

# Change Politics

How to convince your MP

**So, you're convinced – our political system isn't that well set up to solve problems.**

**But – how are we meant to change the system if the people we are relying on are the politicians themselves?**



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**Well, we're going  
to have to do it by  
taking advantage of  
that same system.**

**Through a delicate mix of well-mannered convincing and education, we can demonstrate that it is in their best interest to take on board the use of citizens' assemblies.**



Politicians are all looking for ways that they can outcompete their rivals (and their allies) when it comes to winning elections, portfolios and earning media attention. What we're here to do is explain to them how citizens' assemblies are a complementary tool that they can use to make their political lives easier.

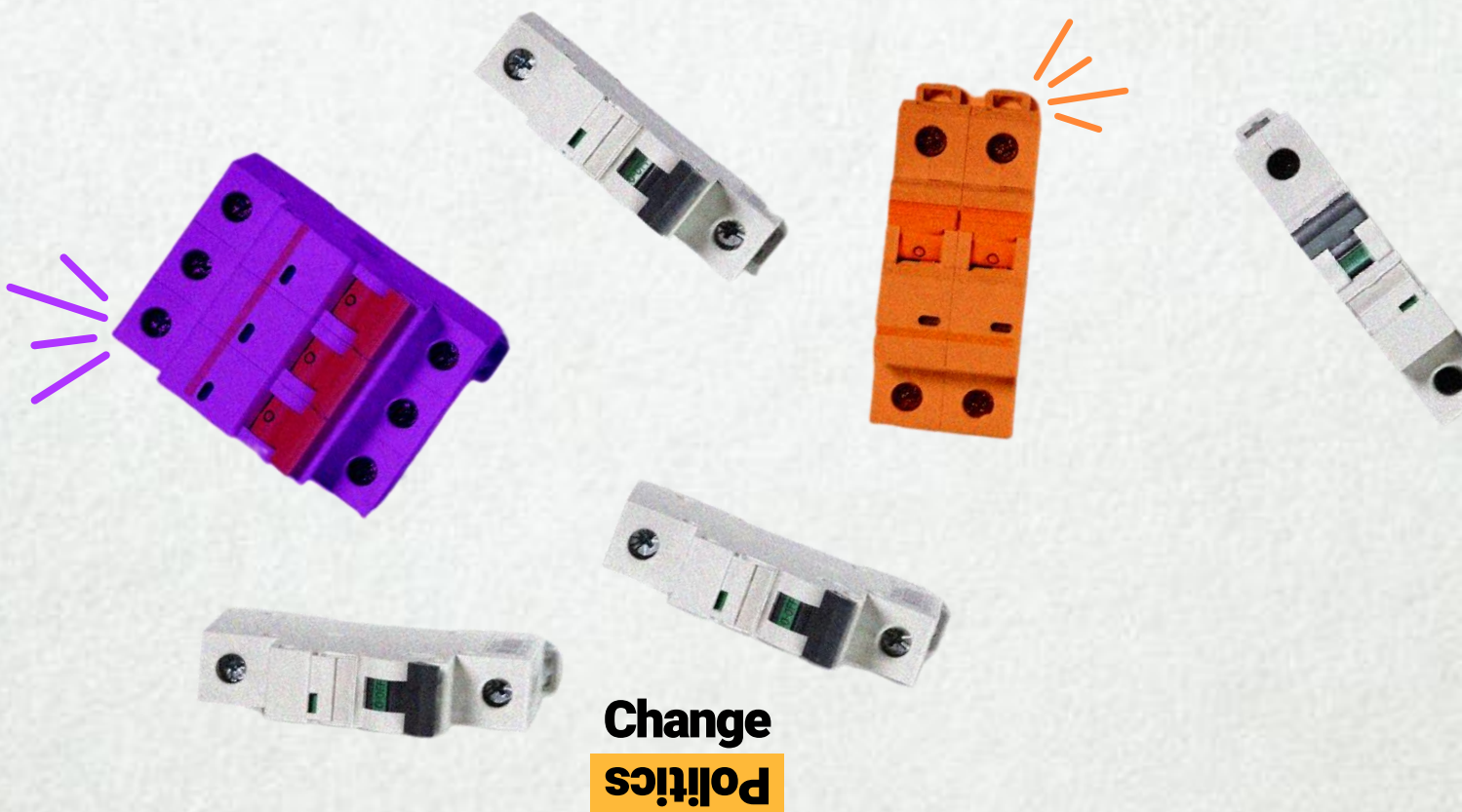


Citizens' assemblies are incredible circuit-breakers for wicked long-term problems, where difficult trade-offs and unseen complexity make specific issues electorally difficult. For example, think of issue areas like climate change, tax reform, housing prices and crime.

But we need to be smart in how we go about this. Politicians are harangued and pestered most days so they're not going to respond well to us lecturing them. Instead, we must incentivise them by showing them that through these processes, they're likely to get solutions to problems and that that can lead to sweet, sweet votes.

Changing politics is going to take patience and strategy that anticipates the momentum behind citizens' assemblies. They're growing fast and it's in a politician's best interest to get on board.

