

# **Paraplegic & Quadriplegic Association of Queensland**

## **incorporating Post Polio Support**

Mr. John Howard  
Leader, Liberal Party of Australia  
12 AM PO Box 336  
Gladesville NSW 2111 0)

16 October 2001

Dear Mr. Howard,

### **An Accessible Australia**

I am writing to seek your consideration of An Accessible Australia as an election platform. The reason is simple. It would be good for Australia - and people would readily understand it as a platform for common good, regard it as good judgement and vote for it.

Currently, we are not an accessible nation. Indeed, around 35% of the population struggles to access goods, services, information, buildings, infrastructure and precincts. To understand this, one needs to recognise that Australia is a changed society - see population indicators overleaf.

An Accessible Australia offers the benefits of raising the bar for social justice and the economy, the latter because Australia will have maximised the performance of its assets, services, information, markets, sales and profits.

Indeed, a safer, accessible environment means increasing the economy for all, impacting favourably on business, employment and quality of life for all ages. Accessible buildings and infrastructure appreciate faster, offer more secure rentals, reduce public liability and maintenance costs. Accessible employment can influence welfare payment reduction.

There is an undeniable relationship between access and performance. Indeed, the performance of every part of Australia is directly related to its accessibility, i.e., if a precinct, building or service can only be accessed by say, 65% of the population, that is the maximum performance (or sales) it can ever deliver on its very best day.

For Australia to grow and prosper, it is essential that mechanisms through design and training be provided to support equitable access and thus allow an inclusive, integrated community realise its fullest performance both locally and globally. And that requires leadership.

Yours sincerely,

John Mayo  
Manager - Community Relations

## **Factors and Influences:**

### **Access:**

Access is not about so called disabled access. Strategies to develop An Accessible Australia are based on achieving equity, equal opportunity and equitable access for all the community. It is true that people with a disability are among the strongest advocates for access quite simply because their lives are the most limited without it. However, a parent with a twin side by side stroller, the aged, people with temporary mobility impairment (e.g. through injury) and people with a medical condition all have similar access needs.

### **Numbers:**

	<b>Population ABS</b>
People with permanent disability	19%
The aged, 65 + (highest: Queensland)	12%
Parents with prams (children aged 1 to 4)	7%
People with temporary mobility impairment	?
People with a medical condition- comprising illness, muscular, respiratory, cognitive	? Total: 38% +

### **Without access:**

The lack of predictable, safe access to the built environment means large sections of the population cannot live and work independently within the community, cannot access education and employment, goods and services. This creates 'missed markets' because more than 35% of the community cannot get in the door to do business - and that is a lot of missed bottom line. Australia loses \$5.5 billion PA\* in domestic tourism alone as a result - and tourism is a big employer of the young. (\* Source: Darcy, 1996, University of Technology, Sydney)

### **Transport:**

Australia needs accessible transport. The DDA Transport Standard for accessible public transport has been available since 1996 yet the government still did not pass it through Parliament before this election, which has reduced the credibility of the government and incurred mistrust.

### **Voting:**

Voting is regarded as the most basic right. People who cannot use steps are sick of being denied the right to vote like everyone else at polling booths. They expected politicians and the Australian Electoral Commission to show leadership to support this fundamental right. It's now 2001 and voting venues for this election will again be inaccessible to many Australians.

The disability and aged sectors will be active advocates in this election - and will have the support of the families and large networks connected to them.

## **Elements of policy for a Party to consider:**

A whole of government approach to equity, equal opportunity and An Accessible Australia.

Greater emphasis on compliance by beneficiaries of Commonwealth funding to meet equity, equal opportunity and non-discriminatory requirements.

Many police stations, schools, hospitals, health, community and information services, and federal government agencies, are inaccessible. This creates a lose, lose situation given the community cannot access services and service providers cannot meet either their Equity or Equal Employment Opportunity Act requirements. Therefore, strong support is required for the planning and progressive introduction of non-discriminatory services that will deliver win, win benefits.

Information is the power needed to operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When people are unable to access information they are excluded from participation in the community, education, employment and recreation. Information sources and storehouses need to be accessible and easy to use - and systems should not penalise regional users. Communication strategies need to take account of that.

Support a change of culture to achieve equity, equal opportunity and non-discriminatory access for all to public housing and accommodation, transport, education, employment, recreation and services (e.g. retail, medical, government). At the heart of that change is a fundamental tenant: In order to maximise the community's participation in anything, first you must maximise the community's access to it.

Support the passage and implementation of the DDA Transport Standard to make Australia become an accessible nation and connect the community.

Support the Access to Premises Standard being drafted by the Australian Building Codes Board for presentation to Parliament by the Attorney-General, that will require planners, designers, asset managers and developers to achieve non-discriminatory outcomes in the built environment.

Support the identification and promotion of social, legal compliance and economic benefits to the community, industry, commerce, employers - and seek a partnership with the big players in the public and private sectors.

Support the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and like agencies that have generally been performing a valiant role with care and diligence in dealing with these issues at the human coalface.