Shane Knuth and in Mt Isa 42 per cent of the primary vote with Rob Katter. The RAP performed well in other northern seats - in Hinchinbrook the KAP received 36 per cent of the vote, just behind the LNP. In Dalrymple, Labor could only muster 11 per cent of the vote ... The KAP also did well in other regional areas and in some seats on the outskirts of Brisbane.217

The KAP state leader, Aidan McLindon, lost to the LNP in Beaudesert, as did KAP’s star candidate, former Test cricketer Carl Rackemann in the seat of Nanango in the Kingaroy district.218 Across the state, KAP polled 11.55 per cent, but in key rural and regional areas their primary vote was much higher, with a vote above 20 per cent in at least 12 seats.219

Mr Katter said the result meant the party would do well at future federal elections, particularly in the race for the Senate. “On those figures, we would have won a senator and seven federal seats.”220

The vote for the Greens

Opposition to coal seam gas had been a prominent theme of the Greens campaign, but exit polling showed that the issue had little resonance, and the Greens overall vote dropped by about one per cent from 2009 levels.221 The Greens trailed the KAP vote by four per cent, notwithstanding that they had candidates in every seat.

216. Ibid.
219. Ibid.
220. Ibid.
Political analysts speculated that the Greens modest voter support may have been linked ‘to voters tarring the party with the same brush as ousted Labor leader Anna Bligh’, or to ‘an undercurrent of social conservatism’.  

Post-election analysis and commentary

The magnitude of Labor’s loss, and the distinctive circumstances of Campbell Newman’s ascent to the premiership from outside parliament, were prominent sources of comment, analysis and speculation in the days following the 2012 Queensland election.

The magnitude of the Labor loss, its causes and implications

While the “it’s time” factor was widely acknowledged to be pertinent—Labor had been in office for 20 of the last 22 years, and its election wins in 2006 and 2009 were considered by many to have been a bonus—the post-election commentary focussed largely on two matters: the legacy of Bligh’s unanticipated asset sales in 2009 and associated issues of trust, and a voter backlash against Labor’s personal attacks on Newman and his family.

On the former matter, opinion polls had long evidenced Queenslanders’ sense of betrayal about asset sales and a subsequent loss of trust, and had consistently registered voters’ declining approval of both Anna Bligh and Labor:

No amount of heroics during the floods could get around the fact that [Bligh] had broken promises over the privatisation of Queensland Rail and the abolition of the petrol subsidy. Ultimately, voters didn’t trust her.  

Continuous track-polling undertaken by Labor during the campaign showed that the biggest grievances among voters were broken promises about privatising assets and abolishing a petrol rebate, along with the “it’s time” factor. In exit polling, cost-of-living issues seem also to have been on voters’ minds.

Labor’s negative campaigning—in particular Bligh’s criticisms of Newman’s family, her statement in parliament suggesting that Newman could wind up in jail, and her declared intention to refer

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Newman to the CMC only to admit subsequently that there were no grounds for so doing—dismayed many voters:

[E]xit polling across 20 of the most marginal seats ... found the conduct of the campaign was the major influence in the way people voted. The negativity, coupled with the lack of a policy agenda, turned Labor’s expected defeat into massacre.... Bligh was admirable during the floods, but when she sanctioned and participated in the campaign against Newman and his family she discredited herself and her party.226

With Labor reduced to a handful of parliamentary seats, concerns were expressed that the parliamentary processes of scrutiny and accountability would be greatly weakened, as the tasks of opposition would be shouldered by too few Labor MPs:

No human being can juggle three portfolios, committee work and tend to the needs of their constituency at the same time with the rigour and attention to detail that is required. Such an imbalance is not a recipe for robust scrutiny of a government with a thumping majority... 227

Unsurprisingly, the implications of the Queensland loss for federal Labor were canvassed by many pundits. One colourful opinion writer expressed it thus:

If Saturday’s state result was in any way a dry run for what awaits Labor federally next year, voters in Queensland are waiting with baseball bats, rocket launchers and cans of capsicum spray, sitting in steamrollers, in readiness to obliterate the ALP. If the staggering and unprecedented 16-17 per cent swing at Saturday’s state election is in any way reflected at the next federal poll, Labor will be utterly destroyed, with senior Government figures from Treasurer Wayne Swan down swept from office... On Saturday’s numbers, not one Queensland MP would survive.228

