

**Chronology**

**The Howard Years – 1996 – 2007**

## First Howard Term 1996 - 1998

### 1996

- **2 March 1996 – John Howard becomes Australia’s 25<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister**  
Under the theme of “For All of Us”, John Howard becomes Australia’s 25<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, taking charge of the 54<sup>th</sup> ministry since Federation with a 45 seat majority. It’s the biggest mandate since Malcolm Fraser’s 1977 victory; 2 party preferred swing of 5.1 per cent. The ALP loses 31 seats, the Liberal Party gains 27, the National Party two and the Independents three (including Pauline Hanson, dis-endorsed Liberal candidate and new Independent MP for Oxley, Queensland).
- **8 March 1996 – John Howard reduces the ministry from 31 to 28**  
John Howard reduces the ministry from 31 to 28 and dismisses six departmental heads.
- **11 March 1996 – John Howard restores the Queen to the oath of allegiance**  
Howard restores the Queen to the oath of allegiance and the Australian flag to his official car.
- **12 March 1996 – Budget deficit of \$9 billion**  
New Treasurer, Peter Costello, releases revised figures showing an underlying budget deficit of \$9 billion. Dubbing it the “Beazley black hole”, Peter Costello announces the government will have to implement cuts of \$8 billion over two years, in order to balance the budget by the third year. Grinding Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) meetings ensue, to determine the size and areas the cuts will take.
- **28 April 1996 – Port Arthur massacre.**  
Lone gunman Martin Bryant kills 35 people at the popular Tasmanian tourist site. John Howard immediately takes strong leadership and within three months pushes through uniform gun laws banning all semi-automatic firearms despite fierce opposition from some States and his Coalition partner, the National Party. The anti-gun reform movement reached boiling point at a tense pro-gun meeting at Sale, Victoria, on 16 June 1996, where the PM reluctantly wears a bullet proof vest. John Howard is the first Australian PM to wear a protective vest in public.
- **20 May 1996 – Howard reaffirms the government’s commitment to waterfront reform**  
Speaking in parliament, John Howard reaffirms the government’s commitment to waterfront reform: *“We have no desire to destroy the Maritime Union of Australia, as is so wrongly alleged. We have every intention of lifting productivity on the waterfront. We have every intention of ensuring that the Australian waterfront is competitive on a world basis.”* During the first half of 1996, Transport Minister John Sharp commissions consultants to devise an industrial relations strategy to achieve the reforms.
- **19 August 1996 – Protesters converge on Parliament House** to oppose the government’s planned budget cuts and new Industrial Relations legislation.
- **20 August 1996 – Peter Costello delivers his first federal budget (1996-1997)**, making savage cuts to address the \$9 billion deficit. Cuts particularly target the ABC (\$55 million); the former Keating government’s labour market programs; the environment; aged care; foreign aid; higher education (increased tertiary fees); large cuts to the funding of ATSIC; support for Research and Development slashed; Medicare surcharge introduced for high income earners, but health insurance rebates are provided for middle Australians (“Howard’s

battlers”). The government’s first budget is generally well received – dubbed by commentators as “*tough but fair*”.

- **31 August 1996** – John Howard rules out the possibility of reintroducing a GST, saying “*It’s (GST) off the agenda. We were elected for this term on the basis there would be no GST and that remains our position.*”
- **10 September 1996** – Pauline Hanson, Independent MP for Oxley, delivers maiden speech in the House of Representatives, denouncing the “privileges” Aborigines enjoy over other Australians and arguing “*Australia is in danger of being swamped by Asians*” who “*have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate.*” There is no official reaction from the Prime Minister. [Read Hanson’s maiden speech.](#)
- **22 September 1996** – Howard gives a speech to the Queensland State Liberal Council  
Amidst growing criticism of his response to Hanson in both local and Asian press, John Howard gives a speech to the Queensland State Liberal Council, saying “*One of the great changes that have come over Australia in the last six months is that people do feel able to speak a little more freely and a little more openly about what they feel... In a sense the pall of censorship on certain issues has been lifted. I think we were facing the possibility of becoming a more narrow and restrictive society.*” John Howard’s speech is interpreted by some commentators as encouragement and endorsement of Pauline Hanson’s views. By the end of October, a string of Coalition ministers and MPs have publicly denounced Pauline Hanson’s views, but John Howard remains silent on the issue.
- **18 November 1996** – John Howard delivers the Sir Robert Menzies lecture, “The Liberal Tradition: The Beliefs and Values which Guide the Federal Government”, discussing the “black armband” view of history: “*I have spoken tonight of the need to guard against the re-writing of Australian political history and, in particular, to ensure that the contribution of Robert Menzies and the Liberal tradition are accorded their proper place in it. There is, of course, a related and broader challenge involved. And that is to ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that we should apologise for most of it. This black armband view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed. In saying that I do not exclude or ignore specific aspects of our past where we are rightly held to account. Injustices were done in Australia and no one should obscure or minimise them. But in understanding these realities our priority should not be to apportion blame and guilt for historic wrongs but to commit to a practical program of action that will remove the enduring legacies of disadvantage.*”
- **18 December 1996** – Media reports say the government is prepared to use troops on the waterfront and allow unionists to be jailed, as part of its plans to clean up the industry in 1997. John Howard, Transport Minister John Sharp, and Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith deny any plan to use troops on the waterfront to break any strikes. John Sharp: “*Defence intervention is not an option, it is not under consideration... it is not part of a secret plan.*”
- **23 December 1996** – High Court hands down the Wik decision  
High Court hands down the *Wik Peoples v. State of Queensland*. In a 4:3

majority, the High Court rules that the grant of a pastoral lease does not confer exclusive possession, and native title therefore continues to coexist. Where conflict between the joint owners arose, the rights of the pastoral leaseholders would prevail. This decision leads to one of the most divisive land rights debates in Australian history, with the National Farmers Federation (NFF) declaring: “*It has just about ended Aboriginal reconciliation, certainly with the pastoral industry*”, and the then Queensland Premier, Rob Borbidge, saying legislation dealing with Wik would “*amount to a declaration of war on Queensland.*” The Wik decision puts a stop to John Howard’s own plans with native title – in June 1996 John Howard introduced his own *Native Title Amendment Bill* to parliament. Among other things, it sought to convert pastoral leases from fixed term to perpetual.

- **31 December 1996** – *New Workplace Relations Act* comes into force after a deal was finally struck between Democrats Leader Cheryl Kernot and Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith to include a no-disadvantage test (ensuring employees could not be worse off). The legislation increases employers’ power to deal directly with workers, limit strike action and ban secondary boycotts. The Act also establishes Australian Workplace Agreements, or AWAs.

