

**Submission
No 94**

INQUIRY INTO ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL PARTY FUNDING

Organisation:

Name: Ms Giselle Mawer

Telephone:

Date received: 15/02/2008

Dear Committee Chair and members

Thank you for holding this inquiry into this very important topic that goes to the heart of good democratic government, a government elected by the people for the people.

The amount of money spent on elections seems to increase exponentially with each electoral cycle, e.g. NSW Labor's \$16.7 million on the last state election. Local government elections by comparison, tend to be simple low key affairs, with a pamphlet, an article in the local paper, and may be a local meeting and candidates seem to be able to get their message out and be elected. Why is there such a marked difference??

Despite all the measures that might be put in place to ensure transparency etc, it is inevitable that perceptions of corruption and undue influence will be the strings attached to political donations. The actual benefits to businesses and political donors are quite visible to those who've had anything to do with community issues e.g. planning and infrastructure, gambling, whether they are free access to the minister, favourable laws, decisions or appointments. It defies belief to argue that a political donation is made without any expectation of a return in terms of access, information or favour.

We, as in the community and even the politicians, are all losers when decisions are not made based on merit or on the full impartial consideration of the facts. Is it any wonder basic services such as transport and health are in such a poor state? When and how do normal citizens, let alone the most needy people in our society get access to politicians ears to present their case, when access is determined by one's cheque book?

How is it that an MP receiving a gift has to declare it, but a Party can get considerable funds through unnamed or untraceable sources?

It is high time this system was changed. In relation to election advertising, there is absolutely no need for us to be bombarded through every possible medium before elections with emotive spin doctoring, when all we need is the policies of the parties/people standing for office and some information about their track record.

Modest public funding of electoral advertising based on equitable, transparent criteria is all that is needed, perhaps with some dedicated free access to media for parties to get their message out, e.g. short articles in the paper or spots on TV. As outlined in your discussion paper, there are some good models around for us to adopt. Anything more is not only superfluous, it corrupts the political process and leads to bad governance.

It is time that this monster was reigned in. Apart from limiting electoral funding, I think that donations to political parties should also be banned or at least strictly limited to membership fees and publicly disclosed and traceable capped donations.

None of this of course will work without effective monitoring and compliance. Why not require that Parties publish details of monthly electoral income and expenditure

on a website like they currently do for elections to the NSW Electoral Funding Authority?

I've heard it argued that this won't work unless there was a national approach. May be so, but that is no reason not to act at a State level. Can we not lead by example and ban interstate transfers? After all our next State election is 3 years away, long enough to get national consensus in this new world of Labor cooperative federalism.

Is it not time to get some integrity and common sense back into the way we are governed?

Thanks for considering my submission,

Giselle Mawer