

24 June 2011

Inquiry into the funding of political parties and election campaigns

The Heart Foundation welcomes and supports the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into improving the system for the funding of political parties and election campaigns and is pleased to have the opportunity to make a brief submission.

We recognise the following Terms of Reference being considered, however we would like to pay particular attention to the role of third parties in the electoral process.

Terms of Reference:

That the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquire into and report by 30 September 2011 on options to improve the system for the funding of political parties and election campaigns, with particular reference to:

- (a) issues raised in the Government's Electoral Reform Green Paper - Donations, Funding and Expenditure, released in December 2008;*
- (b) the role of third parties in the electoral process;*
- (c) the transparency and accountability of the funding regime;*
- (d) limiting the escalating cost of elections;*
- (e) any relevant measures at the state and territory level and implications for the Commonwealth; and*
- (f) the international practices for the funding of political parties and election campaigns, including in Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States of America.*

In considering these Terms of Reference, the Heart Foundation strongly supports reform to the political donation rules that will ensure no party or candidate can receive donations from the tobacco industry or tobacco interests.

Tobacco smoking is Australia's largest single cause of premature death and chronic disease. It claims the life of more than 15,000 Australians each year and imposes economic and social costs of \$31b a year.

Tobacco is a product like no other. It is a killer with no safe level of consumption. When consumed, the tobacco and components are absorbed into the bloodstream, damaging blood vessels, increasing the risk of plaques, increasing the risk of clots at the site of plaques and reduces the blood's oxygen levels, resulting in heart disease.

The Heart Foundation calls for a prohibition on all tobacco industry and tobacco related donations (including gifts, services and donations at fund raising events).

Such a move is consistent with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), to which Australia is a party.

The FCTC obliges parties to protect health policies from interference by the tobacco industry (Article 5.3).

Article 5.3 Guideline (4.11)ⁱ states:

“Taking into account national law and constitutional principles, parties should have effective measures to prohibit contributions from the tobacco industry or any entity working to further its interests to political parties, candidates or campaigns, or to require full disclosure of such contributions.”

In summary, the Heart Foundation calls for an end to the acceptance of tobacco-related donations. We call for the prohibition of political donations from an industry that produces a product that continues to cause unprecedented death and disease among Australians, both among smokers and those who are exposed to other people’s smoke.

We wish you well with your deliberations and would be keen to assist with any inquiries you may have.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lyn Roberts AM
CEO - National

ⁱ www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article_5_3/en/index.html