## 1997

- **12 March 1997** – *Reith and Sharp meet with Corrigan to discuss waterfront reform*  
Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith and Transport Minister John Sharp meet with representatives from Australia’s leading stevedores, including Richard Hine of P&O and Chris Corrigan of Patrick Stevedores, to discuss the direction of waterfront reform.
- **24 March 1997** – *John Sharp and Peter Reith take a radical plan for waterfront reform to the PM* in a late night meeting. Both ministers argue for the “interventionist” model for waterfront reform, which involved sacking the entire union workforce and replacing it with non-union labour. This was to be done with mutual support from both government and employer.
- **11 April 1997** – *Pauline Hanson launches the One Nation party*
- Debate ensues over whether One Nation would receive Coalition preferences at the next election.
- **21 April 1997** – *John Howard officially signs off on the “interventionist” waterfront strategy* in letter to Peter Reith: “*I support the interventionist strategy you have outlined.*” The government begins to build their case for the reforms in an effort to gather public support for the plan.
- **28 April 1997** – *John Howard releases ‘The Ten Point Plan’*  
John Howard releases the government’s legislative response to the Wik decision, entitled ‘[The Ten Point Plan](#)’.
- **8 May 1997** – *John Howard finally criticises Pauline Hanson* in a keynote address to the Australia-Asia Society, Sydney: “*She is wrong when she suggests that Aboriginals are not disadvantaged. She is wrong when she says that Australia is in danger of being swamped by Asians. She is wrong to seek scapegoats for society’s problems.*”
- **16 May 1997** – *Peter Costello raises the prospect of introducing a GST*  
Speaking at the Essendon Football Club three days after delivering the 1997 budget, Peter Costello raises the prospect of introducing a GST: “*The fair thing would be to tell people and seek votes accordingly.*” The comment makes front-page news.

- 17 May 1997** – Howard and Tim Fischer travel to Longreach to promote ‘Ten Point Plan’

John Howard and Deputy PM and Nationals Leader Tim Fischer travel to Longreach, central-western Queensland, to promote the government’s ‘Ten Point Plan’ to regional Australia. Addressing a hostile 2,000-strong crowd, John Howard pleads for patience: *“Please do not believe this fear-mongering.”* In an effort to prevent a massive political backlash from the Government’s rural constituents, Tim Fischer also describes ‘The Ten Point Plan’ as containing *“bucketfuls of extinguishment,”* and promises that pastoral leases would not be affected by native title claims.
- 18 May 1997** – John Howard appears on Channel 10’s *Face to Face* program

Endorsing Peter Costello’s comments, John Howard appears on Channel 10’s *Face to Face* program and raises the need for further tax reform and ipso facto a GST: *“You can’t have reform unless you look at all of the options”*. Catching his Cabinet colleagues by surprise, John Howard’s unilateral decision comes amidst a slump in the polls, and growing criticism the government is “directionless” and “going nowhere”. [Read the transcript from John Howard’s interview on Face to Face.](#)
- 26 May 1997** – John Howard attends the Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne, celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1967 Aboriginal referendum. Delegates jeer and boo the PM during his address, with some in the audience turning their backs when John Howard defends his Ten Point amendments to the Native Title Act. In an uncharacteristic display, John Howard shouts at the audience: *“I also need in the name of truth and in the name of a free discussion on this issue to repudiate the claim that my Ten Point Plan involves a massive hand out of freehold title at taxpayers’ expense. This is an absolute myth, it is absolutely contrary to the fact and I absolutely repudiate it.”* John Howard’s outburst gives the impression of a PM under siege. [Read Howard’s speech.](#)
- 13 August 1997** –Howard announces he will go to the next election with a GST *“I want to share this great adventure with the Australian people.”* John Howard announces he will go to the next election offering extensive tax cuts in return for the introduction of a GST, contrary to his earlier promise that a GST “was off the agenda” and “never ever”. Following John Howard’s announcement, Peter Costello immediately establishes a special, top-secret unit to put together the package.
- 18 September 1997** – John Sharp, Peter Reith meet with Chris Corrigan of Patrick Stevedores

In Melbourne John Sharp, Peter Reith and their advisers meet with Chris Corrigan of Patrick Stevedores to discuss the progress of waterfront reform, and the use of non-union labour.
- 24 September 1997** –Transport Minister John Sharp resigns after being found guilty of breaching the Prime Minister’s Ministerial Code of Conduct. Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith takes over full responsibility for waterfront reform. On the same day, Administrative Services Minister, David Jull resigns over “travelgate”. Two days later, Minister for Science and Technology, Peter McGauran resigns for making false travel allowance claims. John Howard’s chief political adviser, Grahame Morris and office manager, Fiona McKenna, are also sacked for possible cover up over travel rorts. John Howard describes the week as *septem dies horribiles* (seven days of horror). During its first term, the Howard government suffered more casualties from improprieties than any previous Australian government.

- **23 October 1997 – The Asian economic crisis**  
\$10 billion is wiped off local sharemarket in the wake of a major collapse on the Hong Kong stock market. The Asian economic crisis strikes Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea and Indonesia, which all suffer major economic downturns, increasing fears that Australia could be hit next.
- **3 December 1997 – The ‘Dubai plan’** to recruit and train a non-union workforce for the waterfront is raised in parliament by the Labor Opposition. Peter Reith denies any knowledge of the plan.
- **11 December 1997 – Australia signs the Kyoto Protocol** but only agrees to continue with the treaty-making process but not be bound by it. While other developed countries agree to reduce their emissions by 5.2 per cent, Australia is one of only three countries allowed to increase its greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2000. Describing it as a “*splendid result*”, John Howard says: “*It is an outcome that will protect tens of thousands of Australian jobs and it is also, importantly, an outcome that will put the world on a firmer path towards controlling greenhouse gas emissions.*”

## 1998

- **2 February 1998 – Constitutional Convention in Old Parliament House** to discuss referendum on an Australian republic officially begins. John Howard presses and succeeds in getting 152 Convention delegates to give “majority support” for the republican model (appointed President by 2/3 parliamentary majority), which would be put to a referendum to be held in November 1999. Vote is 73 to 57, with 22 abstentions.
- **7 April 1998 – Waterfront reform becomes front page news** when Patrick’s chief, Chris Corrigan, sends in security guards and dogs to force his waterfront workers (Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members) off the docks, to be replaced by non-unionists. At 11:00 pm, precisely the same time the dogs move onto the docks, Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith issues a press release announcing a \$250 million credit line for waterfront redundancies. John Howard later announces the removal of the MUA as “*a fightback by the people of Australia against the inefficiency of the wharves.*” Violent clashes between sacked workers and police ensue.
- **22 April 1998 – Judge finds Patrick “engaged in an unlawful conspiracy”**  
Justice Tony North of the Federal Court finds Patrick had “*arguably engaged in an unlawful conspiracy to sack its workforce*”, and grants an interim injunction ordering Patrick to reinstate all of its 1,400 sacked workers.
- **5 May 1998 – The 1,400 MUA workers resume work on the docks**, while Reith and Corrigan negotiate with the MUA to end the dispute and sign new productivity and workplace agreements.
- **10 May 1998 – Costello announces he’ll place One Nation party last**  
During a television interview, Peter Costello publicly announces he’ll place Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party last on his how to vote card for the seat of Higgins, Victoria: “*In relation to my own seat where there is a One Nation candidate running against me, that candidate will be last, not because I have any love for the Labor Party, but because I want to make it entirely clear that is not the future for Australia. The future for Australia is built on tolerance and respect and is built on developing a strong economy, not some idealised and wrong view of the past.*” To date, John Howard has refused to state whether or not his government will preference One Nation last, instead opting for a seat-by-seat basis.

