

# Mackellar Matters

REPORT 2022

 VOICES OF  
MACKELLAR  
BE HEARD

JUNE 2022

# YOUR VOICE YOUR CHOICE BE HEARD



VOICES OF  
MACKELLAR

[voicesofmackellar.org.au](http://voicesofmackellar.org.au)

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# 01

## Introduction

### Who is Voices of Mackellar?

Established in July 2020, the aim of Voices of Mackellar is to encourage the highest standard of community consultation and political representation for the residents of the Mackellar electorate\*.

Voices of Mackellar is a non-partisan community group and is not aligned with any political party or individual election candidate. The Committee members are all volunteers and all activities and administration costs are covered by in-kind

or financial donations from our community of supporters.

*\*The Mackellar electorate covers an area from Palm Beach in the north to Dee Why and Forestville in the south and across the west to Duffys Forest and also includes the offshore communities around Pittwater. There are approximately 110,000 people on the electoral roll in Mackellar.*

### Phase 1: The first Mackellar Matters Report

In late 2020 and through the first half of 2021, Voices of Mackellar volunteers spoke to 435 people in the electorate of voting age.

Using the Kitchen Table Conversation (KTC) format developed by the Victorian Women's Trust and used by other 'Voices' groups around Australia, a group of three to ten residents met for up to 2 hours to talk through a predetermined series of questions. The questions related to what they value in their communities, what issues concern them most and what they look for when it comes to political representation.

The responses from these conversations were recorded anonymously and collated into the first Mackellar Matters Report which was

released on 15 July 2021 at an online event attended by more than 180 people.

The Report was also shared with the Federal, State and local representatives which included an in person presentation by the Voices of Mackellar Committee to the Federal MP at the time, Jason Falinski.

Following the launch of the Mackellar Matters Report, the Committee of Voices of Mackellar hosted a number of events and panel discussions with expert and well known panellists. Topics were determined by the key findings of the Report, focusing on issues of major concern to the community such as the environment, climate change, political integrity and development.



## Phase 2: The 2022 Mackellar Matters Report

In the final few months of 2021, Voices of Mackellar resumed its community consultation process with new participants. However, Kitchen Table Conversations moved to a one hour Zoom session with 3-6 participants provided with the same series of predetermined questions. In addition, a convenient and online community survey<sup>1</sup> was launched in early 2022 .

<sup>1</sup>Contact [info@voicesofmackellar.org.au](mailto:info@voicesofmackellar.org.au) if you cannot access the survey.



*Images from Zoom Kitchen Table Conversation*

For the Zoom conversations, responses were collected from 93 participants and an additional 247 people responded to the online community survey, bringing the total number of participants in this second phase to 340.

Given the relatively short time frame overall and the qualitative nature of the data, the 435 responses analysed in the earlier Mackellar Matters Report have been combined with the new data collected since late 2021.

The findings that follow are based on the responses from a total of 775 Mackellar residents.

**We assert that this gives a more comprehensive and valuable reflection of the views, concerns and expectations of the residents of the Mackellar community.**

### COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

Total Phase 1 (2020-2021)	435 participants
Total Phase 2: (2021-2022)	340 participants
Kitchen table Conversations via Zoom:	93 participants
Online community survey:	247 participants
<b>Combined total (Phase 1 &amp; Phase 2: 2020-2022)</b>	<b>775 participants</b>

# 02

## Summary of Key Findings 2020-2022

**The findings detailed in this report combine extensive qualitative information to give a snapshot of the Mackellar community, their values, concerns and opinions on the issue of political representation.**

The information was collected periodically over eighteen months from late 2020 to early 2022. Responses to ten standardised questions were recorded anonymously via the Kitchen Table Conversation format used by other 'Voices' groups, in face to face and online gatherings plus through a convenient online survey.

A total of 775 respondents participated including 340 in the most recent phase. The recent responses were very consistent with those presented in the original Mackellar Matters Report.

