

Submission Relating to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Regarding the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding And Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017

Submitted by: Julie Howard, Retired Educationalist.

Summary

As a concerned citizen, I urge the Committee to reject the establishment of a public register for key non-party political actors and to protect the rights of citizens to:

- take part in public affairs and elections, as contained in article 25; b) the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as contained in article 19.
- have freedom of association with others
- serve a genuine public interest by protecting:
 - the free, fair and informed voting essential to Australia's system of representative government;
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Rationale

1. There has been a change in the way Australians engage in political decision-making which has led to the emergence of political actors who embrace democracy and actively seek to influence the outcome of elections, **but who have no allegiance to any political party.**
2. This is a positive indicator of the strength of Australian civil society and civic engagement and such engagement is to be encouraged if we are to have a healthy democracy.
3. These amendments pose a threat to the freedoms of these individuals and groups, especially in relation to free speech and rights of association with others concerned with the same political issues.

Discussion

- Supporting a Charity, belonging to a Religious Group or participating in an Activist Group has been accepted as an essential right within our democracy, by Australians over the decades.
- This legislation (Section 287H, and 5b(iii) & (iv) restricts the freedom of these groups to engage in issue driven activities. If these amendments are passed, the Government of the day can deem that groups who have similar political views on an issue to be in association with a political party and therefore compel them to register, thereby restricting their participation in the democratic process.

- Guilt” by association underpins these amendments. Opposing the policies of one party does not equate to allegiance to another and should **NOT** deem a group or individual to be a key non-political actor, who is required to register under the Act.
- The threat to Charities, Religious and Activist groups who voice opposing views to the Government is real. Their budgets will be dissipated by onerous and unnecessary accounting procedures.
- Charities, Religious and Activist groups provide an invaluable service in informing the electorate on key issues. Their involvement is essential if we are to protect a free, fair and informed voting system essential to Australian democracy.

Recommendations:

1. The committee reject the establishment of a public register for key non-party political actors.
2. Protect the rights of individuals and groups to participate in issue driven policies, unimpeded by the restrictions of the register and associated expensive accounting procedures.
3. The concept of ‘associated entity’ should be rejected as it restricts political involvement and freedom of speech.

Julie Howard