**Victorian Students’ Parliamentary Program (VSPP)**

**Teachers’ Parliamentary Convention**

**Tuesday 22 October 2024**

**At Parliament of Victoria**

**funded by the Victorian Government Department of Education**

**Rationale for Professional Development on Civics and Citizenship**

**Civics and Citizenship Rationale:**

 Enables students to -

* become active and involved citizens
* participate in and sustain Australia’s democracy
* investigate political and legal systems
* understand concepts of citizenship, diversity, and identity in a democratic society
* gain knowledge and skills necessary to question, understand and contribute to the world they live in

 **Benefits for students/society:**

* enhance awareness of contemporary issues in the political and legal system
* highlights the dynamic nature of society and exposes students to diverse views
* exposes students to multiple strands within the Civics and Citizenship learning area and several of the capabilities. This supports a smart approach to learning while also demonstrating the close and interconnected relationships that exist between the Constitution, government, parliament, and the people.
* requires students to gain understanding of the subject content, consider benefits and limitations and possible alternatives surrounding the topic, before critically evaluating and reflecting on a preferred position on the question
* develops knowledge and understanding of key legal and political institutions and processes underpinning Australia’s representative democracy
* develops an appreciation of democratic values including equality and the rule of law
* enhances awareness of the civil rights and responsibilities of citizens
* develops understanding of the political and legal systems that protect individuals’ rights
* empowers individuals/groups to actively influence civic life

 **VSPP Teachers’ Parliamentary Convention Topic:**

*Should Australia have three levels of government?* **Context**

Australia's unique system of government is based on the principles of democracy and federalism, embodied in the three levels of government: federal, state and local. It is a complex framework that allows for effective governance, representation and accountability. Each level of government plays a crucial role in addressing the specific needs of the citizens within our community and the debate about whether Australia does need three levels of government is a multifaceted one.

Historically Australia became a federation in 1901 when the six colonies (now states) were unified under a single federal government while still retaining their own individual state governments. This context is important as it reflects a comprise between maintaining local autonomy and creating a national framework for addressing issues that go beyond typical state boundaries like defence, and immigration. The division of law-making powers which is clearly stated in the Australian Constitution is critical to understanding the three levels of government that we currently have.

The Federal government has exclusive powers to make laws in relation to areas such as immigration, currency, defence, foreign policy and trade. It shares concurrent powers with the states in areas like education, marriage and divorce, taxation and health services. States have residual powers to make laws in areas like schools, hospitals, public transport, police, and utilities such electricity and water supply. The powers that local government have to provide services and facilities and make local laws are derived from legislation passed by the state parliament and relate to community specific matters like zoning, local infrastructure, public libraries, waste management and town planning.

 Current arguments for the maintenance of the three levels of government include specialisation of responsibilities as each government has a distinct focus, representation at multiple levels providing more opportunities for public participation and a system of checks and balances that prevents the concentration of power in one single entity. Different regions may have unique needs based on geography, demographics or economic conditions and having a three-tiered government system allows for a tailored approach to governance that can be more responsive to these diverse needs.

Counter arguments against the three levels of government include too much bureaucracy, inefficiencies, duplication of services, the cost associated with running three levels of government and the confusion created by the overlapping responsibilities between different levels. The division of government into three levels can lead to political fragmentation where different parties control different levels complicating policy implementation across jurisdictions.

Some argue the need for streamlining into fewer levels to reduce the associated complexities however others believe this could put at risk localised representation and collaboration.

Teachers will consider, debate and decide through a democratic process giving due consideration to this topic as to whether the three levels of government accommodate both national interests and local needs and in fact do promote efficiencies through specialisation and intergovernmental cooperation. Or that simplifying the current governmental structure in Australia could lead to increased efficacy, greater accountability, more economic benefits and increased flexibility when addressing contemporary challenges like the COVID pandemic and the Murray Darling Basin.

