



Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD)
www.canberra-alliance.org.au

Media Release: Candidate statements and Charter of Democratic Commitment a part of the “New Normal”?

Welcoming the 25 newly elected and re-elected members of the ACT Assembly today, Beth Slatyer, co-convenor of the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD), said the Alliance hopes to work closely with all MLAs to have greater voter participation and discussion of policy development and decision making.

“Across the democratic world” she said, “people report that political parties and supporters have become removed from the needs of their constituents. In Canberra we hope to re-establish the central place of the public interest in government decision-making. There are several well established ways of doing this through use of citizen juries and assemblies. As well, we are considering hosting a new approach from the UK, where randomly selected members of the community take turns to help improve the quality of representation.

“One feature of this election which we think could become the “new normal” has been the development of candidate statements, which included the candidate’s agreement to or modification of a Charter of Democratic Commitment,” Ms Slatyer said.

“Of the 25 elected candidates, 14 lodged a personal statement on the CAPaD website and we know that many voters used these statements to help choose their representatives on polling day. The statements for these elected representatives are available on the CAPAD website along with limited information about the new MLA’s who did not lodge a statement. The statements include their qualifications, policy aspirations and the ways these member plans to represent their constituents. All those who submitted statements agreed to the six points of the CAPaD Charter:

1. *I will at all times tell the truth to the citizens and voters of Canberra and be honest in all aspects of my work as an elected representatives of the people of the ACT.*
2. *I will fully disclose and make public the sources and value of all political funding donations, contributions, gifts public and private in line with ACT electoral laws.*
3. *I undertake to be fair, ethical, compassionate and diligent in serving my electorate and the nation at all times and to uphold the Australian value of "a fair go for all".*
4. *I will promote and support participatory and deliberative methods for policy, planning and legislative decisions.*
5. *I will place the public interest (the welfare and well-being of the community as a whole and the integrity of the planet) ahead of personal interests.*
6. *I will never abuse or misuse the allowances, subsidies, concessions and privileges accorded to me by the people of the ACT and the ACT legislative assembly in my role as an elected representative.*

“The 14 Assembly members who submitted statements committed to represent the electorate in a variety of ways, with most committing to improve two way communication with the community during their term in office, and all committing to promote and support participatory and deliberative methods for policy, planning and legislative decisions. CAPaD will approach members to discuss how they can meet those commitments and encourage participatory democracy in the ACT.”

Ms Slatyer added. “Of course we do not know what role the candidate statements played in voter preferences, nor how many voters consulted the statements. Altogether, 62 of the 141 candidates completed a statement and of those who did so, 23% were elected compared with 11 of the 79 or 14% of those who did not. Completing a statement has certainly not harmed a candidate's chances of election and it could have improved them.”

Ms Slatyer announced that a meeting of representatives of organisations which are members of the Alliance and other NGO’s will be held at lunchtime on Monday 24 October to discuss ways in which civil society groups can work together with the newly elected assembly. This is a prelude to CAPaD’s first Annual General Meeting on 6 November when members will discuss the group’s strategic plan for the coming year.

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