



# Kooyong Speaks

A summary of community consultations

August 2021 - January 2022

Prepared and presented by

**VOICES OF  
KOOYONG**

“Having grassroots discussions like this is very important. Hearing what other people have to say is very important. Dialogue. It helps us to formulate and articulate our views as well.”

# The Federal Electorate of Kooyong

The federal seat of Kooyong is 59 square kilometres in size, and encompasses the Melbourne inner Eastern suburbs of Balwyn, Camberwell, Canterbury, Deepdene, Hawthorn and Hawthorn East, Kew and Kew East, Mont Albert and Mont Albert North, Surrey Hills. Part of Glen Iris and one street in Ashburton are now also included, after the 2021 electoral boundary redistribution<sup>1</sup>.

Since 1901, the electorate of Kooyong has been a tightly held Liberal seat. However, strong representation at the 2019 election from Independent Oliver Yates and Greens' Candidate Julian Burnside resulted in a significant negative swing on first preferences (-8.2%) for sitting member Josh Frydenburg MP. After preferences were considered, Josh Frydenburg MP held Kooyong, with 55.7% of the votes.

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[www.voicesofkooyong.com](http://www.voicesofkooyong.com)

Voices of Kooyong acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands upon which we live. We pay our respects to the peoples of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, their elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise that the electorate we know as Kooyong derives from an Aboriginal word meaning camp or resting place, or haunt of the wild fowl.

Design: Robt Haughie basegraphic.com.au

1. [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/CED224](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/CED224)

# Executive Summary

Voices of Kooyong seeks to promote a greater diversity of opinions and a true contest of ideas to shape the future of our electorate and our country.

**A**s we engaged with our community, we were unsurprised with the thoughtful and considered perspectives that articulated visions for Kooyong and beyond that were both practical and inspiring.

This report serves to amplify the voices, the values and the mood of the community. Kooyong is a sophisticated and intelligent electorate and the data we gathered and share in this report reflects this.

The data we present in this report reflects common concerns, thoughts priorities. There were so many excellent specific thoughts that we could not include them all. The main themes in this report can be summarised as follows:

**Kooyong is looking for decisive evidence based action on Climate Change, investment in innovation to address the existential threat that this represents. They were not impressed with targets set for 2050, and did not understand the lack of ambition demonstrated by the current government**

**Kooyong community members are frustrated and dismayed by the lack of integrity in politics, in particular they spoke of the lack of due process for dispensing the public money, rorting and misrepresentation that occurs in everyday politics. There is a strong desire to see a Federal ICAC.**

**Kooyong community members expressed that they did not feel that they were able to connect and communicate with their current sitting representative. They spoke of times past when they felt that their local politician was accessible and available.**



# Who are the 'Voices of Kooyong'?

**In early 2021, a group of over 50 Kooyong locals came together. They had found each other via social media and were all frustrated by their local representation.**

The common threads bringing the group together were a sense that their values were not reflected by their local representative, their voices were being ignored, and frustration with political representation that was not responsive to local concerns nor accountable to the community.

They were united in a goal to press for better representation for residents of Kooyong, to improve political discourse and to press for accountable, evidence-based decision making.

Despite Melbourne living through extended lockdowns and public health restrictions for much of 2021, Voices of Kooyong grew to over 800 members and over 50 active volunteers in that time. Voices of Kooyong focused on

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## Voices of Kooyong aims:

- **Listen** to the community.
- **Understand** the core **values** and **concerns** of the people of Kooyong.
- **Engage** and **empower** people of all ages to express their views about what is important to them.
- **Identify** candidates who are aligned with the **values** and **issues** of importance to the people of Kooyong.
- Ensure the people of Kooyong are properly **represented** by our Member of Parliament.
- Make our voices **heard**.

engaging neighbours via virtual meetings, virtual events and virtual Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs). In November 2021, Voices of Kooyong was able to co-host its first in-person event, welcoming Kerrie O'Brien and Cathy McGowan to the Kew High School theatre. Voices of Kooyong was also able to host its first in-person volunteer event in late 2021 - a democracy walk along the Anniversary Trail.

The vision for Voices of Kooyong is to continue to engage and empower residents of Kooyong to express their views about what is important to them. Political discourse is often disconnected from the concerns and views of residents.

We want to improve the quality of democracy in Kooyong, to provide a way for residents to engage and make their voices heard.

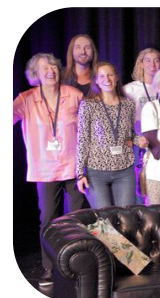
**Voices of Kooyong will continue to bridge the gap between our local member and the community - whoever is next elected as the member for Kooyong.**



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## VOK is committed to:

- **Inclusiveness** and **diversity** of voices.
- Being **honest** and **respectful** in our dealings.
- Acting always with **decency** and **integrity**.
- Advocating views that are **evidenced-based** and from **reputable sources**.



# 'Kooyong Speaks': Aims of this report

We wanted to identify and collate the views, values, and priorities of Kooyong residents. The information:

1.

Has been utilised as a part of the process of considering and endorsing a potential community independent candidate.

2.