[**Victorian Curriculum F-10 Version 2.0 Civics and Citizenship**](https://f10.vcaa.vic.edu.au/learning-areas/humanities/civics-and-citizenship/introduction)

**Rationale:**

We teach Civics and Citizenship as part of the Humanities strand from Year 3 to Year 10. The curriculum is structured to progressively build students’ understanding of democratic principles, the role of government and their responsibilities as citizens. The debate on the three levels of government will help teachers significantly by clarifying government structures, encouraging critical thinking, promoting civic engagement and building on their awareness of rights and responsibilities. These elements collectively contribute to developing informed, engaged citizens who understand the role within a democratic society which is what underpins what we teach our students.

**Aims:**

**Civics and Citizenship aims to ensure students develop:**

* a lifelong sense of belonging to, and engagement with, civic life as an active and informed citizen in the context of Australia as a secular democratic nation with a dynamic, multicultural and multi-faith society
* knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the values, principles, institutions and practices of Australia’s system of democratic government and law, and the role of the citizen in Australian government and society
* skills necessary to investigate contemporary civics and citizenship issues, and foster responsible participation in Australia’s democracy
* the capacities and dispositions to participate in the civic life of their nation at a local, regional and global level

**Structure:**

This topic relates to the Government and Democracy strand where students examine the key institutions ( i.e. three levels of government) and the roles people play in Australia’s system of government. Examples: of these roles would include voting for all three levels of government, engaging in the political process through petitions and lobbying, serving on juries and becoming involved with local councils by attending council meetings, running for local office etc. )

Students develop their skills in questioning, analysing information and evaluating different perspectives about our democratic institutions. They focus on their communicating skills to be able to describe, explain and evaluate civics and citizenship issues

**Learning Intentions**

We will understand the roles and responsibilities of federal, state and local governments and evaluate their effectiveness in addressing the needs of citizens.

**Success Criteria**

I can provide well-structured arguments either supporting or opposing the continuation of the three levels of government in Australia.

**Links to the Curriculum:**

**The Humanities: Civics and Citizenship**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **STRAND** | **RELEVANT CONTENT DESCRIPTION** | **RELEVANT PART OF THE ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS** | **CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING ACHIEVEMENT STANDARD** |
| Government and Democracy | **Levels 3 & 4**Students learn about the roles of local government and how members of the community use and contribute to local services.**VC2HC4K03****Levels 5 & 6**Students learn about the roles and responsibilities of the 3 levels of government in Australia.**VC2HC6K03****Levels 7 & 8**Students learn about:the role of political parties and independent representatives in Australian democracy, including elections, the formation of governments and the balance of power.**VC2HC8K01****Level 9 & 10**Students learn about the role of the Australian Constitution in providing the basis for Australia’s federal system of government and democratic processes, including democratic institutions.**VC2HC10K01**Students learn about the processes through which government policy is shaped, developed and implemented, including the role of political parties, interest groups, the media and legislative processes**VC2HC10K02** | Students can describe democratic institutions and systems using information and sources. Students can explain the values and features of Australia’s democratic institutions and systems, including the 3 levels of government and electoral systems. Students can analyse the roles of key institutions and political actors in Australia’s democracy and the ways in which citizens participate in democracy.Students can evaluate the Australian government’s roles and responsibilities at a regional level. | Construct and use open and closed questions for different purposes. **VCCCTQ010**Examine how different kinds of questions can be used to identify and clarify information, ideas and possibilities.**VCCCTQ021**Consider how to approach and use questions that have different elements, including factual, temporal and conceptual elements.**VCCCTQ032**Investigate the characteristics of effective questions in different contexts to examine information and test possibilities.**VCCCTQ043** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **STRAND** | **RELEVANT CONTENT DESCRIPTIONS** | **RELEVANT PART OF ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS** |
| **Citizenship, Diversity and Identity** | **Levels 3 & 4**Students learn about:why people participate within communities and how students can actively participate and contribute to communities**VC2HC4K07****Level 5 & 6**Students learn about:the meanings of ‘citizenship’ and the rights and responsibilities of different kinds of citizenship, including local, state and nationalcitizenship.**VC2HC6K07****Level 7 & 8**Students learn about:how values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity can support social cohesion and a resilient democracy within Australian society**VC2HC8K10****Level 9 & 10**Students learn about:the challenges to and ways of sustaining a resilient democracy and a cohesive society in Australia.**VC2HC10K10** | Students explain how individuals participate in their community. A possible key question for students to consider would be: how can local government contribute to community life?Students explain reasons to participate in democratic processes and deliberate on issues that affect their communities.Students analyse how the values, principles and influences that underpin democratic institutions are expressed, and who exercises power in these institutions.Students evaluate the roles of key democratic institutions in public discourse and ways of sustaining a resilient democracy |

