Framing the Role of Government and the Economy

Lily Spencer
Communications Lead,
Australia reMADE
this moment
Government shifted its frame...

- We went from a focus on debt and deficit, lifters and leaners, individuals competing in the market, jobs and growth to... (individualism, competition)

-TO-

- ‘Team Australia’ - community, health, safety, care, no ‘red team’ or ‘blue team’, bosses or unions because ‘we’re all in this together’ (community, cooperation)
Now they’re trying (somewhat) to go back

• *It’s all about jobs.*
• *We’ve got to grow our way out of the crisis.*
• *We can’t afford to keep up covid payments forever...*
• *$$ for services depend on a strong economy.*

• But they’re still not overtly scaremongering over debt or austerity, so that’s something! And there’s still talk of working together across ideological divides.
Our role in this moment
1. Know our values (our why)

2. Take up space, socialise our thinking

3. Talk about what we DO want, not just what we don't. We are here to create something good, not just ameliorate something bad.

Australia Remade has some great resources on

- Vision
- Values
- Public good
Elevate what's worked

1. Working together across party/ideological lines

2. Listening to the experts (hi, science!)

3. Putting people first
How to talk about the economy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our opponents’ story vs our story</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raw economic growth is the measure of a successful economy/government.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>We measure government and the economy by the good they create in people’s lives, and their stewardship of nature.</strong></td>
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How do people think about the economy?
Money is a means to an end.

Economy is out of our control.

Wealthy and corporations have too much power.

Government in cahoots with corps, big money.

Unions, enviro groups playing the game as well.

‘Making economy better’ = ‘growing it faster’

People like and want government services, but...

Government isn’t as capable as business.

(Pre-Covid research findings, 2018)
What our research found: nutshell

Most people defaulted to a very narrow vision of the role of government in the economy: taxing and spending, or making laws to regulate business... ‘interfering’ with private sector people who usually have the best solutions to people’s problems.

→ There is a real opportunity now especially to talk up what we can do through government to benefit people’s lives.
How do we keep the debate on our turf?
3 Bits of Advice from Research

1. **Tell your own story**, not your opponents’.
2. **Focus on real outcomes for people and planet**, not dollars and cents.
3. **Talk about active, empowered government and what it can and should do.**
1. Tell your own story
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Our opponents’ story</strong></th>
<th><strong>Our story</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moral</strong></td>
<td>You earn what you <em>deserve</em>.</td>
<td>We’re all in this <em>together</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Competition, status, hierarchy, extreme individualism couched as ‘freedom’, markets, money, dominate nature.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cooperation, humility, equality, <strong>community</strong>, equality, connection, equity, respect nature.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Every <em>individual</em> has the right to thrive by their own effort if we keep government out of the way and let the market work its magic.</td>
<td>All people can live <em>good lives</em> in a <em>flourishing</em> natural world if empowered governments act in the public good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary metaphors we use</strong></td>
<td><strong>Economy as natural/organic (patient, body, gods to be appeased) and the people as inorganic (widgets, factory cogs, units of input and output).</strong></td>
<td><strong>Economy as inorganic human-made and maintained (machine). People as organic needing good conditions to grow, live and thrive.</strong></td>
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</table>
Our message, their story

Example

The government says we can’t afford to extend JobKeeper to everyone, or keep the rate of JobSeeker high, because the budget will go broke.

But that’s just not true. We can’t afford NOT to look after everyone properly, as ultimately the cost to the economy will be greater.

Our message, our story

- We all need a **strong social safety net** when times are tough.

- But right now the Prime Minister’s **policy excludes** certain people from JobKeeper, and he’s about to **send JobSeeker back to poverty rates**.

- Good, responsible government should **expand JobKeeper** and **maintain JobSeeker** because it’s the right thing to do.
2. Focus on outcomes (not dollars)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talking about the process (the recipe)</th>
<th>Talking about the outcome (the cake)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>• The <strong>cost</strong> of not acting on climate change outweighs the cost of taking action.</td>
<td>• We can have <strong>more than enough</strong> energy to <strong>enjoy our lives in harmony with nature</strong> when we tap the power of the sun and wind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We need <strong>bigger investment</strong> in early childhood education.</td>
<td>• <strong>Every child</strong> should be able to go to <strong>preschool for free</strong>, to be <strong>nurtured, loved and taught</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hard-working public sector employees deserve a <strong>2% pay increase</strong>.</td>
<td>• The people who work for our state deserve <strong>good lives</strong> with <strong>enough money</strong> to make ends meet.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
“But how will we pay for it??”