Will be presented to all candidates running in the Kooyong electorate in the forthcoming election.

3.

Will be used to hold whoever is elected to account for the people they represent.

Information was collected via two methods: an online survey 'Kooyong Connects', and through Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs).



We want to improve the quality of democracy in Kooyong, to provide a way for residents to engage and make their voices heard.

523 participants

# Online Survey

A short survey was developed to canvas the residents of Kooyong, aiming to identify key issues for the electorate and nationally, ideal qualities that a Member of Parliament (MP) would possess, and an assessment of the current MP against these qualities.

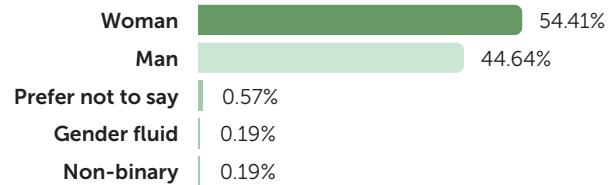
## Who participated?

From July 2021 to December 2021, a total of 523 Kooyong residents completed our survey. Responses were weighted toward an older demographic, with 50 percent being 55 years old and over. Those in the youngest age bracket (18 to 24 years) accounted for just shy of 5 percent of survey respondents. For comparison, the 2016 Census data recorded 28 percent of Kooyong residents as being over 55, and those 18 to 24 being closer to 10 percent of the Kooyong population.

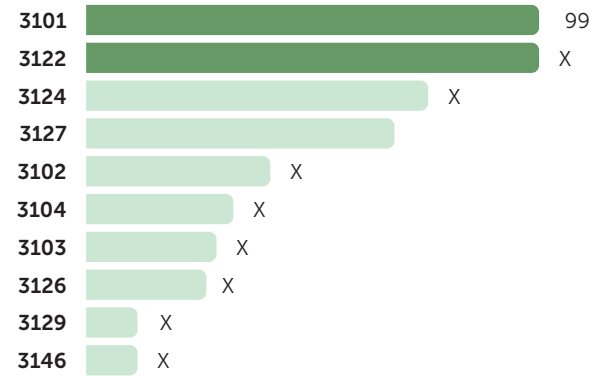
Women accounted for just over half (54%) of respondents, and men just below (45%). Those identifying as gender fluid, non-binary, or preferring not to say, were just under 1 percent of respondents. These figures are representative of the 2016 Census figures.

The strongest representation in survey respondents was from residents of Kew (3101) and Hawthorn (3122), followed by Camberwell/Riversdale (3124), and Mont Albert/Surrey Hills (3127). Residents from Hawthorn East (3123) and Ashburton (3147) did not participate in the survey, though all other postcodes in Kooyong were represented.

## Respondents by gender



## Number of respondents by postcode



## What were the results?

Survey participants were asked to select the 'top 5 issues most important to you,' from a list of predefined categories. Ninety-one percent of the Kooyong respondents rated climate change action in their top five list. Over half of respondents ranked socioeconomic equality, health care/Medicare, and environmental protection as being most important to them. Indigenous affairs and reconciliation was also seen as a key issue, with just under half of respondents listing it, closely followed by concerns around affordable housing, university funding, and aged care.

There was a great deal of overlap between the current issues of most importance and the key issues respondents believed Australia would face in the next three years.

Survey respondents were asked to select the three qualities that they value most highly in a member of parliament, from a predefined list. The most commonly selected response (58 percent of respondents) was honesty and truthfulness, followed closely by ethical behaviour (54 percent). Equal third were integrity, and compassion and empathy (44 percent). Kooyong residents also valued the skills of listening and adapting (35 percent), and having a vision for the future (29 percent).

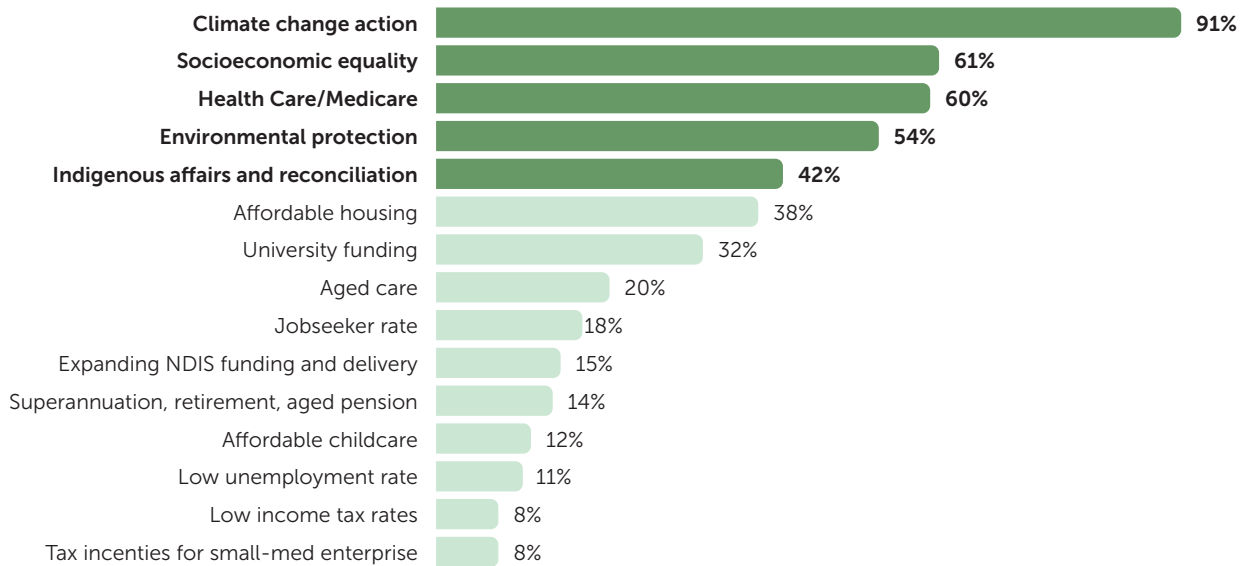
Survey Question 1:

