

Vaccinations

Topic 1: Vaccinations are a means of eliminating and preventing infectious diseases that once killed or harmed many infants, children, adolescents and adults. Australian vaccine policies and guidelines are designed to improve general health and lower the disease and death rate within the community and to be impartial without regard to a person's race, gender, nationality or economic circumstances. Increasing numbers of parents are refusing to have their children vaccinated. This cannot be allowed to continue. Adherence to vaccine policy guidelines is critical to the wellbeing of the whole community.

Topic 2: Most people can readily accept the fact that at times certain laws are necessary for the public good that some of us strongly disagree with, but the compulsory immunization of children involves the wholesale introduction of foreign proteins or even live viruses into the bloodstream of entire populations. For that reason alone, the public is entitled to convincing proof, beyond any reasonable doubt, that artificial immunization is in fact a safe and effective procedure in no way injurious to health, and that the threat of the corresponding natural disease remains sufficiently clear and urgent to warrant vaccinating everyone, even against their will if necessary.

Australian Educational Standards

Topic 1: The decision of the Australian Government to use the PISA international test rankings, together with national testing, as a benchmark for the quality of education in Australia is ill-advised. It is a test that is made by OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) experts and is not related to what teachers are supposed to teach and students are supposed to learn in each country. The real test of the efficacy of the Australian education rests not simply on comparisons with performance in other countries, nor even the mastery of content and skills, but ultimately on the capacity of the individual to be able to lead a fulfilling and happy life, fulfil the obligations of living in a democratic society and to be confident and creative.

Topic 2: To say that the results of Australian students on the PISA tests are disappointing is a gross understatement. It beggars belief that Australian students are not only well behind their Asian counterparts in Reading, Mathematics and Science but on some measures have also gone backward despite increased spending of 48 per cent. Australia families deserve better. The Government must deliver educational reforms that have clear education strategies that include a strong emphasis on implementing change in the classroom to guarantee improved learning outcomes for all.

Feral Cats

Topic 1: The feral cat is found in nearly all habitats across Australia. It has caused the extinction of some species on islands and has contributed to the disappearance of many ground-dwelling birds and mammals on the mainland. Feral cat colonies also serve as reservoirs for infectious diseases and ringworm which are transmissible to native animals, domestic livestock and humans. A co-ordinated, humane eradication program that causes the least amount of pain and suffering to the target animal with the least harm or risk to non-target animals, people and the environment must be developed as a matter of national priority.

Topic 2: So called feral cats have co-existed with various native species for around 200 years (as long as 500 years in some parts). The ecological balance has changed and is still changing. It may well have been better if cats had never been introduced to Australia in the first place. However, even if it were possible to remove feral cats from the Australian ecosystem, it risks doing far more harm than good at this late stage.

Juvenile Sentencing

Topic 1: Figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show the national rate of Aboriginal juvenile incarceration has risen to a startling rate of 31 times the non-indigenous rate. Juvenile jails have become storing houses for disaffected Aboriginal children growing up in squalor and despair. It used to be that social deprivation was a mitigating factor in sentencing. However, this increasingly does not seem to be the case. The tragedy of this utterly misguided approach is that nothing increases a child's prospects of moving on to a life of crime more than a stint in juvenile detention.

Topic 2: As indigenous juveniles are more likely than non-Indigenous juveniles to begin offending early and belong to the group of offenders that has long-term contact with the criminal justice system, primary crime prevention strategies, which seek to prevent crime before it begins, are critical for indigenous communities. Intervening early in life, through the provision of community development, education, vocational and employment skills training, health and social services is a critical component in breaking the cycle of crime and violence that lead to incarceration in detention centres.

Breastfeeding

Topic 1: Breastfeeding in public is not a debate where one can "agree to disagree", where one opinion is as good as the next. This matter is not, nor has it ever been, about mere "opinions". It is about civil rights and the law: Australian women have the right, endorsed by bipartisan political support, and upheld by the majority of citizens - to breastfeed in public wherever and whenever they so please. To ask them to stop, or refuse them service, is to act unlawfully under the Sex Discrimination Act (1984), quite apart from displaying a breathtaking impertinence and lack of courtesy. To perceive, or publicly portray, the matter as one in which it is reasonable to 'agree to disagree' will only encourage others and provide a veil of respectability to antiquated prejudice.

Topic 2: *Sunrise* presenter David Koch has found himself the target of indignant women across Australia after the adverse comments about public breastfeeding he made on the Seven Network program. David Koch, in defending his statements appealed to his right to freedom of speech. He, like many Australians, believed he had the right to express his opinions freely, even if his opinions were controversial or unpopular to some in the community. This is not the case. Australia does not have explicit freedom of speech in any constitutional or statutory declaration of rights, with the exception of political speech. The Gillard Government's planned overhaul of discrimination law will impose unprecedented restrictions on free speech, making it unlawful to say anything that offends another. Freedom of speech is a right preserved in the [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and is the linchpin of all our democratic freedoms. Australians must be guaranteed the right to freedom of speech, irrespective of the potential to offend.