

Adventures in politics: One man's quest to make things right

By *Huw Kingston*

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Adventurer and environmentalist [Huw Kingston](#) threw his hat into the snakepit of Australian politics for the 2019 General Election. It turned out to be a very different but worthwhile adventure.

I LOOKED FOR WATER, but any that was in the river was choked by a thick blanket of [water hyacinth](#). For the most part, the river ran dry. I could have cried. Indeed, my tears would have been the only thing flowing in those parts. I was in southern India with a plan to kayak, but no water to do so.

The day before, in a hotel in the hill country of [Andhra Pradesh](#), I'd made a decision I'd been ruminating on for months. Swatting mosquitos after giving a keynote presentation at an adventure travel conference, I decided to stand as a candidate in the forthcoming Australian Election. I'd never stood for any level of government before but had had

enough.

All expeditions have a catalyst. The one for this next journey had been four months earlier. In the midst of an Australian winter, after some fine days touring and turning in the [Snowy Mountains](#), I skied back to my car. The high I was on took a dive when I switched on the car radio and listened in disbelief to the news that another sitting Prime Minister [had been dumped](#) by his own party. Australia — truly now the coup capital of the Western world.

The Huw Kingston v. Angus Taylor debate that never was: [@margokingston1](#) speaks with [@Huw4Hume](#) in the final days before [#HumeVotes](#) for the [@NoFibs](#) [#podcast](#) [#IndependentsDay](#) [#Huw4Hume](#) [#Ausvotes2019](#) <https://t.co/MtjgEnUpJq> [pic.twitter.com/vFrZceEWIR](https://t.co/vFrZceEWIR)

— No Fibs (@NoFibs) [May 17, 2019](#)

I was angry that our elected representatives lived in another world where narrow, vested interests sucked oxygen that should be used governing, not game-playing. Internal party politics were too often the lead story when focus needed to be on the most important issues of our times; none more so than on climate change.

In the months since that winter's day, every time I looked at my five grandchildren I worried for their future, for what we should secure for it. In those months, I mulled over the idea of standing for Parliament as an Independent candidate in my local seat of [Hume](#). I knew that now more than ever was the time to stand up, not stand back. I wouldn't think twice about heading off on a journey for three to four months, so why would I not give up such time for the future of my grandchildren?

I knew it wouldn't be easy but what worthwhile challenge ever is? I would be standing in a seat that had been Liberal (conservative) for nearly half a century. I'd be challenging a cabinet minister, [Angus Taylor](#), our Minister for Energy. A man known for being rather reluctant to take meaningful action on climate change, a man strangely less than enthusiastic about renewable energy.

I flew home from India to Australia, to the start-line of another journey. As an Independent, I began from a zero base — no funding and no team. It is always uplifting when people believe in you and what you stand for and I was honoured when people jumped on board. Some had been supporters for decades, others I'd never met. The team grew, some shekels came in, strategies were planned. I crisscrossed the diverse, 300km long Hume electorate, trying to get my face, name and policies in front of over 100,000 voters.

It was bloody hard work, but fun was had, too. I'd had a wine barrel painted up with pink pigs and my "[Pork Barrel](#)" regularly appeared at candidate debates and elsewhere. I rode it on a

cargo bike behind the Prime Minister in front of Parliament House as he explained his budget to the media. It was a [photobomb](#) recognised as one of the images of the 2019 Election.

The sitting MP was rattled by my little campaign, as witnessed by his reactions to me and the blanketing of the electorate with his signage like never before. It was more than interesting to see politics in action.

It was widely expected his Liberal Government would be beaten by Labor but, in a shock result, the Liberals returned to power with a slim majority. It seemed that we as a people, as a nation, had sold our children's future down the (dry) river (bed). Locally, Angus Taylor retained his seat with little change to his vote. I came in third (of seven candidates) behind the two major parties. This was a solid result from a first-time candidate with no party backing in a system favouring the party duopoly.

