

# 'Half-baked policies': Push for public input on contentious NSW laws

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Contentious laws such as council mergers or the greyhound ban would be put to community focus groups to stop "half-baked policies" being rushed through NSW Parliament under a "revolutionary proposal" to be considered on Tuesday.

One Nation MP Mark Latham will move a motion to overhaul law-making in the upper house following lobbying from former NSW Treasury secretary Percy Allan.



*Former NSW Treasury secretary Percy Allan has teamed up with One Nation leader Mark Latham to overhaul how NSW Parliament passes contentious laws. CREDIT: LOUISE KENNERLEY, DOMINIC LORRIMER*

A long-time public servant and now an academic, Mr Allan has been urging Premier Gladys Berejiklian, the Labor opposition and crossbench MPs to consider a new approach to controversial laws.

Mr Allan said the upper house could be the most "informed house of review in the country" if it changed how it developed critical policies.

"The crossbench and the opposition are supportive of the proposal and the government is open to it, so I hope everyone will look past any differences they may have with One Nation and support it," Mr Allan said.

"This is about divulging all the information about a problem, putting it on the table and testing it with the community and stakeholder groups before it goes ahead."

Mr Latham said the most problematic NSW laws in recent times had been "rushed, ill-considered legislation and decision-making", such as the greyhound racing ban, lockout laws and council mergers.

"In a sense, this will save the government from itself," Mr Latham said.

"This will slow down some legislation but doing things in haste can just entrench unpopular policies that will linger well into the future. This process can get contentious matters right from the outset."

Last year, Mr Allan [chaired a project for the new Democracy Foundation](#) with two ideologically opposed think tanks that rated how 20 state and federal government policies were developed.

The traditionally left-leaning Per Capita and free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs singled out four policies as having an "unacceptable" level of rigour, including NSW's [local council mergers policy](#) and the federal government's same-sex marriage postal survey.

"Governments lose support because of half-baked policies foisted onto an unwitting public which provokes a backlash," Mr Allan said.

But Mr Allan said ministers could avoid "damage to their reputations" if they involved the community before a potentially unpopular policy was passed as law.

Under the process, all the relevant facts and figures about the social, economic, environmental or other problems that contentious legislation is meant to address would be detailed in a green paper.

Mr Allan said there would also be alternative solutions to fixing the problem, and the "pros and cons" and costs and benefits for all the policy options would be outlined.

The green paper would then be put to "impartial community groups" as well as stakeholders, with their responses and the government's decision contained in a final white paper.

"There is no parliament in Australia that insists on a ministerial bill being preceded by a document that captures the evidence and public views on a particular issue," Mr Allan said.

Ms Berejiklian has signalled she wants [a significant shake-up of both houses of NSW Parliament](#) to make it a place for "modern and progressive debate".

The Premier has asked that the president of Legislative Council, John Ajaka, and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Jonathan O'Dea, report back to her by June 30, with changes to be made for the spring session of Parliament.

Mr O'Dea said the standing order and procedures committee was very keen to improve the way the lower house operated.

"We want to make the lower house more accountable, more efficient, more engaging for the public and more respectful," Mr O'Dea said.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/half-baked-policies-push-for-public-input-on-contentious-nsw-laws-20190527-p51rm3.html>

See also for the report and commentary:

<https://savehuntershill.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/socc-damning-report-into-nsw-amalgamations-6-nov-20181.pdf>