

Submission to the Electoral Act Review (2018)

I write as a private citizen with a strong interest in this matter. I have deep concerns about the current state of public discourse and politics in Tasmania, which I attribute mainly to a dysfunctional system of political finance. This submission relates to Terms of Reference 2 and 3 of the review.

I believe political donations should be closely monitored, restricted or banned entirely as they are inherently, by their nature, corrosive to the democratic process.

This is because:

- The finances of a campaign are a major factor in determining its reach and power. A well-financed campaign has a significant electoral advantage over a poorly financed one, and this advantage is not proportionate to the quality of ideas or the likelihood of voters to agree with those ideas. This is a concept well established in the political science literature.
- Donations allow wealthy individuals to have a disproportionate impact on the success or failure of political ideas, movements and parties by enhancing or limiting their capacity to advertise. This directly contradicts the “one vote, one value” principle of Western democracy.
- The need to raise finance causes political parties to spend excessive amounts of energy on commercial-like fundraising activities, which increases cynicism about politics in the community.
- This inevitably leads to a party’s electoral success becoming dependent on the support of specific wealthy benefactors in the community or in business, resulting in a systemic conflict of interest for policymakers.
- This close relationship between policymakers and private benefactors has such a potent effect on election outcomes that there is a structural disincentive for Governments of the day or established parties to address the issue.

I recommend:

1. A complete ban on donations, membership fees and in-kind support for political parties from all business, NGOs and individuals.
2. The establishment of a 100% public-funding system for political parties based on their public support at elections and administrative funding based on their registered membership.
3. Additional measures to phase-out mass political advertising as a feature of election campaigns and a return to educational programmes, grassroots campaigning, public forums and direct voter contact.

Any government, political parties or individual MPs who take decisive action to eliminate the influence of money in politics should be recognised and celebrated by the community for acting in the public interest.

Action requires MPs to overcome the structural influences exerted on them by a sick system.

Yours sincerely,

- Robert O’Keefe

Private citizen

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