



Background briefing paper: *Preventing election pork-barrelling*

Why We Need a Transparent Election Promises System

Whether making election funding promises to corporates or promising grants to electorate groups during election campaigns – *the bottom line is these promises involve public money.*

Therefore, the public have a right to know, and to have confidence in, the decision-making processes underpinning those election promises made by political parties.

Tasmania has an appalling track-record when it comes to integrity or transparency in election policy and funding promises.

Following community disquiet over perceived pork-barrelling during previous state elections the Tasmanian Integrity Commission (TIC) released two reports about ethical conduct and potential misconduct risks in Tasmanian parliamentary elections.

According to the TIC, indirect electoral bribery “– colloquially known as ‘pork-barrelling’ ... is rarely criminal ... Nonetheless, it poses a significant threat to public confidence in government. It is also questionable conduct from an ethical perspective, if not a legal one.”

In its 2022 report the TIC recommended the following actions be taken before the next state election:

1. The Government consider introducing legislation into Tasmania that incorporates the sentiment of [section 71 of the Commonwealth’s Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013](#). This section says that a Minister must not approve proposed expenditure of relevant money unless satisfied that the expenditure would be a ‘proper’ use of relevant money.
2. The Tasmanian Government consider introducing mandatory grant rules modelled on the [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines](#). These rules should include compliance mechanisms and apply to: Ministers and ministerial staff; grant commitments made during an election period; ad hoc and discretionary grant commitments; and the Premier’s Discretionary Fund.
3. The Government consider adopting the remainder of the [recommendations made in 2011 by the Tasmanian Auditor-General](#) about the Premier’s Sundry Grants program (now known as the Premier’s Discretionary Fund).

Both Tasmanian major parties have form:

2010 – (Labor government) Labor Party candidates made small-scale commitments thorough the Premier’s Sundry Grant program, now known as the Premier’s Discretionary Fund (PDF). The Tasmanian Audit Office stated that ‘in 2010–11, the [PDF] budgeted value was increased from \$640,000 to **\$2.32 million**. This increase was mainly to fund promises made during the 2010 election’ (TAO June 2011).

2018 – (Liberal government) small-scale election commitments made by Liberal Party candidates totalled approximately \$21.4 million.

2021 – (Liberal government) small-scale election commitments made by Liberal Party candidates to 111 projects totalled approximately \$2.47 million.

What Should Happen During the 2024 State Election Campaign?

Tasmanian taxpayers' money should not be treated as vote-buying slush fund by political parties.

In the absence of a transparent, open and regulated grants allocation system, and rigorous political donations disclosure laws, Tasmanians deserve the following from the political parties contesting the state election.

When announcing major policy commitments involving the private sector and specific industries, provide a clear declaration detailing:

- whether they have received donations or other forms of support over the last 12 months from any potential industry or corporate beneficiaries of that policy, and if so when and what amount?;
- whether any potential industry or corporate beneficiaries of that policy have paid to attend any special party event held to provide access to current or prospective MPs, in the twelve months in the lead up to, or during the current state election campaign?

When announcing any election funding, or grants commitments from an existing or a future grant scheme, all political parties should provide a declaration detailing:

- The decision-making process undertaken to determine that grant election promise;
- Why the grant allocation is considered to be in the broader public interest, rather than political self-interest;
- Whether donations or other forms of election campaign support had been provided by the grant recipients;
- Any potential conflicts of interest between the grant recipients and any party endorsed candidates;
- A commitment to submitting the proposed grant commitment, and details of the decision-making process undertaken to the Auditor-General for assessment prior to the finalisation of the grant process.

And of course – all political parties and candidates should disclose all election political donations of \$1000 or above, promptly throughout the election campaign. Tasmanians deserve to know who has paid what to whom when they go to the ballot box on March 23rd.

Pork-barrelling prioritises political interest over the public interest. Poor-quality projects go ahead at the expense of higher-value ones. And the perceived political advantage means ever more grants are rolled out at the expense of more important spending.

- The Grattan Institute (2022)

Further information:

- [Tasmanian Integrity Commission, Paper 1: Tasmania's Electoral Act Offences and Campaign Conduct, 2021](#)
- [Tasmanian Integrity Commission, Paper 2: Grant Commitments in Election Campaigns, 2022](#)
- [Tasmanian Audit Office, Auditor-General Special Report No. 98 – Premier's Sundry Grants Program and Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund, 2011.](#)
- [Wood, D., Griffiths, K., and Stobart, A. New politics: Preventing pork-barrelling. Grattan Institute, 2022.](#)