## What do Kooyong residents think will be the most important issues Australia will face over the next three years?

1. **Climate change**
2. **Socioeconomic equality**
3. **Health care**

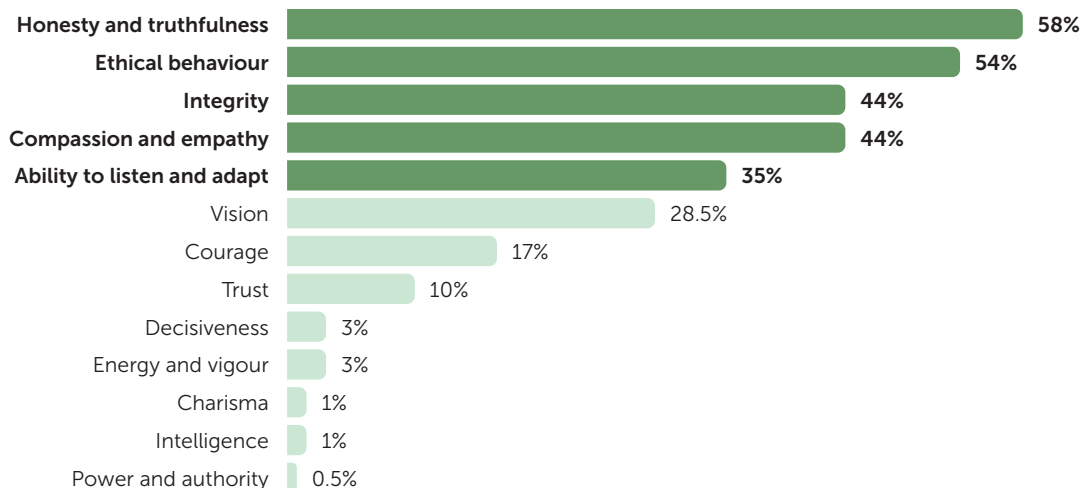
Survey Question 2:

## What are the issues that are most important to Kooyong residents?



Survey Question 3:

## What qualities do Kooyong residents value in a member of parliament?



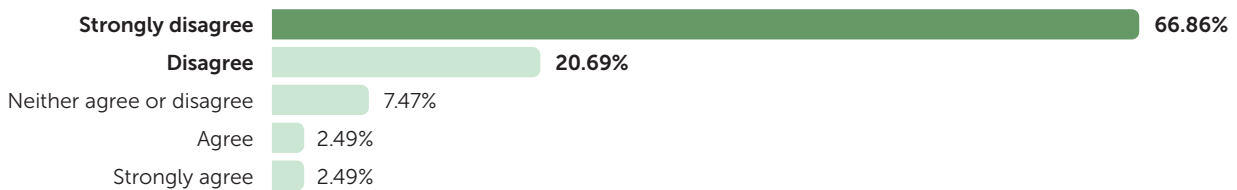
When survey participants were asked whether they agreed that their current MP possessed the qualities they value in a member of parliament (honesty and truthfulness, ethical behaviour, integrity, compassion and empathy), sixty seven percent stated that they strongly disagreed with the statement, and a further twenty percent disagreed with the statement. Only five percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that Josh Frydenberg had the qualities they valued for a member of parliament.

# 5%

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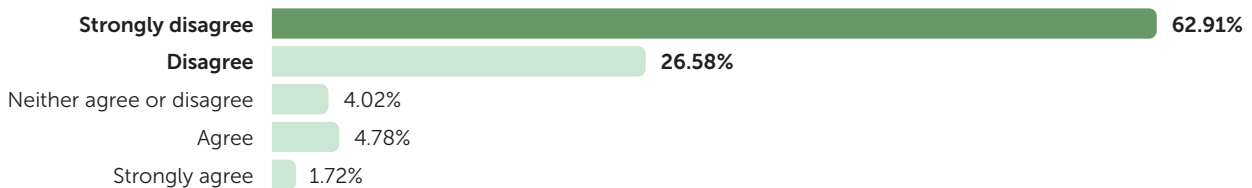
#### Survey Question 4:

### Do Kooyong residents agree that Josh Frydenberg has the qualities they value in a Member of Parliament?



#### Survey Question 5:

### Do Kooyong residents agree that they have an adequate voice in the way they are represented in Parliament?



Respondents (Kooyong residents) were asked whether they believed they had adequate voice in the way that they were represented in Federal Parliament. Eighty-nine percent of respondents stated that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement, indicating that they did not believe they had an adequate voice in their parliamentary representation. Less than two percent of respondents felt that they had an adequate voice in their representation.

