

EDUCATION BEFORE LEGISLATION – THE NEW DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

By Rod Matthews

I firmly believe that the biggest problem we face today is lazy thinking. All problems are solvable – it just takes access to the vast amounts of information and experience that are readily available to us, combined with some creative and rigorous thinking.

With this in mind, how often have you been in conversation with people that you know and love, only to hear someone regurgitate an opinion that they heard on the TV news as if it was their own and, even worse, as if it was undeniable? What do you do? Do you:

- a) run the risk of getting into trouble from your partner and ruining the vibe of the afternoon by challenging your friend's lazy thinking?
- b) take another sip of your drink and let it slide because life is too short to upset friends?
- c) say something like 'I've looked into that and I still don't know enough to make an opinion'?

Fortunately there is another alternative – education before legislation – and this is why I volunteer my services to The New Democracy Foundation.¹

The New Democracy Foundation seeks to work with citizens and governments to reduce the adversarial approach and increase the collaborative approach to policy formulation.

Currently we are running a series of community consultation workshops to develop a recommendation to NSW State Parliament on the economics and security of energy generation in NSW.

This is done by inviting a random sample of registered voters to attend the workshops and provide them with access to the world's leading experts on various energy generation options. After listening to one expert and asking a series of questions, participants are taken through a facilitated process before listening to the next expert.

The result is intended to be an educated group of concerned citizens making a well thought-out recommendation that will then be tabled in parliament.

The process is, of course, not perfect; there are a couple of drawbacks. First, a group of about 100 voters is not a representative sample, and second, just because the report is tabled doesn't mean it will be approved.

One thing, however, is certain: As a result of the work done there will be more people at barbecues and dinner parties who, when someone says something vacuous, will be able to respond confidently, 'I think you'll find it is a little more complex than that.'

ⁱ www.newdemocracy.com.au

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