

Monaro By-election 2022 Interview Questions

Responses from Frankie Seymour - Animal Justice Party

1. Housing and Homelessness

Housing costs in the Monaro electorate are skyrocketing. Specialist homelessness services cannot meet demand and there is a shortage of social housing in the electorate. Secure, safe and healthy housing is the bedrock of mental and physical wellbeing, especially in the middle of a pandemic.

How do you think we can support local communities in the Monaro electorate to access affordable housing and prevent homelessness?

Answer

Having worked in the social welfare/policy field myself for 17 years, many years ago, I agree completely with your assessment of the importance of secure and affordable housing.

The policies of the Animal Justice Party, for whom I am standing, relate to animals rather than people but we have agreed and published positions on a range of purely human issues including homelessness ([Homelessness2021.pdf \(animaljusticeparty.org\)](https://www.animaljusticeparty.org/Homelessness2021.pdf)).

2. A Strong Social Sector

Over the continuing COVID-19 crisis, the social services sector has risen to the challenge and continued to support vulnerable children, young people, families, and communities across the state. But the sector is stretched to capacity, under-funded and experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining staff because of low pay, poor conditions, a lack of affordable rental housing, and the stressful nature of the work.

If elected, how will you champion the work of the sector in the Monaro electorate, including local First Nations organisations, and ensure they get the resources, recognition and support required to meet demand?

Answer

I have no current (post-pandemic) expertise in this matters and would be guided by the views of organisations such as yours. Since companion animals, as well as humans, suffer when social services fail, I would strongly support all meaningful measures to strengthen the social service sector, on behalf of both human and animals.

3. Building Women's Economic Security and Safety

The Monaro electorate has a high proportion of women in employment and a reliance on female dominated industries yet women continue to suffer greater impacts from Covid including job loss and a spike in domestic violence of 9.8% (over NSW).

What measures would you put in place to build women's economic security and independence?

What will you advocate for to better support women and children in the electorate and prevent tragic outcomes for women and children escaping domestic violence?

Answer

I am keenly aware of this issue. Nearly 30 years ago, I developed the policy that split unemployment benefit so that partnered women received their own half of the payment; the whole payment had previously been paid to the male partner. I also worked on programs to assist women with children to re-enter the workforce.

*As an animal advocate, I know only too well that one of the main reasons women stay in violent and dangerous domestic situations is because they cannot take their companion animals with them if they leave, and they dare not leave them behind. Temporary and long-term secure **and pet-friendly** housing options for women fleeing domestic violence are critical for the well-being of the women, the children and the animals.*

Again I would be guided by organisations such as yours on how to achieve this outcome.

4. Supporting Families

While the Monaro electorate has a higher median weekly household income than NSW average there are some significant pockets of disadvantage. In some areas (East Queanbeyan and Cooma) one in five children are growing up in poverty. Children growing up in families experiencing financial hardship are more likely to miss out on effective parenting and to be at risk of abuse and neglect.

What are your/your party's policies to support parents and promote children's wellbeing and keep them safe from harm?

Answer

This is one of the many areas where human and animal wellbeing are both at risk. The causes of the suffering are the same, and the solutions are the same. Where children are at risk of neglect and abuse, so are any animals in the family.

For adults, adequate income support, secure housing, assistance with securing appropriate training and paid work that suits the family's needs, non-judgemental programs to prevent and treat alcohol and drug abuse, and non-violent outlets for the frustrations of poverty

(including engagement in voluntary work to help others, if paid work remains elusive) are all important avenues for promoting wellbeing.

For the kids themselves, both the disadvantaged and those from more secure homes, the most important thing is to prevent the intergenerational impacts of poverty, especially the tendency for the abused who are unable to strike back at the abuser to pass the abuse on to those weaker than themselves, usually younger children or animals. In-school and cost-free after school programs designed to encourage empathy and promote understanding of the circumstances and behaviour of others (including animals) might help with this.

5. Emergency Responses

Research is showing more and more that emergency responses built from the top down suffer from a lack of local knowledge; and from inappropriate funding and resourcing – too much too soon, too little too late, or disappearing just when communities need them most.

What do you think are the key issues in developing disaster preparedness and emergency management systems that work?

Answer

The only way this will happen is for emergency responses to be set up legislatively, with support of both major parties so they cannot be repealed, or amended away. This legislation should guarantee funding as and when it is needed. A number of legislated early warning and urgent need triggers could be agreed by consultation with the social services sector and communities. The legislation would enable local communities to recommend or veto the ways in which the funding is deployed and used.

6. Covid and Climate Change

As the world approaches its limit to growth we are seeing more and more natural disasters including this current pandemic, droughts, floods and bushfires. All of which have greater impacts in rural and regional communities including lower vaccination rates for First Nations communities; fragmented and inadequate health infrastructure; significant mental health impacts; a health workforce that is largely exhausted; and health translation services that are breaking down...

What needs to happen to ensure that our local health systems and related programs are better able to cope with these challenges?

Answer

AJP has a keen interest in these matters, mostly from the point of view of preventing the problems from arising. Pandemics invariably seem to arise as a direct result of abusing or dispossessing animals. Global warming, and the proliferation of extreme weather events it

entails, is in part a consequence of 10,000 years of animal agriculture which has, planet-wide, both removed greenhouse gas sinks to create pasture, and produced methane intensive ruminants in staggeringly high numbers.

To slow and halt anthropogenic climate change (if it is still possible), it is necessary not only to end the use of fossil fuels, but also to revegetate as of much of the Earth's cleared land as possible. It is also necessary to phase out animal agriculture in favour of plant-based protein and/or real meat grown from cells (also known as "clean meat" or "cultured meat").

Australia also needs to work collaboratively with other nations to minimise the risk of further pandemics by ending the animal abuse from which they seem to arise (eg factory farms, wet markets and slaughterhouses, and bush meat).

Meanwhile, a review of the entire health sector, to determine a scale and deployment of ongoing funding that actually meets to needs of the sector, including equitable funding that recognises the disadvantage of rural, regional and First Nation communities, is essential.

As mentioned above, legislation needs to provide for additional funding for emergencies on the basis of verifiable pre-set triggers - rather than knee-jerk or panic driven responses based on hopes of political survival or advantage.