

# Rivers Storytelling

#1 Why stories matter



# What we'll cover this session

1. Why stories matter
2. How emotions drive behaviour
3. What the public actually remembers
4. Framing
5. Preview of story structure

# 1. Why stories matter

# What are stories?

Stories are...

...the explanations we tell ourselves and others about  
WHAT happened, HOW it happened, WHY it happened and  
what it means.

# What are stories?

Our understanding of the world is shaped through stories

Both **personal stories** and **public narratives**

These narratives don't just track social change, they create change

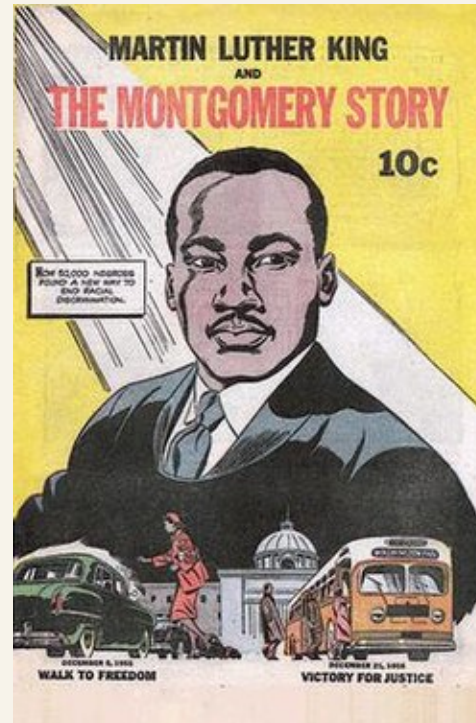


# Why stories matter

Think back on great victories in social change. What do you remember?

Most likely a symbolic moment or story.

E.g. Montgomery bus boycott.



# Why stories matter

“The soil is more important than the seeds”

Ricardo Levins Morales

<https://vimeo.com/250194626>

# Public narratives

Public narratives are the collective (or shared) stories we tell about ourselves as a society, country or community.

They help us interpret what is true, and they also express our worldview.

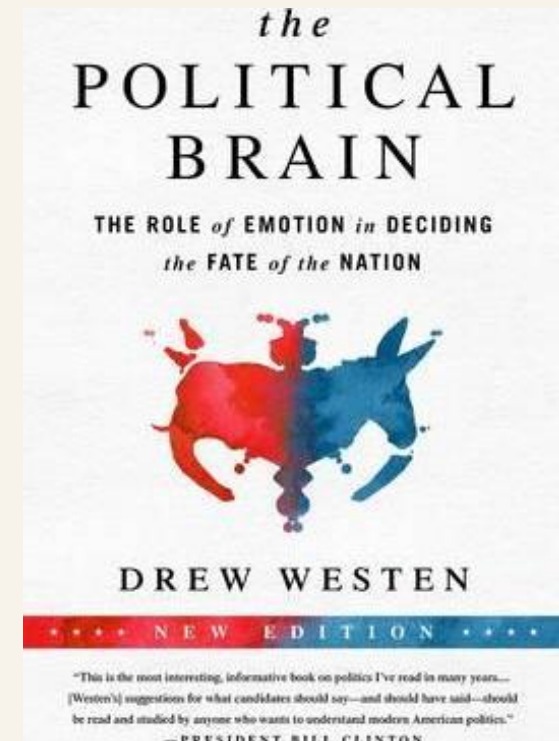
Importantly, they combine facts and **emotional appeals**.



