



Des Houghton

Conservatives vow to remake Liberals

Three Queensland conservatives have formed an association for ordinary Liberal Party members to take back control from party chiefs they say have betrayed conservative values.

Under the model proposed by the Liberal Reform Association, members alone would pre-select candidates to contest local council, state and federal elections across the nation.

The members are rallying support to change the constitution to give members the power to disendorse sitting MPs who failed to carry out their wishes.

The association's founders have started recruiting party members and have invited conservative thinkers who don't belong to any party to join them.

The Liberal Reform Association was formed by Graeme Haycroft, a 45-year LNP party veteran, and Heath Goddard, a successful businessman and a member of the party for 35 years. The third founding member is Matthew Rowan, a software engineer who pulled back from joining the LNP because in his view it had lurched to the Left.

The three founders say their aim is to use the association as a vehicle to save the Liberal Party before a Nigel Farage-style Reform Party arrives to fracture the conservative forces even further.

"I've already got it set up," Haycroft said. "It is a not-for-profit association, and its role is to be a promotional vehicle to sell the changes necessary in the Liberal Party around the country."

"We are a 100 per cent Liberal Party supporter association."

Like thousands of conservatives, Haycroft and Goddard are disillusioned with their party for issues as diverse as the "lunacy" of not dumping net-zero and for allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to fly alongside the Australian flag. This was divisive and belittling and harmful to Indigenous Australians as it was to white Australians.

Haycroft and Goddard believe membership of their party will soar once prospective members know they had a more meaningful role in determining policies and selecting candidates.

"When was the last time there was a competitive pre-selection for a sitting member in the Liberal Party anywhere in Australia?" Haycroft asks. "Members have the right to choose who represents them."

Will a new Liberal reform group lure Tony Abbott back to parliament?

"Our aim is to change the Liberal Party so that it has 250,000 members. "How many has it got now? 25,000?"

He believed it would be "very easy" to increase the numbers by offering members direct input into the decision making.

He said it would take one to five years to complete the reformation that has already begun in overseas democracies.

"Party leaders would be elected by the party members – not the sitting MPs," he said.

"The Canadians did it. The Tories did it in the UK, but they f--ked it up. The New Zealanders did it to a lesser degree."

Haycroft said party chiefs and some MPs would likely oppose the Liberal Reform Association.

"The last thing they want is to be stuck with someone they can't control," he said.

Nevertheless, for the party to survive and prosper, it needed to change its constitution, he said.

Their aim is to help the party recruit an extra 500 to 1000 members in every electorate.

Haycroft said he was inspired by Robert Menzies.

"When Menzies launched his new Liberal Party in 1946, he understood how important it was to have a big membership. He had 60,000 members when the population of Australia was roughly six million."

"That was one per cent of the population. Using that standard today the LNP should have between 250,000 and 300,000 members. Unfortunately, they have less than 30,000 members."

"To be a mainstream political party you have to have a large membership."

IRRITANT OF THE WEEK

The gradual disappearance of offal in our supermarkets and butcher shops. I'm worried future generations will not experience the joy of lamb's fry and bacon, crumbed brains, pressed tongue or devilled kidneys. These are culinary delicacies in Paris and London. It mystifies me why they are shunned here.

"One per cent of the population would be enough. If you haven't got that, you are not going to become a mainstream political party."

Goddard and Haycroft believe many LNP voters are "disillusioned" that their sitting members are standing idly by while their party drifts to the Left.

For sitting MPs it was all about survival and not rocking the boat.

"They honestly believe that doing anything that is likely to change the status quo could negatively impact their re-election chances and their ability to keep their jobs," Haycroft said.

"Sometimes all that is needed to get something going is just a little bit of grunt, obstinate persistence and public support."

Goddard says that victory is staring the conservatives in the face.

Goddard and Haycroft named "four or five" sitting members who would likely win a federal leadership ballot in a landslide – and go on to win the next election as well.

They were the fiercely independent senators Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, Matt Canavan, Alex Antic, the Western Australian MHR Andrew Hastie and perhaps Barnaby Joyce.

And they also threw in another name: Tony Abbott.

Would the former PM be able to make a comeback?

"I think in the conservative world the answer is yes," Goddard said.

The Liberal Reform Association will have a new members' party at Pillow Talk on November 19.

Book at reclaimthedream.com.au.

Backing new look for party

Heath Goddard describes himself as the invisible man of Queensland business.

He is perhaps the most successful retailer in the state's history (move over Stefan) with 74 stores in his Pillow Talk chain, with another four of five stores planned.

Goddard also describes himself as an arch-conservative.

He is disillusioned with the nation's "mishmash of mismanagements" caused by dangerous ideologists.

He has supported the LNP financially for decades.

No more.

But rather than walk away he wants to fix the party and is backing Red Union boss Graeme Haycroft in a bold move to rewrite the LNP constitution.

Goddard, 73, who was born in Mitchell, 587 km west of Brisbane and grew on the family sheep property, wants change.

"I say this, not for me, it's for my children, and more importantly, my grandchildren," he says.

The obsession with net-zero and destructive green projects infuriate him.

"If we continue going down the line we're currently going, there will be no future for anyone's child," he said.

Goddard was speaking at his new three-storey \$60m headquarters at Darra, an architectural triumph designed by Cottee Parker.

It looked more to me like a Scandinavian hotel than a commercial building.

With atriums and hanging gardens and row upon row of creative studios, it also has the largest photographic studio I have ever seen.

Below there is a massive warehouse (think Bunnings) and undercover pickup-and-delivery areas.



Heath Goddard
Picture: Des Houghton