

# POOR REPORT CARD FOR POLICYMAKERS



**Dennis Shanahan**

DENNIS SHANAHAN/ National Editor/ Canberra  
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The Albanese government is being urged not to use inquiries, commissions, integrity bodies and auditors to “rake over failed policies and decisions” but to adopt proper and transparent decision-making after an annual review found a majority of government decisions had failed or were mediocre at best.

An independent review of 20 major decisions by the federal, NSW, Queensland and Victorian governments during 2022 found only five reached “acceptable” processes, six decisions failed and the remainder received only “mediocre” results.

On a measure of good process, the worst of the 20 decisions was the Morrison government’s rushed laws to ban minor political parties from using the same name as established parties before the 2022 election.

The second-worst decision on process and the worst decision in NSW was the emergency laws introduced to deal with climate change activists disrupting Sydney's roads and ports during the pandemic.

The best worked-through new laws were the Coalition's amendments to the Fair Work Act to help people during Covid-19 lockdowns and the NSW Liberal government's laws to force people to have "disease testing" after spitting or putting bodily fluids on police during demonstrations.

At the time of the federal changes to the Fair Work Act, the then industrial relations minister, Christian Porter, told parliament the changes were not ideological.

"These reforms address known problems in the industrial relations system and will be crucial to securing Australia's economic recovery and safeguarding the workplace for future generations," he said.

Queensland's changes to housing legislation protecting tenants' rights was judged equal best for consultation and process with the federal and NSW pandemic changes.

The decision of the Morrison government in relation to pandemic changes judged the worst-handled was the temporary suspension of the fuel excise tax to ease the cost of living burden.

As Daniel Andrews's Labor Victorian government faces election, its best decision was a social measure on decriminalising prostitution while its worst was an economic measure attempting to impose a windfall gains tax.

The overall standard of decision-making during the last year of Covid lockdowns in Australia was judged by an independent panel engaged by the not-for-profit Evidence-Based Policy Research Project to be slightly lower than 2021 and the highest level of "unacceptable" decisions in the five-year program.

Peter Shergold, a former Howard government public service chief and author of a scathing independent report of government decisions made during the pandemic, said "normal" decision-making had to be brought up to a higher standard or good decisions in a crisis would be impossible.

"Having just completed a review of Australian governments' response to Covid-19, I am utterly convinced that we cannot make good policy

decisions in a crisis if we are not better practised at developing evidence-based legislation during more 'normal' times," Professor Shergold, the Chancellor of Western Sydney University, said.

Former NSW Labor education minister Verity Firth said the results of the investigation were a guide for the new Labor federal government. "This project demonstrates good, evidence-based policymaking ... is possible, but not always achieved," she said.

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