## 2. How emotions drive behaviour

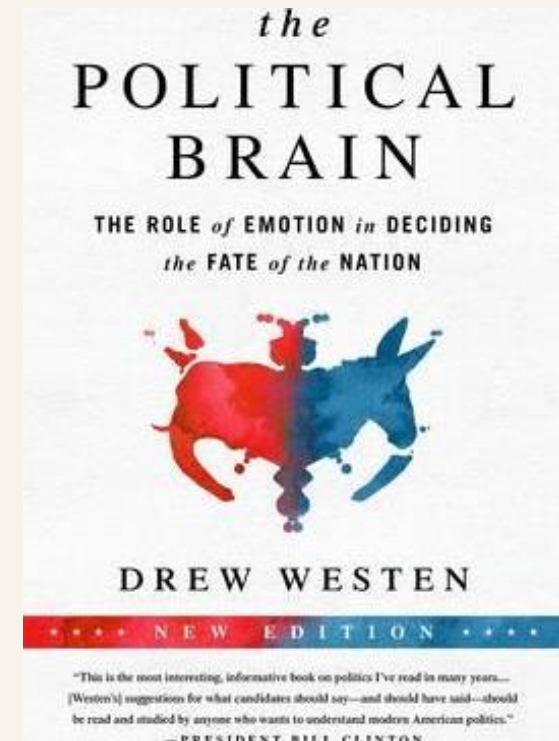
# How would you answer this question?

You're a presidential candidate in the US with a long-standing public position opposing the death penalty. During a live TV debate the moderator asks...



# How would you answer this question?

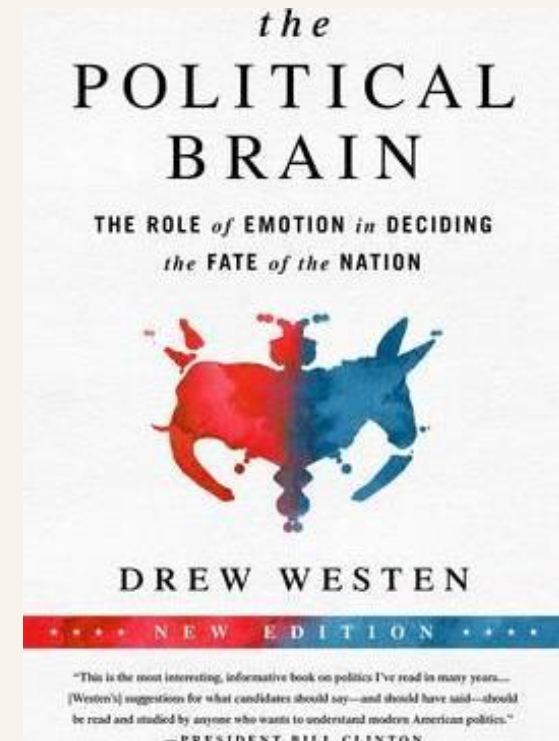
MODERATOR: Governor, if your daughter were murdered, would you favour an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?



# What is missing from this answer?

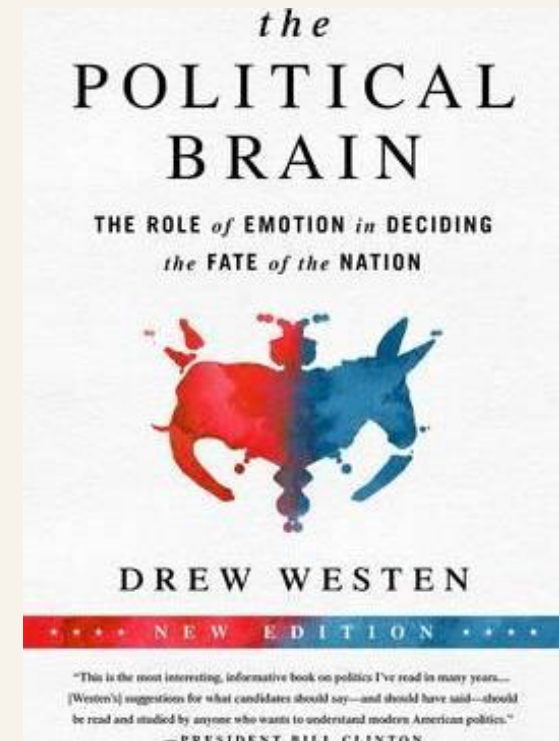
## WHAT THE CANDIDATE SAID:

No, I don't. And I think you know that I've opposed the death penalty all of my life. I don't see any evidence that it's a deterrent, and I think there are better and more effective ways to deal with violent crime.



# What he should have said

- **Emotional response** e.g. “I love my daughter and the thought of something like that happening to her just makes me feel sick and angry”
- **Rational statement** E.g. “However, I also know that the death penalty doesn’t work...”