**Let's use that to our advantage.**

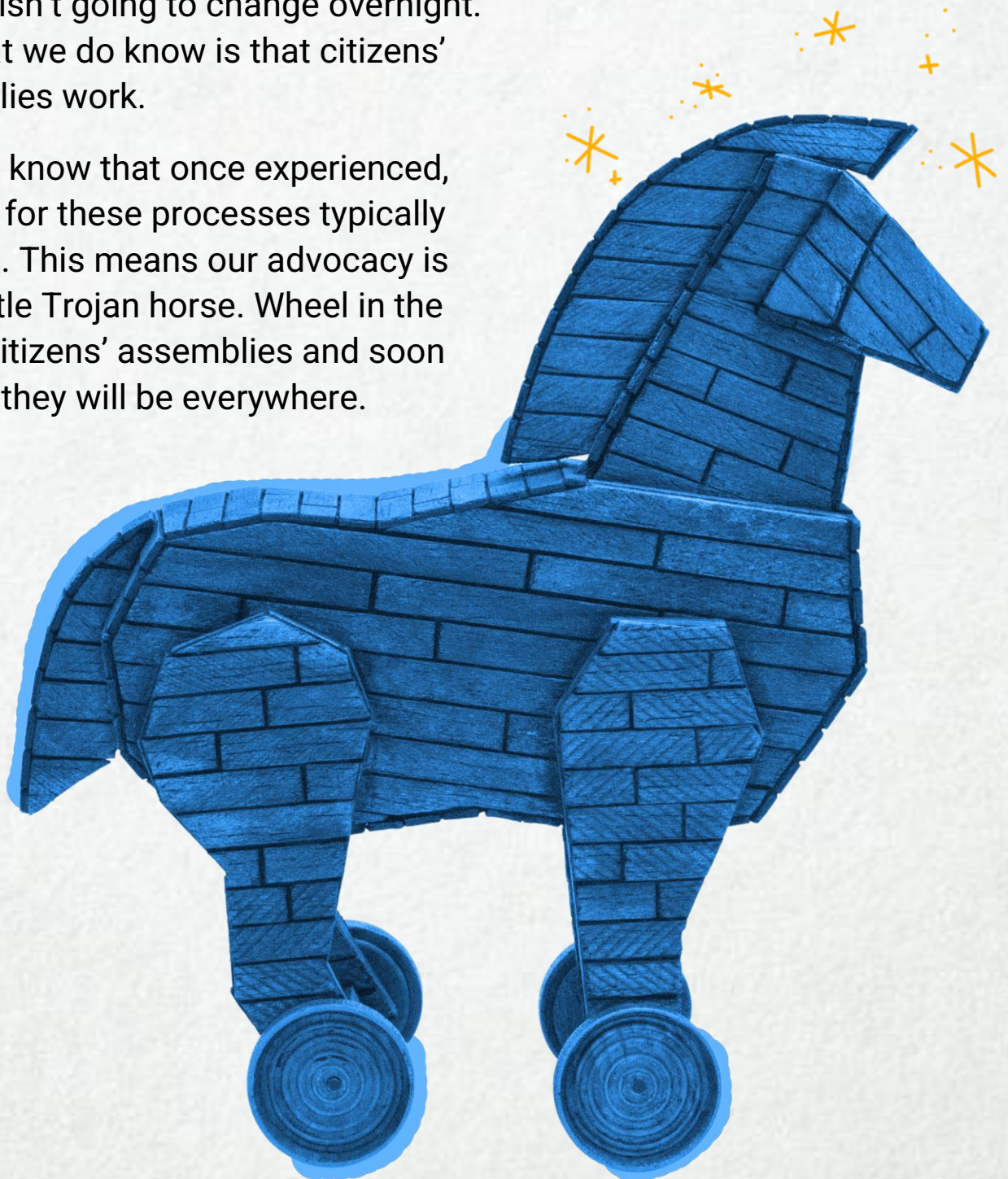


# Approach

## An important note on tact.

We need to be realistic. The political system isn't going to change overnight. But what we do know is that citizens' assemblies work.

We also know that once experienced, support for these processes typically spreads. This means our advocacy is like a little Trojan horse. Wheel in the use of citizens' assemblies and soon enough they will be everywhere.





# What does this mean for what you want to say to your local Member of Parliament?

**Of all the MPs and Senators  
in the country, there are:**

**01. A select few** who are already supportive of the use of citizens' assemblies to address long-standing challenges.

**02. Some who understand** what citizens' assemblies are but aren't sold on their implementation, but perhaps they are open to trial it.

**03. A wider cohort,** most of them, who think they've heard of them but associate them with something else like focus groups or direct democracy (it's neither), these politicians are ripe for education despite seeming against the idea.

**04. Then there is another group** of politicians who will fastidiously hold onto political power with all their might, and they aren't very convincible.

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# We're going after #2 & #3

**The main hurdle in place of implementation citizens' assemblies is the common refrain from the politicians in this middle band:**

**"It's interesting but people don't care."**

We're targeting the MPs in groups 2 and 3, those who are curious but not convinced there is an appetite for change, and those that don't really know what they're talking about and could come around if they had a better understanding of what we're talking about.