Most people overwhelmingly cited the beautiful natural environment as the main reason they love living in Mackellar. At the same time the most frequently expressed concern locally was that not enough was being done to protect that environment.

This was also somewhat reflected at the national level where the main area of concern related to the lack of action on climate change action as well as the degradation of the environment.

Another significant area of national concern was the lack of accountability and transparency in government, linked to the influence of political donors and lobbyists. Media diversity, housing affordability, economic and indigenous inequality also ranked in the top ten issues of concern.



When it comes to political representation, the majority of respondents said honesty and integrity plus ‘community over Party’ were qualities that made for good political representation. Listening also rated highly.

Unfortunately a clear majority (73%) of respondents did not feel they had an adequate voice in the way they were represented. The reasons most frequently given were that the representative would not listen nor represent the issues of the respondents. Whilst some had been successful, others had given up or not even tried.

In conclusion, the Mackellar community value their natural environment though feel it is under threat. Lack of action on climate change as well as a lack of accountability and transparency were of greatest concern. It’s concerning in a democracy such as ours that so many of the Mackellar respondents did not feel heard or listened to by their political representative.

The election of Mackellar’s first ever<sup>2</sup> independent Member of Parliament, Dr. Sophie Scamps in May 2022 is significant uncharted

territory for the Mackellar constituency. Elected on a platform of being a ‘community-backed’ independent, taking ‘our community’s concerns to Canberra’<sup>3</sup> this report provides concrete evidence of those issues and representation concerns

**It is clear that Voices of Mackellar has an important role to play through empowering the community to engage with their democracy and providing a neutral platform for the people of Mackellar to be heard.**

<sup>2</sup> Bill Wentworth served as the first MP for Mackellar from 1949 till October 1977 before leaving the Liberal Party to serve as an independent for the last 2 months of his term.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.sophiescamps.com.au/about\\_sophie](https://www.sophiescamps.com.au/about_sophie)



# 03

## Findings in more detail

### Living in Mackellar...

In answer to the question *'What do you love about living in Mackellar?'* most respondents (84%) cited the beautiful natural environment as the reason for this. Otherwise, many identified the friendly community as being an incentive for living here. The area is seen to offer a relaxed lifestyle, while also offering most of the amenities that the community requires.



### The necessary ingredients for a strong community...

In answer to the question *'What makes for a strong community?'* again, it is clear that people in Mackellar are happy living amongst friends and family with whom they perceive they share similar values. Responses indicated that it was important to have shared spaces where people can meet informally, or within organised groups and activities. A small number of people did mention that there was not enough cultural diversity amongst the Mackellar population, while several stressed the importance of inclusivity, and treating everyone with trust and respect.

## Local concerns...



Just as most respondents (84%) valued the *beauty and proximity of the natural environment in the Mackellar electorate*, so one of the main concerns is that not enough is being done to protect that environment. Several people mentioned the PEP11 project (possibility of offshore petroleum exploration) as a stark example of how the environment could be mismanaged. Wildlife and biodiversity protection, especially of koalas, was also a feature.

Issues relating to *increased population* – over-development, congestion on roads, waste management and housing issues, were also of concern. Many (18%) wanted the return of Mona Vale Hospital, and the same percentage wanted the Northern Beaches Hospital to be more in the public domain.

*Social issues*, such as mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems, domestic violence, insufficient social services including aged care, and a lack of activities and jobs for youth were prevalent.

# Broader and national concerns...

The main area of concern on national issues related to the lack of action on *climate change* action as well as the degradation of the environment. Also ranking highly were the linked issues of sustainability, waste management, renewable energy, and the dependence on and subsidising of the fossil fuel industries.



*We need to take the politics out of the climate change action.*

*The people in power have not considered climate change action as a crisis.*

Other *governance issues* like the lack of long-term planning, the need for tax reform plus the selling of Australia's assets to foreign investment, were well represented. It is interesting to note that only 1% of respondents considered the economy an issue of concern, although a few people commented that we are fortunate to live in Australia. Only 2% of participants identified China or issues around national security as areas of concern.