# 6.5%

Less than 7 percent of respondents felt that they had an adequate voice in their representation.



# Kitchen Table Conversations

24 Kitchen tables

102 participants

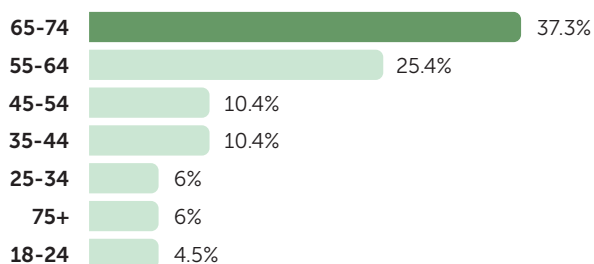
**B**ased on the model developed by the Victorian Women's Trust<sup>3</sup>, and used most notably by Voices 4 Indi<sup>4</sup>, Voices of Kooyong has been running small group-based discussions since August 2021. This report documents the outcomes of some 24 Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs) that took place for Kooyong residents from September to December 2021.

The KTC model includes a standard series of open-ended questions, meant as conversation starters for a group of four to six participants. The groups were led by a facilitator, and the conversation documented by a scribe.

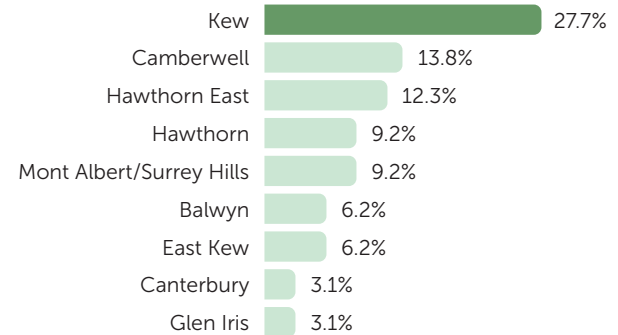
The purposes of the discussions were to explore, listen, and document. The discussions were not meant as forums for changing people's opinions, and it was recognised that all opinions were valid.

Participants for the KTCs were identified through personal connections of the volunteer team, through social media, and through presence in the community. Individuals of all political persuasions were encouraged to attend. Notes taken by scribes were collated, reviewed, and analysed thematically.

## Age of KTC participants



## Suburbs of KTC participants



## Who participated?

A total of 24 KTCs took place, with 102 participants. Due to the public health restrictions on in-person meetings, groups were conducted via teleconferencing platforms.

We encouraged participants to complete an online demographics form that requested information on age, gender, ethnic origins, and postcode. Completion of the form was not compulsory, and as such, we do not have full demographic data for all participants. Completion of the demographics form was at a rate of just over six in ten participants. We have demographic data for 67 participants, of which there were 40 women and 27 men. Two thirds of the demographic data was for participants over 55 years of age. Thematic results presented will be for the full 102 participants.

## KTC Findings

The key themes that emerged from the KTCs in response to the standard series of open-ended questions are summarised on the following pages.

3. <https://www.vwt.org.au/projects/kitchen-table-conversations/>

4. <https://voicesforindi.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/V4I-Report.pdf>

## What are the best things about living in Kooyong?

Overwhelmingly, KTC participants described their thankfulness for the environment – natural and built – of Kooyong. Participants described plentiful parkland, access to multiple bike trails, the river and creeks, the bird and wildlife population, access to a variety of public transportation options, great walkability (to events, shops, the parks), and a feeling of safety when out and about.

**“It’s a privilege to live here. Safe, comfortable, good schools, aesthetics of built and natural environment, walking paths, recreation, open spaces, public transport, close to shopping.”**

Residents commented that the region was great for raising children, and that there were plenty of schooling options (both private and public were mentioned). The community services were described as kept in good condition, and the connectedness of the community (micro-communities, cultural groups) were spoken of by some participants as being strong and in proximity to them. One participant’s response exemplified the responses by saying, “we want for nothing.”

**“We love living here! We love the schools – I haven’t heard a bad thing about the public schools across Kooyong. We are very fortunate with the community infrastructure, we have pools, parks, schools, bike tracks, and access to health and hospital care, accessibility to the city. We are in a relatively well serviced area from a community and infrastructure perspective.”**

The participants recognised the privilege of their environment and felt that this was highlighted to them during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, when the 5-kilometre movement restrictions were in place. There were many comments along the lines of “I love living here.”

**“There is always something within walking distance and that’s valuable to me.”**

## What don't you like about living in Kooyong?

Kooyong was described by participants as being “conservative,” an “entrenched Liberal area” where “everyone votes Liberal.” The KTC participants frequently mentioned feeling concern over the lack of compassion in the electorate for others, for example refugees, and for the lack of concern for the wider community. Individually, participants felt isolated in these views, and that they didn't feel Kooyong people were “their people.” The Kooyong residents also spoke about their unhappiness with their federal representative: that the MP does not respond to letters or emails, that the electorate is taken for granted, and that there was a lack of integrity in the MP's conduct.

