

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja

year in review

My 12th Year in the Senate was as always busy and productive. Below is a summary of my work in 2007, beginning with a snapshot of some of the highlights.



Snapshot of the Year

Wins

- successfully campaigned for the repatriation of David Hicks
- stopped the Access Card
- finally won access to Rent Assistance for Austudy recipients
- successfully lobbied the Government to set up an inquiry into access to electronic media for the deaf and hearing impaired

Legislative Work

93 Senate speeches for 2007

- 19 packages of legislation spoken to in the Senate - 36 amendments moved to 6 packages of legislation
- 13 Notices of Motion moved (3 passed)
- 8 minority reports written
- 14 batches of questions on notice
- 6 questions without notice
- 2 Private Senator's Bills introduced

Other parliamentary highlights:

- Debate of my Private Senator's Bill to regulate pregnancy counselling
- urgency debate calling for David Hicks to be repatriated immediately from Guantanamo Bay.



Australian Defence Force Academy University lecture 2007, 19/09/2007

We topped the Australian Privacy Foundation survey with 9/10: "The Democrats' response to the Privacy Election Challenge rated very highly, with a strong response to each of the 8 challenges set. "This is perhaps a reflection of Senator Natasha Stott Despoja's commitment to privacy issues over many years" - Roger Clarke, APF.



Opening of Hawke Building, University of South Australia, 11/10/2007

Awards

- voted the third highest performing politician in Federal Parliament, and second best in the Senate, by online advocacy group "FairGO" for the period 2004-2007
- Best Published Press Article in this year's Better Hearing Australia Clear Speech Awards for my Advertiser article, "Time to Give Disabled a Good Hearing"

WEL survey: the Democrats topped this survey, equal with the Greens, achieving a score of 73/100 in recognition of our work on women, work and family issues.

The Democrats are ranked highest on the Make Poverty History Policy Report Card, which shows how the five main political parties compare on support for key development outcomes.

Speeches

Invited addresses included 17 key national speeches to groups including:

- Australian Defence Force Academy annual university lecture
- Australian Council of Social Services national conference
- National Tertiary Education Union Forum
- Serious Women's Business international conference
- Oxfam national conference
- GetUp Senate debate
- Minter Ellison Boardroom Lunch
- Australian Institution of Management Breakfast
- The Governor's Leadership Foundation panel
- Ernst & Young Breakfast
- GALAs Awards Night

I also spoke to many student groups through school visits all over Australia.

Private Senator's Bills introduced

- Privacy (Data Security Breach Notification) Amendment Bill 2007
- Workplace Relations (Guaranteeing Paid Maternity Leave) Amendment Bill 2007

Other bills considered by the previous Parliament prior to the election:

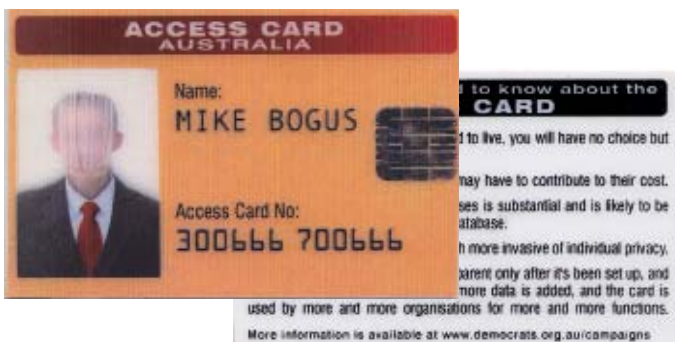
- Constitution Alteration (Appropriations for the Ordinary Annual Services of the Government) 2001 [2002]
- Defence Amendment (Parliamentary approval for Australian involvement in overseas conflicts) Bill 2003 [2004]
- Genetic Privacy and Non-discrimination Bill 1998 [2004]
- Ministers of State (Post-Retirement Employment Restrictions) Bill 2002 [2004]
- Parliamentary Charter of Rights and Freedoms Bill 2001 [2005]
- Patents Amendment Bill 1996 [2004]
- Pregnancy Counselling (Truth in Advertising) Bill 2006
- Privacy (Extension to Political Acts and Practices) Amendment Bill 2006
- Repatriation of Citizens Bill 2007
- Republic (Consultation of the People) Bill 2001 [2004]
- Same-Sex Marriages Bill 2006
- Same-Sex: Same Entitlements Bill 2007
- Taxation Laws Amendment (Scholarships) Bill 2005
- Textbook Subsidy Bill 2003 [2004]
- Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005
- Workplace Relations Amendment (Paid Maternity Leave) Bill 2002 [2004]

Key Campaigns for 2007

Access Card

Constant work to highlight the privacy and security concerns with the Access Card saw it temporarily stopped in its tracks. Labor has now committed to dumping it altogether.

Our ongoing campaign included a 'No ID' web-petition, mock ID card, flyer, poster, community survey and call for a Senate inquiry which saw the legislation postponed following the committee's damning report.



David Hicks



Following years of campaigning by the Australian Democrats, David Hicks was finally repatriated to Australia in June, after pleading guilty to the new offence of 'providing material support for terrorism'.