- **12 May 1998** – Peter Costello releases the 1998-99 Budget, which includes a \$2.7 billion surplus – marking the first budget surplus in eight years.
- **13 June 1998** – Queensland state election. Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party dominates, winning 11 seats and 22.67 per cent of the vote. Labor’s Peter Beattie is elected Premier, replacing the Coalition’s Rob Borbidge. The debate about One Nation preferences continues, but John Howard refuses to give a clear statement whether or not his government will preference One Nation last at the next federal election.
- **13 August 1998** – Howard and Costello launch the Coalition Tax Reform Package  
The day before Peter Costello’s 41<sup>st</sup> birthday, John Howard and the Treasurer launch the Coalition Tax Reform Package, which includes a 10 per cent GST (“Tax Reform – Not a New Tax, A New Tax System”). Launching the package, John Howard says: *“Many of the things that I’ve canvassed this morning are issues to which I have been committed in terms of policy change more than half of my political life and I find in the launching of this plan, the achievement in a personal sense, a lot of the things that I’ve wanted to do.”*
- **30 August 1998** – John Howard calls an early election for 3 October 1998, buoyed by the generally positive response to the government’s new tax package.
- **3 October 1998** – John Howard wins a second term  
Despite exit polls predicting a loss for the government, John Howard wins a second term, but with a reduced majority of 12 seats. The government suffers a 4.6 per cent swing for a two-party preferred vote of 49.02 per cent (ALP wins 50.98 per cent). One Nation wins almost one million votes and 8.4 per cent of the first preference vote (more than The Nationals), but Pauline Hanson fails to win the new House of Representatives seat of Blair. In his victory speech, John Howard declares the win a magnificent victory and a mandate for the GST, but also makes a surprise, unscripted commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation.

## Second Howard Term 1998 - 2001

- **14 - 18 November 1998** – John Howard attends the APEC meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, against the backdrop of the Asian economic crisis. Australia has weathered the Asian economic crisis well. Peter Costello later attributes Australia’s strong economic position in a climate of global crisis to the Coalition’s first budget in 1996: *“We didn’t know then that there was going to be an Asian downturn. In fact we thought then that Asia would be booming. If we hadn’t put our own house in order before the Asian downturn I think we would have experienced serious recession. I think we saved serious recession, I think we saved hundreds of thousands of people their jobs. I think we saved millions of Australians their family homes because you wouldn’t have had low interest rates. Of course it was tough, but I am glad we did it.”*
- **19 December 1998** – The Prime Minister writes to Indonesian President, B.J. Habibie, urging him to *“negotiate directly with the East Timorese and consider the option of an act of self-determination after a substantial period of autonomy.”* Although the letter represents an historic shift in Australia’s foreign policy direction with Indonesia and East Timor, it is not publicised.  
[Read Howard’s letter to Habibie.](#) [PDF]

## 1999

- **12 January 1999** – The Indonesia government says it is “concerned” and “deeply regrets” the government’s policy shift with East Timor, as Foreign

Affairs Minister Alexander Downer publicly announces the government's new policy on East Timor. Australia will pressure Jakarta to allow a vote on self-determination for East Timor – but John Howard stresses that his position on recognising Indonesia's sovereignty remains unchanged.

- **27 January 1999** –Habibie agrees to UN supervised ballot on independence  
Contrary to expectations, Indonesian President, B.J. Habibie announces Indonesia's agreement to a United Nations supervised ballot on independence for East Timor in August 1999. News of the ballot provokes a wave of violence by pro-Indonesia militias. John Howard comes under increasing pressure internationally and domestically to stop the bloodshed and to push for a peacekeeping force to supervise the ballot, while the Federal Opposition labels his diplomacy "*hopelessly inadequate.*"
- **27 April 1999** – Australian–Indonesian high-level “emergency” meeting is held in Bali, Indonesia, to discuss security planning for the East Timor ballot, in the wake of increasing violence. Despite much discussion over the need for a UN peacekeeping force to be in place at the time of the ballot, John Howard fails to persuade the Indonesian President to accept such a force. Habibie also refuses to publicly promise to disarm all warring groups before the ballot. Instead, Australia will provide a small contingent of police and civilian personnel to help the UN oversee the ballot.
- **14 May 1999** – Independent Senator Brian Harradine declines to support the government's GST package. Peter Costello and John Howard must now convince the Democrats to support the tax package.
- **28 May 1999** – Democrats Leader Meg Lees agrees to tax package  
Following days of intensive negotiations, Democrats Leader Meg Lees finally agrees to the government's tax package. John Howard agrees to basic food being exempt from the 10 per cent tax.
- **26 August 1999** – John Howard introduces his ‘Motion of Reconciliation’ to parliament, but does not offer a national apology, instead tabling a declaration of “*deep and sincere regret*” for past injustices to Aborigines. [Read the Motion of Reconciliation.](#)
- **30 August 1999** - East Timorese vote for independence in UN-run elections: 21.5 per cent vote for autonomy; 78.5 per cent effectively vote for independence. Result of the ballot prompts another wave of killings by militia, while thousands of East Timorese flee. International and domestic outrage escalates.
- **10-13 September 1999** – APEC meeting, Auckland New Zealand  
John Howard leads discussions for a UN peacekeeping force in East Timor, with US President Bill Clinton and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan backing his position.
- **12 September 1999** – Indonesia accepts peacekeeping force in East Timor  
After significant international pressure, Indonesia accepts a multi-national peacekeeping force, to be led by Australia, into East Timor. Australia will provide 4,500 troops. Diplomatic relations between Australia and Indonesia reach a low point; Habibie is refusing to take John Howard's telephone calls, accusing him of “*misusing our close friendship*”. *The Australian* newspaper reports “*the holocaust in East Timor is a direct consequence of the failure of Australian policy*”.
- **20 September 1999** – Australia-led International Force East Timor (INTERFET) successfully enters East Timor and occupies Dili.



- **4 October 1999** - UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reports to the Security Council that INTERFET had restored a large measure of security and order to East Timor.
- **6 November 1999** – Republic referendum  
55 per cent vote against a republic; 45 per cent vote for a republic. The referendum proposal does not win a majority in a single state. On the eve of the referendum, John Howard says: *“I will vote no to Australia becoming a republic because I do not believe in changing a constitutional system which works so well and has helped bring such stability to our nation.”* Malcolm Turnbull, then Chairman of the Australian Republican Movement, says there is only one man to blame: *“History will remember him for only one thing. He was the Prime Minister who broke a nation’s heart.”*

## 2000

- **27 May 2000** – Corroboree 2000, Reconciliation convention at the Sydney Opera House  
Agreement not reached between the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Government on a Declaration towards Reconciliation, which was prepared in anticipation of a historic reconciliation ceremony to be held on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Federation, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2001. Government is opposed to the sentence: *“...as we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives.”* The government’s preferred response is ‘practical reconciliation’, with a focus on health, education, housing and employment. 250,000 people walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge in the Peoples Walk For Reconciliation, followed by similar marches throughout Australia. John Howard opts not to walk across the bridge, while the media reports the PM directed his Cabinet not to walk. [Read Howard’s Address.](#)
- **1 July 2000** – GST legislation comes into effect, coinciding with a raft of polls showing the government at its lowest popularity level since the 1998 election. Anti-GST protests widespread.
- **26 July 2000** – Howard speculates about retiring when he is 63 or 64  
John Howard, interviewed by Phillip Clark on ABC radio, indicates that the 2001 election may be his last, and speculates about retiring when he is 63 or 64. *“I don’t have the view that I am so indispensable and so important and so vital that you know, the Liberal Party will be bereft without me”.* Causes a flurry of leadership speculation.
- **4 December 2000** – Waterfront workers achieving 25 crane lifts per hour  
Less than three years after the Maritime Union of Australia said it was impossible, waterfront workers are achieving 25 crane lifts per hour.

