



# Young people will be heard at highest level

**T**HE return of Federal Parliament this week highlighted the stark differences between the new modern Rudd Labor Government and the outdated, tired old government it replaced.

It was a truly moving experience to be on the floor of Parliament as the Prime Minister read his apology to the Stolen Generations.

Something I, and I'm sure millions of Australians, will never forget.

The Government also commenced the process of introducing a workplace relations system that works for all Australians. A system that is fair and flexible, simple and productive.

Delivering on a key election commitment it made to the Australian people; a commitment the Australian people endorsed in November.

As the Federal Minister for Youth I also had the opportunity this week to outline to Parliament how young people can participate in the decision-making process.

In my maiden speech to Parliament I said I didn't want to be the voice of youth in the House. That hasn't changed. I want to make young people have their own voices heard at the highest level of decision making.

The former government abolished the position of Minister for Youth. This Government takes a different approach to youth representation.

We believe that young people play a vital role in our community. They must be listened to and their experiences and opinions must be included in the democratic process.

Too often we hear talk about the youth of Australia being this country's future – and this of course is true – but we must also recognise young people play an important role in the present.

We must recognise that there is a generational divide, which is widening, amongst the Australian community. Generations coming through have different circumstances, opinions and concerns to those who came before them.

This is true when you look at the



experiences of young people today in attaining first home ownership. It is also true when you look at the experiences of those entering adulthood already with hefty debts on their shoulders from their education. And it is true when you look at concerns about issues like climate change. It's our young people who will face the consequences of the actions we take today.

The Rudd Government is establishing an Office for Youth to address these, and many other issues facing young people. The office will have the role of examining all Government priorities and looking for opportunities for young people in the policy-making process.

In addition to establishing the Office for Youth, this Government is also committed to delivering on our election commitment to establish the Australian Youth Forum. This will be a



**VOICE:** For now and the future

body by which young people – a broad and diverse range of young people – can come together and talk directly to government about their views and concerns. It will operate all year round and will be an important way in which young people can speak directly to government and have those concerns addressed and responded to by all of our ministers.

The Australian Youth Forum will also provide a body of experts in youth policy and young people that the Government can talk directly to about our priorities and how they will impact on their lives.

The impact on universities of the previous government's voluntary student unionism changes is also a major issue for young people.

I have been absolutely amazed by the number of people who have contacted me in the last couple of months to talk about the impacts. These concerns have come not just from students – and certainly students have been among that group – but also from vice-chancellors, sporting organisations, local councils and a whole range of people in the broader community.

Today I'm releasing a discussion paper on ways to restore services and sporting facilities on university campuses. I'll be visiting university campuses across Australia to assess the impacts of the damage caused by the voluntary student unionism legislation.

We will work with universities, students and sporting and community groups to ensure students in Australia have the services and representation that they need on campus.

Young Australians have been silenced for far too long. It is my great pleasure as the Minister for Youth to make sure that not only do they have a strong voice in government but also that it is listened to and responded to by this Government.

**Kate Ellis is the federal MP (Labor) for Adelaide and Minister for Youth and Sport**