**“I don't get any replies to my letters, so I've actually given up on all sorts of things. I feel very unsupported by the representative taking pot shots at Victorians during COVID.”**

Environmentally, the KTC participants discussed traffic, and a pro-car bias, impacting negatively on the electorate. Traffic linked to the large numbers of private schools, through traffic, freeway traffic and pollution, and traffic related to 'high-rise' apartments were all discussed as elements of the area that were not pleasant. Tied to this was the discussion around inappropriate developments and poor planning of higher density housing, which participants believed contributed to the issues with traffic, congestion, and environmental damage.

**“You really have to consider if you want to go up Glenferrie road at school end time. An awful lot of kids are driven to and from school. What's wrong with all the public transport?” “Kooyong has great public transport but getting around in Kooyong is quite hard, it all goes into the city, not around Kooyong.”**

The inequality of the region was also highlighted as a negative of the electorate. KTC participants described a cultural divide between “the haves and have nots,” and of this divide being visible at local schools, with the population of university students, and the perception of an increase in homelessness. There were many descriptions of elitism, of a lack of compassion, and a lack of welcoming within the community. Participants also described the lack of affordable housing, and of this being a deterrent to young people moving to the region, and to greater cultural diversity. A lack of cultural diversity was also a theme of this discussion, with Kooyong being described as “monocultural,” or “homogenous,” in a “bubble,” and lacking in art and music culture.

**“I feel it's a very conservative place, it's not culturally diverse, it's not an equal place.”**

**“I have one of the cheapest rentals in Kooyong and I don't like the perception that Kooyong is all well-heeled.”**

## What makes a really good political representative?

The Kooyong KTC participants described a 'really good' political representative in reasonably uniform terms; there was a lot of repetition of a few key themes. A 'really good' political representative was described as a person who was driven by integrity and who was authentic and respectful in their actions, doing what they say, following through, focused on the needs of others, humble, and not prone to influence from, for example, the fossil fuel sector.

**"I'd like someone who is prepared to lead, who can focus on the future, and what sort of society we need, and want to leave for our kids. I want trust and integrity too. Our MP talks platitudes. I want authenticity. I also want leadership on the reconciliation issue."**

An ideal, effective representative was expressed as being someone who had a real, deep engagement with constituents. Someone who knew constituents' needs and the needs of the area. Someone from the community and embedded within it, with the capacity for critical thinking, vision for the future (beyond their term), and the interests of constituents at heart. The ability to listen and to understand were seen as the means through which these things could occur.

**"They should actually bat for you. They should have the interests of their constituents and know them well and have a good understanding of their views. Their constituents' views should be more important than their own."**

The KTC participants discussed an intense dislike of 'spin' and party politics. There was a belief that party interests were at odds with local interests, and that being an independent representative and removing oneself from party politics would lead to better results for local communities, like those within Kooyong.

**"Kooyong is a big electorate with diverse views, but because it always votes Liberal then the views that are not so aligned with Liberal policies get omitted. For instance, climate change, tax reform. There is no end to the politics, and we get upset with politicians doing deals or tolerating extreme views because it brings votes..."**

## Do you feel you have a say in the way you are represented? If so, how?

Except for voting at election time, the KTC participants did not feel they had a say in the way they were represented. There were many examples of phone calls and emails to the MP's office not being returned, or being returned with automated replies, and meetings never booked. A representative of the 'Grandmothers for Refugees Kooyong' reported that they have been asking for a short meeting with the MP for a long time and have still not yet been granted one. There was the overwhelming feeling that the community was not listened to, even with local surveys, which were described as "insulting," and "all about Liberal Party issues." There were themes of frustration and despondency. The participants did not feel heard.

"No [I don't feel I have a say]. Current state and federal politicians seem motivated by their own self-promotion and personal political ambition, rather than the interests of the community they should be serving."

"The period leading up to the election, and voting, is when I feel most connected. Other than that, I don't feel represented. In federal politics, where there is such a small balance of power, it's all about towing the party line and staying in power. There is little interest in what the community thinks."

"No, we are in a safe seat. If we ring their office, you don't get a response. I feel I have no impact, except by joining others in collective action, like in the 'Me Too' movement."

"I don't have a voice in anything. I don't think anyone listens."

While many respondents reported their experiences of reaching out to the local MP, with unsatisfying results, a smaller group of KTC participants expressed views as constituents who haven't approached their local MP. There was a perception from them of the local MP as being someone who wouldn't listen, or wasn't approachable.

"I feel disillusioned as a young person...but I haven't been active and reached out."

"I've never written to our local member because he presents himself as someone who's not listening. I figure, what's the point, and that's a sad conclusion to draw. He's not approachable."

"I don't think I've really tested it. My local members both annoy me but I haven't written to either of them."

