

# Winning the 2013 Federal seat of Indi

## Number Crunching for Cathy – by Tony Perrott

The paper has been prepared by Tony Perrott one of the key numbers people on my campaign. In this personal reflection, Tony outlines some of the assumptions, the scenarios and the modelling which was undertaken in designing the campaign strategy. He also explains the daily and weekly overview that was maintained throughout the campaign.

“Sitting around the dinner table April 2013 Cathy mentions something about she might be interested in Federal politics, could I prepare some numbers for her. “You want to do what?”

Out came the laptop, Google Indi, Google AEC, Google Sophie, Google Tony Windsor. We laugh and drink more wine. I said I can have a look.



In early May, I put together my research and sent it to Cathy. Briefly...

### 1. Statistics (the boring bit!)

Indi always looked like a Liberal strong hold: returning conservative member of Parliament since 1931, the voting distribution rarely went to preferences. ALP never got a look in. Benalla, Murray Valley and Benambra which were the overlapping seats in Victorian State elections were also comfortably held by Liberals and Nationals. But the signs were there. Sophie Mirabella’s primary vote (the Liberal incumbent) had fallen from 62% to 52% in 2010, Greens polled well in Beechworth, Yackandandah and Stanley. Independent candidates had run previously, but had hardly made a dent in 2010 gaining less than 6%. The Libs were winning almost every booth with enormous primary votes, away from the regional towns, up the valleys and the party machine ensured pre polling centres favoured the incumbent. Could the right Independent candidate at the right time have an impact on the electorate? The grass roots group Voices 4 Indi thought that it could happen. The best scenario seemed to be to make the seat marginal if, in the next election, would require two things:

1. Libs not win 50% of 1<sup>st</sup> preferences and,
2. ALP with 25% force the election to one or two rounds of distribution of preferences to give

the Libs a bit of a scare.

### 3. Winning 1:4 first preference votes

Understanding that the National party and the Liberals have an agreement , that they do not contest seats where either of them has a sitting member; thus to the great annoyance of national party votes, the national party does not run candidates in Indi while it was held by a Liberal MP. There was a possibility that the traditional National party voters would make a protest vote and support a rural independent.

**Sate voting patterns: Background statistics regarding voting in NorthEast Victoria at State elections:** see <http://www.vec.vic.gov.au>

The state division of **BENALLA**, held by Bill Sykes (NAT) in the 2010 state elections, gained 63% of primary votes, ahead of ALP (18%) and GRN (8%). Sykes won every voting centre (generally in the ratio 3 to 1 compared to the ALP candidate) Towns in this electorate which are also in the federal seat of Indi, include Benalla, Euroa, Mansfield, Myrtleford, Bright and Mt Beauty

In the state Division of **MURRAY VALLEY**, held by Tim McCurdy (NAT), 53.8% of primary votes in the 2010 state election (69% two party preferred), GRN gained less than 5% McCurdy won every voting centre. Towns also in Indi include Wangaratta and Rutherglen.

The state Division of **BENAMBRA**, held by Bill Tilley (LIB), 55.9% of primary (66.5% pref), GRN gained more than 11%. Tilley won every voting centre. Greens polled well in Beechworth (>20%), Yackandandah (25%) and Stanley (33%), however these total only 650 votes. Towns also in Indi include the above three and Wodonga, Tallangatta, Corryong and Mitta

**For information on the Historical voting in Federal seat of INDI see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral>**

:

**Mac Holton** (CP) 1958, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1969, 1972, 1974, 1975, (55 – 75%)

**Ewen Cameron** (LIB) 1977 (26%) + NCP 36% prefs, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1990, (60 -65%)

**Lou Lieberman** (LIB) 1993 (40%), NAT 23%, ALP 34%), 1996 (68%), no NAT candidate, 1998 (60%), no NAT candidate, 10 candidates

**Sophie Panapolous** (LIB) 2001 (40%), NAT 12%, ALP 27%, GRN 3.8%

2004 (62.6%), no NAT candidate, ALP 26.2%, GRN 6.4%

2007 (54.5%), no NAT candidate, ALP 32.1%, GRN 7.6%

2010 (52.6%), no NAT candidate, ALP 27.2%, GRN 9.5%

### Voting in federal seat of INDI in 2010 election

<http://results.aec.gov.au/15508/Website/HouseDivisionProfile-15508-218.htm>

The above site goes to Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) page for Indi.