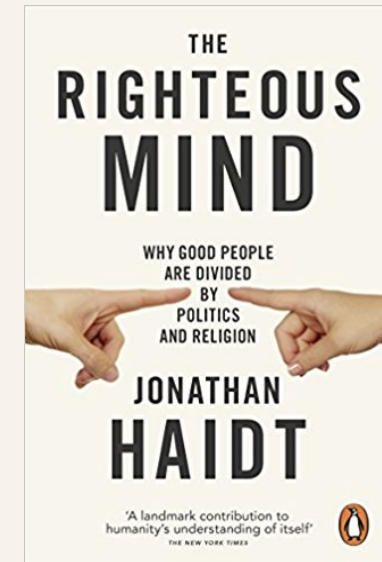




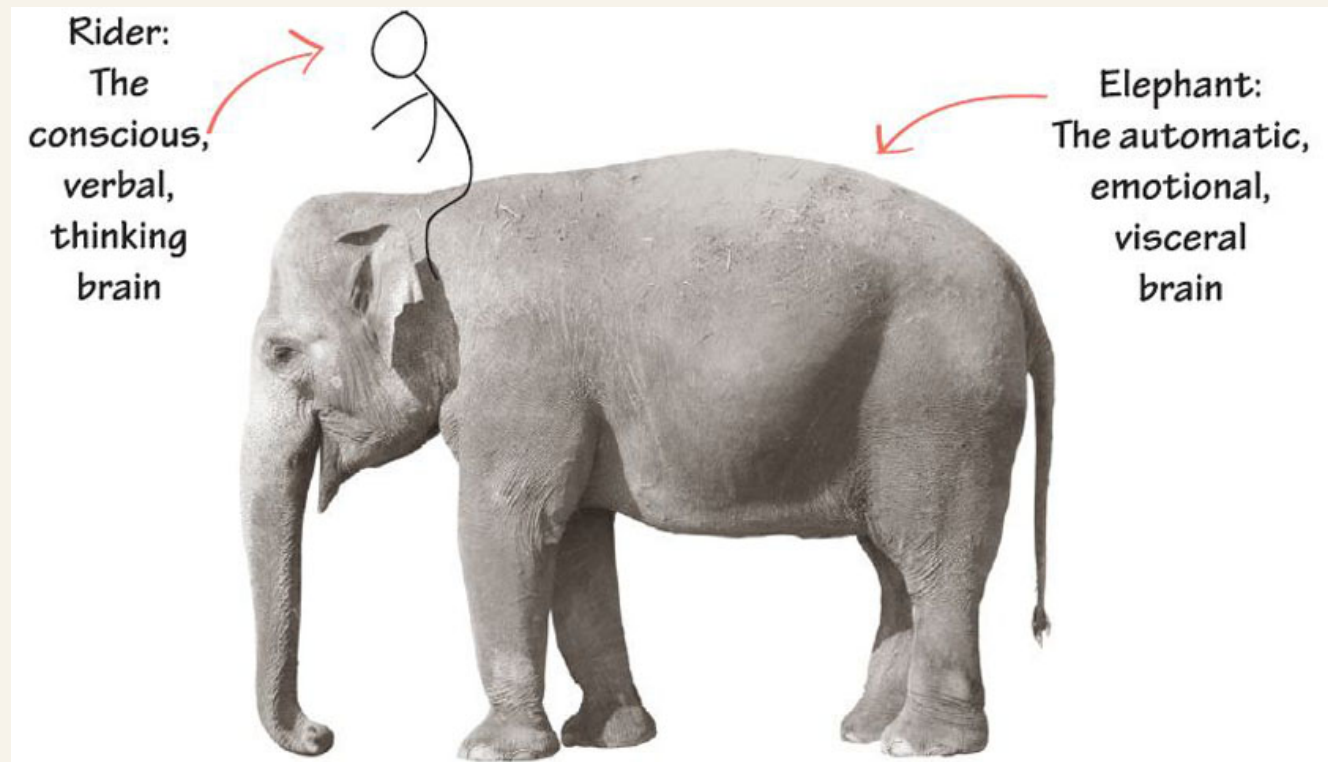
# Emotions & Reason

- Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt:
- **Emotional intuition first, strategic reasoning second.**
- “The reasoning process is more like a lawyer defending a client than a judge or scientist seeking truth.”