While many ventured similar opinions, at least one senior journalist suggested that historical voting patterns in state and federal elections militated somewhat against such an extreme outcome for Labor in the federal arena:

[P]redictions of a federal wipeout for Labor in the rugby league states are premature. The evidence to date is that voters distinguish between federal and state in numbers large enough to deliver a split ticket, where the Coalition thrives in one jurisdiction while faltering in another... Labor won 22 state elections in a row between June1998 (Queensland) and August 2008. The Howard government had a near miss at the start of that cycle, in October 1998, but increased its majority in the federal elections of November 2001 and October. It may be a long

Queensland election 2012

shot for the Gillard government, but history suggests the next federal election is still winnable.229

The unique circumstances of Newman’s ascendance

From the moment Campbell Newman announced his move from Brisbane City Council politics to the state level, interest was galvanised around the implications and challenges of leading a party and aspiring to a premiership when not yet even an MP.

As one newspaper had stated at the time, the LNP made an ‘extraordinary decision to install Campbell Newman as the leader-in-waiting’, a decision that history would reveal to be ‘either a great political coup or an infamous own goal’.230 In the event it proved an even greater coup than might have been imagined when the LNP took its initial decision. As academic Ian Ward argued in his post-election analysis:

The LNP’s success [in the 2012 election] lay in convincing voters jaded with “politics as usual” that it had changed, and that change was possible. Its master stroke was to pluck Campbell Newman from his lord mayor’s chair and install him as the premier-in-waiting.

Leaders are now crucial to the marketing of their party. Newman’s “can do” reputation gave him gravitas. But he was also a “clean skin” from outside the parliament who had not been involved in his party’s leadership wrangling.231

This electoral strategy of thrusting a high-profile, ostensibly ‘clean skin’ figure into a party leadership role was a theme pursued in several newspapers. For example, the Adelaide Advertiser pressed the merits of the strategy—partially tongue-in-cheek—describing it as ‘the equivalent of nuclear capabilities for future elections or the sporting equivalent of an entire AFL team of first-round draft picks’:

No longer will the political powerbrokers have to dip into the shallow gene pool of their elected representatives, which after 10 years in opposition are often depleted by the public’s dislike of the profession, the daily trench warfare, what they consider to be low pay and a lack of life experience in the real world.232

http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F1525498%22
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F643274%22
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http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F1525171%22
The Newman government takes shape

A general post-election consensus emerged that the severity of Labor’s defeat had likely consigned it to at least a decade out of office, if not longer. With the largest majority in parliament in Australian history, Newman had been handed the personal authority and the numbers to pursue whatever legislative agenda he desired.

Newman himself said that he was making ‘no apologies’ for proceeding ‘at the quickest, fastest rate to implement change in Queensland’, citing his ‘mandate for all the policies we put out there prior to the election’. In particular, Newman had pledged to reduce the unemployment rate to four per cent, and return the budget to a surplus in 2014–15. But a post-election report by ratings agency Fitch said that Queensland’s budget position ‘was not strong despite its resources-reliant economy’ and that the state ‘did not have much “financial flexibility” especially in terms of revenue generation’. One business analyst expressed Newman’s fiscal dilemma in the following terms:

No, you actually can’t wave a magic wand that cuts debt, builds infrastructure and creates sharply rising employment all at the same time, particularly when you’ve effectively ruled out any further privatisations and insisted that regaining the top credit rating is a priority.

The Newman Government’s new Treasurer, Tim Nicholls—who judged Queensland’s existing fiscal position and outlook to be ‘unsustainable’—announced an audit of the state’s finances to be led by former Federal treasurer Peter Costello. The audit commission’s first report was to be filed by 15 June 2012, with follow-ups in November 2012 and February 2013.