## 2001

- **10 February 2001** – West Australia election  
Liberal Premier Richard Court defeated by Labor. One Nation picks up 10 per cent of the popular vote.
- **17 February 2001** – Queensland election  
Labor’s Peter Beattie increases majority and the Liberals are routed with only three MPs elected. Growing backbench anxiety over the influence of One Nation, impact of the GST - especially from small business over the need to submit quarterly Business Activity Statements (BAS) - and rising petrol prices.

- **1 March 2001** – John Howard backflips by announcing a 1.5 cent/litre cut to fuel excise, after previously saying the country couldn't afford it. John Howard tells a party room meeting that he is *"not going to be sacrificed on the pyre of ideological purity"*.
- **17 March 2001** – Ryan by-election, in the blue ribbon Queensland Liberal seat held by the retiring former Defence Minister, John Moore. Labor's Leonie Short wins with a 9.6 per cent swing against the government. Many commentators now predicting the death knell of the government.
- **1 May 2001** – Leaking of Shane Stone memo  
Leaking of Shane Stone (Federal President of the Liberal Party) internal memo to Channel 9's Laurie Oakes, in which the government is heavily criticised: *"our leadership is not listening"*; *"we are seen as a mean government"*; *"the dead hand of Treasury is everywhere"*; *"Government is out of touch"*. Tensions flare between John Howard and Peter Costello.
- **22 May 2001** – Peter Costello delivers 2001-02 Budget  
Features include significant handouts and tax concessions to the over-55 group, especially pensioners and self-funded retirees, and young families are targeted with a first home-buyers scheme. The budget marks the beginning of a turnaround in popular support for the government.
- **14 July 2001** – Aston by-election, Victoria  
While there is a fall in the Liberal two party preferred vote, the Liberals manage to retain the seat. John Howard says it is a sign his team is *"back in the game"*.
- **26-27 August 2001** – Tampa rescues asylum seekers  
The Norwegian container ship, MV Tampa, rescues 438 Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers from a sinking Indonesian fishing vessel. Australia refuses to accept the asylum seekers, and SAS officers are ordered to take control of the ship. Border protection elevated to a major election issue, whilst international debate mounts about Australia's treatment of the asylum seekers.
- **29 August 2001** – John Howard introduces the *Border Protection Bill* into the House of Representatives: *"This Bill will confirm our ability to remove to the high seas those vessels and persons on board that have entered the territorial waters under Australian sovereignty contrary to our wishes. It is essential to the maintenance of Australian sovereignty, including our sovereign right to determine who will enter and reside in Australia."* The bill is opposed by the Opposition and defeated in the Senate. John Howard launches attack on Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, labelling him a man who stands for nothing: *"He has no ticker."* [Read the Border Protection Bill 2001.](#)
- **3 September 2001** – 'Operation Relex' begins, in which Australian Navy ships are used to intercept asylum seeker boats, forcing them to return to their origin, and preventing them from reaching Australian soil.
- **10 September 2001** - \$10 million deal agreed between the Prime Minister of Nauru, Rene Harris, and Australia, to house 1,000 asylum seekers on Nauru, including those on board the Tampa – the agreement becomes known as "The Pacific Solution".
- **10 September 2001** – John Howard meets with President George W Bush in Washington as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the ANZUS Treaty (signed September 1<sup>st</sup> 1951). It is the first-ever meeting between the two leaders. John Howard and President Bush sign a joint statement reaffirming the strength and the vitality of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.
- **11 September 2001** – Al-Qaeda attack on New York's twin towers, and the Pentagon in Washington. More than 3,500 are killed, including 10 Australians. John Howard is in Washington at the time of the attacks, and is one of the first

allied leaders to pledge military support to the U.S. According to Howard's Chief of Staff, Arthur Sinodinos: *"It had a huge impact on the boss because it was an attack on the American homeland ....it bonded him further with Bush and Cheney and co because of that common experience. In a sense it brought out the 'Winston' in John Winston."*

- **14 September 2001 – John Howard invokes the ANZUS Treaty**  
John Howard returns from Washington and invokes Article IV of the ANZUS Treaty for the first time in Australian history. Howard declares the terrorist strikes an attack on Australia, and the invocation of the treaty *"demonstrates Australia's steadfast commitment to work with the United States."*
- **14 September 2001 – Collapse of Ansett Airlines.**
- **18 September 2001 – Amended Border Protection Bill** is reintroduced into parliament. This time, the Opposition supports the amended Bill. [Read amended Bill.](#)
- **27 September 2001 – Defence Minister Peter Reith announces he will step down** at the coming election. John Howard: *"Of all the people with whom I have been associated in politics over the years, there is none I hold in higher regard than Peter Reith."*
- **5 October 2001 – John Howard announces a federal election** for 10 November 2001. 'Leadership' in of global uncertainty is the key issue.
- **7 October 2001 – U.S launches first air strikes against al-Qaeda and the Taliban** in Afghanistan. ("Operation Enduring Freedom"). Strong international support for this action.
- **7 October 2001 – "Children Overboard" controversy begins.** As part of Operation Relex, HMAS Adelaide intercepts a boatload of asylum seekers. Information is communicated from Defence to the government that children have been thrown overboard. Upon receiving the information during a conference, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock holds a press conference: *'I regard these as some of the most disturbing practices I've ever come across in public life.'* Prime Minister says on same day: *"I want to make that very clear, we are a humane nation but we're not a nation that's going to be intimidated by this kind of behaviour."* Over the coming days, dispute arises over the existence of photographs showing children being thrown overboard.
- **10 October 2001 –Peter Reith releases photographs purportedly showing children being thrown overboard**  
Amidst media hype, Defence Minister Peter Reith releases photographs purportedly showing children being thrown overboard, as evidence defending Ruddock and Howard's statements made two days earlier. [Read Virginia Trioli's interview with Peter Reith.](#)  
The same day, Peter Reith's office is advised there are doubts about the accuracy of the photos.
- **17 October 2001 – U.S President George Bush telephones John Howard**, asking for Australia's commitment to war in Afghanistan. Prime Minister commits ships, aircraft, an SAS detachment, and 1,550 military personnel are deployed. The deployment includes two 707 aircraft refuellers, a 150-man SAS squadron, and an Orion aircraft. Twenty-six other countries also contribute forces.
- **18 October 2001 – SIEV X sinks** (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel), drowning 352 asylum seekers. 41 adults and 3 children survive.
- **20-21 October 2001 – John Howard travels to Shanghai to attend APEC summit** and enjoys photo opportunity with US President, George W Bush, while Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, refuses to meet him. John Howard also holds discussions with PNG Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta,

to expand the PNG Manus Island camp to deal with the ever-growing number of asylum seekers.

