



14 June 2018

Committee Secretary
 Economics and Governance Committee
 Parliament House
Sent via email only: egc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Submission: Electoral Legislation (Political Donations) Amendment Bill 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to your inquiry into the Electoral Legislation (Political Donations) Amendment Bill 2018 (**Bill**).

This submission is made on behalf of Brisbane Residents United Inc (BRU), Brisbane's peak body for community resident actions groups. Whose purpose is to:

- Represent Brisbane and surrounding district residents and provide them with a united voice to Governments on matters pertaining to urban planning and development.
- Act as a resource centre, facilitating information sharing across established and start-up local resident associations.

Below is a summary of our submissions, followed by more detailed submissions and recommendations for further improvements.

We would gladly present before the Committee in any hearing held on this inquiry if desired.

Summary:

- 1. Overall, BRU supports the intent of the Bill as a necessary step in improving integrity in decision making of government by reducing the interests of private profit companies being put before the public interest.**
- 2. We suggest that the Committee recommends the consideration of further policies for introduction to make even greater improvements to integrity of governance in our state, as recommended below.**

We applaud the introduction of this private members Bill. By addressing the risks to our democracy arising from allowing for-profit political donations, this Bill goes the extra necessary step to improve integrity in government that was not provided for in the previous Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 1 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 (**Belcarra Bill**). We consider that the policy introduced in the Belcarra Bill to limited 'prohibited donors' to property developers and their representative industries is too limited to have true impact at reducing the risks of corruption of decision making processes inherent in allowing political donations.

We further commend that this Bill provides for prohibits on for-profit corporate political donations to both state and local government, since risks posed by political donations to our democracy are real at both levels of government.

We recommend that further action be taken in addition to the important initiatives proposed by this Bill to ensure even greater improvements to integrity of decision making in the public interest in Queensland. For example the cap on expenditure for elections (as suggested in Belcarra Report Recommendation 1) would be a useful mechanism to increase fairness and transparency around elections. The cap on expenditure for elections has been introduced in NSW. A cap on election expenditure is arguably easier to regulate than prohibiting political donations from certain entities. As the investigation by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, Operation Spicer, found in 2016, even with a ban on donations entities find ways of getting around the particular restrictions to provide donations.

Alternatively, we consider that the option of publically funded elections may be the most effective means of reducing risks associated with election donations winning favour for private interests. Further recommendations to reduce the risk of corruption and to improve integrity in governance are provided in more detail below.

Our ideal scenario would be that political donations at all levels of government were replaced by a system where the only election materials allowed are those publicly funded for each candidate. The candidates would be provided with a certain number of flyers, a certain number of TV and radio spots and an article in the local paper explaining their platform and policies. They could door knock and stand on street corners or participate in their local communities as much as they wish.

We believe this system would actually prove less expensive for the taxpayer than the current system of electoral funding at all levels of government. This case would be proved if you consider both the opportunity cost and the true cost of some of the appalling political decisions that have been made and no doubt will be made in the future, as a result of the undue influence of political donors.

Recommendations for improvement:

- 1. We suggest that the Committee recommends to government that publically funded elections be investigated, as a means to truly reduce the risks to integrity surrounding election donations.**
- 2. Alternatively, a cap on expenditure by candidates and other parties for elections (Belcarra Report Recommendation 1) may assist in stopping the constant hunt for donations to support election promotional work and for donors to find ways around the rules. This is in place in NSW currently.**

3. We suggest the Committee recommends that consideration be given to other further options for reducing the risks to integrity surrounding election donations, particularly:
- a) providing for a 'betterment tax' payable to the government where land zoning benefits a property developer in order to reduce the incentive in existence to change zoning to benefit particular developers, and to compensate the community adequately in exchange for the windfall to the developer due to the change in planning regulation; and
 - b) addressing the revolving door between industry and government, which can lead to inside relationships being used to the benefit of the private sector without due regard being given to the public interest. While Queensland has comparatively strong restrictions around when a senior public servant/Minister can work as a lobbyist, our framework could be further strengthened by:
 - improving the definition of 'lobbyist', for example to include acting for even non-profit entities that represent private industry, such as the Queensland Resource Council; and
 - better enforcing existing limitations on lobbyists moving between government and the private sector.

We call on the State government to give serious consideration to our concerns to ensure that Queensland is moving towards the best government governance system in Australia; one that truly inspires confidence and certainty from all stakeholders and empowers our communities to meaningfully participate in all levels of government. Should you require any further information I can be contacted on [REDACTED].

We look forward to the rest of the legislative implementation of the CCC Operation Belcarra Report to deal with the remaining outstanding recommendations. We request the opportunity to appear before the Committee in their hearing into this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Handley
President
Brisbane Residents United Inc steering group