- **Budgets are about choices, priorities and values.** We have seen that what really matters is putting people first.
- Where there’s a **will**, there’s always a **way**.
- **We elect governments to serve us:** people, communities and the planet.
- **We can do so much more.** We have the heart, the brains, the imagination, the determination. Money is never an acceptable excuse.
3. Talk about what active, empowered government can do
Critiquing government

• The research shows that when most people hear criticism of ‘the government’ or even politicians, they understand it as ‘our system of democratic government isn’t working.’

• They are left to conclude that private corporations are the viable option for getting something done.
When we point out the shortcomings of political leadership, focusing on **what government should do** conveys what they have done wrong, *in a way that encourages people to think good government can do right.*

→ When criticising a government policy, program or project, or lack thereof, say ‘**government can/ should do x,**’ not ‘government has failed to y’.
<table>
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<th>Government as the solution</th>
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<td>● By excluding casuals from the JobKeeper payments, the government has failed to provide for some of the most vulnerable in our society.</td>
<td>● The private sector has pushed a million people onto casual contracts. The government should expand JobKeeper to make sure everyone in our society is taken care of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The government has failed to take climate change seriously and now they’re pushing a gas-fired recovery.</td>
<td>● The next energy boom is going to be renewable. Government can move us past fossil fuels to become the next global energy super power.</td>
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Metaphors
be with you
Use journey metaphors

We’ve seen *how far we can go* when we listen to experts, work together and put people first. The *road ahead may have challenges*, but we can do anything when we put our minds to it. What once seemed *impossible* -- free childcare, homes for people who need them, raising the rate of income support -- now seems obvious. So *where do we want to end up on the other side of this*?
Use building metaphors

Let’s lock in and build on the pollution reduction gains we’ve made during this time. Australia has the tools to become a green tech powerhouse. We know how to design green agriculture that draws carbon out of the air. We can engineer a sustainable transport revolution. We can build better lives and livelihoods in harmony with nature. We can take this opportunity to build back better than before.
Avoid war metaphors

Covid-19 is not a ‘battle’ against an ‘enemy’ we must defeat at all costs. That implies pitting nations or people against each other, fanning flames of fear, paving way for authoritarian government crackdowns.
Journey, not war

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| • We can fight this virus  
• ‘Frontline’ workers  
• Win the battle against covid-19 | • We can navigate our way through this  
• Essential workers, teachers, nurses, shop-keepers, etc  
• Slow the spread, flatten the curve |
Avoid ‘economy as a patient’

It’s hard to do in this health + economic crisis, but primes people to think of economy as a natural body or entity we shouldn’t ‘interfere’ with. Try to use the word ‘recovery’ only holistically -- referring to people or society as a whole, not economy/budget/sharemarket.
**Machine, not body**

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<td>• Revitalise the economy</td>
<td>• Get the economy back on track</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Economic rescue package</td>
<td>• Supercharge the economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We need a stimulus</td>
<td>• Flick of a switch, reset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economy is on life support</td>
<td>• Steering us towards a better future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resuscitation</td>
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Questions?
What messages are you thinking about for your own work?
What are you going to start/continue doing?
What messages are you going to STOP using?
Resources

• **Advice and tools for leaders** - including Covid-19 Messaging Guide
  [https://www.australiaremade.org/remaker-u-practical](https://www.australiaremade.org/remaker-u-practical)

• **Vision for Australia reMADE**
  [https://www.australiaremade.org/the-vision](https://www.australiaremade.org/the-vision)

• **Introducing the Public Good with reMAKERU**
  [https://www.australiaremade.org/introducing-the-public-good](https://www.australiaremade.org/introducing-the-public-good)

• **Economic Messaging Project** Full Report and Guide
  [www.australianprogress.org/economics](www.australianprogress.org/economics)
Thank you!

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