- **28 October 2001** – Liberal party election campaign launch. John Howard: *“We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.”* This becomes the de facto slogan for the 2001 election campaign.
- **7 November 2001** – Acting Chief of Defence Force Angus Houston telephones Peter Reith, advising him there was nothing to suggest that women and children had been thrown into the water. Peter Reith does not take further action on the advice, and the government goes to the polls defending the claim that children had been thrown overboard.
- **10 November 2001** – John Howard wins an historic third term with a 14-seat majority and a 2.01 per cent two party preferred swing to the government. Labor receives 37.4 per cent of the primary vote, the party’s lowest since 1931. Peter Reith, John Fahey and Michael Wooldridge exit politics. Labor leader Kim Beazley steps down and is replaced by Simon Crean, with Jenny Macklin as deputy. One Nation’s Pauline Hanson fails to win a Senate seat and resigns as One Nation party president, withdrawing from federal politics.

### **Third Howard Term 2001 – 2004**

#### **2002**

- **January 2002** – Hunger strikes and protests at Woomera Detention Centre by detainees leads to increasing criticism and debate about the government’s mandatory detention policy. [Read 4 Corners transcript: “About Woomera”](#).
- **29 January 2002** – President George W Bush makes State of the Union address. In his State of the Union address, President George W Bush discusses the “Axis of Evil” referring to Iraq, Iran and North Korea: *“States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose grave and growing danger.”* [Read Bush’s Address](#)
- **27 February 2002** – Chris Barrie admits there is no evidence that children were thrown overboard. Chief of the Defence Force Admiral Chris Barrie finally admits there is no evidence that children were thrown overboard from a vessel in waters off Christmas Island on 7 October 2001.
- **28 May 2002** – ASIO, Federal Police and foreign affairs officials go to Guantanamo Bay. Australian Government sends ASIO, Federal Police and foreign affairs officials to Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo Bay, to interview two Australian inmates David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, both suspected of al-Qaeda links.
- **12 June 2002** – John Howard addresses a joint session of the US Congress: *“My friends, let me say to you today that America has no better friend anywhere in the world than Australia.”* During the visit, John Howard signals support for a US-Australia Free Trade Agreement: *“A comprehensive free trade agreement, by boosting trade and investment between us, would add a stronger economic dimension to the very deep bilateral ties that are already here.”*
- **August 2002** – Prime Minister raises the possibility of Australia supporting the U.S in a military strike against Saddam Hussein in Iraq.
- **12 October 2002** – Bali bombing. 88 Australians killed out of a total of 202. Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer later described John Howard’s

reaction to *The Age* (14/12/02): *“My sense of him was just the quiet resolve and the incredible responsibility he felt. He was on the phone throughout the day (at home at Kirribilli House) worrying about this, suggesting that, thinking about what else we could do.”* [Read 4 Corners transcript “The Bali Confessions”](#).

- **15 October 2002** – John Howard is confronted with accusations he was to blame for the Bali bombings, due to his government’s hard line on Iraq. John Howard: *“I would say to those people that they are wrong. Terrorists murdered Australians in Bali, nobody else.”*
- **17 October 2002** – Memorial service at Kuta Beach, Bali, where John Howard gives a moving, eloquent speech. [Read Howard’s speech](#).
- **23 October 2002** – Senate Committee Inquiry into “A Certain Maritime Incident” (2001 Children Overboard controversy) concludes with a majority report that then-Defence Minister Peter Reith *“deceived the Australian people during the 2001 election campaign concerning the children overboard claims... The question of the extent of the Prime Minister’s knowledge of the false nature of the report that children were thrown overboard is a key issue in assessing the extent to which the Government as a whole wilfully misled the Australian people on the eve of the federal election.”* [Read the report](#).

## 2003

- **10 January 2003** –Howard announces Australia will send troops to the Middle East for training with US and British forces, ahead of a possible war with Iraq.
- **22 January 2003** –Howard releases details of the troop pre-deployment to the Persian Gulf: transport ship HMAS Kanimbla; two frigates; HMAS Anzac and HMAS Darwin; a 150 member Special Forces task group and a RAAF reconnaissance team - codenamed “Operation Bastille”. An AC Neilsen poll shows 62 per cent of respondents believe Australia should be involved in a conflict with Iraq only if approved by the UN.
- **8-15 February 2003** – Howard travels to Washington for discussions with President George W Bush, Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld regarding Australia’s support for war in Iraq. At this time, John Howard is still pushing for second UN Security Council resolution, and also meets with UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. Bush says of Howard: *“Prime Minister Howard is a close personal friend of mine, a person whose judgement I count on, a person with whom I speak frequently. He sees the threats the free world faces as we go into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I’m proud to work with him on behalf of a peaceful world and freer society. He’s a man grounded in good values and I respect him a lot.”* Bush confirms that Australia is part of the US “coalition of the willing” in any military action against Iraq. Howard continues on to London for a meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and then to Indonesia where he meets with Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri.
- **14-16 February 2003** – John Howard returns home to huge anti-Iraq war marches held around Australia. The marches mark the largest <http://army.gov.au/media/2006/08006.doc> war demonstrations in Australia since the Vietnam war. [“War protests rise as UN deadlines loom, ABC PM](#).
- **18 March 2003** – Bush formally asks Australia to be part of the “coalition of the willing”  
President George W Bush formally asks Australia to be part of the US “coalition of the willing” in military operations against Iraq.
- **19 March 2003** – John Howard announces that Australia has joined the coalition of the willing, led by the U.S, *“which aims to disarm Iraq of its*

*prohibited weapons of mass destruction.*” War in Iraq begins, with 2,000 Australian naval, air and ground fighters sent to war. The commitment includes navy frigates; a Special Forces Task Group; a squadron of F/A-18 aircraft and C-130 Hercules aircraft.

- **20 March 2003** – John Howard addresses the nation on Iraq. [Read Howard’s Address](#)
- **1 April 2003** – US Senate thanks Australia for its support in the ‘war against terror’.
- **1 May 2003** – US President George W Bush declares “Mission Accomplished” US President George W Bush declares “*major combat operations in Iraq have ended*”, speaking from the deck of the aircraft carrier, USS Abraham Lincoln (“Mission Accomplished”). [Read Bush’s announcement.](#)
- **2-4 May 2003** – John Howard visits President George W Bush at his Crawford ranch in Texas. President Bush says of Howard: “*The Prime Minister showed he’s not only a man of steel, he’s showed the world he’s a man of hearts as well*”. [Read transcript of joint press conference.](#)
- **26 May 2003** – Governor-General Peter Hollingworth resigns after months of attacks and scandal regarding sexual abuse in the Anglican Church. John Howard: “*He (Hollingworth) made a very significant error of judgement in relation to the matter that has been under discussion and under debate and he has paid an extremely high price for that error of judgement.*”
- **3 June 2003** – John Howard tells colleagues he will go to the 2004 election As his 64<sup>th</sup> birthday approaches, John Howard tells colleagues in a special meeting of the Liberal party that he intends to stay on as PM and will fight the 2004 election: “*While ever it remains the party’s best interests and my colleagues want me to, I’d be honoured to continue as leader.*” John Howard tells heir-apparent Peter Costello the news over a cup of tea in the PM’s Canberra office. Peter Costello: “*it wasn’t my happiest day, put it that way.*”
- **24 July 2003** – Australia sends military and police to take control of the Solomon Islands Australia sends 2,000 strong military and police contingent to take control of the Solomon Islands, after years of violence and lawlessness. The commitment (RAMSI) is the biggest military mobilisation in the South Pacific since WW2.
- **22-24 October 2003** – George W Bush and Hu Jintao visit Australia In an historic diplomatic double-bill, U.S President George W Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao visit Australia and address parliament on consecutive days.
- **2 December 2003** – Mark Latham is elected new leader of the Labor Opposition. Support for Labor immediately increases.