**Background Reading**

***What is a convention?***

* [Recent example: Uluru – Uluru National Convention 2017](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/event/first-nations-regional-dialogue-in-uluru.htm)
* [Australia’s System of Government](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/about-public-sector/australias-system-of-government/)
* [Victoria’s System of Government](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/about-public-sector/victorias-system-of-government/)
* [Victoria’s Parliamentary Structure](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/about-public-sector/victorias-system-of-government/parliament/)
* [Victoria’s legislative process](https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/how-parliament-works/how-a-law-is-made/)

**Supporting material for teachers to prepare and conduct their own parliamentary convention**

***Preparing to conduct a parliamentary convention***

The following is designed to assist you with your planning for your local Convention. Where possible try to involve students in the planning of the Convention.

* Select a topic / issue for the Convention’s program (best to choose a topic that is a YES/NO question that can be voted on)
* Confirm a date for the Convention
* Draft letters of invitation to local schools to attend
* Invite appropriate speakers (try to balance our affirmative and negative views)
* Confirm and brief speakers on the topic and preferred angle of the presentation
* Book and confirm a venue/location that would be appropriate for your program (e.g. theatre-style for speaker presentations; classroom-style for discussion groups)
* Compile program / flyer or other promotional materials
* Develop pre-reading / stimulus materials or activities for students to do in preparation for the Convention
* Ensure every participant obtains a copy of program and pre-reading material
* Confirm speakers and others AV requirements
* Confirm attendee numbers
* Organise catering (if required) or can request attendees to bring their own lunch
* Print registration / name list for check-in
* Make name tags (if required)
* Conduct evaluation after the Convention

Need more information or assistance? Feel free to contact National Curriculum Services via registrations@ncsonline.com.au or call us on (03) 9415 1299.

***Sample pre-convention activities:***

* [**Pre-convention activities (Primary)**](https://ncsonline.com.au/projects/victorian-students-parliamentary-program/primary-schools)
* [**Pre-convention activities (Secondary)**](https://ncsonline.com.au/projects/victorian-students-parliamentary-program/secondary-schools)

***Conducting a parliamentary convention***

Once pre-convention activities are completed, prepare to make your own parliament and role play the legislative process in the House of Representatives.

A step-by-step process is outlined in [**Make your own parliament**](https://peo.gov.au/teach-our-parliament/classroom-activities/parliamentary-processes-and-practices/make-a-law-house-of-representatives/)**.**

**Suggested background material to introduce this topic:**

**Federation**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Key Knowledge/Question** | **Remarks** |
| [**What is Federation?**](https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/history-of-parliament/federation/federation) | *Fact Sheet explaining the process of Federation for Australia.*  |
| [**Unpacking Federation further**](https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/history-of-parliament/federation/the-federation-of-australia) | *Detailed outline of the road to Federation for Australia.* |
| [**Federation: The Birth of a Nation - Behind the News - YouTube (4.51 minutes)**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecB-Lpm_AZ0) | *Behind the News video clip – Overview of Federation.*  |

**The Constitution and the Division of Law-Making Powers**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Key Knowledge/Question** | **Remarks** |
| [**Australian Constitution: What it is and How it Affects You**](https://www.moadoph.gov.au/explore/democracy/the-australian-constitution-what-it-is-and-how-it-affects-you)  | *Simple and easy explanation of the Australian Constitution.* |
| [**What is the Australian Constitution**](https://youtu.be/xyOH605fHW8?si=eACBB7Sj8Xzt5i9) **–** Australian Human Rights Commission | *Overview of the separation of powers and how the wording of the Australian Constitution can be changed through a referendum.* |
| [**The Division of Law-Making Powers**](https://www.ruleoflaw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Division-of-Powers.pdf) | *Mind Map and activity on the Division of Law Making Powers including Local Council with an attached activity.* |