## What ideas do you have for making a stronger relationship between people and elected representatives?

The discussion around how to achieve stronger relationships between people and elected representatives centred on the need for real engagement, which it was felt was significantly lacking in the electorate. The participants were creative in their responses and ideas, suggesting Town Hall meetings, smaller Zoom sessions, community pulse-meters (with emojis for quick responses, as an example), and the physical presence of the representative in the community (at the shops, at local festivals, 'doing life'). It was thought that alternate methods may need to be utilised to engage the younger generation, and that this was important.

**"Robocall town halls are what not to do, they do not facilitate engagement. I took up the call once on a very quiet night in, when I got the call it just felt like a session of Dorothy Dixers and no real room for community discussion or debate. It's branded as engagement."**

The participants believed that the federal representative should want to engage with constituents, and should do so regularly, not just when they feel their seat was threatened. Several participants went further, suggesting that there should be job mandates and accountabilities, formal ways to ensure that federal members fulfilled meeting requests and answered their constituents including in a meaningful way.

**"This is the heart of their job. Whatever means you can and have available, it's engagement - engagement - engagement."**

**"Integrity, accountability, courage and generally there to represent the community and the national interest as opposed to a career to pursue."**

Participants also commented that better engagement from the federal member would have positive effects on them, that they would feel heard and encouraged to continue to offer their thoughts, "engagement also results in enthusiasm and participation." There were expressions of wanting to provide feedback on proposed legislation, and even just the time for open, honest discourse between the community and the federal representative. There were also suggestions around limiting the terms in office, paying politicians less, stricter rules around fundraising, and ensuring representation of young people. Participants thought that these factors may also positively impact the engagement of an MP.

**"Community engagement: go out and see the people and seek feedback at the same time. 'As a member of the community, how does this fit with you?'"**

**"I'd like more public meetings with debates between local member and other candidates, so they can get a feel for the community's feelings. It's important to separate national and local issues."**



## What particular issues within the Kooyong electorate should be the focus of the next Federal election campaign?

The number one issue raised as the focus for the 2022 federal election, across all Kitchen Table Conversations, was that of climate change and the need for immediate, decisive action. At a Kooyong level, participants talked about the priorities needing to be: promotion of solar power, development of a renewable energy grid, roll out of electric vehicles, and enhancement of recycling and green waste removal processes, alongside reduction of traffic and minimisation of inappropriate development. There were references to climate change at a national and global level, and a sense that “issues in Kooyong are national issues.”

“All [climate] issues we’ve talked about could be actioned at a local council level – it would be good to have a federal member who supported the local council around climate change, asylum seekers, honesty, greening the electorate, improving public transport. That is the definition of a local member.”

“Climate change is the number one issue, an existential issue for the whole world, and current action is appalling.”

Another key theme was ‘using wealth well.’ Participants talked about the wealth in Kooyong, though lamented at the unequal nature of it; rising levels of disadvantage within the community were described. KTC participants saw the next federal election as an opportunity to focus on righting some of the inequalities in the electorate, and utilising the resources present, along with assistance from the government. Topics of focus covered matters of: climate (developing a hub and sharing solar), housing (increasing affordability of housing and availability of social housing, the issue of overseas investment), health (public waiting lists), and immigration (welcoming refugees to the community).

“We have the individual wealth here but joining the dots and integrating is where we’re being let down.”

Education was seen as a key method of reversing inequality, and a focus on increasing investment in public schools was described as a high priority for the next federal election by participants. Comparisons between the funding of private schools in the region (of which Kooyong has one of the highest concentrations in the country) to public schools were made, and the sentiment “we don’t want to keep on fuelling this divide between private and public” summarised these discussions well. At the tertiary level, particular mention of the need to support Swinburne University, which is within the Kooyong boundaries, was made.

“Equity in society and that includes education. Everyone needs a good education. Everyone needs an affordable roof over their head. The price of house rises is dreadful. They can do something about it.”

“[We need to] look holistically at education, as a benefit to building people’s personal capacity. A good vocational education expands understanding and human capacity.”

The perceived lack of integrity, lack of diversity and representation, lack of shared values, and lack of accountability of Federal Members of Parliament were described as being relevant to the Kooyong electorate, and relevant to the upcoming federal election. Many participants raised the idea of an independent representative as being able to address some of these issues, and the establishment of a federal anti-corruption commission for others. Participants did not feel well supported by their current local member, especially during the pandemic and Victoria’s long lockdowns.

“While climate change affects the whole world and the whole country, as does gender inequality, I think the biggest issue for Kooyong is the quality of our representation. For Kooyong, the quality of our representation needs to be dealt with.”

Kooyong KTC participants were concerned about the recovery of communities and small businesses after Covid-19, and felt that this would be a relevant issue of focus for the next federal election. Additionally, on an economic front, the difficulties encountered by casual staff were raised, as was the lack of job stability more generally, and stagnated wage growth.

“[We need] decent wage growth; more people can work part-time with decent wage growth.”

“The future of work needs a sense of security. No job security is scary.”