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An important thing to keep in mind (for our sanity!), is to not feel disheartened by a lack of response or how long it might take to hear back from your MP. You never know the impact of a compelling and reasoned letter. It may just be that your letter lays the groundwork for a conversation we have 1-2 years later with that MP who recalls the term citizens' assemblies because of your communication.

And if you don't hear back and you'd like to reach out again, it's best to give it a little time (perhaps 3-6 months) so you're not pushed into their waste-paper basket as someone who 'pesters'. Annoying? Absolutely. Strategic and necessary? Sadly, yes.

**OK. Let's get into the detail.**





# Who even is your MP?

**First things first. You need to be across who your local Member of Parliament is.**

To do this for your Federal Member, head to the [Parliament of Australia website](#) and add your postcode or address down the bottom.

For your state or territory MP, [you can use this site as a starting point](#). Each parliament and legislative assembly site is organised differently.

Now to on to what to say, and how we can be strategic about this to be most effective.



# What to say

**This doesn't need to be complicated. It's more the sum total of the correspondence that will move the needle – not to say that you shouldn't try and be convincing!**

**To convince your local MP you will need to do three things:**



**01. Introduce yourself** and explain your relationship to them and what you care about.

**02. Introduce the idea** of citizens' assemblies and why you'd like to see them used.

**03. How** 1 and 2 relate to one another.



# How this might look

Dear The Hon. Dominic Perrottet, MP,

My name is [your name!] and I live just around the corner from you in Beecroft. I'm writing to you because I think we both share a concern around [insert the issue you're focused on] and would like to see steps taken towards a solution that our entire community can agree to.

