14. South Australia

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South Australia was not expected to loom large in the federal election, with only 11 of the 150 seats. Of the 11, only four were marginal—requiring a swing of less than 5 per cent to be lost. Three were Liberal: Sturt (held by Christopher Pyne since 1993, 1 per cent margin), Boothby (Andrew Southcott since 1996, 3 per cent) and Grey (4.5 per cent). Of the Labor seats, only Kingston (4.5 per cent) was marginal.

Table 14.1 Pre-Election Pendulum (per cent)

ALP			Liberal Party		
Electorate	FP	TPP	Electorate	FP	TPP
Kingston	46.7	54.4	Sturt	47.2	50.9
Hindmarsh	47.2	55.1	Boothby	46.3	52.9
Wakefield	48.7	56.6	Grey	47.3	54.4
Makin	51.4	57.7	Mayo	51.1	57.1
Adelaide	48.2	58.5	Barker	46.8	59.5
Port Adelaide	58.2	69.8			

FP = first preference

TPP = two-party preferred

Labor won Kingston, Wakefield and Makin from the Liberal Party in 2007. The Liberal Party could win all three back. But, in early 2010, it was expected that if there was any change in South Australia, it would involve Liberal losses.

The State election in March 2010, however, produced some shock results. The Rann Labor Government was returned to office, despite massive swings in its safe seats. In the last two weeks of the campaign, the polls showed Labor in trouble. The Rann Government—after four years of hubris, arrogance and spin—was in danger of defeat. The result saw an average two-party swing of 8.4 per cent against Labor—stronger in its safe seats, with an average of 11.6 per cent. But in the key marginal Labor seats, the average anti-Labor swing was only 4.2 per cent, and the Rann Government survived.

If these swings were repeated in the federal election, it would mean the loss of Adelaide, and possibly Hindmarsh and Kingston. Further, Labor would have

no hope of picking up Boothby and Sturt. The key issue was whether South Australians would distinguish between federal and State politics, and whether they had exhausted their anger with the Labor badge in the State election.

A *Sunday Mail* poll (25 July 2010) found the Liberal Party leading in Boothby with a two-party vote of 52 per cent. An *Advertiser* poll (21 August 2010) found Labor had increased its buffer in Hindmarsh to 62 per cent. The key Liberal seat of Sturt had improved to a Liberal two-party vote of 55 per cent. At that stage local pollsters seemed to decide that there was nothing much exciting happening, and polling virtually ceased.

The federal party leaders had also decided that South Australia was unlikely to be fertile territory. Both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott made fleeting visits to ‘fly the flag’, but that was it. According to *The Advertiser* (22 July 2010), this was a ‘significant slap in the face to the electors of this state’. Without a raft of marginal seats that showed some signs of moving, the pork-barrels were distributed elsewhere. There were key projects in South Australia that would have benefited from federal funding. The redevelopment of Adelaide Oval kept blowing out in cost. The Rann Government would have welcomed a pork-barrel to assist in the funding of its new hospital. The desalination plant was also crying out for some federal funding, but no-one seemed to listen.

The most talked about issue in South Australia was water. The Murray River is crucial for the State—the parlous state of irrigation quotas, the collapse of the Lower Lakes and The Coorong, and Adelaide’s dependence on the Murray for its water supply were themes of daily conversation everywhere. The decision of the Murray–Darling Basin Authority to refuse to release its report on proposals to save the basin until after the election did nothing to endear the voters to the Gillard Government.

The Advertiser (22 July 2010) expressed the view of most South Australians when it editorialised: ‘Perhaps, when Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott visit this electoral backwater, they will come armed with transparent and accountable plans to save this state’s lifeline—and possibly their own political careers.’ During her fleeting visit to Adelaide, Julia Gillard did raise water as an issue. She travelled to the marginal Liberal electorate of Sturt to announce a stormwater-harvesting project for the eastern suburbs, which centre on Sturt. But as the Rann Government was refusing to fund the necessary pipelines, the announcement fell rather flat.

Sturt Labor candidate, Rick Starr, held a street-corner meeting. He stated that he was ‘disappointed that the announcement Julia made a couple of weeks ago [for a people’s assembly] didn’t satisfy me that she was pushing climate change to the level of the agenda that it should be’. A recording of the comment was

passed to the ABC. Starr, a law professor, emailed the ABC claiming that the 'recording device was concealed and in breach of the *Listening Devices Act*', and that he 'had not given the consent required' (*The Advertiser*, 3 August 2010). The affair was a storm in a teacup, but did show the extent to which parties are determined to keep their candidates either silent or on song.

The Greens decided that one of their key planks—opposition to anything related to uranium—held the possibility of winning votes in South Australia. Greens Senate candidate Penny Wright announced that the commitment to 'end the exploration for, and the mining and export of uranium' would be firmly applied (*The Advertiser*, 21 July 2010). The problem was that the Roxby Dam mine was involved in a massive \$21 billion expansion project, involving thousands of jobs. This was a major economic plan of the Rann Government. Penny Wright was of the view that BHP could still operate, but with the uranium part shut down. BHP Billiton and the Rann Government had no public comment.

