

## Foreword

Whether you are a supporter or a critic of John Howard, or a sitter on the fence, there is no doubting there are huge lessons to be learned from his success.

On four occasions, Australian voters have endorsed the man, his politics and his values. What does this tell us about ourselves and about the way our democracy works? What does it tell us about Howard?

Understanding more about Howard's success might be the key to knowing where we Australians are heading in this new century.

But we have to know where to look. And we have to ask the right questions.

After more than a decade of Howard's leadership, I am convinced that most of our storytellers in the mass media are missing the main story. Some of them are clearly one-eyed. Others need to sensationalise. They woo their viewers by presenting politics as a sport, a gladiatorial contest between two big men. Others are distracted by whatever pops up as the big story of the day and seem incapable of looking at longer-term trends and patterns. Who really cares about our common wealth when the main preoccupation of the media is low-cost entertainment?

I have been so intrigued by the stories of the Howard years that I have made it my business to go behind the day-to-day sensations and look for the real stories. I have to know what we can learn from his success.

I have tried to ask the important questions and follow the evidence to provide a balanced portrayal of the significance of Howard's

leadership. But I was shocked by what I found. Some say I am too hard on Howard. Others tell me I should have been much tougher. Howard polarises people.

Politicians are elected to serve the people, the national interest. But when we find politicians at both national and state level choosing instead to serve their own interests and those of their financial backers, we know our democracy is in trouble.

I see myself as an ordinary Australian who cares about our country and our people. My approach has been to paint the big picture, supported by stories and facts. I have not tried to cover every point of view, or answer every question. To do so would have required a book five times this size.

My hope is that in the following pages you will find a fresh, lively and bold perspective on the past decade, one that will inspire you to join with the many Australians who are working to create the next chapter of our history as a nation.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the many specialists and writers whose work I have drawn on in these stories. Without their expertise, this book would lack the evidence that supports its challenging conclusions.

Mike Clancy  
May 2007