

# Outgoing Liberal Party director defends pork-barrelling

**Matt Maloney**

LIBERAL Party state director Peter Coulson has spoken strongly in favour of the practice of pork-barrelling during election campaigns, despite long-held criticisms that it is all about buying votes.

The parliamentary committee on Tuesday started the first of two days of hearings on this year's House of Assembly and Legislative Council elections.

The state's Integrity Commission from 2021 published three papers on ethical

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conduct and potential misconduct risks in Tasmanian parliamentary elections.

In its first paper, it referred to the pork-barrelling as "indirect electoral bribery" and defined it as the giving of a benefit to a small or localised group of electors to buy their

vote.

Labor leader Dean Winter after the 2024 election pledged to ban pork-barrelling in future state elections when the party was next in office.

The state budget this year listed 480 election commit-

ments from the Liberal party, which amounted to almost \$1.3 million. Mr Coulson defended the practice of promising funding commitments to community groups and other organisations.

He said the Liberal party ensured that election candidates were not part of the decision-making process over funding commitments, but he would not identify who made those decisions when asked multiple times by committee members.

Mr Coulson said it was right for political parties to

make funding commitment decisions prior to elections, and fulfil them if in government as part of the budget process.

"I have a real problem with the suggestion that political parties shouldn't actually tell the people what they are going to do," he said.

"I don't see a strong argument yet that says the bureaucrats are the best people to decide how public money is to be allocated. In my mind, the best people to decide who their money should be spent on is the

Tasmanian public."

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters chairwoman Meg Webb said the issue was that the Liberal party made decisions on the allocation of public money behind the scenes through a non-transparent process.

She said this was opposed to the government of the day making funding decisions, openly and fairly.

"Bureaucrats aren't making decisions ... they are facilitating the decision-making process in a more accountable and transparent way."