I understand however that this isn't a simple thing to do, and the nature of politics often dissuades you from taking on issues that on their face seem politically unpopular.

I have recently discovered a new method for solving problems like this – **citizens' assemblies**. They take a representative sample of the community and give them the time and information to find agreement on solutions to a problem. In our case, you'd have everyday people making recommendations on how we tackle [this issue], but the key difference is that they would have heard from a range of experts and then had to agree as a group on their solutions.

These processes have already been used successfully around Australia, including in:

- Geelong
- Melbourne

I think we'd be able to make some inroads on the issue and could also be surprised at the ingenuity everyday people possess. Plus, the wider community will see you standing alongside people like them, sharing a decision that affects everyone. It's a fantastic trust-building exercise for the community.

I hope you consider this new approach. And if not on [insert your issue], then maybe you could trial this approach on something else and if it is successful it could graduate into something larger.

Warmly,

[Your Name]

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# Some **tips**

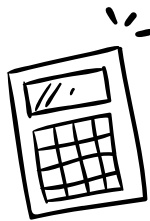
**Stuck on what exactly you want to say?**

**Here are some **useful pointers:****

**Some issues that we think citizens' assemblies will be helpful at addressing:**



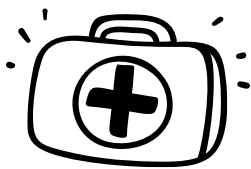
Housing and  
house prices



Tax reform



Prisons



Healthcare  
spending



Donations



Climate  
change



# Why citizens' assemblies are good at solving these issues:

**01. They bring a representative mix** of everyday people together rather than the usual suspects which builds public trust.

**02. They aim for common ground** on solutions rather than staking out debates at the edges.

**03. They give people time to consider** a wide range of sources so they can provide public judgement on an issue in contrast to public opinion found on Facebook or in opinion polls.

**04. They garner wide public support** because they involved 'people like us', not traditional political operators like lobbyists, donors and parties.

**05. They help reduce polarisation and disinformation** because recommendations are made with reference to critical thinking, unconscious biases and supporting evidence.



# What you might like to ask of your local MP

**01. If they're a Minister,** they could trial the use of citizens' assemblies to address a longstanding problem in their portfolio.

**02. If they're a member of a parliamentary committee,** they could advocate for the use of a citizens' assembly-like process that complements the work of a committee inquiry ([see here](#)).

**03. If they're a backbencher,** they could learn about citizens' assemblies and make the case for their use to their party colleagues.

**04. If they're a member of the opposition and a member of the shadow ministry,** they could include the use of citizens' assemblies in their party platform for addressing tricky issues. It helps them commit to solving something but not risk sticking their neck out with a position they then need to defend.

**05. If they're a member of the opposition but not a shadow minister,** they might be on the hunt for a seat on a committee and could use citizens' assembly-like process to improve the way the public is involved in these processes.



# How this might link to **your life**

**01. This bit is mostly up to you,** I don't know who you are, but what we do have in common is that we're both out here trying to change politics, and that means we must have something in common.

**02. It might be that you're fed up with the theatre of it all,** that you'd like to see something change for your children's future, or that you don't believe in the complete lack of imagination when it comes to what our future could be like.