Source: Haidt, 2001. ‘The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment.’ Psychol Rev. 2001 Oct;108(4):814-34.

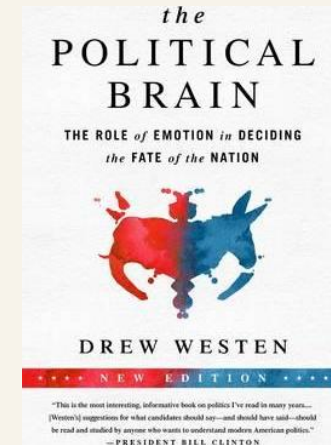


# Emotions & Reason



# Why focus on emotion?

- We over-emphasise rationality.
- Emotion & motivation same Latin route, *movere*, to move.
- Haidt: “If you want to change people’s minds, you’ve got to talk to their elephants.”



# Activity: emotional stories

In breakout rooms, explain:

- Have you seen an emotional story about rivers or nature on the news?

### 3. What the public actually remembers



# People only retain 'the gist'

- Republican pollster Frank Luntz:

*There's a simple rule: You say it again, and you say it again, and you say it again, and you say it again, and you say it again, and then again and again and again and again, and about the time that you're absolutely sick of saying it is about the time that your target audience has heard it for the first time.*

# What people remember

- Emotional moments
- Powerful images
- Stories with moral lessons
- Short repeated phrases
- People doing things

# What people struggle to remember

- Specific facts
- Complex, abstract wording and arguments
- Long lists

When we can't remember, we fall back on dominant public narratives and 'frames'

## 4. Frames

# Frames

- Thought is physical – neural connections in the brain
- Frames are connections of words. E.g. If say “doctor”, you think “nurse”, “hospital”, “patient”. You are in the “health” frame.
- Frames are the lens through which we see issues.

