



‘Neighbourly conversations’ — cross-party conversations with MPs from nearby electorates

An initiative of the Women’s Climate Congress

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Introduction

At a time when Australian society is deeply divided on the question of climate, a central principle of the Women’s Climate Congress is to promote collaboration and mediation among the currently polarised political and social groups that have prevented unified national action on climate change over the past decades.

The ‘neighbourly conversations’ initiative is one of a number of projects the Congress is developing to model and promote a different style of public discourse that can bring the currently divided perspectives on climate change together to find common ground.

To create a ‘neighbourly conversation’, we invite MPs from different political parties who represent neighbouring electorates to join up to 15 Congress members from their electorates and elsewhere for a facilitated Zoom or face-to-face conversation of (preferably) at least 1.5 hours.

These conversations aim to:

- EXPLORE a new kind of conversation — one that can bridge political divides
- BUILD relationship and understanding
- OPEN pathways for further constructive conversations and collaborative action.

Process

The process for these conversations has been developed by experienced facilitators Deb Collins and Caresse Cummins of the Wicked Elephants Coop,¹ in consultation with members of the Women’s Climate Congress. The conversations are not recorded and are held under the ‘Chatham House Rule’ (ie that in reporting the event we do not identify names or affiliations of who says what).²

The conversations are designed to be different to other public conversations that we are usually part of — in that they are neither debate nor Q&A, but rather a shared space of discovery and hearing other perspectives.

This is achieved through a form of circle practice (ie all participants were involved in the conversation, as in a circle) and recounting of stories that have shaped us — both for the politicians and the Congress members — particularly around climate action.

At the end of the conversation, we hope participants feel they have been drawn to look at things from a different perspective in a conversational space that is not threatening but underpinned with truth and strength.

In concluding, we will collectively identify areas of ongoing collaborative action, such as further events at a local level, or support for further similar conversations, or other Congress initiative at a national level.

Comments from participants at our first conversation

On 13 September 2021, Josh Wilson (ALP, Fremantle) and Celia Hammond (Lib, Curtin) participated in our first neighbourly conversation. Here are some comments from participants:

‘I enjoyed Monday’s conversation so much. I felt very energised and motivated afterwards.... I’m really grateful to Josh and Celia for their time, their openness, and their willingness to listen to our perspectives.’

‘The ‘neighbouring electorate’ approach is a good one. I was challenged (in a good way) by listening to what others had to say ... and, the beauty of the environment you helped create today, that ‘challenge’ did not cause a ‘defensive shut down’ - but, rather, more thought and reflection.’

‘I really enjoyed the conversation, and, even better, learned some things and was pushed to think differently about some things along the way.’

Contact and further information

To arrange a ‘neighbourly conversation’, please contact:

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For further information about the Congress, see

www.womensclimatecongress.com

And to join our National Congress of Women series of events, see

www.nationalcongressofwomen.com

¹ <https://www.wicked-elephants.coop/>

² <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>