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No peeking: Rockliff government spurns Legislative Council call to improve ministerial diaries disclosure

Government ignored November 28 deadline to provide an update on improved transparency

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MEETING	Dinner with David O'Byrne MP	Re: various issues
MEETING	Saul Eslake	Re: General issues
MEETING	Joint Regional Cabinet - Tasman Council	Re: Various issues
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MEETING	Font PR on behalf of Polyfoam	Re: various issues
MEETING	Bass Straight Freight	Re: transport issues
MEETING	Huon Aquaculture	Re: Salmon issues
MEETING	Launceston Health Hub	Re: health issues
MEETING	Salmon Tasmania Chair	Re: Salmon issues
MEETING	Arm End Golf Course	Re: various issues
MEETING	Responsible Wagering Australia	Re: various issues
MEETING	Simplot President	Re: Various issues
MEETING	Miriam Beswick MP and Rebekah Pentland MP	Re: Various issues
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MEDIA	7AD - flood recovery grants	
MEDIA	Wild Weather event - Beaconsfield Neighbourhood House	
MEETING	Premier's Visitor Economy Advisory Council	Re: Tourism issues
MEDIA	Richard Perno - 7LA	



Tasmanian Premier Jeremy Rockliff and an extract from his appointments diary. Image: Bob Burton/Tasmanian Inquirer.

The Rockliff government has shunned a call by the Legislative Council to consider how to improve the public disclosure of the appointments diaries of Tasmanian cabinet ministers.

On September 10, the Legislative Council supported a **motion** by independent MP Meg Webb calling on the government to undertake a “comprehensive” public consultation process on a best practice model for ministerial diary disclosure. The motion asked the government to report back to the Legislative Council by November 28.

But the government has not commenced public consultation and did not provide an update to the council by that date. *Tasmanian Inquirer* asked Premier Jeremy Rockliff why, but received no response.

In the debate on the motion, Webb said the Rockliff government had tried to frustrate the intent of the scheme by releasing appointment diaries only once a quarter, missing disclosure deadlines and often providing no details of why meetings were held.

Webb recounted two instances when questions by Legislative Council members about ministerial meetings went unanswered. She said the MPs were “told flippantly to look up the ministerial diary disclosures” despite on at least one occasion those diaries not yet being publicly available.

“It is an unacceptable approach – one that treats transparency measures and the Tasmanian electorate, on whose behalf these systems should operate, with arrogance and contempt,” Webb said.

In the three months to the end of September, Rockliff’s diary entries **listed** the purpose of a meeting as “general issues”, “various issues”, or “various matters” 38 times. Other entries were equally vague. The purpose of an August 30 meeting between Rockliff and Huon Aquaculture, the state’s second-largest salmon producer, was listed as “salmon issues”.

Tasmanian Inquirer asked the premier’s office whether the government would provide the Legislative Council with an update in 2025. It received no response.

Rockliff’s minimalist approach contrasts with that adopted by then-premier David Bartlett in 2009 when a Freedom of Information **request** led to the release of comprehensive details of party events and meetings with departmental officials and MPs, party events, and lobbyists. They included who attended meetings, their purpose and duration.

Bartlett began disclosing diary appointments across all his portfolios. This continued for both Bartlett and his successor, Lara Giddings, during the Labor–Green government between 2010 and 2014. This nation-leading reform was quietly **dumped** following the Liberal party’s 2014 election win.

The practice of disclosing ministerial diaries resumed after the Legislative Council supported a March 2023 motion by Webb **proposing** public consultation on a revived disclosure scheme. The Rockliff government ignored the request for public consultation, opting instead for quarterly reporting and disclosure of limited information on meetings.

NSW Premier criticised for "misleading" diary entry

The failure to disclose adequate diary information can come back to haunt ministers. On December 6, a New South Wales Legislative Council committee of inquiry **took** Labor Premier Chris Minns to task for his diary description of a meeting with a long-term acquaintance working with the Australian Turf Club as a “meet and greet” when the topic was the proposed redevelopment of the Rosehill racecourse for housing.

The committee found the use of “meet and greet” to describe the meeting was “inaccurate, misleading” and did not “adequately describe the purpose of this meeting”. The committee **recommended** [Pdf] that the NSW government “update the ministerial diary disclosure requirements to mandate an accurate description of attendees, purpose and any conflicts of interest and extend these requirements to shadow ministerial spokespeople”. In a minority report, Labor MPs said they supported a review of the diary disclosure regime. The committee has referred its report to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

The disclosure of ministerial appointments has been introduced in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, with slight variations. The Queensland scheme **requires** monthly disclosure of ministers’ appointments diaries. In Victoria, the disclosure of diary appointments is embedded in the **Ministerial Code of Conduct** and requires ministers to report details of meetings, including a list of who attended.

The Tasmanian government’s leader in the Legislative Council, Leonie Hiscutt, told members in September that the government considered the request for a public consultation process on improvements “to be an unnecessary and duplicative step” and insisted the current scheme was “appropriately providing the Tasmanian community all relevant information in relation to ministerial diaries that is in the public interest”.

Tasmanian Inquirer asked the premier’s office whether the government would provide the Legislative Council with an update in 2025. It received no response.

Webb said she intended to return to the issue early next year.

Bob Burton is a Hobart-based author, researcher, editor and freelance journalist. He is the Editor of *CoalWire*, a weekly bulletin on global coal industry developments for the US-based non-profit group Global Energy Monitor. His freelance journalism has been published in a wide range of news outlets from the *British Medical Journal* to the US-based *PR Watch*.

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