



the drum mcr
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Welcome to our first edition!

Welcome to our first edition of The Drum. The Drum is a monthly publication which will be reporting back on the views of MCR's special "public interest" focus group.

The group consists of 8 Brisbane residents who come from all walks of life and a range of Brisbane suburbs. They are aged from their early 20s to their 60s.

Each month we get the group together and ask them to discuss a number of "hot" news issues. This month we explored such diverse topics as the Ipswich Motorway, the Federal Labor leadership and succession plans within the Beattie Government.

Ipswich Motorway – The upgrade we have to have

Our panelists are very supportive of the Ipswich Motorway announcement made by the Federal Government in early March. They think that such an upgrade is long overdue. The strong perception in the group is that this is a pretty bad road to travel on at the moment.

Group members have no problem with the decision to upgrade through a bypass at Goodna, rather than just upgrading the

existing road. They think that a bypass will mean far less disruption for motorists, even if it does cost more to do it.

Respondents firmly believe that the Federal Government's offer only pertained to the bypass. They consider it academic to talk about what you could have done with the extra funds, if the Federal Government had simply upgraded the existing road. They just don't believe such a scenario would have ever come into play.

What other roads are needed in SEQ?

Our panelists are also strongly supportive of building a Western Bypass ring road which would connect the south-western suburbs with the northern suburbs and the Bruce Highway.

While they consider that there will be a NIMBY reaction by some of the residents in the western suburbs, they do not believe this will be sufficient to prevent the project. They firmly believe that most Brisbane people believe the time has come to build this "missing link" in the network.

Interestingly, our panelists say they would be willing to pay a toll on the Western Bypass, simply because of the added convenience. However none of our panelists would be using it on a daily basis and they concede

their views might change if this were the case.

In addition to the Western Bypass, other “missing links” that respondents want constructed include:

- The duplication of the Gateway Motorway
- More north-south bridges across the Brisbane River.

The “R” word – Is recycled water OK?

When all is said and done, our panelists would prefer not to have to drink recycled water. But they realise it has to be accepted as probably the best solution to the current water crisis.

The majority consider recycled technology to be safe, given that it is used in other parts of the world. Most panelists doubt whether they will even be able to taste the difference.

Our group genuinely believes that ordinary individuals have a role to play in alleviating the water situation. All of the panelists consider they are currently doing their bit to help. Older panelists in particular, lament that ‘waterwise education’ was not introduced much earlier by governments.

Kevin Rudd: The new kid on the block

So far, our panelists are liking what they see of Kevin Rudd. He is considered Labor’s best chance in a long time of toppling the current Government.

They view Rudd as a much better leader than either Kim Beazley or Mark Latham before him. They believe that neither of

these predecessors represented the type of leadership material that is necessary to become Prime Minister.

Most see Rudd as intelligent and on top of his brief, but they want more time to make up their minds about what he is really like. None of Rudd’s policy announcements have made any impact on this group. At the moment it is all about the “look and sound” of Rudd, rather than substance.

Certainly, quite a few in the group believe that Rudd is giving Howard a run for his money. Some mention that Howard appears to be panicking a little. They see this as unusual coming from Howard and can’t remember a time when he appeared like this before.

Importantly though, they think that Howard is still a leader who has Australia’s best interests at heart. They respect Howard for this and think it is a strong attribute in Howard’s favour.

And their call on the upcoming election?

At this point in time, our panelists are very reluctant to predict the outcome of this year’s Federal election. Some think it is too close to call. Others think Howard still has his nose in front.

Overall, they are skeptical of the current polls which have Labor substantially ahead. They think there is a long way to go yet.

None in the group think that Howard is in danger of losing his seat of Bennelong to Maxine McKew. Even given the redistribution in the seat, they find it hard to accept that an incumbent Prime Minister would be in that much danger. But they do concede that Howard will probably have to pay more personal attention to his seat in the upcoming campaign than he had previously anticipated.

The Beattie Barometer

One of the regular issues that The Drum will be looking at is the performance of the Beattie Government on different issues and topics.

We kicked things off by getting the group to provide a general assessment of the Beattie Government in the wake of last year's State election.

One obvious thing stood out when discussing this issue. Panelists can't assess the Beattie Government without assessing Beattie himself. There is a general belief that he is the Government.

On his handling of issues, panelists suggest that the water crisis has been a kind of perverse "blessing in disguise" for Beattie. By focusing most of his energy on this headline-grabbing issue, he is able to turn the public's attention away from the more everyday problems of health, education and roads.

However, our panelists send a warning to Beattie that he is simply sweeping issues under the carpet and he needs to be aware of things popping up again as crises in the future. They are firmly of the view that the Beattie Government has been "sitting on its backside" far too long on these bread and butter issues.

But while our group can find ample fault with Beattie, they still see no viable alternative. They talk about a "disorganised and divided Coalition" some 6 months down the track from the election. They believe that nothing much has changed in the Coalition leadership and give no indication that they expect anything to change.

And what do they think of the Anna Bligh succession plan?

There are mixed reactions to the performance of Anna Bligh.

Some see her as doing a good job. But others think that her performance is dependent on Beattie being there behind her.

While they see her as a capable Infrastructure Minister, they are not so sure about her ability to be Premier. There is a belief that once Beattie leaves the scene, she will not appear as secure and solid as she currently does.

Panelists were not at all impressed with Bligh in the recent story in The Courier-Mail about her not being willing to wear safety boots on a construction site. They think this shows a side of her personality they haven't seen before.

All up, our group think that Bligh needs more time and more experience before she would be ready to take on the Premier's mantle.

In our next issue.....

Some of our topics for the next issue:

- The Beattie Barometer continued
- An ongoing examination of the Federal election climate - Is this Howard's end?
- Global warming
- Are our kids getting a good education?
- Would Heather Beattie make a good Lord Mayor?