Source: Lakoff, Metaphors We Live By

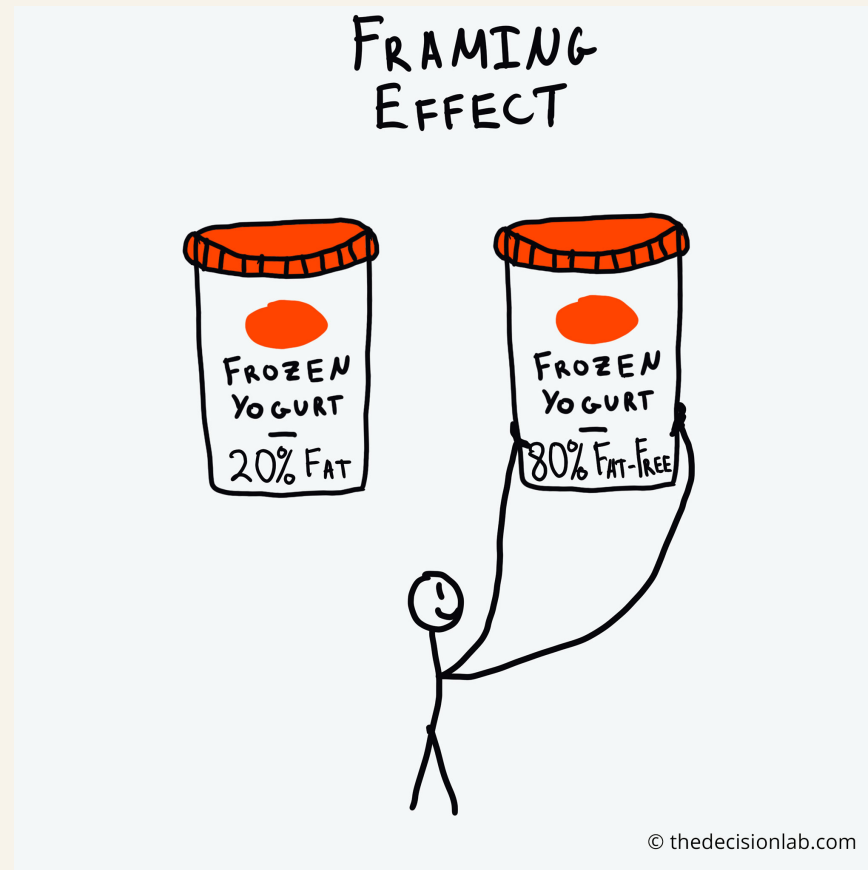


Frames - experiment

# DOG



# Framing example



# Framing example



# Framing example



Pollution

Climate

Environment

# Framing example

Electricity system

Energy Prices

Blackouts

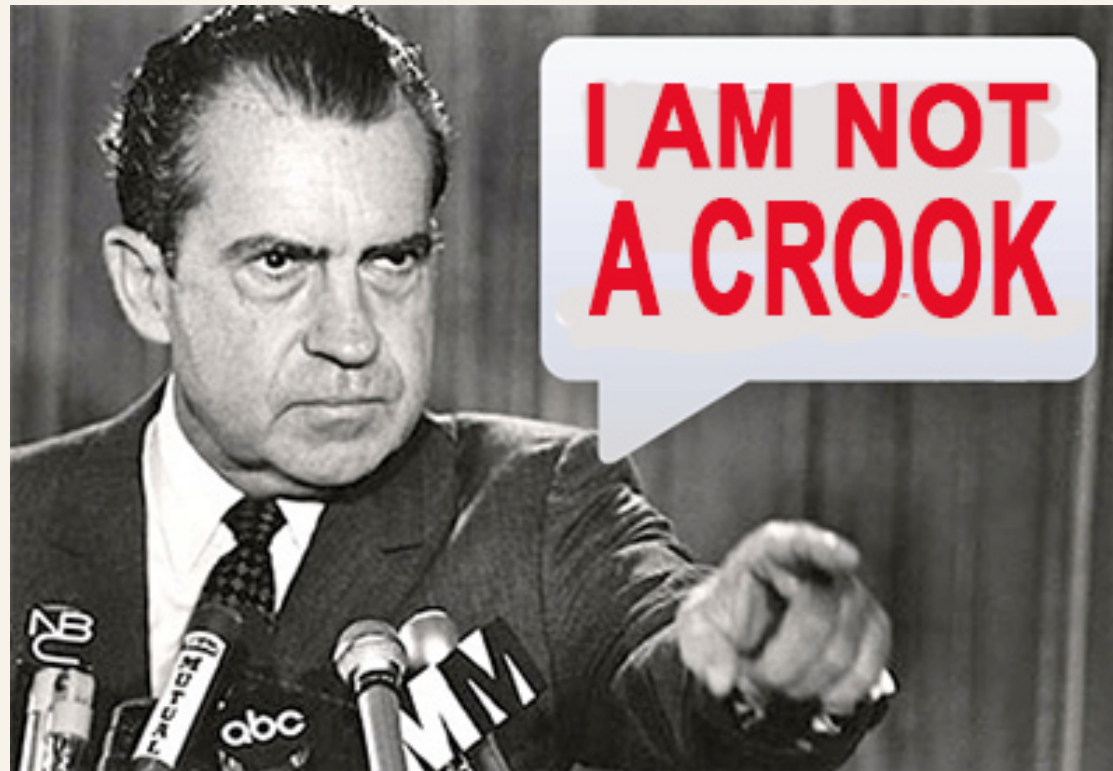


# 'Clean Energy Act' becomes 'carbon tax'

***“It wasn’t a carbon tax, as you know. It was many other things in nomenclature terms but we made it a carbon tax. We made it a fight about the hip pocket and not about the environment ...it took Abbott about six months to cut through and when he cut through, Gillard was gone.”***



# Never negate your opponent's frame





# What do you remember?

- Acting on climate change will **not** cost jobs
- The environment is **not** less important than the economy
- The Basin Plan will **not** destroy regional communities

Instead, make a statement with your frame:

The Basin Plan can guarantee the survival of rivers and regional communities.



