

# RESTORE INTEGRITY TO POLITICS

Getting corporate money out of politics and ensuring everyone has a voice in our democracy

Our government should be building a future for all of us, not for their big corporate donors and big business mates. Right now, our political system is stacked in favour of big corporate donors who buy access and outcomes through political donations and powerful lobbying. The Greens' plan will clean up politics, end the corrupting influence of corporations and ensure that our representatives are accountable to all of us.



## THE GREENS WILL:

- **Restrict the corrupting influence of big political donations**
- **Shine a light on shady lobbyists** and close the revolving door between big business and politics
- Establish a **federal anti-corruption commission**
- **Protect the rights of community groups** to speak out
- Allow **everyone to participate in democratic processes**

### REFORM POLITICAL DONATIONS

Currently, big wealthy corporations are able to buy political influence on the issues that matter most, like fighting climate change. The fossil fuel industry receives \$2,000 in subsidies for every \$1 they donate to political parties and candidates.<sup>1</sup> Parliament should act in the best interests of all Australians, not just the wealthy few. Our political donations laws must be cleaned up, just like the old polluting industries that exploit them. Dodgy, secret donations are unethical, they undermine public confidence in democratic institutions, and they lead to perceptions of corruption that decrease investment and increase costs and economic inequality. A study by the Australia Institute found corruption has potentially reduced GDP by \$72.3 billion, or 4%, since 2012.<sup>2</sup>

Our current laws are not strong enough to ensure that the public interest is protected from the corrupting influence of political donations. For example, tens of thousands of dollars from gambling interests were donated to a fundraising vehicle for former Abbott government frontbencher Kevin Andrews as he was watering-down pokies laws.<sup>3</sup>

The Greens will protect Australia's democracy by combining better transparency measures with bans on donations from industries with a record of shady influence on decision makers. We will lower the threshold for disclosure of donations to individual candidates and parties from the current \$13,800 to \$1,000. Information about donations should be disclosed in real time, or as close as possible.

The Greens will prevent 'donation splitting' by requiring all donations from a single donor in one financial year to be cumulative. Under the current system, corporate donors can fudge the rules by splitting donations into smaller amounts that fall under the reportable threshold, sometimes also donating to different branches of a political party over the course of the year.

#### The Greens will clean up politics by:

- Banning political donations from the mining, development, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, banking, defence and pharmaceutical industries;
- Placing a cap of \$3,000 per parliamentary term on all other donations;
- Placing expenditure caps on political parties and associated entities;
- Until stringent caps are in place, ensuring donations above \$1,000 are reported to the public in close to real time;
- Banning 'donation splitting' and all donations from foreign entities.



<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian* (2016) 'Fossil-fuel industry gets \$2,000 in 'subsidies' for each \$1 in party donations'

<sup>2</sup> *The Australia Institute* (2018) 'The Cost of Corruption'

<sup>3</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald* (2015) 'Political donations: Second pokie lobby tips \$45,000 into Kevin Andrews-linked fund'

## SHINE A LIGHT ON SHADY LOBBYING

Professional lobbying can be a shady business. The public rarely knows who is meeting with politicians, for what purpose, and what outcomes are gained. We do know that lobbyists are often advancing the interests of big business over everyone else.

We also know that there is a revolving door between politics and big business. Many politicians and their staff leave politics for cushy jobs with industry, and many lobbyists are hired by politicians. This revolving door corrupts our democracy and prioritises the interests of big business over the community. The current Ministerial Code of Conduct, which has an 18 month cooling-off period before former Ministers and their senior staff can work in positions which would present a conflict of interest, is weak, unenforced and frequently ignored by the major parties.