**Three Levels of Government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Key Knowledge/Question** | **Remarks** |
| [**Three Levels of Government**](https://education.aec.gov.au/teacher-resources/three-levels.html) **–** Teacher Resource from the Australian Electoral Commission | *Explanation of each of the three levels of government – Commonwealth, State/Territories and Local.* |
| [**Behind the News: Levels of Government**](https://www.abc.net.au/education/btn-levels-of-government/13603692) | *Video of the three levels of government produced by the team at Behind the News.*  |
| [**The Three Levels of Government**](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/teach-and-learn/Resources/three-levels-of-government-flashcards/) **–** Parliament of Victoria | *Informative flashcards and visual representations of the key responsibilities of each of the three levels of government in Australia.* |
| [**The Three Levels of Government**](https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/three-levels-of-government) | *Another excellent resource from the Parliamentary Education office that provides teachers and students with a range of resources that contains a fact sheet, video and interactive task on the three levels of government.* |
| [**The Levels of Government**](https://youtu.be/Rf-LvHj9Zpk?si=3CvEgJswKazBkfAI) **–** Parliamentary Education Office | *Introduction to the three levels of government in a short video presentation.* |
| **[Australia’s system of government:](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/about-public-sector/australias-system-of-government/)****[How the Australian system of government works](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/about-public-sector/australias-system-of-government/)** | *Overview of the Australian system of government with specific links to the Australian Constitution and Local Government Victoria.* |

**Arguments supporting Australia continuing to have three levels of government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Remarks** |
| [**How Healthy is Australian Federalism?**](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/pops/pop56/c03) Summary of Lecture presented by Geoff Gallop  | *The lecture explores the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and State/Territory parliaments and includes the response to a Q & A session after the lecture.* |
| [**Rediscovering the Advantages of Federalism**](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/pops/pop35/c02) **–** summary of lecture presented by Geoffrey de Q Walker | *This lecture addresses a range of advantages of a federal system including the right to vote, free speech, autonomy of the states, greater participation in government, a system of checks and balance and the benefits of accommodating regional preferences and diversity. It includes responses to a Q & A session that followed the lecture.*  |
| [**Federalism - the Good, the Bad and the Opportunities**](https://apo.org.au/node/6516) **-**By Anne Twomey for Analysis and Policy Observatory | *The article examines some of the benefits of Federalism including greater flexibility, lower cost public sector, greater cooperation between the Commonwealth and States and voter’s choice.*  |
| [**Federalism is a natural fit for Australia, but we need to make it work**](https://theconversation.com/federalism-is-a-natural-fit-for-australia-but-we-need-to-make-it-work-31846) **-**Article from The Conversation written by Cheryl Saunders  | *The article considers the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States referring to government spending, the importance of collaboration and cooperation and the issues that could arise from federalism reform.*  |

**Arguments against Australia continuing to have three levels of government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Remarks** |
| [**Australian Local Government Association happy for honest Discussion on Federation**](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-21/alga-happy-for-27honest-discussion27-on-federation/5612078) – ABC News ( July 21st, 2014)  | *Article raises the issue of local councils as not being recognized in the Australian Constitution and the implication of this on government funding.*  |
| [**Australians are Over Governed and therefore Overtaxed**](https://www.afr.com/opinion/australians-are-overgoverned-and-therefore-overtaxed-20181206-h18t52) **–** Australian Financial Review(December 7th, 2018) | *The article suggests that the government should provide essential services like national defence, criminal justice and regulation of air control to reduce taxes. This could be an interesting debating point about why we do not need three levels of government.* *\*\* Article also attached at the end of the booklet* |
| [**Australian is over governed and overtaxed – Cory Bernardi**](https://www.skynews.com.au/opinion/paul-murray/australia-is-overgoverned-and-overtaxed-cory-bernardi/video/b43e725a3d131c917ae7973c22888978) **–** Sky News May 9th 2023 | *Debate after the release of the 2023 May Budget focuses on whether local councils are cost effective and if their services are relevant given the expense to taxpayers.*  |
| [**Audit Reveals how Australia is hopelessly Over Governed**](https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/audit-reveals-how-australia-is-hopelessly-overgoverned/news-story/5f08744ebe2bfc6c43916d5ab873ba7f) **–** The Courier Mail (May 1, 2024**)** |  *The article considers the need for Federation reform due to the cost of operating three levels of government.*  |
| [**Hawke’s Federalism: why he wanted to abolish the States:**](https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/hawkes-federalism-why-he-wanted-to-abolish-the-states/video/b42d2b4a7d4202a8d0e0bff3977d0bb6)The Australian(31 December 2015) | *Former Prime Minister Bob Hake discusses the proposition of abolishing the states as he believes they are inconvenient, inefficient, and unnecessary opting for a new cooperative form of federalism with just the Commonwealth Parliament and local government with increased powers.*  |
| [**Red Tape is Costing Australia $176 billion a year**](https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/nationna/red-tape-is-costing-australia-176b-a-year/video/f2ed17228e3ac80e979ffa7950d77fa8) **–** Herald Sun (December 12, 2019) | *Article focuses on excessive government regulations at the federal, state, and local levels costing the Australian economy $176 billion a year because of all the red tape.*  |