## 2004

- **9 February 2004** – The Howard government signs a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, removing tariffs for 99 per cent of manufactured goods excluding sugar.
- **9 March 2004** – Newpoll puts Mark Latham in front as preferred leader over John Howard, with Labor attracting 55 per cent of the two-party preferred vote.
- **22 June 2004** – “Not Happy, John” campaign John Valder, ex-President of the federal Liberal party, mounts campaign to oust John Howard from his Bennelong seat – “Not Happy, John” campaign reflects growing criticism by some conservatives about the government’s position with

Iraq and ongoing controversies over treatment of asylum seekers in detention centres, especially incarceration of children.

- **22 July 2004** – Report by former diplomat, Philip Flood, exonerates the Howard government of political interference in intelligence assessments regarding the existence of WMD's, particularly relating to the Iraq war. However, the report does find that Australia went to war on the basis of intelligence that was *"thin, ambiguous and incomplete and there was an intelligence failure on weapons of mass destruction."* [Read the report.](#)
- **29 August 2004** – John Howard announces a federal election for 9 October 2004. Launching his election campaign, John Howard: *"I have no prouder claim as Prime Minister than to say that over the last 8 and a half years, real wages in this country have risen by between 13 and 14 per cent, against a miserable 2.6 per cent in the 13 years of Labor government. The Coalition has been a better friend of the workers of Australian than Labor could ever dream of being."* Main focus is the government's economic record and issue of trust: *"Who do you trust to keep the economy strong and protect family living standards?"*
- **9 September 2004** – First-ever terrorist attack on an Australian diplomatic mission in Jakarta, killing 10 Indonesians and injuring more than 200 people.
- **6 October 2004** – John Howard snooks Mark Latham, announcing a Tasmanian forestry package that gains the support of Tasmanian timber workers. John Howard receives a hero's welcome at a meeting of timber workers in Launceston.
- **8 October 2004** – The infamous 'handshake' between Mark Latham and John Howard outside ABC radio studio.
- **9 October 2004** – John Howard wins an historic fourth term with an increased majority in House of Representatives, and the first working majority for a government in the Senate for 24 years. The Coalition wins 46.72 per cent of the primary vote. Two party preferred vote of 52.68 per cent – swing to the government of 2.07 per cent. Marking the party's worst result in 98 years, Labor wins just 37.63 per cent of the primary vote.

#### **Fourth Howard Term 2004 –2007**

- **26 December 2004** – Boxing Day Tsunami wreaks disaster in Aceh, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Burma and parts of Malaysia. Australia contributes \$1 billion to the rebuilding of Aceh and other development projects in Indonesia. [Read 4 Corners report "After the Tsunami"](#).

#### **2005**

- **1 January 2005** – Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement commences.
- **18 January 2005** – Labor leader Mark Latham announces his resignation, citing ongoing pancreatitis. Kim Beazley takes over as Opposition Labor leader.
- **3 February 2005** – Unlawful immigration detention of Australian citizen, Cornelia Rau, revealed. [Read 4 Corners "Anna's Story"](#).
- **8 February 2005** – Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone announces details of Cornelia Rau Inquiry.
- **16 February 2005** – Kyoto Protocol comes into effect  
Now signed by 140 countries, the Kyoto Protocol on climate change comes into effect. John Howard reaffirms the government's opposition to the pact when pressed during Question Time: *"This government does not believe it is in*

*Australia's interests to sign the Kyoto Protocol. Until such time as the major polluters of the world, including the United States and China, are made part of the Kyoto regime it is next to useless and indeed harmful for a country such as Australia to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol.”*

- **4 April 2005** – **New Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, visits Australia** and declares that the links between Indonesia and Australia have never been closer.

- **25 May 2005** – **Backbenchers attempt to overturn the government’s detention policy**

Move by backbench MPs, Petro Georgiou, Bruce Baird and Judi Moylan, to overturn the government’s detention policy and push a vote on the release of all long-term detainees amidst growing concern by experts regarding the mental health of detainees. John Howard tells the MPs the government owed its political success to the policy, and that he would not be changing it, nor allowing a conscience vote. Judi Moylan after the meeting: *“As a party and a government we have always stood for a fair go and a vigorous democracy based on the rule of law and justice for everyone. We have fought in two world wars ... to preserve democracy and the rule of law. The policy of detaining people without charge does not uphold that principle. We lock up people who are fleeing regimes which we have fought against.”*

- **26 May 2005** – **John Howard introduces ‘WorkChoices’ reforms**

John Howard introduces to parliament *“the most significant changes to industrial relations in 101 years”*, the culmination of his 20 year mission to reform Australia’s industrial relations system, and building on Peter Reith’s 1996 IR changes. The changes includes a new Australian Fair Pay Commission to set the single adult minimum wage; sidelining of the Industrial Relations Commission; legislation to exempt businesses with up to 100 employees from unfair dismissal laws; a reduction in the number of allowable conditions in awards from 20 to 16; and the creation of a national, uniform industrial relations platform by using the constitutional powers of the Corporations Act to impose it. The laws will be known as ‘WorkChoices’.

- **June 2005** – **Union campaign against WorkChoices begins.**

- **17 June 2005** – **Liberal backbenchers force changes to mandatory detention policy**

Liberal backbenchers, Petro Georgiou, Judi Moylan and Bruce Baird force changes to the government’s mandatory detention policy, guaranteeing parents and children will be released from immigration detention and the fast-tracking of temporary protection visas.

- **1 July 2005** – **The Coalition officially takes control of the Senate** with working majority of one, for the first time in 24 years. Key legislation for the Senate to pass include the privatisation of Telstra and the IR reforms.

- **25 July 2005** – **John Howard makes top-secret visit to Baghdad** and meets with Iraqi PM Ibrahim Jaafari and then visits Australian troops at Camp Smitty, in Iraq’s southern Al-Muthanna province.