### **The Greens will always stand up for transparency in politics. We will:**

- Shut the revolving door between politics and big business, by enforcing and extending to five years the cooling off period for post-politics for-profit work that might raise a conflict of interest, and ensuring it applies not just to Ministers and staff but to all MPs and their senior staff;
- Ensure that for-profit in-house lobbyists, and any for-profit lobbyist who holds an unrestricted Parliament House pass, is listed on the Australian Government's Lobbyists Register, and complies with the Code of Conduct;
- Give the Lobbyists Register and Lobbying Code of Conduct teeth, enforced by an independent Parliamentary Commissioner;
- Establish a new Diary Register: a monthly, published register of all meetings with for-profit lobbyists, to disclose all meetings with MPs and Senators, who is present at the meeting, and the subject of the meeting.

## A FEDERAL ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION

Public confidence in the political process is at an all-time low. People are increasingly aware that politicians often represent the interests of the big end of town over the rest of us.<sup>4</sup> Public interest is best served by a clear separation between politics and business. Yet we don't have a robust mechanism at the federal level to ensure that separation, or to prosecute politicians when they do the wrong thing. State and territory anti-corruption commissions have proved effective at investigating corruption and acting as a warning to potentially corrupt MPs and public servants that they will be caught.

The Greens will establish a Federal Anti-Corruption Commission to hold politicians and public servants to account, and to stop big corporations and the super rich from buying the political outcomes that favour them. The Commission would consist of:

- A National Integrity Commissioner;
- A Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner;
- An Independent Parliamentary Adviser.<sup>5</sup>

The Greens' Federal Anti-Corruption Commission has been costed independently by the Parliamentary Budget Office to cost \$150m over the forward estimates and \$350m over the next decade.

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4 ABC (2016) ['Confidence in democracy hits record low as Australians 'disaffected with political class'](#)

5 The Greens have had a bill for a Federal ICAC since the 42nd Parliament. [More details.](#)



### PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS TO SPEAK OUT

The public is rightly concerned about improper influence over Australia's democratic institutions and processes. However, the Coalition Government is using that concern as a smokescreen to the silence groups that they see as their political opponents. Instead of addressing the influence of big money from corporations and powerful individuals, the Coalition Government is trying to stop charities, other non-government organisations and civil society more broadly from doing their jobs through new laws and regulations.

#### We will:

- Defend the ability of charities and not-for-profit groups to use their funding (including international funding) for issues-based advocacy;
- Remove gag clauses from government funding agreements;
- Distinguish between charities and not-for-profit groups' issues-based advocacy and politically partisan electioneering when considering regulation;
- Ensure that charities and not-for-profit groups don't face a greater compliance burden than they do presently, and that they are not subject to more extensive regulatory controls, administrative requirements or criminal offences than businesses and industry associations;
- Ensure that donors whose donations aren't used for politically partisan electioneering will not be subject to new public reporting or registration requirements;
- Defend charities and not-for-profit groups so that they are free to cooperate on issues-based advocacy to advance the public interest, including by working with people who aren't Australian citizens or permanent residents.



### BOOST PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The more people we have participating in our political system, the healthier we make our democracy. The Greens want to encourage greater public participation in our democracy. We will legislate so that government decision-making bodies, advisory bodies and community consultation processes require consumer groups and citizens to be represented at the table in a meaningful way.

Freedom of information laws need to be strengthened to enable greater scrutiny of government processes and thus better inform citizen participation.

Thanks to technological developments, there are many exciting new ways to participate in our democracy. For example, several local councils have already implemented online budget allocation tools to complement community forums to help work out their budgets.<sup>6</sup> We will trial a variety of innovations and digital platforms to increase democratic participation.

#### The Greens will implement trials for:

- Citizen assemblies and juries to complement Parliamentary processes on big decisions;
- Participatory budget making, where more people have the opportunity to have a meaningful say when governments determine how to invest and raise revenue;
- Petitions which reach a threshold of support to trigger a real debate in parliament.

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<sup>6</sup> *New Democracy Foundation* (2017) 'Participatory Budgeting: The Next 'Big Thing' in Australian Local Government?'