The Australian Democrats decided to re-enter the election contest in the State that had been their power base for more than 20 years. Their focus for the House of Representatives was Sturt. On the eve of the election, it was revealed that the Democrats' candidate had a conviction for a child sexual offence. He withdrew from the election, but his name remained on the ballot paper. Party leader, Sandra Kanck, admitted that this would 'damage the efforts of the other candidates for the party: for all of their bloody hard work, [he]...is going to undo it' (*The Advertiser*, 20 August 2010).

The count in the Boothby electorate had a problem. Following a complaint from the Labor Party, alleging improper practices in the counting process, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) agreed that a parcel of ballot papers 'had not been handled in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*'. A member of the commission's staff had transferred batches of votes (2977 ballot papers) from a number of boxes into one, for 'ease of handling'. The AEC, on legal advice, removed these votes from the count, but this did not affect the final result of a victory for the Liberal Party.

The Advertiser, South Australia's only local daily, published an editorial on 7 August that was essentially a call for a change in the parties' appeals, criticising them for 'wasting all of their energy sledging the other side'. On election eve, *The Advertiser* offered clear advice to the voters, based on the overriding issue of water: 'For South Australian voters, Labor's policy to return water to the River Murray is markedly superior [and]...Ms Gillard and Labor should be given a second chance' (20 August 2010).

Table 14.2 State-Wide Results, House of Representatives (per cent of votes)

Party	2007	2010	Swing	Two-party	Swing
ALP	41.8	40.2	-1.6	53.5	+ 1.1
Liberal	43.2	40.7	-2.5	46.8	-1.1
Greens	7.0	12.0	+ 5.0		
Family First	4.1	5.0	+ 0.9		
Other	3.9	2.1	-1.8		

Both Labor and Liberal suffered a small primary swing against them, with the Greens the major beneficiary. Six of the 11 seats were forced to preferences. But the overall result was that no seats changed hands, and all incumbents were re-elected. There was no sign of the State election landslide swings against Labor. In fact, in the former safe Labor electorates of Hindmarsh, Adelaide and Port Adelaide, which had produced the large anti-Labor swings, it was almost the status quo from 2007.

Table 14.3 2010 Election Pendulum (per cent)

ALP				Liberal			
Electorate	FP	TPP	Swing (TPP)	Electorate	FP	TPP	Swing (TPP)
Hindmarsh	44.5	55.7	0.7	Boothby	44.8	50.8	-2.2
Adelaide	43.9	57.7	-0.8	Sturt	48.1	53.4	2.5
Wakefield	49.2	62.0	5.4	Mayo	46.8	57.4	0.3
Makin	50.6	62.2	4.5	Grey	55.8	61.2	6.7
Kingston	51.1	63.9	9.5	Barker	55.0	62.9	3.4
Port Adelaide	53.8	70.0	0.3				

FP = first preference

TPP = two-party preferred

In the electorates of Kingston, Makin and Wakefield, there was a solid 'sophomore swing'. In all three, the Labor incumbent was first elected in 2007, and each had markedly increased support.

On the Liberal side, there was a swing against Labor in Grey—a massive electorate where the mining tax issue had an effect. The party narrowly held its two marginal seats of Sturt and Boothby.

The Senate election in South Australia offered more potential for change than the House of Representatives. The six senators elected in 2004 were split evenly: three Labor and three Liberal. Of these, only three—two Labor and

one Liberal—renominated in 2010. Labor Senator Dana Wortley found herself relegated to the unwinnable third position after the party decided to select a union leader for the top spot.

There were 17 parties and three Independents—a total of 42 candidates. There was little doubt that Liberal and Labor would initially win two seats each. The two remaining seats were a contest between Labor, the Greens and Family First. The leading candidate for Family First was property developer Bob Day, who stood for the Liberal Party in 2007, then for Family First in the State election of 2010.

The electoral ‘star’ of SA politics, Nick Xenophon, did not have any nominations under his ‘No pokies’ banner in either the State or the federal elections. His record of pulling votes, however, made his endorsement potentially very valuable. Xenophon announced that his endorsement ‘would not be given lightly’ (*The Advertiser*, 14 August 2010), but Bob Day jumped the gun. After Day’s full-page advertisement in *The Advertiser* (13 August 2010), Xenophon complained to the Electoral Commission that Day had implied he had Xenophon’s endorsement.

Table 14.4 Senate Result, 2010

Party	Vote (%)	Quota	Seats
ALP	38.3 (+ 2.7)	2.67	2 (–1 on 2004)
Liberal	37.3 (+ 1.7)	2.02	3 (= 2004)
Greens	13.3 (+ 6.8)	0.93	1 (+ 1 from 2004)
Family First	4.1 (+ 1.3)	0.28	-
Other	7.0 (–12.4)	0.49	-

Labor’s surplus was transmitted through preferences to elect Penny Wright for the Greens, giving South Australia two Greens senators. This left the Liberal Party and Family First to battle it out for the sixth seat, which eventually went to the Liberal Party.

A comparison of the SA and national results shows that Labor held up well.

Table 14.5 2010 Election: South Australia and national compared (percentage of votes)

	ALP	Liberal	Greens	Others	ALP	Swing
	Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary	TPP	Swing
South Australia	41.8	43.2	7.0	8.0	53.5	+ 1.1
National	37.9	43.5	11.7	5.0	50.1	–2.6

With all incumbents returned in the House of Representatives, the only change was the election of a second Greens senator at the expense of the Labor Party. The election in South Australia was all but a non-event.