From here one can navigate to different sections

- a break down of first preference votes for each candidate separated into
  - ordinary votes cast on election day,
  - ordinary votes at prepoll centres
  - postal votes
  - absentee votes

- preference flow (two party preferred),
- the votes cast at each voting booth,
- actual distribution of preferences.

## 2.Counting the Vote How does it work? Short note on what happens on election day

At each polling booth, the AEC counts the first preferences for each candidate by physically placing the ballots in piles. And another pile for informal votes. The totals are recorded.

Then (with predetermined instructions from head office) two candidates (say X and Y) are chosen to be the likely last two in a preference distribution. This is usually Two Party preferred (referred to as TPP LIB v ALP) but can be GRN v ALP or IND v LIB etc.

The full process of eliminating candidates one at a time and distributing preferences is NOT done on election night. Rather, the two piles of votes for the two candidates (X and Y) are put aside.

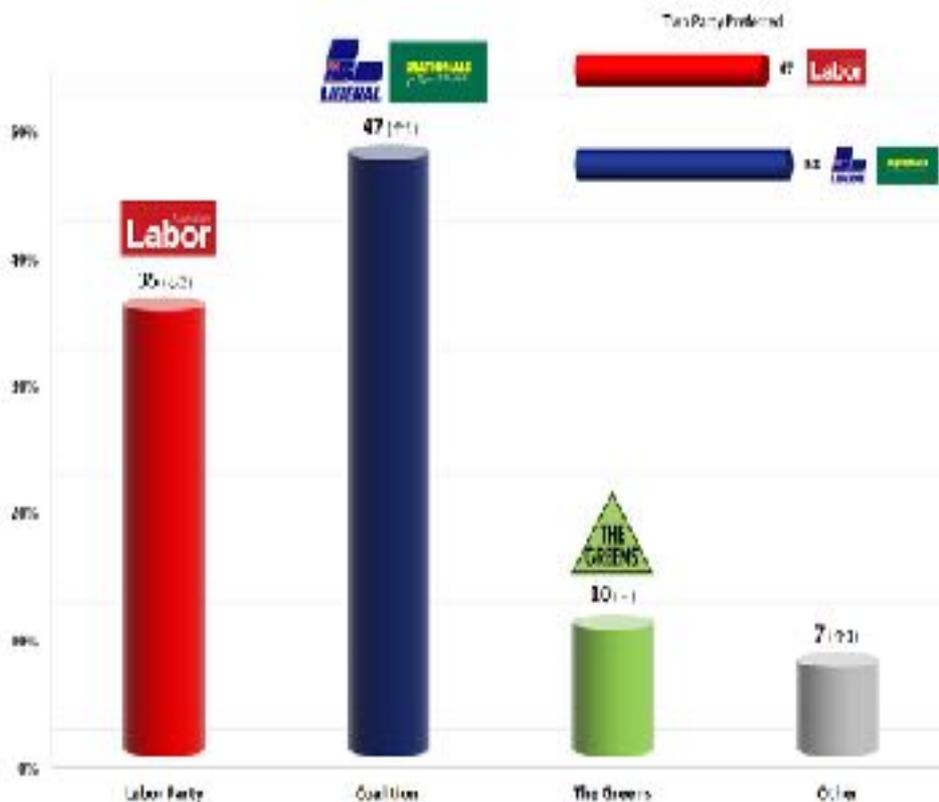
The votes for the other candidates are then sorted into just two piles (X and Y).

The numbers are recorded for each booth and tallied at the electorate voting centre.

The votes are returned to the original candidates piles.