The re-elected member for Hume and now Minister for Energy *and* Emissions Reduction continues to deny the true trajectory of Australia's carbon emissions and continues to believe fossil fuels are the future.

There were so many positives as a result of my standing. I'd met hundreds of incredible people: farmers involved in regenerative agriculture, communities reducing plastic pollution and protecting wildlife, organisations working in the areas of mental health and homelessness, companies building solar and wind farms.

My wife Wendy took on the campaign with a fiery enthusiasm that at times took even me by surprise. It was a

special journey together when so often, on my expeditions, I've headed off alone with her support but not her company.

And I was very proud to be the only candidate out of some 1,500 across Australia to use recyclable, waterproof cardboard signage amid a sea of some 400,000 plastic corflute signs. I can only hope that in proving these could stand up to six weeks of the campaign in all weathers, it might lead to change in a world where we have no choice but to massively reduce our plastic usage.

Huw Kingston is the latest independent challenging Morrison gov MPs on climate change and renewables, and is now vying to topple energy Minister Angus Taylor [#auspol](#) [#HumeVotes](#) [#ClimateElection](#) <https://t.co/OZI2HMqO71>

— Yes 2 Renewables (@Yes2Renewables) [March 4, 2019](#)

As my campaign proceeded, I looked enviously westward into the deserts of central Australia. Not one but two massive rain events had hit Far North Queensland early in the year and, over the following months, floodwaters soaked southward for thousands of kilometres. All these watery tentacles ultimately lead to [Lake Eyre](#), Australia's lowest point and largest lake. Kati Thanda, as it is known to the [Arabana](#) traditional owners, rarely holds water; the desert drinking up

any flow as it heads toward the lake. For a few years, I'd had a plan for when this rare event might next take place and now it was happening; the desert rivers were flowing.

With the Election out of the way, I reckoned a river journey was still a possibility before all was dry again; a desert campaign of sorts. After the fun and games of the previous months, it seemed a perfect way to reset my compass. I drove west, kayak strapped to the roof of a vehicle now stripped of campaign livery. I crossed the ailing [Murray River](#) at Mildura and on into South Australia. My campaign had included deep concern for the Murray-Darling; Australia's longest river system and one in some peril. Cry me a river, indeed.

The major Lake Eyre basin rivers – the Warburton, Georgina, Eyre, Diamantina, Cooper, Thompson – that flow not out to sea but inland are some of the few Australian rivers not touched by dams, weirs and flood control. Their integrity saved by the fact they flow naturally so rarely.

My plan for the paddle was pretty ballsy. Like the Election campaign that preceded it, I didn't achieve the ultimate goal, but again like the campaign it was all so very worthwhile. Eight days on the muddy waters of the [Warburton River](#) — just me and countless thousands of birds who somehow knew the

river was flowing, who somehow knew the fish were breeding. It was all rather unlike that Indian waterway months earlier. But in common, India, the world's largest democracy and a country that shares its national day with Australia, also held its own election as we had held ours. 900 million voters and 800,000 polling booths versus 16 million and 8,000.

Enjoying close shaves, I always have a haircut when travelling. In India, days after I'd decided to set out on my political adventure, a barber said to me, between cut-throat flourishes, "*Ricky Ponting very good, [Adani](#) very bad*". Adani, a massive Indian mining company, had plans to develop a [huge new coal mine](#) in Australia. A project that had become a beacon for action to reduce fossil fuel usage and a major campaign point in the Election. "Stop Adani" was a catchcry from school strikers to old-time environmentalists.

I'd spent more time in a collared shirt during the Election campaign than I ever had before. The morning after the Election, I grabbed a t-shirt from the wardrobe. Across the front was printed 'Stop Adani'. I still believe there is a climate for change. There has to be.

This article was [originally published on Adventure.com](#) and has been republished with the author's permission.

[Huw Kingston](#) is an award-winning adventurer, writer and environmentalist. He has a particular love of long human-powered journeys in wild places across the globe and a passionate dislike of single-use plastics, in particular, the scourge of bottled water. You can follow him on Twitter [@Huw4Hume](#)