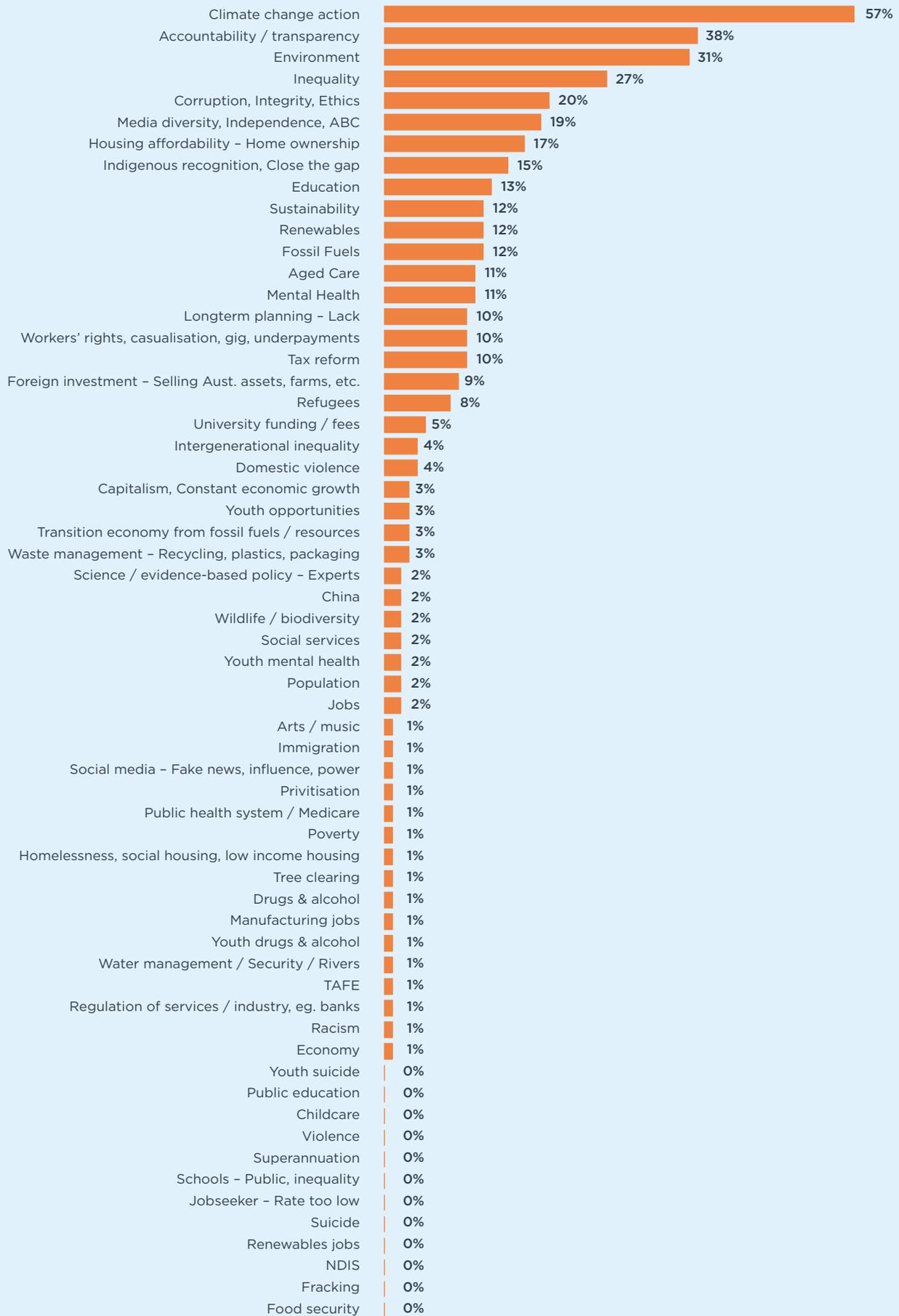
*Pork barrelling reduces trust in government so people tune out.*

*Powerful lobby groups are buying out our democracy.*

*Social issues* relating to inequality, intergenerational inequality, indigenous recognition, refugees, and workers rights and domestic violence were well represented. Health issues relating to mental health and aged care ranked reasonably highly, although the public health system and drug and alcohol issues were low on the list.