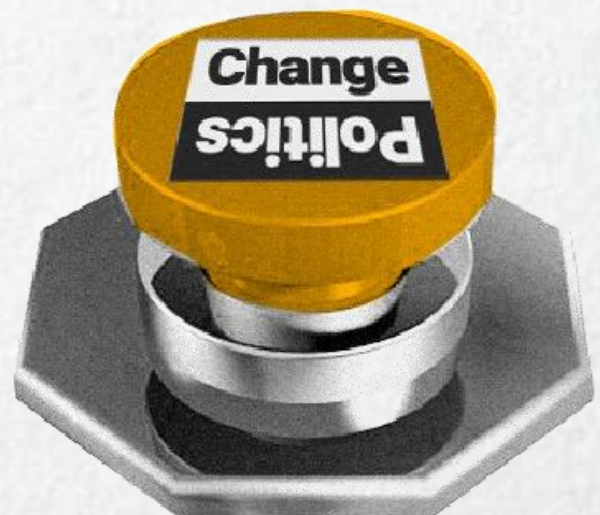
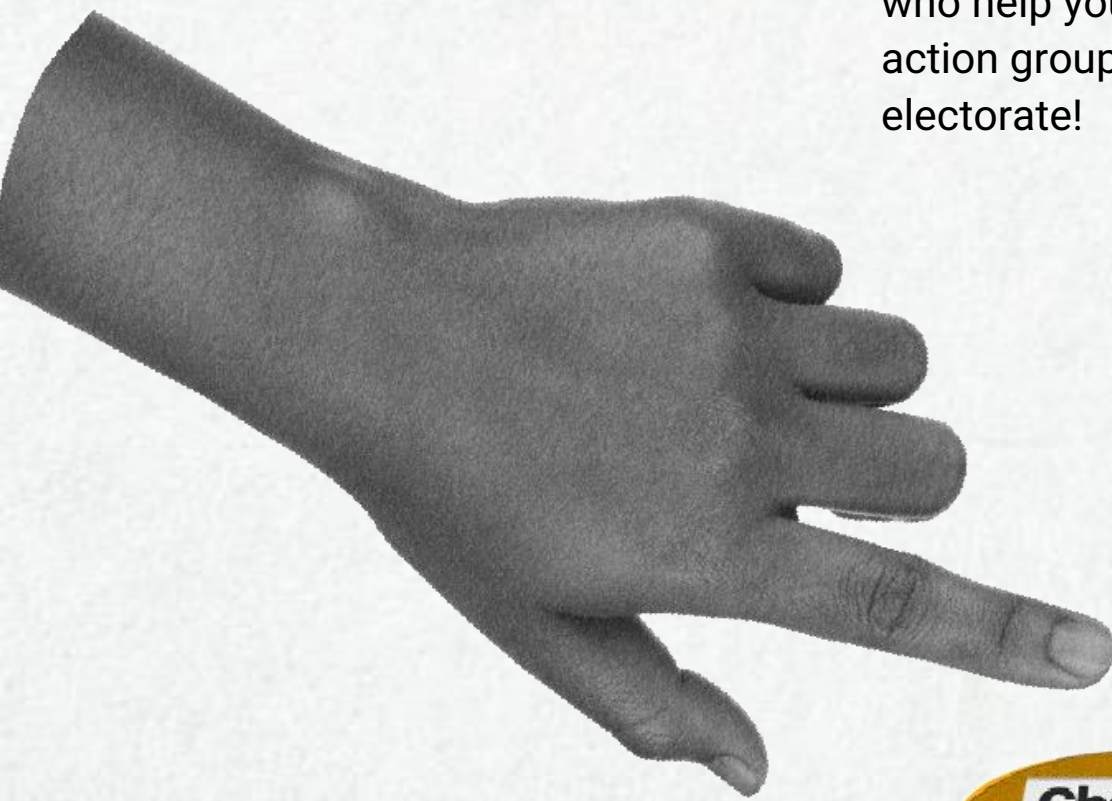
**03. A gentle pull of the heart strings** and our common humanity and you might strike the right chord.



# What next?

**Overachiever?** You could write to MPs who aren't your local Member but might be Ministers that cover a portfolio that oversees action on a specific cause you care about.

You could also consider **joining Active Democracy**, who help you create local action groups in your electorate!



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