

# Integrity group aims to ensure that Tasmanians can

**I**s trust in government and politicians at an all-time low? It certainly feels that way in public commentary.

So often political decisions are perceived as favouring vested interests over public interest which risks all MPs being tarred with the same brush of presumed corruption.

Integrity in politics and governance becomes undermined, tainted by sarcasm, scepticism or worse.

Every time a low bar of integrity is normalised in our political environment, we worsen the downward spiral.

High standards of integrity are the bedrock of our democracy and governance, write **Meg Webb** and **Kristie Johnston**

The standard we walk past is the standard we accept.

A recent letter to the editor in this publication (titled 'Skewed focus', March 12) expressed frustration at MPs "deliberately avoiding Tasmanians' important issues", such as cost of living and increased utilities costs, focusing instead on

unimportant matters like stadium construction, greyhounds and integrity concerns.

The fact integrity was seen by the letter writer as a frivolous focus for elected representatives is a telling indicator of how damaged or misunderstood the concept of integrity in public life has become.

We must not lose sight of the fact high standards of integrity are the bedrock of our democracy and governance – they underpin all public policy choices and are essential to making good decisions in the public interest.

Agreed standards of behaviour, transparent and accountable processes, clearly disclosed interests, well-resourced empowered



**Meg Webb**

investigatory bodies, are all key components of our integrity architecture.

Put simply – we don't only bang on about integrity for integrity's sake, we champion integrity because without it, Tasmania gets worse outcomes in cost of living, health, education, infrastructure, environment and justice – in every policy area.

It is no coincidence that as we've seen an ever lower bar of integrity displayed in our politics, it has correlated with ever-worsening outcomes in virtually every key measure for our state.

# have trust in political decision-making in this state

We will not overcome the significant challenges Tasmania faces, such as affordable housing and cost of living, without the solid foundation of robust integrity in decision-making.

Whether in the priorities pursued, investments committed, systems designed or policies implemented – success and accountability on all these fronts requires decision-making architecture with integrity at its core.

We must set the highest expectations and ensure they are met through systems of governance built on strong, robust integrity principles.

As others have aptly observed, democracy is not a spectator sport.

Responsibility for maintaining the health and virtue of Tasmania's governance and decision-making lies with every single one of us – elected representative, statutory officers, public servants, civil society, the media and community members.

We can encourage this collective



**Kristie Johnston**

responsibility, and work against the downward spiral of decreasing public trust, by actively engaging in building and promoting the core principles and mechanisms of integrity.

Launching the Parliamentary Friends of Public Integrity group this week is a tangible effort to bring together members from across the state parliament committed to democratic transparency, accountability, good governance and ethical standards in the public interest.

Yes, there are many Tasmanian MPs who have a genuine

commitment to these principles and want to champion them.

The Parliamentary Friends of Public Integrity group is not a panacea, but it will provide a dedicated platform for policymakers, MPs, integrity entities, civil society, and other stakeholders to connect and champion evidence-based good governance and transparent decision-making practice and reforms.

Because if we aren't actively improving and strengthening integrity in our governance, we risk complacency further eroding it.

We are determined to work and

collaborate across party and parliamentary boundaries to find common ground because we want to reverse the downward spiral and ensure Tasmanians can trust political decision-making in this state demonstrates the highest degree of integrity.

Above all, we work to strengthen integrity so we can all tackle the challenges faced by Tasmania and build successful solutions on a strong foundation.

**Meg Webb is the independent member for Nelson and Kristie Johnston is the independent member for Clark**