- **28 July 2005** – **Howard signs Asian Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate**

Along with the US, John Howard signs the Asian Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate at the ASEAN regional forum. John Howard is still refusing to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

- **1 October 2005** – **Twenty people killed in Bali bombings**

Twenty people killed, including four Australians, following a coordinated terrorist attack on tourist restaurants in Bali. [Read eyewitness accounts.](#)



- **14 October 2005** – Vanstone announces Nauru asylum seekers will be relocated to mainland Australia  
Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone announces 25 of the 27 remaining asylum seekers being held at the Offshore Processing Centre on Nauru will be relocated to mainland Australia, with half of them granted refugee status. The decision follows a review by independent experts who warned urgent action was required to prevent further deterioration in the mental health of detainees on the Pacific island. The move means Nauru – the centrepiece of the government’s “Pacific Solution” for processing asylum seekers offshore – will no longer hold large numbers of asylum seekers. John Howard declares offshore detention an “outstanding success”: *"This Government has stopped illegal immigration and our measures have included the Pacific Solution. Without it and without the other measures we'd still have a problem."*
- **2 November 2005** – Kevin Andrews, introduces the WorkChoices legislation  
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, introduces the controversial WorkChoices legislation to the House of Representatives: *"This is economic reform the Australian way – evolutionary and in a manner that advances prosperity and fairness together. As the Prime Minister has said, these are big reforms, but they are fair reforms."*
- **3 November 2005** – The government introduces wide-ranging anti-terrorism measures, the *Anti-terrorism Bill 2005*, to parliament. [Read Anti-terrorism Bill 2005.](#)
- **10 November 2005** – Cole Inquiry  
‘Inquiry into Certain Australian Companies in Relation to the UN Oil-For-Food Programme’ announced (Cole Inquiry). Australian Wheat Board (AWB) accused of paying \$300 million in kickbacks to Saddam Hussein’s government in order to sell Australian wheat to Iraq through the UN Oil-for-Food Programme. [Read the Cole Inquiry.](#)
- **12 November 2005** – Coalition backbencher Danna Vale says John Howard has ignored her plea for him to ask US President George W Bush to either free David Hicks or send him home to be tried. John Howard says Hicks could not be tried under Australian law: *"We do not intend to pass retrospective criminal laws. That would represent a very significant regressive move and it would violate the basis of our criminal justice system."* David Hicks has now been detained at Guantánamo Bay for almost four years.
- **15 November 2005** – Hundreds of thousands of Australians attend public rallies around the nation to protest against the WorkChoices legislation.
- **11 December 2005** – Cronulla riots. Racial tensions explode between Muslim groups and other locals in southern Sydney, with thousands involved in violent clashes at Cronulla beach. [Watch 4 Corners “Riot and Revenge”.](#)
- **12 December 2005** – John Howard holds press conference condemning the Cronulla riots, where journalists grill him over his handling of racial tensions, and his failure to call for calm earlier. John Howard: *"I do not accept that there is underlying racism in this country... It’s important at a time like this that we reaffirm the non-discriminatory character of our immigration policy."*

## 2006

- **January 2006** – Bureau of Meteorology declares 2005 was Australia's hottest year on record, prompting renewed fears about global warming.
- **12 January 2006** – Australia and East Timor sign a treaty to share billions of dollars in revenues from disputed oil and gas fields (The Greater Sunrise Fields),

ending a marathon dispute over the area, which at one point saw Australia denying accusations it was bullying its tiny neighbour. John Howard on the treaty: *“There's great affection in Australia for East Timor, there's great sympathy for the people of East Timor, there is a great desire on the part of the people of Australia that the people of East Timor have a strong secure future.”*

- **16 January 2006** – **The Cole Inquiry into AWB** commences first public hearings.
- **2 March 2006** – **Tenth anniversary of John Howard's prime ministership.** Growing speculation about succession planning, and a possible handover to Peter Costello.
- **27 March 2006** – **Controversial WorkChoices laws come into effect** across Australia.
- **10 April 2006** – **John Howard pays tribute to Peter Costello**, describing him as the “principal architect” of the Government's economic policies.
- **21 April 2006** – **Australia experiences the first Australian defence personnel casualty** of its involvement in the Iraq campaign. Media reports Private Jacob Kovco died after accidentally discharging his gun, but this reason was later changed to skylarking with his pistol.
- **9 July 2006** – **Howard/Costello leadership speculation reaches crescendo.** News Ltd reports that in 1994, John Howard made a secret deal with Peter Costello in the presence of former Defence Minister Ian McLachlan, to hand over the leadership after serving two terms as PM. John Howard denies that this constituted a deal, saying: *“Mr Costello and I on a number of occasions, over the years, have denied the existence of a deal. The leadership of the Liberal Party is determined by the more than 100 men and women who make up the parliamentary Liberal Party. The leadership of the Liberal Party is not determined by John Howard or Peter Costello or indeed any other individual.”* Peter Costello responds: *“I did not seek that undertaking, he volunteered it and I took him at his word. Obviously that did not happen.”*
- **11 July 2006** – **Leadership showdown ensues** at a Cabinet meeting in Sydney. John Howard takes the back entrance, avoiding the media, while Peter Costello walks in the front door, telling journalists waiting outside: *“My parents always told me if you have done nothing wrong you have got nothing to fear by telling the truth. I told the truth.”* Post Cabinet meeting, Peter Costello and John Howard meet privately for 30 minutes, where Costello asks Howard to stand down now, to which the PM refuses. After the private meeting, John Howard fronts the media: *“I have indicated to him, as I have always indicated, that in the end it's the will of the party and the interests of the party that is paramount.”*
- **30 October 2006** – **The Stern Report is released** The world's biggest economic evaluation of climate change, The Stern Report, is released, translating the effects of climate change into economic terms: \$9 trillion.
- **31 October 2006** – **John Howard downplays the findings of the Stern Report**, telling Coalition MPs not to be “mesmerised” by just one report.
- **27 November 2006** – **Cole Inquiry clears government ministers** of any knowledge regarding AWB kickbacks to the former Iraqi regime. It also found no evidence of illegality by government officers, or that the Foreign Affairs Department knew AWB paid kickbacks through transport fees. John Howard: *“The Commissioner has found in the most emphatic of terms imaginable that there's no evidence of wrongdoing. We didn't have anything to hide and the Commissioner has found that there was no wrongdoing on the part of any of my ministers.”* [Read the findings.](#)

- **4 December 2006** – Kevin Rudd elected Leader of the Opposition, with 49 votes to Kim Beazley's 39. Julia Gillard elected unopposed as Deputy Leader of the Labor Party. Kevin Rudd: *"I will offer a new style of leadership, an alternative, not just an echo"* of the Howard government.
- **9 December 2006** – Rallies held across the nation in support of terrorism suspect David Hicks, who has now spent five years detained in Guantánamo Bay without being tried. Pressure is mounting on the Federal Government to bring David Hicks home or bring him to trial.

## 2007

- **23 January 2007** – John Howard announces ministerial reshuffle. Malcolm Turnbull becomes Environment and Water Resources Minister in Cabinet, while Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone is dumped. Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews steps into Immigration portfolio and Joe Hockey takes over Industrial Relations.
- **25 January 2007** – John Howard unveils \$10billion water plan to take control of Australia's water resources, declaring water management as the country's biggest challenge. The centrepiece of the 'ten point plan' is to take control of the Murray-Darling river system from the states.
- **26 February 2007** – Labor unleashes its star power. Former ABC journalist and presenter Maxine McKew announces she will contest again John Howard in his seat of Bennelong, which has been held by the PM since 1974.
- **2 March 2007** – John Howard celebrates 11 years in power, and is now the second-longest serving PM after Sir Robert Menzies.
- **7 March 2007** – Five Australians killed on Garuda Indonesia Flight 200 when it overshoots the runway at Adisucipto International Airport, near Yogyakarta. The disaster is later attributed to pilot error.
- **21 March 2007** – John Howard defends his commitment to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, during a speech to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. PM: *"I am prepared to accept constructive criticism of the Government's position on Iraq. But our opponents also have to take responsibility for their position. In Mr Rudd's case, it's been unclear at times whether he is auditioning for the editorial board of the Weekly Standard or to be Australia's answer to Michael Moore."*
- **26 March 2007** – Australian Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks pleads guilty to a charge of providing material support for terrorism before a U.S military commission in Cuba.
- **31 March 2007** – David Hicks sentenced to nine months in Adelaide's Yatala jail, to be released after the 2007 federal election. As part of a plea bargain, David Hicks is gagged from speaking to the media for 12 months, and withdraws allegations of abuse by U.S military forces at Guantanamo Bay.
- **10 April 2007** – John Howard announces troop boost of 300 personnel to Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Opposition leader Kevin Rudd is promising to pull troops out of Iraq by mid-2008 if elected. [Read \*The Australian\* "Howard doubles troop numbers to Afghanistan"](#).
- **19 April 2007** – John Howard releases a report stating that unless significant rain falls in the Murray-Darling basin with the next six to eight weeks, Australia will face a major agricultural crisis with no irrigation allocations available to farmers.
- **20 May 2007** – David Hicks returns to Australia.

