Dear Sir/Madam,

I am greatly relieved to see some progress being made in improving the integrity of governance in Tasmania. While the proposed reforms are a positive step, they still fall short of what is truly needed. It appears that the Tasmanian Integrity Commission is playing it safe, perhaps in an attempt to appease parliamentarians and their supporters. I strongly encourage the Commission to seize this opportunity to elevate Tasmania to the forefront of integrity and transparency. The proposed reforms should not merely bring Tasmania up to par with other jurisdictions; they should aim to surpass them, and be a leader in the field in the same way that we have for such reforms as gay law reform and relationship status.

One important aspect that requires attention is the disclosure of lobbyist donations. Instead of simply indicating whether they have made donations in the past 12 months, lobbyists should be required to disclose the recipients of their donations and the timing of these contributions. Additionally, the disclosure threshold should be lowered to approximately $1000 to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

I fail to comprehend the rationale behind excluding paid access from the scope of the proposed reforms. Paid access provides lobbyists with a means to bypass formal channels and gain direct access to public officials who hold decision-making power. This creates an unfair advantage for those who can afford it and undermines public trust. The Commission must ensure that paid access is properly regulated and disclosed to maintain a level playing field. Wealth should not be the determinant of whether your voice can be heard.

While the proposed disclosure log is a step forward, it is not sufficient in its current form. It lacks crucial information regarding the content and objective of lobbying interactions, only requiring public officials to record the general type of activity. This makes it difficult for the public to comprehend the nature and purpose of lobbying efforts. Lobbyists should also be required to maintain a disclosure log, as is done in Queensland, to enhance transparency and accountability.

To promote compliance and transparency in lobbying, a Lobbying Code of Conduct should be enshrined in legislation, as recommended by the Centre for Public Integrity. Various jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Canada, Ireland, and Scotland, have already implemented such legislation. Tasmania should follow suit to encourage adherence to ethical lobbying practices. Furthermore, legislation should extend its jurisdiction to cover the private sector, ensuring comprehensive monitoring of compliance. The proposed sanctions for non-compliance are not severe enough. The suggestion to de-register lobbyists for failing to comply should be bolstered with a lengthy ban, such as a ten-year prohibition on reapplying, along with substantial fines. Instances of non-compliance by lobbyists or public officials should be promptly and transparently published, as demonstrated by New South Wales' Lobbyist Watch Register. If the desired legislation cannot be introduced immediately, it should be implemented after a thorough review of effectiveness and function in two years, as stated in the Framework Report.

To strengthen integrity measures, Tasmania should adopt the best practice of other jurisdictions and enforce a ban on dual hatting for the entire term of office. Anything less than this undermines the integrity of governance and disproportionately caters to the lobbying industry.

In regards to gifting, Section 4.4 of the report asserts that public officials must refuse gifts from registered lobbyists. However, it is imperative that the proposed model also prohibits unregistered lobbyists from offering gifts to public officials. If the Commission intends to encompass all gift-giving within its recommendations, this should be clearly stated and more explicitly outlined in the proposed reforms.

Canada's cooling-off period of five years sets a noteworthy standard. The Commission should align its proposed cooling-off period with this best practice to ensure the appropriate level of post-employment restrictions.

The significant reduction in funding for the Integrity Commission in 2014 by the Tasmanian government is a matter of concern. It is crucial that the Commission is fully resourced and adequately funded to gain and maintain the public's trust. To prevent future instances of under-funding, the Commission's funding should be protected by law.

While the Commission's expanded definition of lobbying and lobbyists is commendable, it is regrettable that local government is not included within the scope of the proposed reforms. Local governments are particularly susceptible to lobbying influence, especially regarding matters related to land use and zoning. These issues can have long-lasting impacts on the social, economic, and environmental well-being of citizens. Therefore, it is imperative that local councils disclose their lobbying contacts and activities to both the public and the Commission. Too many Tasmanian councils are filled with developers, real estate agents, and others with clear conflicts of interest.

With best wishes,
Jenny Smith