If you are watching the count on TV, we get Antony Green showing a pretty column graph showing primary votes (the number of number 1 votes) for each candidate and then magically morphing into a graph with two columns (or a pie chart with two sectors) showing the TPP and the margin and the swing. Yay! And the race is on to declare a winner before even 20% of the vote has been counted.

The AEC count postal and absentee votes in the following week and may not start the process of full preference distribution until the following week and then maybe officially declare the winner in close contests a further week later.



### 3. Preferences explained (the fun bit!) Background & History -What happened in Indi in 2010?

Skip this section if you are not interested in history: The following data shows how the preference votes of candidates were distributed to the final two candidates in the 2010 election in INDI.

DEM (947 votes) are distributed ALP (54%), LIB (45%)

= *ALP gains 80 votes more than LIB*

FF (3190 votes) to ALP (32%), LIB (68%)

= *LIB gains about 1100 more than ALP*

IND (4945 votes) to ALP (62%), LIB (38%)

= *ALP gains 1200 more than LIB*

GRN (8000 votes) to ALP (78%), LIB (22%)

= *ALP gains 4500 more than LIB*

It does not show the candidate's **second** preference, but rather, which of LIB or ALP was **higher** up in the voting rank. For example this ballot paper which had 1 DEM is a vote for LIB!

4	Lappin	IND
3	O'Connor	GRN
6	Leschen	ALP
1	Carey	DEM
5	Mirabella	LIB
2	Cavedon	FFP

On election day, during the two party preferred count, this ballot paper is put directly on a pile for LIB. In the following week, during the full preferential distribution process, this ballot would start on the DEM pile, then go on the FFP pile, then on the GRN pile, then finishes on the ALP pile. If you have been watching closely, you may have noticed the ballot never goes on the IND pile. Well done! This is because the IND candidate is eliminated before the GRN candidate! This voter certainly got their money's worth! But the point is that the voter *preferred* LIB over ALP.

Note: The second preferences on ballots for last two candidates (LIB and ALP) are not used and do not affect the result of the election. Their ballot

papers are never moved from the original piles.

### **How many votes does a candidate need to win?**

Each electorate, with the exception of Tasmania, has approximately 100 000 +/- eligible voters. Not all of these enrol to vote, actually vote and many people vote informally. An informal vote may be blank (ie voter did not bother) or may have an error (eg two number 1 preferences).

In 2010 Federal election, 64 candidates (of the 150 seats contested) achieved more than 50% of the formal vote straight up on first preferences and were elected.

This left 86 seats that went to preferences. i.e the process of eliminating the lowest ranked candidate on first preferences and redistributing those votes among the remaining candidates. This process continues until one candidate has 50% plus one vote and can be declared the winner.

In 2010 election, 75 candidates who were leading on first preferences (but did not have 50% plus one) went on to win after the distribution of preferences. 10 candidates (8 ALP, 1 GRN and 1 IND) won the seat from “second place”.

It is possible to win from “third place” and indeed this has happened. In 2010 Andrew Wilke was one of the 10 who won from behind, and he actually won from third place.

Watch this video to see the process of redistribution of votes

<https://youtu.be/0xs1TUGwqiE>

### **Let us now look at the full preference distribution process.**

Here are the results of the 2010 federal election in the seat of INDI again.

	<b>DEM</b>	<b>FF</b>	<b>IND</b>	<b>GRN</b>	<b>ALP</b>	<b>LIB</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	947	3190	4945	8000	23034	44555

*count*

*The lowest polling candidate (DEM) is eliminated and the 947 ballots are physically distributed to the other candidates.*

*Now there are 5 candidates*

	-947	+84	+275	+231	+166	+291
2 <sup>nd</sup>	0	3274	5220	8231	23200	44746

Next goes FF and again preferences are distributed. 84 of these were originally DEM votes, then FF and now are distributed again.

Now there are 4 candidates

	-3274	+803	+315	+422	+1734
3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	6023	8546	23622	46480

next we say goodbye to IND and preferences go to the last 3 candidates. Some of these ballots will have 2<sup>nd</sup> preferences to an already eliminated candidate. The AEC officers will look for the next preference which goes to a candidate still in the running.

