

Explainer: who are the independents and minor parties in the lower house?

Written by Tracee McPate, Manager, Strategic Programs and Outreach, School of Government and International Relations, Griffith University

Five crossbench members of the House of Representatives will take their seats in the 45th parliament when it convenes in coming weeks.

Joining veteran Queensland politician Bob Katter are third-term independent member of parliament (MP) Andrew Wilkie, the Greens' Adam Bandt, and the returning independent MP for Indi, Cathy McGowan. This seasoned group will be joined by a first-time MP for the Nick Xenophon Team, Rebekha Sharkie.

After a slim victory, how the Coalition works with the crossbench MPs will prove important to the success and stability of the Turnbull government.

Bob Katter (Katter's Australian Party) – member for Kennedy

Katter has a long and colourful history in politics. A former National Party member for the state seat of Flinders, he served as a minister in Queensland's Bjelke-Petersen government from 1983 to 1989.

Katter entered federal parliament in 1993 as a National Party MP. He resigned in 2001 to become an independent, citing an [irreconcilable ideological difference](#) on the Coalition's economic direction.

Now he is set to commence his 23rd year and ninth term in federal parliament as head of Katter's Australian Party (KAP). He formed KAP in 2011 as a response to a weakness he saw among independent MPs: the inability to affect change for their constituencies.

Katter is known for his erratic and often eccentric style. He favours an interventionist and protectionist approach in support of agriculture and rural industry. He believes in statehood for Northern Queensland and is a fierce supporter of the union movement.

In lending his qualified support [to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull](#) should the Coalition require

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his vote, Katter indicated he would be mindful of issues such as support for live cattle exports and going ahead with the Hell's Gate dam to help boost jobs in the state's north.

A challenge for Katter in this new parliament may well be reconciling his support for greater protectionism and the union movement with the Liberal Party's focused economic liberalism.

Andrew Wilkie – member for Denison

Wilkie has [given Malcolm Turnbull his assurance](#) that he will back the government on supply and confidence. But he [wants to maintain his independence](#)) as a representative of his electorate.

Wilkie has won the former safe Labor seat of Denison in Tasmania with an increased margin at each election since 2010.

A former Army officer and manager with contractor Raytheon Australia, Wilkie joined the public service as a senior strategic analyst in the Office of National Assessments in 2001.

In 2003 he [famously resigned](#) in opposition to the Howard government's participation in the Iraq War. [He argued](#) the intelligence leading to Australia's involvement was predicated on a lie.

Wilkie has been a member of the Liberals and Greens, running for the latter in 2004 and 2007. Neither was a good fit.

Running as an independent in 2010, he stood on an anti-gambling platform and railed against the parlous state of mental health services – issues he still champions. He also threw his support behind Labor to help secure Julia Gillard minority government.

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In recent years, Wilkie has been highly critical of the live export trade, Australia's failure to legalise same-sex marriage, and the treatment of asylum seekers.

The challenge for the government will be working with Wilkie on a case-by-case basis, particularly on these issues and others concerning his electorate.

Adam Bandt (Greens) – member for Melbourne

Bandt was first elected to parliament in 2010, winning the previously safe Labor seat of Melbourne.

A lawyer by profession, Bandt has had a strong interest in human rights and social justice issues in both his legal and political careers. His PhD examined governments' suspension of human rights.

In the 45th parliament, the Greens indicated they would focus on Medicare, subsidised dental care, the formation of a national body to protect the environment, and the end of offshore detention of asylum seekers.

It is also likely that Bandt will revisit issues he raised in the past for which he might find crossbench support. These include reforming politicians' entitlements and political donations, and the need for a national anti-corruption body.

A Coalition government will continue to find working with Bandt and the Greens a challenge. Ideologically they are poles apart on issues from school funding and the environment to unions.

Bandt has stated that while the Greens [would not be averse](#) to entering a coalition arrangement with Labor, they would [not support a Liberal-National Coalition](#) government.

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In the House of Representatives, Bandt could add weight to the sizeable Labor opposition.

Cathy McGowan – member for Indi

McGowan was re-elected for a second term in 2016. She [increased her margin](#) in the former long-term Liberal-held safe seat against Sophie Mirabella.

McGowan is a former Liberal Party member and electorate staff member for Ewen Cameron, a previous Indi MP. She has worked as a teacher in rural Victoria, a public servant, a consultant on issues affecting rural communities, an academic, researcher and company director.

McGowan's strong local presence and deep understanding of local issues have seen her speak out on economic disadvantage, rural employment, improving infrastructure, telecommunications, renewable energy and transport.

While her [voting record indicates](#) she has strongly supported the Coalition government's policy agenda, her focus has been very much on the needs of Indi.

Since the election, [McGowan has said](#) she would work productively with the Coalition and would [back the government on supply and confidence](#). She has also highlighted her positive working relationship with Turnbull.

The government will face fewer challenges working with McGowan than some of the other independents and minors, but she will clearly put her electorate's needs first, and is likely to favour the National Party's regional agenda.

Rebekha Sharkie (Nick Xenophon Team) – member for Mayo

Sharkie is the political novice on the crossbench. The newly elected member for the South Australian seat of Mayo is also the first House of Representatives member of the newly formed Nick Xenophon Team (NXT). She is not, however, completely new to politics.

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While coming from an administrative, conveyancing and small-business background, Sharkie has tertiary qualifications in politics and experience working for MPs. She worked with state Liberal MP and party leader Isobel Redmond and, for a brief time before resigning, with the man she unseated, Jamie Briggs.

During the election campaign, Sharkie drew attention to issues in her electorate, including youth employment, transport and access to medical services. She wants to [focus on a range of issues](#).

Her party leader Nick Xenophon has had discussions with Turnbull about issues of concern to NXT in the forthcoming parliament, including free-trade agreements (FTAs) and the future of the Arrium steelworks. The party believes FTAs are not in Australia's national interest and wants to see them reviewed at the very least.

Sharkie tripped up on the issue of FTAs on the campaign trail and it's unclear whether her inexperience and potentially loose party discipline will see NXT fracture like the Palmer United Party. Xenophon is, however, a more experienced leader and is more likely to hold the team together

The authors do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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