Parliamentary work during the year in relation to Mr Hicks' case included:

- a Return to Order calling for the Government to release advice on the legality of the military commissions, voted down by the Government
- Parliamentary questions on Mr Hicks' detention; the nature of consul visits; the Government's support for the military commission process; and the Government's refusal to allow a cross-party parliamentary delegation to visit Guantanamo Bay.

The close of the year saw David Hicks released from Yatala prison – I join with many others in stressing the importance of this case and the ongoing need to uphold the integrity of our legal processes and the protections available for Australian citizens overseas.



David Hicks Rally, February 2007

Anti-terrorism issues

Following the bungling of a number of anti-terrorism cases in 2007, notably the Haneef case, I moved to establish a Senate Select Committee inquiry into Australia's anti-terrorism laws. It was blocked by the Government and the Opposition.

During the year, I spoke to many security-related bills in the Senate and moved important amendments, including to prevent disturbing new 'sneak and peek powers' for police to covertly search homes; the ability for mobile phones to be used as tracking devices; and vague classification laws that could implicate innocent people and prevent scholarly review of 'terrorist material'.

The Government has now introduced more than 40 pieces of security-related legislation since September 11. The AFP itself has admitted it is still grappling with some of these new powers and a review of the adequacy of our laws is imperative. I will again move to establish such an inquiry this year.

Pregnancy counselling

Liberal Senator Judith Troeth, Labor Senator Carol Brown, and Greens Senator Kerry Nettle all agreed to sign on to my Pregnancy Counselling (Truth in Advertising) Bill 2006, updating the original bill I initiated 18 months earlier.

The Liberal Government's \$15.5 million Pregnancy Counselling Helpline also kept my office busy. The helpline kicked off on May 1, marred by privacy concerns following confirmation that calls to the helpline would be recorded and call information kept for up to seven years. Despite anticipating 4000 calls per month, in its first month of operation it received just 93 calls.



In September, I was proud to introduce my updated Paid Maternity Leave Bill – to bring Australia into line with other OECD countries.

The bill was launched at a Parliament House reception with speakers Professor Barbara Pocock, from the Centre for Work & Life, and Professor Margaret Hallock, the Director of the Wayne Morse Centre for Law and Politics at the University of Oregon. It received extensive media coverage.

The Bill was supported by the Council of Small Businesses of Australia, Business and Professional Women, the Australian Hotels' Association, the YWCA, the National Foundation of Australian Women, the ACTU and the NTEU.

Among other paid maternity leave work this year, I addressed marie claire's paid maternity leave rally in Sydney (YouTube available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G73UurPYFo>)

"Business and Professional Women Australia (BPWA) strongly supports Senator Natasha Stott Despoja's Workplace Relations Amendment Bill, Guaranteeing Paid Maternity Leave, for a period of 14 weeks and to be fully funded by the Federal Government."

- Kay Morrison: President Business and Professional Women Australia

"... the passage of the bill could assist tourism and hospitality businesses address growing labour shortages by enhancing their capacity to attract and retain good staff. Mr Healey commended Senator Stott Despoja for her persistence in pursuing this issue."

- Bill Healy AHA National President

Attorney-General's

The Government's move to protect genetic privacy in June 2006 was the culmination of my decade-long campaign on this issue, from when I first introduced the Genetic Privacy and Non-Discrimination Bill 1998.

Privacy issues and the need for a Bill of Rights were priorities in 2007.

In April I met the Australian Law Reform Commission as part of their review of the Privacy Act which is due to report in March, and I await their findings with interest. During the election campaign I highlighted the need to remove the exemption for political parties from the Privacy Act.

I introduced a Private Senator's Bill to require organisations to notify people when a privacy breach occurs; kept up my campaign for genetic discrimination to be banned; attended a briefing on New Matilda's Human Rights Bill and co-authored a paper for a Constitutional Law conference in Melbourne.

Republic

I have called on the Rudd Government to hold a new plebiscite on a Republic to coincide with the planned reconciliation referendum in 2009.



Releasing the Pregnancy Counselling Petition at Parliament House

Foreign Affairs

A personal highlight - co-hosting His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Parliament House with the other members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet.

A lowlight -The failure of both major parties to set a timetable for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of 0.7% Gross National Income spent on overseas aid.

I lodged questions on notice seeking the Government's response to the situation in Darfur and the international response. I also wrote to Chinese Ambassador Zhang Junsai asking his Government to pressure the Sudanese Government into ending the crisis.

I questioned what steps the Government had taken to ensure that security cooperation under the Lombok Treaty would not include members of the Indonesian military who have been accused of war crimes. I spoke at the launch of a TV ad calling for human rights monitors and media to be allowed access to West Papua and at the launch of Blundering In, a Sydney University report on Australia's failed policy towards West Papua.

I wrote to Foreign Minister Downer to urge further pressure against the Burmese military junta following their crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

On World AIDS Day I called on the new Government to maintain the Parliamentary Liaison Group on HIV-AIDS, which was first established in 1985.