**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN FOCUS:**

**CASE STUDY 1: COVID PANDEMIC - 2020-2022**

**Context:**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic presented a range of challenges for governments worldwide including Australia. Management of this health crisis involved complex interactions between the federal, state and local governments highlighting the role of the three levels in Australia. These interactions attracted attention to both the strengths and weaknesses of these government structures.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Remarks** |
| [**Multi-Level Government and COVID-19: Australia as a case study**](https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/3473832/MF20-Web3-Aust-ATwomey-FINAL.pdf)– University of Melbourne | *Case Study provides an insightful overview of the role of the three levels of government during the pandemic. It does focus on the interactions and the relationships between the Commonwealth Parliament and the States & Territories and the positive and negative outcomes.*  |
| [**How Federations Responded to COVID -19**](https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/3908170/MF-Constitutional-INSIGHT-07-COVID-and-federations.pdf) **–** Melbourne Forum on Constitution Building in Asia and Pacific  | *Article focuses on how federations around the world responded to and dealt with the pandemic in policy terms and outcomes. Highlights Australia’s approach comparative to other countries.*  |
| [**The Impact and Implications of COVID-19: An Australian Perspective**](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2516602620937922)**-**Sage Journals | *Article describes and discusses the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Australia, its impact on people and the economy and policy responses to these impacts. Highlights some of the complicated issues that arose through the relationships between the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments.* |

**CASE STUDY 2: MURRAY DARLING BASIN**

**Context:**

The Murray Darling Basin is one of Australia’s’ most significant river systems that covers a vast area across four states: Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It plays an important role in Australia’s agriculture, ecology and water supply. However, the basin faces numerous challenges that arise from governance complexities as it involves various levels of government i.e. federal, state and local that can lead to conflicting policies and priorities. Each state has its own regulations regarding water usage which complicates joint management efforts.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Remarks** |
| [**The Murray-Darling Basin scandal: economists have seen it coming for decades**](https://theconversation.com/the-murray-darling-basin-scandal-economists-have-seen-it-coming-for-decades-119989) **–** The Conversation, by Professor John Quiggan | *The problems that the Murray Darling continues to face as it deals with irrigation lobby groups and water rights.* |
| [**Murray-Darling: when the river runs dry**](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2018/apr/05/murray-darling-when-the-river-runs-dry) **–** The Guardian, by [Anne Davies](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/anne-davies), [Mike Bowers](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/mike-bowers), [Andy Ball](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/andy-ball), and [Nick Evershed](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/nick-evershed) | *The article provides an insight into why the Murray-Darlin Basing plan has failed using maps, images, and summaries***.**  |
| [**Law inconsistencies across Murray-Darling Basin states making water theft harder to police, study finds**](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-04-28/murray-darling-basin-water-theft-study-coorong-farmers-sa-nsw/103752938)**-**ABC News, By [Timu King](https://www.abc.net.au/news/timu-king/14024760) | *Great article on the impact of inconsistencies in water laws between states causing increases in water theft.*  |
| [**Big irrigators unlikely to sell water in 70 billion-litre buyback scheme, major agribusiness says**](https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2024-07-23/small-scale-farmers-sell-water-buyback-big-irrigators-unlikely/104108514) **-**ABC News, / By [Else Kennedy](https://www.abc.net.au/news/else-kennedy/103159252) and [Warwick Long](https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/warwick-long/4592812) | *The article focuses on the issues that farmers within the agricultural landscape of the Murray Darling Basin face and the government’s buyback water scheme.*  |