With Newman’s initial appointments to key bureaucratic positions being people with close ties to him either politically or from his time at Brisbane Council, he acknowledged the potential criticism of providing “jobs for the boys”. Newman defended his choices on the grounds of merit, saying that ‘these are people who’ll do a fantastic job... [and] will perform and deliver on the promises we have made’. A Courier-Mail editorial the following day argued that while Newman’s haste was ‘understandable’ he also needed to:

... make sure he has the right mix of skills to produce results. Good government requires more than good policy and political will. It also requires a high degree of skill in public... There is also the need for business or individuals to be able to speak with the department and believe that it

237. Ibid.
is apolitical. Ministers can be approached with their political ties clearly exposed but the
department should remain a neutral colour to ensure that ideas of all sizes are given
appropriate consideration.239

As the new clutch of LNP parliamentarians gathered for the first time, Newman urged his colleagues
to build up the respect of the public of the role of an MP’, reminding them that they were ‘servants
of their communities’ who should also ‘aim to improve parliamentary standards’.240

Queenslanders’ expectations of Newman and his team are high. The report card on their first
hundred days in office will be eagerly awaited.

viewed 29 March 2012, 
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressclp%2F1530520%22
teams-mission-20120328-1vxmn.html
Appendix 1: Optional Preferential Voting and its impact

Optional Preferential Voting (OPV)

FACT SHEET

Queensland State elections have used Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) since 1992. This voting system is not new to Queensland - a form of OPV was used here from 1992 to 1942. The reintroduction of OPV was recommended by the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC), and passed by Parliament on 11 April 1991. OPV is also used in Queensland local government elections (in those councils divided into single member wards or divisions) and in the NSW Lower House.

OPV is an unusual, if not unique, voting system. It gives voters more options to express their political opinions, while at the same time preserves the voting choice available under full preferential voting. Under preferential voting, voters have the opportunity to rank candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3, and so on). To win, a candidate must obtain a majority (more than half) of total formal votes in the count. Measure this against first-past-the-post voting, where electors do not express preferences beyond a first choice (they vote '1' only). To win, a candidate must gain more votes than any other candidate. A majority of total formal votes is not required.

OPV adds two additional options to the voter’s choice, so that a valid vote may be cast by:

1. expressing a single primary preference for one candidate only, leaving all other squares blank (this is called ‘plumping’ for one candidate)
2. expressing a partial distribution of preferences by voting for some, but not all candidates on the ballot paper (for example, voting 1, 2, 3 on a ballot with five candidates)
3. expressing a full distribution of preferences (that is, marking every square in order of preference).

Instructions on how to cast your vote always appear on the ballot paper you receive in the polling booth. These read: ‘Place the number one (‘1’) in the square opposite the candidate of your choice. You may if you wish indicate your preference for additional candidates by numbering the other squares in your preferred order.’ You should note the instructions refer only to numbers. To ensure your vote counts at Queensland State elections, use number(s) only.

Counting the votes under OPV

The scrutiny or vote count for each of the 89 State electoral districts is done in stages.

1. First, ballot papers are sorted (and counted) into formal and informal votes. Ballot papers without a clear first preference are set aside as informal votes and are not admitted to the count.
2. The majority required to win the seat on first preference votes (primaries) is calculated by determining how many votes comprise 50 per cent + 1 of the total formal votes.
3. All formal ballot papers are then sorted by first preferences for each candidate and these are counted. If a candidate receives an absolute majority (50 per cent + 1) of first preference votes, then that candidate wins the election outright on primary votes. If no candidate wins a majority of first preference votes, then preference votes have to be counted to determine a winner.
4. The second count is done by excluding the candidate with the fewest votes, and distributing the second preferences as indicated. Ballot papers with no second preferences are set aside as exhausted votes reducing the total formal votes left in the count and a new majority is calculated. If a candidate has a majority (50 per cent + 1) of votes after preferences are distributed, then that candidate is the winner.

If no candidate has a majority after the second count, it is necessary to continue to a third count by excluding the next remaining candidate with the fewest votes and distributing the preferences as indicated. The counting continues until one candidate has a majority of votes.

Source: Electoral Commission Queensland, website
Optional Preferential Voting and the impact of ‘just vote 1’

When Queensland re-introduced OPV in 1992, a survey of the state election ballot papers showed that 73 per cent of ballot papers were marked with a full list of preferences, 4 per cent with a partial list, and 23 per cent were marked ‘1 only’ votes. In 2001 the ALP urged voters to ‘just vote 1’, and since that time nearly two-thirds of voters at each state election have cast ‘1 only’ votes, with around 30 per cent of voters listing a full set of preferences. That is, the number of electors who ‘just vote 1’ nearly trebled. The logic of a party urging a ‘1 only’ vote is to maximise the primary vote that its candidate receives, and to minimise the negative effect that preferences might have on the party’s electoral outcome once those preferences are distributed. (For self-interested strategic reasons, of course, a party might sometimes urge voters to direct their preferences to a particular party or candidate.)