I marked the second anniversary of the hanging of Van Nguyen and called for the Government to plead for urgent clemency for the 6 young Australians on death row in Bali, and legislate immediately to close any loopholes which allow Australian intelligence to be used to impose the death penalty on people overseas, to avoid this fate befalling other Australians.



Co-hosting the Dalai Lama in Parliament House. Gratuitous Conrad pic!

Higher education

Student income support was again an important issue, especially given the lack of response to the 2005 Senate inquiry into student income support issues.

I scrutinised higher education legislation through the Senate committee process, and in particular the Higher Education Endowment Fund; published two Higher Education Bulletins for university students; and launched a higher education policy during the election campaign aimed at abolishing student fees, boosting income support, repealing voluntary student unionism legislation and increasing base funding to universities.

"We congratulate the Democrats on their vision and on their continued commitment to higher education in Australia. We look forward to seeing the major parties take up the Democrats' challenge in the details of their policy releases as we approach election day"

- Nigel Palmer, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations.

"The Democrats' higher education policy lays down a challenge to the other parties in this election..."

- Dr Greg McCarthy, National Tertiary Education Industry Union.



Higher Education Forum chaired by Natasha Stott Despoja, November 2007

Research and Development launch:

"The Democrats proposed 'Technology Challenge' is a thoughtful response to the lack of high-level strategic thinking that goes into addressing risks and problems"

- Bradley Smith, Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies

"The NTEU commends Democrats' Science and Research spokesperson, Senator Natasha Stott Despoja, on her long running and unequivocal advocacy for the higher education sector. Senator Stott Despoja has played a major role in ensuring that the concerns of those in the higher education sector have been heard, not only by various Governments but by the wider community"

- Andrew Nette, National Tertiary Education Industry Union.

Science

Stem cells: I was proud of my role in ensuring there was a debate on Australia's stem cell laws in 2006, and ultimately that the laws were progressed to allow somatic cell nuclear transfer. I watch with interest the progress of legislation in this area at the State level and see it as one of the most important achievements of my Parliamentary service.

In 2008, I am calling for an Inquiry into Australia's Space policy.

Media highlights



In the studio with Stan Thompson, ABC Mount Gambier

- Profile piece in The Bulletin magazine
- "Mother Who?" book chapter
- Guest appearance on The Catch Up
- The Bulletin article on reform of the United Nations system
- Opinion pieces in The Sunday Mail, The Courier Mail, The Sunday Age; The Canberra Times, Online Opinion and Blaze
- My fortnightly Advertiser columns
- Co-hosting 9am on Channel 10 and additional appearances on 9am
- Front page of The Border Watch and extensive regional media during my trips
- TV debate on the election on ABC Asia Pacific
- Kerri-Anne Kennerley panel



Co-hosting 9am with David Reyne

Women, Work and Family

Alongside the standout issues of Paid Maternity Leave and Pregnancy Counselling, I continued to work on issues including women's representation, gender equity and the wage gap, domestic violence and initiatives such as White Ribbon Day.



9 October Press Conference at the Mary Lee Statue North Terrace

Women's launch:

"The Democrats statement offers concrete solutions to some of the concerns being faced by Australian women."

- Marie Coleman, NFAW

Youth Poll 2007

The annual Youth Poll results showed that more than two thirds of young Australians want the Government to enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians; and that 84% of respondents believe higher education should be publicly funded, with more than half expressing opposition to full-fee paying universities receiving government funding.

I also conducted a Federal Election Youth Poll, to gauge young people's opinions and ensure that their views were included in the political process.



Higher Education Policy Launch at University of Adelaide

Enrol to vote campaign:

Rock the Vote was launched in Adelaide in June and I kicked off my campaign to encourage young people to enrol to vote.

In September I launched a 1st Time Voter's Kit, and a facebook video campaign, alongside Screaming Jets frontman, Dave Gleeson, to encourage young people to make their vote count.

Election campaign

The election dominated October and November – I launched seven policies for the Democrats nationally from South Australia:

- Higher Education
- Science and Innovation
- Women
- Paid Maternity Leave
- Republic
- Privacy
- Human Rights - Julian Burnside QC launched this policy and endorsed our work in this area.

"Natasha Stott Despoja has been such a remarkable representative of human rights in Australia in the Parliament that an invitation from her to launch this policy was irresistible."

- Julian Burnside QC

Other key events included a trip to the South East of South Australia and campaigning in Brisbane with Senator Andrew Bartlett on paid maternity leave and childcare issues.



I also spoke at the Party's State and National launches in November and on Election Day I visited key South Australian seats and polling booths to support candidates and helpers.

The Year Ahead

Priorities for 2008 include continuing the campaign for paid maternity leave; reintroducing my motion for a Senate inquiry into Australia's anti-terrorism laws; continuing to lobby for an Australian republic; renewing the call for transparent advertising of pregnancy counselling services; Murray Darling Basin; SA water issues; attempting to outlaw genetic discrimination (ten years after I first introduced a bill to do this!) and calling for an inquiry into space issues.