**Extending reading and resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Remarks** |
| [**Threats and challenges to Australia’s democracy are well outlined in government report. Now for some action**](https://theconversation.com/threats-and-challenges-to-australias-democracy-are-well-outlined-in-government-report-now-for-some-action-234898) **–** The Conversation by Associate Professor Carolyn Holbrook | *The article focuses on the release of the Strengthen Australia Democracy Report in July of this year highlighting the threats to our democracy presented by AI, social media, and the internet. It also emphasis the importance of democracy education in our schools.*  |
| [**Federalism**](https://australianpolitics.com/democracy/key-terms/federalism/) **–** Australian Politics.com | *Excellent article that is highly recommended for reading as it provides a relevant discussion of federalism as well as references to contemporary issues affecting the relationship between the Commonwealth Parliament and the States/Territories.* |
| [**Federalism in a Changing Australia**](http://www.cefa.org.au/ccf/federalism-changing-australia) – article by Constitution Education Fund(CEFA) | *The article raises some relevant points about what we expect the government to provide as services. It also provides an overview of what federalism means.*  |
| [**Compulsory voting in Australia is 100 years old. We should celebrate how special it makes our democracy**](https://theconversation.com/compulsory-voting-in-australia-is-100-years-old-we-should-celebrate-how-special-it-makes-our-democracy-234801) **–** The Conversation (July 22, 2024) | *The article explores compulsory voting in Australia over the last one hundred years and its importance to democracy.*  |

*This stimulus information is prepared for school and teacher use as part of the Teachers’ Parliamentary Convention. It does not reflect the views of the Victorian Government or the Department of Education.*

***Please Note:***

*Both articles below are linked to resources for* ***Arguments Against Australia*** *continuing to have three levels of government.*

**Article 1: From the Financial Review (December 7th, 2018)**

**Australians are over-governed and therefore over-taxed**

 **By David Leyonhjelm**

[Limit government to what we need it for](https://www.afr.com/news/economy/alternative-2018-budget-would-reset-national-agenda-senator-david-leyonhjelm-20180502-h0zirl), and we will all save thousands of dollars in tax.

If the government only got involved in the provision of services that the private sector is not well suited to provide, like national defence, criminal justice and the regulation of air quality, government spending would be no more than half of current levels. I have obtained costings from the Parliamentary Budget Office confirming this, which are available on their website.

If government spending was halved, this would allow taxes to be halved as well, leaving a modest surplus to pay down the government's appalling debt.

I recently introduced a bill to show just what a near‑halving of the Commonwealth tax take would involve, and how it could be done.

First, we should reduce income tax to a flat rate of 20 per cent while lifting the tax-free threshold to $40,000. This would save a typical worker on around $55,000 more than $6000 a year and reduce the tax system's disincentive for income earning.

Those earning $200,000 would still pay $32,000 in tax, but at least they wouldn't face their current tax bill of more than $67,000.

**Foreign investment**

[We should reduce the company tax rate to 20 per cent.](https://www.afr.com/news/economy/dump-imputation-but-simplify-tax-20181105-h17iav)This would help secure ongoing foreign investment which is so important for employment and wage growth. The alignment of personal and company tax rates would also simplify the tax system, which would reduce the need for so many tax agents, lawyers and bureaucrats.

We should abolish fuel tax. This would deliver motorists dollar-a-litre fuel for the first time in decades. And we should abolish the luxury car tax, which protects a car industry that no longer exists.

We should abolish alcohol tax. This would save around 75 cents a can or pot of beer, and around $25 on a bottle of spirits. Low levels of alcohol consumption are not harmful, while the harms that arise from higher levels of consumption primarily fall on the drinker. It is not the role of government to prevent us from harming ourselves; at most, alcohol policy should focus on public education, and the rigorous enforcement of regulations that prevent and punish antisocial behaviour.