# Rivers – which frame?



# Summary

# Activity: what I'll take away

In breakout rooms, explain:

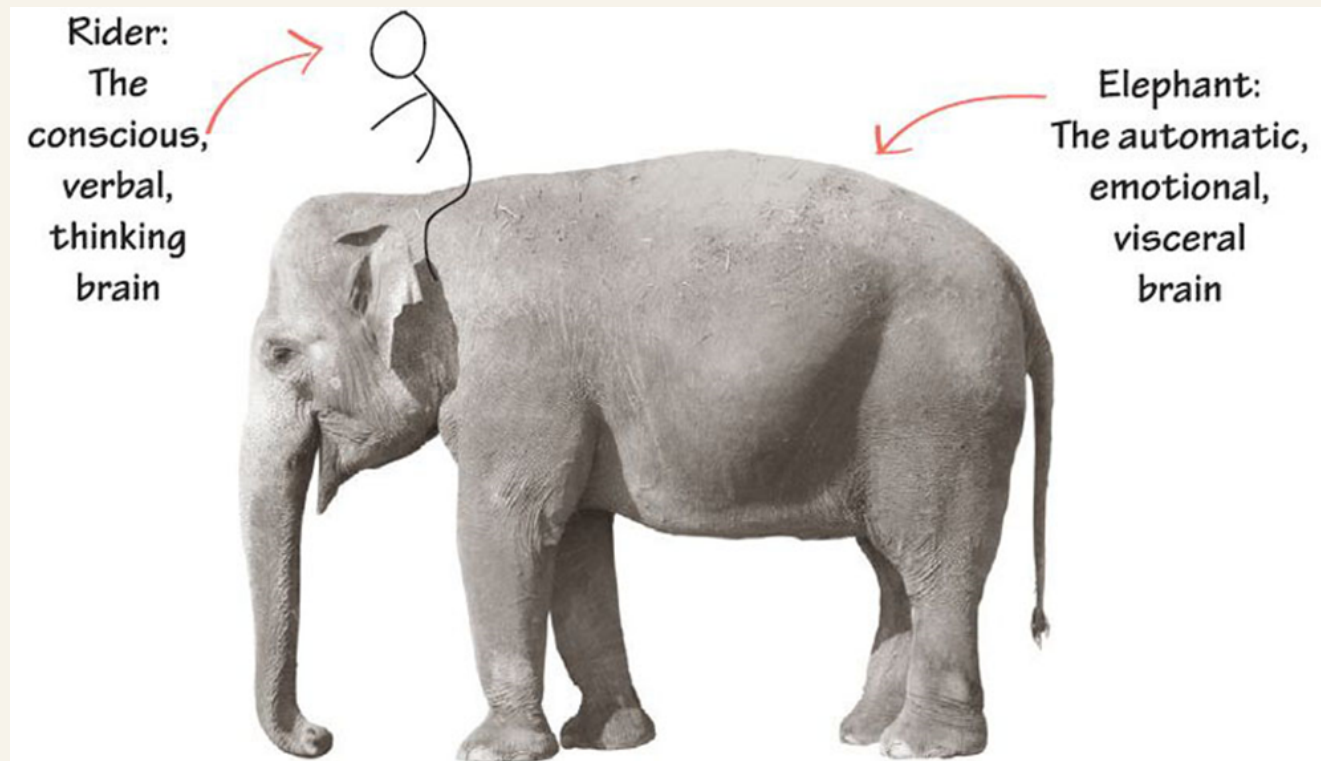
- One thing you've learned
- One question you have

# Summary

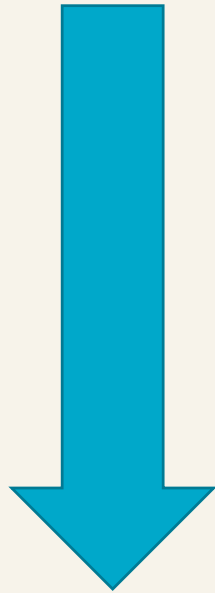
- Stories shape political change
- Emotions drive behaviour, which is then rationalised
- The public only remembers the gist
- Consider whose 'frame' you're using

Preview: story structure

# Emotion & reason



# Super simple story structure for political change



- Emotion to care
- Rational problem
- Moral choice?
- Rational solution
- Emotion to act

Next steps



# Upcoming sessions

- **25 Nov:** Personal Stories and Opinion Pieces
- **16 Dec:** Getting Local Media
- **27 Jan:** Social Media
- **24 Feb:** Pulling it all Together (Big Picture Story)
- **31 Mar:** Story Circle (Listening to Build Community)

# Homework

Pick a nature/rivers issue you care about and answer these questions:

What's the rational problem and rational solution?