Another significant area of concern is the *lack of accountability and transparency* in government, linked to the influence of political donors and lobbyists. Many respondents were concerned by the lack of media diversity, media independence as well as threats to ABC funding. Housing affordability ranked highly as an issue of concern. However, issues relating to homelessness, social housing and low-income housing did not rank highly. This is possibly because the latter issues did not significantly affect the people who participated in the survey.

## BROADER CONCERNS AMONGST VOICES IN MACKELLAR



# The top concerns of participants

Attendees of our Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs) and in our online survey were asked to outline their issues and concerns both at the local and national level. They were then asked to prioritise their top 5.

## TOP 20 ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- 1 Climate Change Action
- 2 Accountability/Transparency
- 3 Environment
- 4 Inequality
- 5 Corruption, Integrity, Ethics
- 6 Media Diversity, Independence, ABC
- 7 Housing Affordability - home ownership
- 8 Indigenous recognition, close the Gap
- 9 Education
- 10 Sustainability
- 11 Renewables
- 12 Fossil Fuels
- 13 Aged Care
- 14 Mental Health
- 15 Longterm Planning - Lack
- 16 Tax Reform
- 17 Workers' rights, casualisation, gig, underpayments
- 18 Foreign Investment - selling Aust. assets, farms etc
- 19 Refugees
- 20 University funding/fees





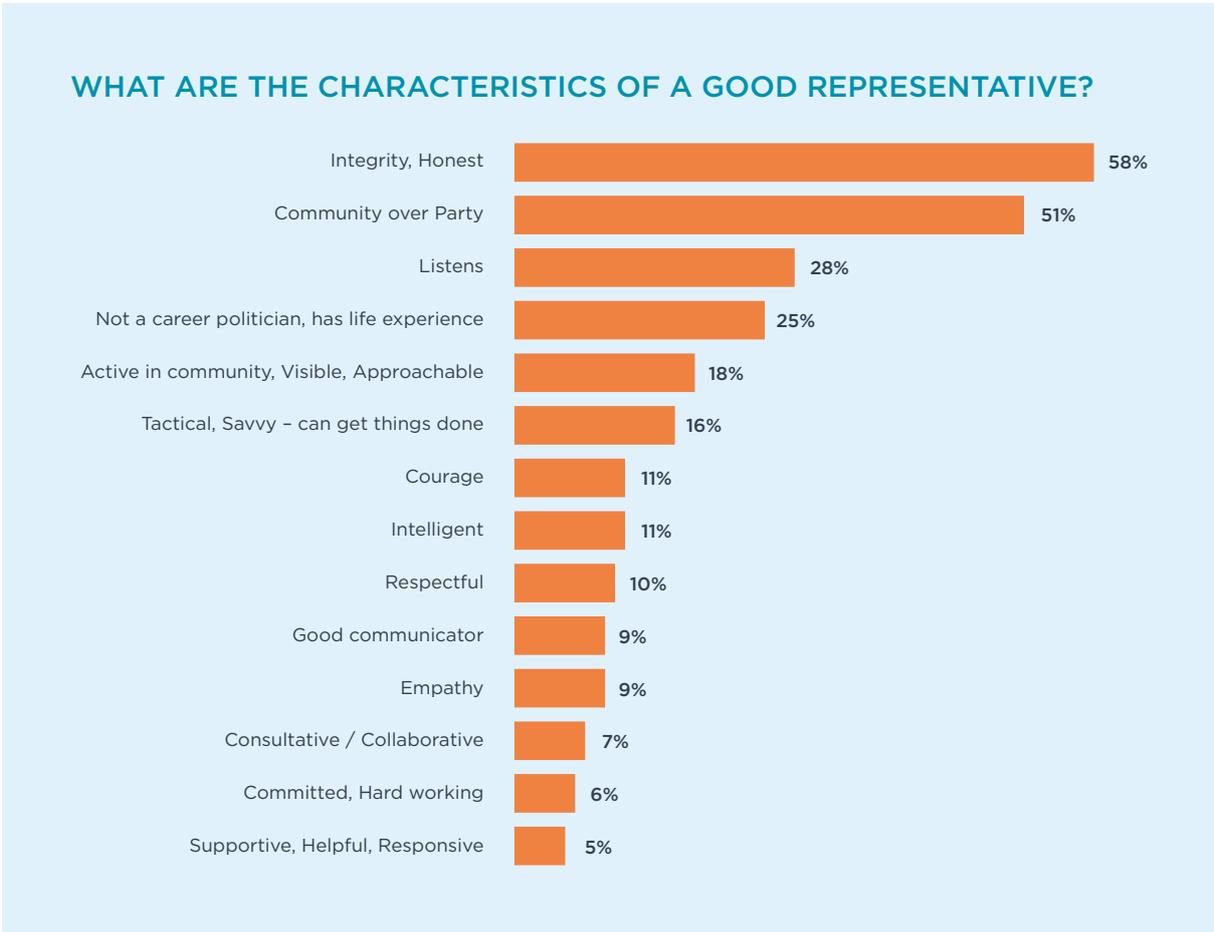
“Alone, we can do  
so little; **together**,  
we can do so much”