We should abolish the luxury car tax, which protects a car industry that no longer exists.

We should abolish tobacco tax too. This would save around $20 from a pack of cigarettes, boosting the budgets of some of the poorest and most disadvantaged Australians who are also being denied proven quitting options like nicotine e-cigarettes.

Many smokers already save the budget billions by dying early after a relatively short period of morbidity, while elderly non-smokers spend decades on the age pension, in subsidised aged care and in the public health system. It's quite unfair that we ask smokers to boost the budget twice by also paying among the highest tobacco taxes in the world.

**Import tariffs**

We should abolish import tariffs. Australia continues to have an ad hoc array of import tariffs, on foodstuffs such as margarine, dairy spreads, pasta, bulgur, almonds, strawberries, maple syrup, biscuits and ham, and on items like umbrellas, guitars, drums, calendars, towels, granite, sandstone, steel and cars. These hidden tariffs amount to big brother fiddling with our decisions on what to buy, for no reason whatsoever.

We should also abolish the passenger movement charge, which is one of the most expensive departure taxes in the world. It has no relation to the costs of government customs operations and applies as much to business people and foreign tourists as it does to Australians holidaying in Bali or across the ditch.

Each of these tax cuts is included in the Lower Tax Bill 2018 I introduced to the Senate last week. The bill is not likely to pass in the couple of weeks of parliamentary sittings before the next election but, for each tax cut detailed in the bill, it allows us to ask the major parties: why not? Why should drinkers pay so much tax? And smokers? And tourists? And motorists? And wage earners? And shoppers?

I have arranged for the Senate economics committee to hold an inquiry into the Lower Tax Bill 2018 over the final months of this parliamentary term. Perhaps the major parties will explain to us in submissions to this inquiry why Australians from all walks of life need to pay as much tax as they are paying now.

But I'm not holding my breath for such an explanation. You can't justify the unjustifiable.

*David Leyonhjelm is a senator for the Liberal Democrats*

**Article 2: The Courier Mail (May 1, 2024)**

**Audit reveals how Australia is hopelessly over-governed**

 **By Dennis Atkins**

THE case that Australia is over-governed has never been put so starkly than with the Commission of Audit.

EXPOSING a massive, often unaccountable and mostly mysterious $409 billion-a-year operation called government to the cold light of day was always going to be revealing, informative and entertaining.

The Abbott Government’s Commission of Audit has given Australia the most comprehensive look yet at how national government works (or doesn’t).

[**COMMISSION OF AUDIT: THE KEY POINTS**](http://www.couriermail.com.au/business/commission-of-audit-reveals-spending-cuts/story-fnic6klz-1226902160516)

It’s a document that will give fodder to people and interest groups everywhere — from the welfare lobby shocked at the winding back of benefits and allowances to the unions screaming about freezing the minimum wage and the education lobby squealing at the idea of handing all things schools to the states.

The Commission has given the government and voters enough to think about and talk about until Budget night — which is when, we’re told, we’ll hear the first response.

This may be the intention, but you’d have to think the pressure to rule some things out (“state income tax”, anyone) might not survive 11 days.

Commission head, former Business Council boss Tony Shepherd, reckons the big opportunity from all this is to reform the federation by more cleanly delineating roles and responsibilities and introducing some competitive federalism which make all jurisdictions more efficient and responsive.

His case for change is nowhere better put than in a chart on page 27 of the report’s first volume which “summarises the structure of federal financial relations under the current intergovernmental agreement”.

This is a polite way of saying the chart crams onto one page the 140 agreements which are underpinned by a further 230 separate implementation plans. Standing off to one side are 15 Council of Australian Governments councils, five legislative and governance forums and at least seven oversight and regulatory bodies.

The case that Australia is over-governed has never been put so starkly.

Doing something is the hard part although Shepherd’s audit makes a compelling case by outlining potential savings running into billions of dollars.

Just a month after he was elected, Kevin Rudd called premiers to Melbourne where they agreed to slash the number of ministerial councils and bodies administering commonwealth money from almost 100 to single figures.

As this report shows, the number of these bodies is now at 140, thanks to a failure to follow through and the immense institutional power of the bureaucracy to not just resist but overturn change.