

To whom it may concern,
Please find my submission below.
Warm regards,
Millie Rooney

Submission on Tasmania's Model for Reform of Lobbying Oversight

The reforms proposed by the Tasmanian Integrity Commission's Framework Report present a notable step forward in enhancing lobbying oversight. However, further improvements are necessary to align the regulatory system with best-practice standards. This submission aims to highlight areas of concern and provide recommendations that will contribute to a stronger and more transparent lobbying framework.

II. Disclosure Log

It is disheartening to note that lobbyists will not be required to fill out a disclosure log. This omission represents a significant missed opportunity in promoting transparency. In the interest of fairness, lobbyists should be mandated to produce a record of their activities. Not only this but both the intended outcome and specific topics discussed during lobbying activities should be disclosed (as has been successfully mandated in Ireland). The current disclosure log only requires a general description of the activity, lacking specificity regarding legislation or policies targeted. Additionally, the suggested timeframe for disclosure should be shortened from five days to three, or ideally, updated in real-time to capture last-minute lobbying before a vote.

III. Cooling-off Periods

The proposed 12-month cooling-off period for former public officials is inadequate in mitigating undue influence. To align with practices in other jurisdictions such as Queensland and South Australia, a gap of over 2 years between leaving public office and engaging in lobbying activities would establish a more robust safeguard against conflicts of interest.

IV. Legislative Approach

To ensure clarity and enforceability, the Tasmanian Integrity Commission should adhere to the OECD's Principles of Transparency and adopt a legislative approach to lobbying regulation. Other jurisdictions, such as New South Wales and Western Australia, have successfully implemented lobbying legislation, serving as models for Tasmania's reform efforts. Such legislation would subject both lobbyists and public officials to clear rules and standards, enhancing the integrity of the process.

V. Transparency of Donations

The proposed model's lack of transparency regarding donations is inadequate. The disclosure of the amount and recipient of donations should be public, rather than solely revealed if they exceed a certain threshold determined by other laws. To enhance public trust, a lower threshold should be implemented, allowing citizens to be fully aware of who funds public officials and parties. Furthermore, lobbyists must be obligated to regularly update their registered information to ensure accuracy and accountability.

VI. Prohibition of Gifts

The Tasmanian public expects a comprehensive prohibition on lobbyists and any individuals seeking specific outcomes from gifting politicians or public officials. The proposed reforms should explicitly define and address this issue to prevent the compromise of integrity in our democracy.

VII. Extension to Local Councils

Given Tasmania's poor reputation for public integrity, it is crucial to seize this opportunity to include lobbying reform at the local council level. Extending the proposed reforms to encompass local councils would contribute to restoring public trust and ensuring the same high standards of lobbying oversight are upheld across all levels of government.

VIII. Dual Hatting

The practice of dual hatting within lobbying creates an inherent conflict of interest and jeopardizes the integrity of our democracy. In line with the recommendations made in the Coaldrake Report, the Tasmanian Integrity Commission should extend the cooling-off period to cover the full term of office. This extension would effectively prevent conflicts of interest from compromising the public interest.

IX. Paid Access

Clarity is required regarding the Commission's stance on paid access. As public officials may be lobbied in informal settings, it is imperative that the proposed reforms adequately capture these interactions. Therefore, it is necessary for the Commission to clarify its position and ensure that paid access is included in the updated processes.

The proposed reforms within the Tasmanian Integrity Commission's Framework Report demonstrate progress, but there remains significant room for improvement to achieve a robust and transparent lobbying oversight system. By implementing the suggested recommendations, Tasmania can set an example for best-practice lobbying regulation and strengthen public trust in the democratic process.