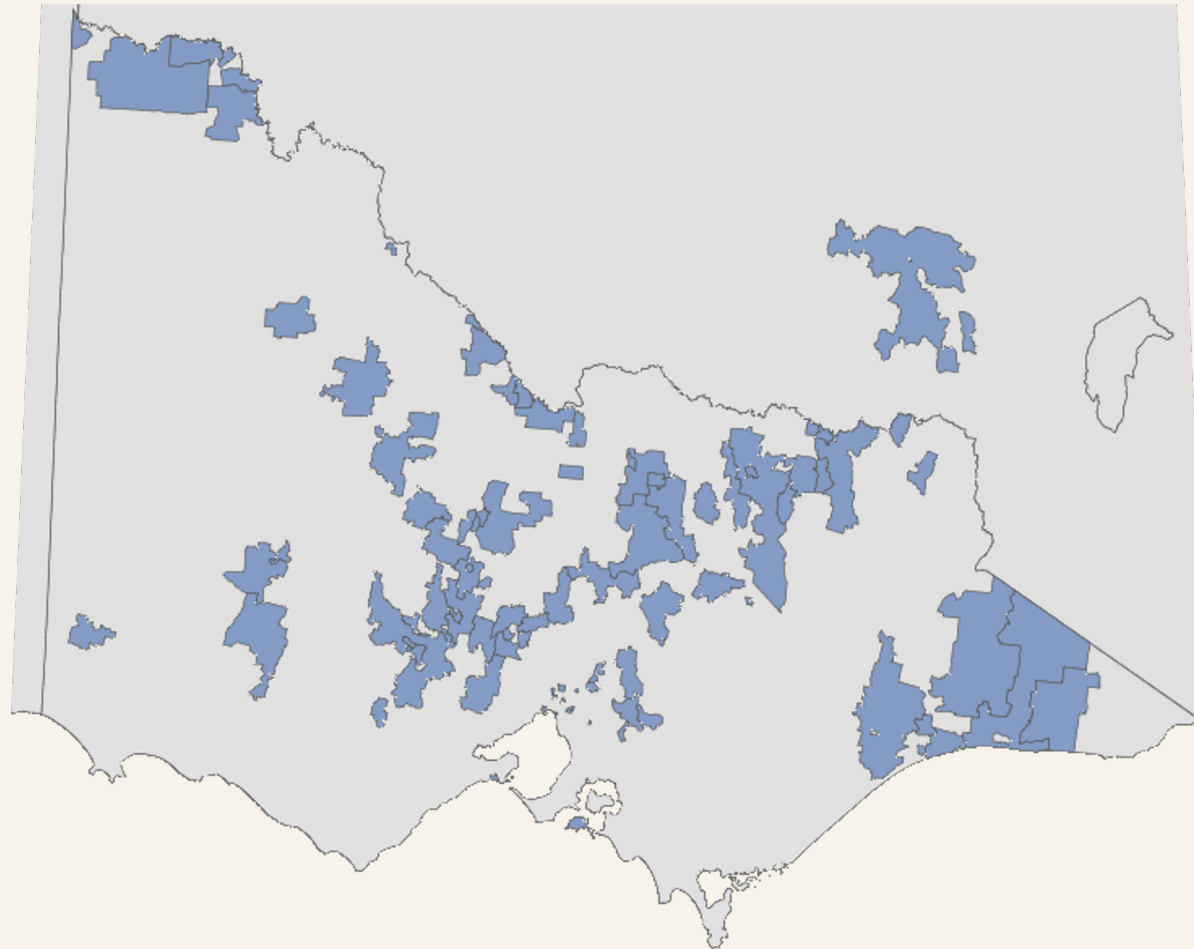
What do you feel about it and why?

Can you name the emotion?

What's your personal story relating to this?

Start drafting an opinion piece or personal story to share.

# Feedback and keeping in touch



Thanks for coming!