

Benjamin Cronshaw

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Submission to the Inquiry on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Banning Dirty Donations) Bill 2020.

Dear Inquiry,

I thank Senator Waters for her work in developing this bill and advocating for our democracy.

The Bill seeks to prevent political donations from property developers, the tobacco, banking, liquor, gambling, pharmaceutical and mining industries. I support the principles and intention of this Bill.

Our democracy should work to represent the interests of the people. Each person coming of age at 18 thus has one vote in each election to elect their representatives in Parliament. People are also free to contribute money for political donations to political parties or other causes that they support, to advance their interests and values. Political donations are a legitimate form of political expression, and help to support the campaigns of candidates and parties to raise issues and get elected. However, the capacity for community members to contribute political donations can be overwhelmed by the contributions of big industries, who can afford to pay vast amounts of money to advance their interests and ingratiate themselves with political parties through donations. It would not be surprising if political parties were seen to be basing their policies at least in part on the desire to maintain or promote political donations from these industries. Even the appearance or suspicion of such influence by industries on party policy can be detrimental to our democracy. With undue political influence from donations, people can lose faith that government policy is working for their interests or become disenchanted with their ability to have their say and influence policy (e.g. from voting or private political donations). Tobacco, liquor and gambling industries make money out of activities that are demonstrably bad for individuals and the community. Other services such as banking and mining are legitimate, but there are nonetheless concerns that they have too much influence and can get away with activities that are bad for people or the environment.

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These industries will still be able to lobby for their interests and contribute to the public debate. It only restricts their expression in one area, namely giving political donations. This is a legitimate restriction for the sake of ensuring that parties represent the community and helping to restore faith in democracy.

The limit on political donations to \$3000 per source per term is also commendable. The average community member or small business or community organisation would be unlikely to contribute more than \$3000. Hence, the capacity of most people to be involved in democracy via political donations is not constrained. It does limit larger donations, which would help to level the playing field and prevent any donor from having or being seen to have undue or excessive influence.

This Bill has some good ideas for reforming political donations that I hope will be considered and taken up by the Parliament. Thank you for considering my submission.

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Cronshaw.