HELEN KELLER, AUTHOR

# Characteristics of good political representation...

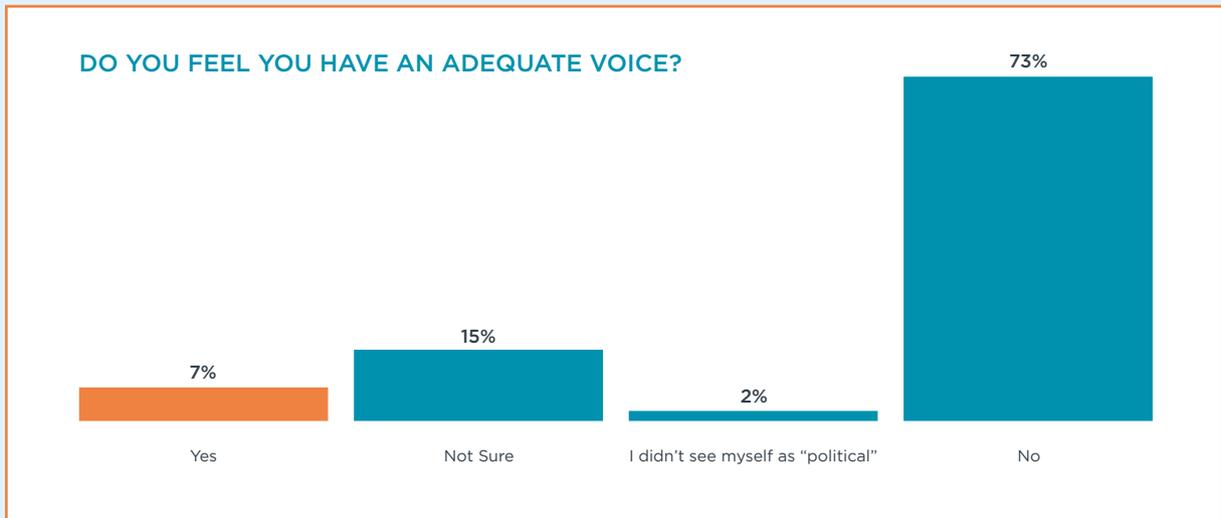
In response to the question '*What are the characteristics of a good political representative?*' the majority identified integrity and honesty as a main characteristic of a good political representative. They also felt the representative should be courageous enough to support the wishes of the community above any party lines. Listening, being respectful and having empathy also featured as key characteristics. People thought that a good representative should be active in the community and capable of getting things done. Only 11% of respondents identified intelligence as a key attribute, whereas 25% considered having life experience beyond politics as an important attribute.

