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Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
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Redlands2030 Inc. submission regarding the Electoral (Transparency and Accountability in Local Government) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

Redlands2030 is a community group advocating for good governance and community participation in public decision-making in government about matters and issues affecting the Redlands.

Redlands2030 supports the need to improve transparency and accountability in local government in Queensland.

Redlands2030 Case Study

Current laws relating to disclosure of gifts and donations to local council candidates and elected councillors are confusing and inadequate.

The inadequacy of current donation disclosure is the subject of a case study by Redlands2030: "Mayor Williams gets a mysterious gift".

This case study explains how the public was unaware for nearly four years that Mayor Karen Williams had received \$5,000 from an interstate developer who had at least two significant dealings with Redland City Council.

The different and inadequate reporting obligations of the Local Government Act 2009 and the Local Government Electoral Act 2011 made it possible for the public to be kept in the dark about this matter.

The weblink for this case study written by Redlands2030 is: <http://redlands2030.net/mysterious-donation/>

All of the CCC recommendations should be adopted

A good starting point for tightening up current disclosure laws are the six recommendations made by the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) in its report: "Transparency and accountability in local Government".

It is disappointing that the Government's bill does not give effect to two of the CCC's recommendations, namely:

Recommendation 5

That the Government expand the regulation of donations to include the expenditure of donations and a requirement to account for unspent donations by either only using the funds for campaign purposes or transferring them to a registered charity.

Recommendation 6

That the Government strengthen the obligation upon councillors, chief executive officers and senior executive employees (relevant persons) to declare funds, gifts or benefits provided to another entity which could be perceived to provide the relevant person with a benefit.

The Committee should consider amendments to the bills which give effect to CCC recommendations numbers 5 and 6.

The gift and donation disclosure threshold should be \$200

The CCC recommended that the disclosure thresholds in the Local Government Act 2009 and the Local Government Electoral Act 2011 be aligned at \$500 which is the gift disclosure threshold in the Local Government Act.

It would be more transparent to align the reporting requirements by adopting the \$200 donation disclosure threshold in the Local Government Electoral Act.

For comparison, in the USA the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) requires candidates to file periodic reports disclosing the money they raise and spend including all receipts and expenditures exceeding \$200 per election cycle.

The FECA disclosure rules are summarised on the Federal Election Commission's website:
<http://www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/fecfec.html>

It's time to ban donations from property developers

In addition to adopting the CCC's recommendations (but with a \$200 disclosure threshold) the Committee should also consider a ban on political donations from property developers.

Australians' trust in government has fallen over the past year from 45% to 37% according to a recent survey discussed in a recent article in the Brisbane times. Details of the article are:

"Distrustful nation: Australians lose faith in politics, media and business" by Michael Koziol, Brisbane times 20 January 2017 url <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/distrustful-nation-australians-lose-faith-in-politics-media-and-business-20170118-gttmpd.html>

Improving the transparency of the election process at all levels of government will help fix this alarming trust deficit.

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30 January 2017

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