## What issues beyond the Kooyong electorate should be the focus of the next Federal election campaign?

### Climate change:

Again, climate change was listed as the top priority for the upcoming federal election. It was described as “an existential crisis,” the current management “an embarrassment.” Participants were disturbed by the 2050 goals, and united in the view that climate related goals need to be focused on 2030. The discussions included the assessment that the Liberal Party of Australia were held hostage by the National Party on climate, were overly focused on natural gas as a solution, and were lacking in strategic thinking. Participants discussed the impact of poor strategy at a national level on our reputation globally, and on the environment of our Pacific neighbours.

“There are many, but climate change is so important -we’re in an existential crisis. I’m worried about who will be left on the planet. We’ve been talking about this issue for 50 years. We need goals for 2030, not 2050. We also treat our Pacific communities/neighbours appallingly, and they will be affected by our inaction on climate change.”

“Our Federal government has to divest itself of fossil fuels, and develop a strategy for the redeployment of that workforce; to move to renewables and not think of gas which is a major climate polluter. We need to come up with ways for renewables to be adopted. The current government is so behind on this. The Federal Government is not prepared to move away from the forces controlling decisions. It’s embarrassing.”

“Climate change is critical, but throws up other issues too like the need for innovation and making adjustments to the economy. There has been no advanced thinking and our handling of Covid has been a disaster. There is a lack of accountability for the ways things are handled.”

“There are opportunities in climate change, but we are allowing the debate to focus on “workers in coal towns.” we can re- skill to lead a new generation of new technologies. We are letting these opportunities pass us by....”

## Integrity and accountability

The perceived lack of integrity and accountability for federal politicians was a major point of discussion across KTCs. Participants were concerned with a lack of minimum moral standards, and lack of accountability for politicians when the community and political standards weren't met. Various examples were given that have been seen in this Government's term. Participants linked this perceived lack of integrity and accountability back to trust, and the impact that a lack of trust has across all areas of policy. Participants described wanting honesty, accountability, and transparency, extending from policy to media relationships and funding. Participants called for anti-corruption commissions as a part of a solution to this problem.

"Lack of integrity in government. We see it across all levels and on both sides. ICAC in Sydney and IBAC here, the brazenness and lack of political integrity is topical at the moment because we see ... benefit to individual MPs. There is a lack of shame, accountability and the consequence is really damaging."

"The media is an issue. There is a lack of independent media. There is dominance from the Murdoch press, which has a climate-distorted view. We need political reps who encourage a diverse media, not dominated by one group."

"Let's have hard discussions – not the polite fiction that everyone accepts, and avoiding talking about it – we need political leaders who are being honest and talk directly about the need to change and what that means. In doing so, dispelling some of the myths and fears."

## Social justice and compassion

Matters of social justice, compassion, and kindness were raised as key issues for the upcoming federal election. There were calls for genuine self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and for greater numbers represented in Parliament. Policy-wise, and practically, KTC participants wanted the The Uluru Statement from the Heart adopted, vastly improved health and educational services, and a focus on Indigenous maternal health and education, to benefit the whole community.

“There’s a lack of long term vision ... a change agenda... and courage by the government to address issues like fundamental equality, and our Indigenous people.”

“Getting Indigenous voices to parliament is really important.”

Australia’s current Refugee policy was described as being inhumane and lacking in compassion; there were multiple discussions around the benefits of welcoming greater numbers of refugees into our community. Participants saw addressing these concerns as a key, immediate issue for our country.

“Asylum seeker and refugee programs are other priorities for me. We have an opportunity to welcome more people in....we’re too selective with who comes in.”

“I’d like to see us double the Afghani refugees....and ban detention.”

Gender issues were also highlighted under the theme of social justice.

“We have a misogynistic culture. Of the 55 recommendations made in the Respect@ Work enquiry, only 6 were adopted. Our Government has to be dragged kicking to acknowledge issues. It’s shameful.”

“Our approach on refugees is dismissive. People on the poverty line don’t get enough to live on. We need to start caring for other people as well as the planet. Sexual equality is another key issue.”

## Public spending as investment in our future

Public funding as investment in our future was the fourth major theme of discussions on the national priorities for the 2022 federal election. KTC participants' key concerns were around spending to build up health care, universities, and infrastructure and industries that would support national growth and employment. There was a feeling that there had been poor, or reduced, funding in these areas, and that there had been degradation of capacity in, for example, education and health. There was a strong sense that smart public spending was vital for a healthy society, and that this had been neglected.

"The gutting of the university sector, not just over the pandemic but over the past decade, with the increase in university fees, the student fees debt. Medicare too. We're at real risk of becoming the United States."

"I really wish we could change the discussion about public spending – public spending is an investment not just being flushed away. Medicare, COVID recovery, and climate change are all investments in the future of the nation. We could have been the leaders in solar if we had bought in 20 years ago. I want a change in conversation about public spending and how that can lift a nation up."

"There should be productive jobs for anyone who wants. Employment is a key issue. We should decide what industries we want, make a plan and have a structurally managed budget. The current policy by the Treasurer is deliberate inflation."

"Education...our universities have been abominably treated, and there needs to be priority given to our TAFE education."

"The pandemic has really shown how under funded health care is in Australia – the ambulances, mental health etc and during the pandemic it's been reactive health care rather than proactive."

