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## HOW NOT TO INTRODUCE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: THE 2010 CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON CLIMATE CHANGE PROPOSAL

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During the 2010 federal election campaign in Australia, climate change surfaced as a major issue. Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced a Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change (CACC) involving 150 randomly selected citizens.

Those of us who had worked on the Australian Citizens' Parliament (ACP) one year earlier wondered whether this could be the moment in history when Australian politics took a deliberative turn, perhaps inspired by the ACP itself.<sup>1</sup> That hope quickly faded. This chapter explains why and, in doing so, uses the Gillard case to illustrate seven different errors one can make when proposing a deliberative political reform.

### Context of the CACC Announcement and Reaction

On June 24, 2010, the Australian Labor Party ousted its leader, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and replaced him with Julia Gillard, who became Australia's first female prime minister.<sup>2</sup> Among other problems, there had been some controversy during Rudd's tenure about his retreat from an emissions trading scheme to address climate change, especially since he had earlier described climate change as "Australia's great moral challenge."

The development of national economic policy in response to climate change had been a tortuous affair in Australia, one of the strongest economies in the world, underpinned by natural resource extraction and coal

power generation.<sup>3</sup> The Copenhagen Summit had passed in disappointment, with Australia committing to only a 5 percent reduction in emissions by 2020. The industrial and political forces pitted against government intervention with a carbon emissions trading scheme (ETS) had been relentless.

Opinion polls showed strong public acceptance for an ETS, but a vocal minority of individuals, motivated by climate-change skepticism and free-market ideology, spurned any such government intervention. In spite of this contention, even within each major party, they came close to legislative agreement on an ETS, only to fall away for various reasons. The Greens, for example, found the version too compromised to support.

With that failure, the government had the trigger to take the electorate to a double-dissolution election, that is, dissolving both houses of Parliament at the same time, but ignored that opportunity as it neared the end of its term of office. At the time of the election, the government had deferred the possible introduction of ETS legislation until 2013, blaming the recalcitrance of the Opposition.

Thus, this issue remained unresolved when Gillard began the election campaign just one month into her tenure as prime minister. Not even a week had passed in the federal election campaign when Gillard took action, announcing on Friday, July 23, 2010, that she wished to convene a deliberative Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change (CACC).

It would be a monumental understatement to say that the CACC announcement failed to attract an enthusiastic response. Instead, it met skepticism—from Opposition parties, media commentators, industry, environmentalists, and even the wider community. It is edifying to analyze the reasons for this collective resistance, as well as the strategic errors that likely caused—or at least contributed to the negative reception.

The most common critique was that the CACC appeared as yet another delaying tactic. Though Gillard simultaneously announced a number of other policy decisions related to climate change, some believed the CACC would slow down the progress that had been made toward a comprehensive ETS policy on climate change. What happened next showed not only that critics rejected citizen deliberation on climate change but that they also had little interest in deliberating *about* such deliberation.

Australian political philosopher Tim Soutphommasane has written, "The real test of a democracy is not whether it can overcome its disagreements, but how it conducts itself in light of them. The manner in which our open, honest national conversation proceeds will say a good deal about our