Now there are 3 candidates. This is an important stage. I call it the 3 horse race and number 3 at the start may now have jumped to number 2!

	- 6023	+2653	+1621	+1749
4 <sup>th</sup>	0	11199	25243	48229

The third last candidate is eliminated and preferences distributed to the top two candidates

	-11199	+8673	+2526
Final two party preferred	0	33916	50755
		<b>ALP</b>	<b>LIB</b>

Changing these votes into percent gives the TPP

LIB 59.19% to ALP 40.81%. A swing of 9.19% required by ALP in the next election.

Reminder! The winner of INDI 2010 was LIB candidate on 1<sup>st</sup> preferences. The full distribution of preferences shows the TPP win for LIB against ALP. This is used to calculate the margin or swing required in the next election to remove the sitting member.

#### **4. The 2013 Independent Campaign (the exciting bit)**

**How did Voices for Indi (V4I) use numbers to design their election strategy.**

Main point: V4I's campaign and Cathy needed to stop the Liberals winning 50%+1 2013. If Sophie's vote came in below %0%, that would mean that preferences would be distributed.

The strategy was to take votes from LIB and ALP rather than GRN. Therefore V4I candidate could let GRN do what it does well in Beechworth, Stanley and Mt Beauty. We decided not to focus large resources into extreme LIB strongholds, in the Upper Murray and Upper Mitta valleys.

Cathy had a clear aim to win her home town of Yackandandah (total enrolment 1150) and other towns in her local government area of Indigo

Shire.

We hoped to persuade disillusioned LIB voters everywhere to put Cathy 1, and LIBs 2 as a protest vote. We allocated significant resources to the polling booth at Wodonga Central (2500 voters split down the middle two party preferred) Benalla pre poll voting centre (PPVC) and Wangaratta PPVC.

We made the assumption that “entrenched” LIB voters had probably made up their mind before they arrive at PPVC or had applied for a postal vote, these accounted for 16800 votes.

We estimated that up to 40% of the electorate may be voting early before election day and we needed to develop a strategy about how to get to these voters as postal votes traditionally favour the incumbent member.

### **Wodonga Workshops – Volunteer training**

Leading up to election day on Sept 7th 2013, Cathy's Wodonga office /Hub was buzzing. Eager volunteers regularly packed into rooms for training and workshops on: scrutineering, role playing how to give out 'How To Vote Cards', understanding AEC rules, understanding preferences, and why putting Cathy No 1 was so important – how to explain this it to your family and friends and using social media. Similar training workshops were also held in Campaign Hubs in Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield.

### **Strategic Planning Committee Wodonga**

The local Wodonga, strategic planning committee meet weekly at the Wodonga office to report on and update Cathy's 90 day plan, as it became a 30 day plan and then a 7 day plan. Cathy announced that she didn't want to come second, it wasn't enough to make the seat marginal, she wanted to Win!

### **Spreadsheets and models; scenario planning**

Four weeks out from the election, the ‘campaign numbers people’ were playing with numbers to see what may work. Could the Liberal candidate possibly lose another 10% of the primary vote? The consensus of most probably outcome was something like: LIB 42%, ALP 24%, Cathy 20%, Green 10%, other 4%

The hope was that Cathy could win from third place.

The scenario is: LIB do not get 50% of first preferences, candidates start getting eliminated and votes redistributed until final 4 candidates we assumed would be LIB, ALP, IND, GRN and still no 50%. The Green votes are redistributed. Then there were 3! The Green preferences most likely would flow to Cathy, she overtakes the ALP candidate. ALP is eliminated and Cathy gets most of their preferences also and wins! Sounds easy when you say it quickly.