*I want a representative who has the courage to cross the floor when it matters to their constituents.*



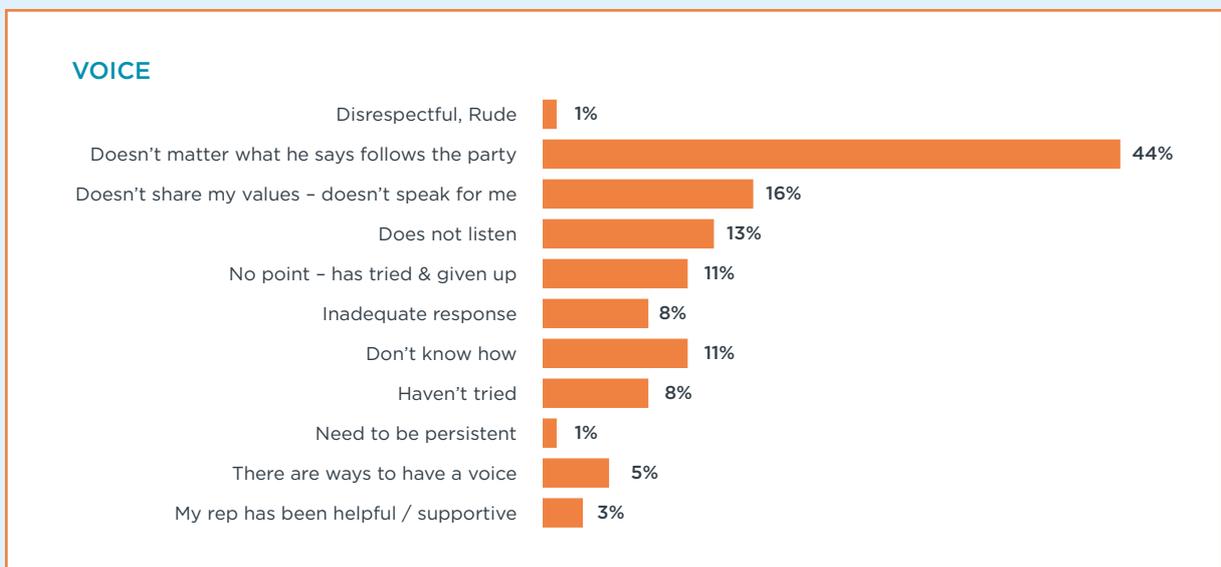
# Having a voice and being heard...

In response to the question '*Do you feel you have an adequate voice in the way you are represented?*' only 7% of respondents answered 'Yes'.



When asked why they felt they did or did not have an adequate voice, 9% included remarks indicating that it was possible to have their views heard by the representative in Mackellar. Of these 34 people did not give a reason for this view. The reasons the remaining 53 people who thought they had an adequate voice with the representative in Mackellar, are shown below.

On the other hand, 73% of the responses indicated that the representative would not listen nor represent the issues of the respondents. Sadly, 19% of the responses suggested the respondent had given up and/or had received an inadequate response, and another 19% of the responses indicated that the respondent would not engage at all with the local representative.





“There is no **power for change** greater than a community discovering what it **cares about.**”

MARGARET J. WHEATLEY, AUTHOR, SPEAKER & TEACHER

# 04

## Acknowledgements

### **Special thanks the following people for their actions and support to make the Mackellar Matters 2022 Report a reality**

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### **The Voices of Mackellar Committee:**

Sheilah Hogan

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