



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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PM Albanese must address Parliament's unfinished business

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's headline agenda, which dominates media reporting, includes China, climate change, and a federal integrity commission. Besides those issues, he is now responsible for the unfinished business of the previous Parliament, on which his Labor Party took a position. Now that it is in a position to act on these issues, what will the Albanese government do?

Banking Royal Commission reforms

The Labor Party is the reason Australia had a banking royal commission in 2018, after it switched its position and supported the Independents, One Nation, Greens, and rogue Nationals who were fighting for one. Commissioner Kenneth Hayne's year-long dissection of systemic financial misconduct exposed a lawless financial system overseen by supposed regulators like the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) which at best were toothless tigers, but all too often were complicit in the financial crimes due to their deliberate negligence. The Labor Party under Bill Shorten lost the election that immediately followed the royal commission, however, and in the subsequent three years, Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg did everything in their power to trash the reform intent coming out of the royal commission, to the point where it may as well not have happened.

Now Labor is in government, and in a position to revive the reform intention of the royal commission, what will it do to clean up the systemic financial corruption facilitated by failed regulators? For example, will Treasurer Jim Chalmers scrap Josh Frydenberg's blatantly political "Statement of Expectations" to ASIC issued in August 2021, by which Frydenberg ordered new ASIC Chairman Joe Longo to go softly-softly on the banks? Frydenberg directed ASIC to:

- "identify and pursue opportunities to contribute to the government's economic goals" (absolutely not ASIC's job, which should be solely to police financial crime);
- "consult with the government and treasury in exercising its policy-related functions" (a way for Frydenberg to ensure ASIC goes soft on the banks);
- "minimise regulatory burdens" on the banks (burden—what a joke!); and
- ensure its guidance to financial firms is not "unduly prescriptive" (don't dare tell the banks what to do).

As Senior Law Lecturer Andrew Schmulow, from the University of Wollongong, wrote in *The Conversation* on 27 August 2021, Frydenberg's direction ended any intention of ASIC to follow Commissioner Hayne's recommendation that its first question in regard to financial crime should be "why not litigate"? Schmulow observed: "Rather than 'why not litigate', it reads as 'why not capitulate'."

Will Albanese and Chalmers scrap this approach and restore ASIC as a regulator with teeth? Or will they succumb to the lobbying of their former ALP colleague and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh, now the chief of the Australian Banking Association (in whom Jim Chalmers reportedly confides, according to the 9 May 2022 *Australian Financial Review*)?

Australia Post inquiry

Due to the efforts of the Licensed Post Office (LPO) Group, Bob Katter MP, and the Citizens Party, Scott Morrison's brutal shaming and removal of Christine Holgate as CEO of Australia Post led to a powerful Senate inquiry. With the ALP members of the inquiry siding with the majority, the final report [made many recommendations](#) that are very important to the ongoing functionality of Australia Post and the viability of LPOs, but which the Morrison government ignored. Will the Labor government now implement the recommendations, including those highlighted below, which it supported in opposition?

Recommendation 5: The Australia Post Board and Shareholder Ministers and the Prime Minister apologise to Ms Holgate for denying her the legal principles of procedural fairness and natural justice in her departure from Australia Post.

Although Morrison and his thug Ministers are now gone, the board must be made to apologise—and then sacked.

Recommendation 8: Restructure the Australia Post Board to end the practice of it being stacked with political party hacks, and ensure it includes nominees of the House of Representatives; the Senate; the employees and unions; and the licensees.

This is a crucial reform, especially the inclusion of a representative of labour and the LPOs on the board.

Recommendation 13: Require the resignation of the Chair of Australia Post, Lucio Di Bartolomeo.

Di Bartolomeo betrayed his CEO, and misled the Senate inquiry, for which “he—must—go!”

Recommendation 14: The Australian Government consider requiring all banks to allow Australia Post to process basic banking transactions for their customers as a condition of their licence; and that fees be levied on ADIs that are sufficient to cover the cost to post offices of providing this service.

This would make it mandatory for all banks to participate in, and pay properly for, Bank@Post, which would ensure the viability of the LPOs. Since Christine Holgate’s removal, the banks have been slashing their payments for Bank@Post.

Recommendation 17: Expressly rule out privatising or divesting of Australia Post, or any of its services, including parcels.

The Australian public is fully supportive of their community licensed post offices, and expects the new government to act on these recommendations.

Sterling First and financial victims

The Senate Economics Committee’s inquiry into Sterling Income Trust rejected ASIC chairman Joe Longo’s excuses, and expressed “serious concerns about the performance of ASIC”, “including its under-assessment of the gravity of the risks, the timeliness of its response, and its failure to act proactively”, noting that “ASIC had sufficient evidence and grounds for concern in 2017 to refer the matter to its enforcement division for investigation”.

This was effectively a finding of negligence by ASIC; given that, what is the Labor government going to do to compensate the more than 100 elderly Sterling First tenants who face eviction and homelessness due to ASIC’s negligence?

The Citizens Party will keep fighting to ensure the Albanese government accepts its responsibility for addressing these crucial issues.

[Click here to sign the Citizens Party’s petition for a post office people’s bank.](#)