In the week before the election it appeared that Cathy was doing well. Pre poll voting centres (PPVC) were staffed with an army of volunteers. The guessing game was complex with a record field of eleven candidates. A new scenario seemed to get Cathy across the line (this time from second place):

LIB (40%) Cathy (25%) ALP (15%) Green (5%) PUP (3%) Sex (3%) Family First, Bullet Train, Kat, Ruap, Podesta (1% each)

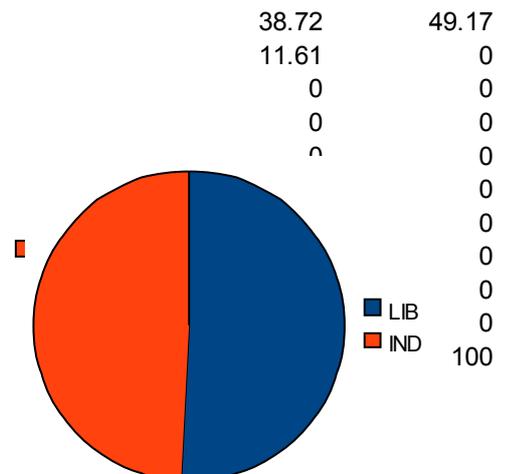
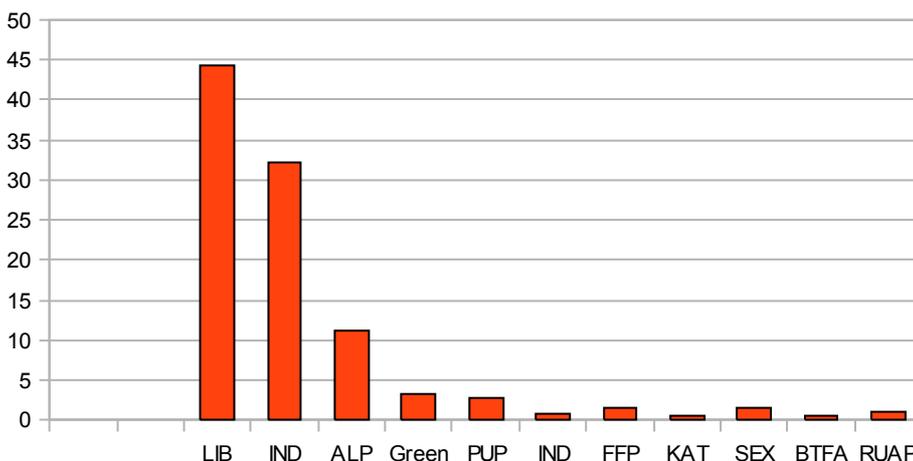
Spreadsheets can be wonderful tools. If you start with some nice numbers and make lots of assumptions and tweak it some more, one can get the desired result. One scenario had Cathy to win starting with Sophie on 43%, Cathy on 32% and assuming 90% of ALP preferences went to Cathy. How realistic was it to dream of a LIB primary vote of 43 or even 42? How many voters who really want to vote NAT but have to vote LIB will decide to vote Cathy? We made a guess that this may be 25% of the LIB vote. But Cathy has to get the “rusted on” LIB vote too! The spreadsheet below is soooo close, needs a little more tweaking!

2013 Federal Election Voting in INDI interactive predictor

see notes below

Candidate	Party	First Pref Votes (1 <sup>st</sup> count)	Exclude6 (7 <sup>th</sup> count)	Exclude 1 (8 <sup>th</sup> count)	Exclude Green (9 <sup>th</sup> count)	Exclude ALP (final count)
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Sophie Mirabella	LIB	<b>44.4</b>	48.43	48.97	49.67	50.83
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Many assumptions, including 90% preference flow from ALP to Cathy. The sitting member to get 65% of postal votes. This is the historical trend. Looking back through my notes, I consider Cathy to have just one chance of winning and that is to be still in the running when 8 candidates have been eliminated and LIB have still not achieved 50% plus 1. Cathy has to be second when it comes down to a 3-cornered contest. Sophie has 9 chances of winning depending on Lib first preferences (each time a candidate is eliminated she may get to the magic 50% plus 1).