- **1 June 2007 – Government climate taskforce releases its report**  
Following a six-month inquiry, John Howard’s hand-picked government climate taskforce (led by Prime Minister and Cabinet departmental head, Peter Shergold) releases its report, recommending Australia implement an emissions trading scheme by 2012. Despite this, John Howard declines to set a target for greenhouse gas reduction until after the 2007 election. Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd pledges to start emissions trading by 2010 and sets a long-term emissions reduction target of 60 per cent on 2000 levels by 2050.
- **21 June 2007 – John Howard declares child abuse and domestic violence in Indigenous communities a “national emergency”**, following the release of the damning *Little Children are Sacred* report John Howard announces a Northern Territory Intervention package consisting of a raft of controversial measures to deal with the crisis, including bans on pornography and alcohol, and compulsory health checks (to check for signs of sexual abuse) for all Indigenous children under 16 years of age. [Read the report](#)
- **2 July 2007 – Doctor Mohamed Haneef is arrested at Brisbane airport** on suspicion of being involved in the Glasgow International Airport attack. The 27-year-old Indian physician is the first person to be arrested and detained under the 2005 Australian Anti-Terrorism Act. Haneef’s detention of 12 days became the longest without charge in recent Australian history, and causes a huge public outcry both here and in India.
- **27 July 2007 – DPP drops all charges against Dr Haneef**, with the prosecutor citing “no reasonable prospect of a conviction of Haneef being secured.” Two days later, Haneef returns to India. [Watch 4 Corners: “The Trials of Dr Haneef”](#)
- **7 August 2007 – John Howard’s Indigenous communities intervention package, Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007**, is rushed through the House of Representatives. The Government has agreed to hold a one-day Senate inquiry into the bills, but Opposition parties, Indigenous groups and welfare organisations claim there was little time for proper examination (approximately one week for 500 pieces of legislation), and even less community consultation. Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough says the legislation gives the government the authority to do what is necessary to secure the future of Aboriginal communities. Defending the swift passage of the legislation, John Howard: *"The principles of the legislation and what it enacts has been out there in the public domain for quite a long time and people know what's happening; it is something of an emergency."*
- **21 August 2007 – The Federal Court overturns the government’s decision** to cancel the visa of former terrorism suspect Dr Mohamed Haneef on character grounds.
- **2 – 9 September 2007 – APEC annual leaders meeting held in Sydney**, bringing the city to a standstill. NSW Police criticised for heavy-handed approach to protestors. [View ABC APEC 2007](#)
- **5 September 2007 – John Howard and U.S President George W Bush hold a joint press conference**, with both leaders reiterating their commitment to the Iraq occupation.
- **12 September 2007 – John Howard survives partyroom meeting without a leadership challenge**, after Alexander Downer (at the request of the PM) canvasses the possibility of a change in leadership amongst senior colleagues.
- **13 September 2007 – Howard announces he will retire next term**  
John Howard announces that if re-elected, he will retire next term and most likely hand over the leadership to Peter Costello within 18 months to two years.

- 11 October 2007 – John Howard delivers speech to the Sydney Institute**  
 John Howard delivers "The Right Time: Constitutional Recognition for Indigenous Australians" speech to the Sydney Institute. Overturning more than a decade of opposition to symbolic reconciliation: *"I sense in the community a rare and unexpected convergence of opinion on this issue between the more conservative approach, which I clearly identify with, and those who traditionally have favoured more of a group rights approach. It is a moment in time which should be seized, lest it be lost. Now, for the first time in a long time, we can see the outline of a new settlement for indigenous policy in Australia. It stands at a point of intersection between rights and responsibilities; between the symbolic and the practical."* John Howard also admits reconciliation had been an area *"I have struggled with during the entire time that I have been Prime Minister"*, and acknowledged his failure to fulfil his 1998 election night promise: *"I believe we must find room in our national life to formally recognise the special status of Aboriginal (people) and Torres Strait Islanders as the first peoples of our nation...If re-elected, I will put to the Australian people within 18 months a referendum to formally recognise indigenous Australians in our Constitution - their history as the first inhabitants of our country, their unique heritage of culture and languages, and their special (though not separate) place within a reconciled, indivisible nation. My goal is to see a new statement of reconciliation incorporated into the preamble of the Australian Constitution."*
- 14 October 2007 – "Australia's Choice"**. John Howard calls a federal election for 24 November 2007, up against the 'New Leadership' of ALP leader Kevin Rudd. Grim polls forecast clear defeat for the Coalition.
- 21 November 2007 – Howard's campaign frustrated by Lindsay pamphlet scandal**  
 Just three days out from voting day, John Howard's election campaign frustrated by scandal. Members of the Liberal Party are caught letterboxing the electorate of Lindsay (held by PM-favourite Jackie Kelly) with pamphlets from a bogus Islamic organisation praising Labor for its support of the Bali bombers. It is later revealed that Jackie Kelly's husband, Gary Clark, aided by husband of Liberal candidate Karen Chijoff, Greg Chijoff, was distributing the pamphlets. Ignoring a party directive not to speak to the media about the incident, Jackie Kelly tells ABC radio: *"When I first read it (pamphlet) I had to laugh...pretty much everyone who has read it chuckles, in terms of the parody it does make of various things that have happened during the campaign. My view is that it's a bit of Chaser-style prank."* [Read The World Today; "Liberal's embroiled in Lindsay letterbox scam"](#).
- 24 November 2007 – Prime Minister, John Howard is defeated by Kevin Rudd**  
 After 11 years in power, four election victories, and now the title of second-longest serving Prime Minister, John Howard is defeated by Kevin Rudd, with a swing against the Coalition of 5.7 per cent. The Liberal Party loses 20 seats, the National Party loses three seats, while Labor gains 23. [Read ABC News; "Defeated Howard Thanks Australia."](#)
- 25 November 2007 – Costello announces he will not run for Leader**  
 John Howard's obvious successor, Peter Costello, announces he will not run for Leader or Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party.
- 1 December 2007 – Maxine McKew officially declares Bennelong a Labor seat,** ending John Howard's 33-year grip. It is the first time Labor has held the seat since its creation in 1949. [Read ABC News; "Mckew declares victory in Bennelong"](#).

**END**