The ALP’s strategy to urge ‘just vote 1’ in the 2001 elections no doubt contributed to its landslide victory. The party won 66 of the 89 seats, 44 of them on primary votes. The controversial political party, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, secured three seats on preferences. Of the remaining 20 seats, only four were won on the primary votes—16 were won on preferences.

Election analyst Antony Green assessed the ‘just vote 1’ strategy, its effect on subsequent elections, and its implications for 2012, in the following terms:

The Labor shift to ‘1’ only voting is dramatic in 2001 and clearly influenced preference flows of other parties, as it was intended. ... Labor specifically directed preferences to the Nationals in a couple of seats ... in an attempt to save the Nationals from losing seats to One Nation.

What Labor’s ‘1’ only vote did was seed the idea of not giving preferences amongst voters for the various non-Labor parties. In 2001 ... (It) was in Labor’s interest to encourage ‘1’ only votes as it was the non-Labor support base that was divided. As long as Labor had the highest first preference vote, encouraging ‘1’ only votes was a tactic that worked in Labor’s favour...

Optional preferential voting was one of the reasons for the drive to a single conservative party in Queensland. ... Now that Labor’s first preference vote is being splintered by the presence of the Greens, it is in the interest of the ... Queensland LNP to encourage ‘1’ only voting.

... (In) 2009 three-quarters of LNP votes followed their party’s recommendation and gave no preferences, a dramatic change from the 1990s. In 2009 Labor returned to giving ‘1’, ‘2’ preferences on many how-to-votes, reflected in the decline in Labor ‘1’ only votes.

Under the full preferential voting system that operates in Federal elections, the ALP has consistently received more than 70 per cent of the Australian Greens preferences. But under Queensland’s


optional preferential system, and with a strong tendency for people to ‘just vote 1’, such a high flow of Greens preferences to Labor is less likely to occur. This ‘could put some safer Labor seats at risk’.245

Antony Green has drawn attention to the fact that since 1915 ‘Queensland has seen just three elections that changed the state’s political order, and another three short term governments that proved to be just political interludes. There have been fewer changes of government in Queensland over the last century than in any other state’.246

244. Ibid.
## Appendix 2: Queensland 2012 Election Timetable

### 2012 State General Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue of Writ</td>
<td>Sunday 19 February 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close of Roll</td>
<td>5:00 pm Saturday 25 February 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close of Nominations</td>
<td>Noon Monday 27 February 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Poll Voting - Declaration (In Person)</td>
<td>Starts: 8:00 am Friday 2 March 2012</td>
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<td>Ends: 6:00 pm Friday 23 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Poll Voting - Declaration (Postal Applications)</td>
<td>Starts: Sunday 19 February 2012</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ends: 6:00 pm Thursday 22 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Poll Voting - Declaration (Postal Voting)</td>
<td>6:00 pm Saturday 24 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Poll Voting - Electoral Visitor Applications</td>
<td>Starts: Sunday 19 February 2012</td>
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<td>Ends: 6:00 pm Thursday 22 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Poll Voting - Electoral Visitor Voting</td>
<td>6:00 pm Saturday 24 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Poll Voting - Declared Institution</td>
<td>Starts: Tuesday 13 March 2012</td>
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<td>Ends: 6:00 pm Saturday 24 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last day for lodging How-to-Vote Cards for approval for distribution on Polling Day</td>
<td>5:00 pm Friday 16 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polling Day</td>
<td>6:00 pm Saturday 24 March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cut-Off for Return of Postal Ballot Papers</td>
<td>6:00 pm Tuesday 3 April 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline Return Writ</td>
<td>Monday 23 April 2012</td>
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## Appendix 3: Comparative list of successful candidates by seat 2009 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2009 Election Outcome</th>
<th>2012 Election Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>KEECH, Margaret</td>
<td>BOOTHMAN, Mark</td>
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<td>Ashgrove</td>
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