### **5. Election Day – the count - no result!**

On election night, the ordinary votes were counted. The ALP and Green vote evaporated. First preference votes showed two excellent and important statistics:

1. LIB had less than 50% (Sophie had lost 8%)
2. Cathy was second with 32% and could possibly win.

The AEC hadn't heard of McGowan and was still thinking that the two party preferred vote would flow to LIB v ALP.

Indeed, on election night, the AEC vote counters saw that the two biggest piles were LIB and Cathy but AEC staff were still instructed to count how many voters preferred LIB to ALP. This situation is called a seat going 'maverick' It doesn't often happen but great fun when it does.

On the ABC's Antony Green predicted LIB retain. The tally room was showing LIB verses ALP (59 to 41).

When the AEC staff realised ALP was not in the race, the ordinary votes (cast by voters at the polling booths on Saturday) gave Cathy the lead on two candidate preferred by +1770 votes over Sophie.

Cathy had won outright on 1<sup>st</sup> preferences in many booths and outnumbered the Libs in Wodonga and Wangaratta. The count was to drag on for more than a week with a nail biting count of pre-poll votes and postals and exhausting scrutineering.

### **6. The Analysis:**

Looking at the spreadsheet again on previous page. It is fairly close to what actually happened. Notice that first preference votes for LIB is

approx 44% compared with IND + ALP + GRN at 46%. Sophie gets some second preferences from all the minor candidates as they get eliminated and creeps closer and closer to 50%. Cathy has to wait until the GRN and finally the ALP candidates are eliminated to collect their preferences.

### **Pre Polling Voting Centres and Postal Votes**

Following election day, very day of counting favoured the LIBs. The count from the pre poll voting centres, which came in on the Monday wiped out 719 votes of Cathy's lead. Every day, an agonising 2000 postal votes were opened and counted to slice another 300 votes from Cathy. Every day!

Then the miraculous discovery of 1003 votes for Cathy! They were legitimate but somehow misplaced (counted but not recorded!). It reversed the incorrect pre poll results and now showed a clear win for Cathy in Wodonga and Wangaratta.

A week after election day, Sophie was running out of Postals. Cathy was winning the Absentee votes.

I got a phone call from journalist Tony Wright. He was writing an article for the Fairfax papers which includes Albury's Border Mail. He asked me to make a prediction on the numbers. I was on holiday in Cairns but glued to my computer for every AEC release of each day's counting and keeping notes on scraps of paper and literally on the backs of envelopes! I confidently said "Cathy will win by 600 votes". 8 days after the election and still counting!

Wow! We did it! Cathy wins! By 439 votes. Cathy won by gaining the preferences of every other candidate. The final vote on a Two Candidate Preferred basis (TCP), and Cathy had 50.25% to Sophie 49.75%.

I remember Cathy exhorted all her campaign volunteers in the last week, telling supporters it as so close, it would be terribly disappointing to 'just' lose by a few votes, could they please do everything possible to find that extra 1% of voters who may change their vote. And they did.

So where did those votes come from?

Was it all the work at Wodonga PPVC? Most certainly. I am a little biased here as my partner Liz and I oversaw the roster which had volunteers

handing out how-to-vote-cards all day everyday for two weeks. Wodonga PPVC had a massive 10109 voters and Cathy won this “booth” by a margin of just 451. Similar rosters were organised in all pre polling centres including Wangaratta, Bright, and Benalla

Was it all the doorknocking? Most certainly.

Was it the orange chairs – keep the set orange, and orange flags, orange T shirts, core flutes and the orange army? Absolutely.

Was it the number two spot on the ballot paper? It helps!

Number one spot on the ballot was Rise Up Australia Party which received 985 votes. Cathy got 679 of these preferences (373 more than Sophie). Some of these may have been “donkey votes” where voters just fill in the ballot 1,2,3 etc down the page.

Was it the young people, the first time voters and their extensive use of social media – absolutely.

But most of all it was Cathy and the people of Indi who wanted something better for themselves, their community and their children.



Reading the news September 2013 – Tony Liz and Cathy