"The NDIS fits into the public spending discussion, it enables people to participate more fully in our society. The fact that NDIS funding is a political issue and reductions in funding have occurred [is awful] – funding the NDIS not just flushing money down the drain, it's supporting people. Denticare, Medicare, NDIS, whatever, is preventative spending and an investment."

"I hope to see more of a plan about the pandemic and ongoing preparedness as well as recovery. How do we prepare, build better infrastructure, fund health care, fund better services to ensure that we're in good stead moving forward."

## In the words of participants, how can these issues be addressed effectively?

### Elect representatives who serve local and national interests, not a political party:

"Stop thinking about the next election and saving your seat – have vision, think globally. Be a leader, not a responder to crisis, think more strategically."

"[We fix this through] independents who are not tied to party votes and force the government to be accountable – this government isn't accountable to anyone, they're just doing what they feel like."

"A sense of a local representative – feeling that we have access. I know [MP] is not interested in what I want to say – I'd like someone being involved in the community. What's important to him is the coal lobby. We've lost the sense of local [representation]."

"We need people serving the national interest rather than their personal career interest or the party interest. If the parties themselves had integrity and belief then these things would align."

"Getting more Independents in State and Federal government will mean these important issues get more airtime, and higher quality submissions and debates. They can force governments to act, particularly in the lower house where the action starts. We have a problem in our lower houses that there's not enough need for negotiation - as Julia Gillard did in government."

"...by having independents not bound by party rules and factions, maybe we need more independents not bound by the constraints of their parties – maybe an independent is the way forward."

### Increase the transparency, fix the corruption, hold them accountable:

"Politician funding, donors and lobbyists have an undue impact on government in Australia. It's a fiasco. We need greater transparency and auditing of these to ensure they are not getting payoffs or benefits for them or their dependants."

"Federal campaign funding – it's not properly disclosed – it's a major party issue not just a LNP issue. Fixing campaign funding is an issue and someone must have a better answer than what we currently have."

"Politicians need to listen to their electorate. We have Royal Commissions, and then they don't follow the recommendations. We need mechanisms so that findings from independent reviews are implemented."

"Policies need to be put in place, as promised."

"This term of government has really highlighted the issue of transparency. How do they get away with so many things?"

## Get citizens engaged:

"We need to hold our elected reps accountable. We get the politicians we deserve. We have to be more vigilant as an electorate and to be actively involved in the process. We have to be the agitators and protesters. Without this, our politicians think they can get away with anything."

"This is a process that takes time ... we need strategies for engaging more people...around unifying issues of citizenship and how to create a better society."

"It's important to engage people within our communities who may not be involved because of language or education. It's hard to get young people engaged."

"Having grassroots discussions like this is very important. Hearing what other people have to say is very important. Dialogue. It helps us to formulate and articulate our views as well."

"There's enough wealth in Kooyong for us not to be "takers" but to be "leaders e.g., creating our own community or innovation hubs, can we create grids and pilot the rollout of EVs and other projects? If we're trying to lead the nation, why not be Kooyong? Why do we have to be the sleepy blue safe seat that no-one cares about?"

## Develop sound policy that works for public good:

"Hold on to the values and ethics that are important – honesty, empathy, critical thinking, evidence- based decisions."

"We need an evidence-based approach, using experts rather than media and big business influence. We need to listen to experts and to the community."

"Federal ICAC. Climate change. Rooting out the misogynistic men. Asylum seekers. Threatened species and destruction of environment. If you fixed those you'd be well on your way."

"Being forward thinking in how we spend money and tackle hard subjects. There are opportunities in climate change but we're allowing the debate to focus on "workers in coal towns". We can re-skill people to lead a new generation of new technologies. We are letting these opportunities pass us by because the conversation is negatively framed. The message should be positive and sell hope."

"There's enough wealth in Kooyong for us not to be "takers" but to be "leaders e.g., creating our own community or innovation hubs, can we create grids and pilot the rollout of EVs and other projects? If we're trying to lead the nation, why not be Kooyong? Why do we have to be the sleepy blue safe seat that no-one cares about?"

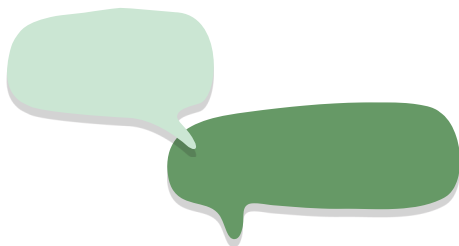
"Jobkeeper and Jobseeker really didn't last very long and it was pretty quickly wound back – a social security net should be there. We can clearly afford a proper social security net."

"Rebuilding the university sector rather than trying to destroy it – it's essential to the future of the country. Rebuilding the arts sector after the pandemic."

"Reinstate social enterprise programs, reinvestment in people and local communities."

# Conclusions from survey data collected for 'Kooyong Speaks':

1. Action on climate change, integrity, social justice, and public spending as investment are seen as key priorities for the next federal election
2. Kitchen Table Conversation participants want to engage with their Member of Parliament, and want to be engaged.
3. There is a desire for change among constituents of Kooyong.



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