

Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No: 024

Submission By: [REDACTED]

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Submission to the Committee regarding the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025

1. Introduction and General Position

This submission is made in opposition to specific proposed amendments within the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025. While I acknowledge the stated intent of the Bill is to restore fairness, I firmly believe that two key proposals will have the opposite effect. They threaten to undermine public trust, compromise political integrity, and reintroduce unacceptable risks of corruption into our state's political system.

My position is to strongly oppose:

- The removal of the ban on political donations from property developers for State elections.
- The provision to allow loans from financial institutions to be used for electoral expenditure for State elections.

I urge the Committee to reject these specific amendments to uphold and strengthen the integrity of our democratic processes.

2. Opposition to Removing the Ban on Property Developer Donations

The current ban on donations from property developers was implemented for clear and compelling reasons, to sever the link between political donations and favourable planning and development decisions. Reversing this ban for State elections would be a significant and damaging step backwards for transparency and good governance in Queensland.

Key Arguments:

Risk of Corruption and Undue Influence: The property development industry is unique in that its commercial success is heavily dependent on government decisions, including land rezoning, development application approvals, and major infrastructure projects. Allowing donations creates a direct and tangible risk of both perceived and actual corruption. It suggests that development outcomes can be bought by the highest bidder rather than determined by sound public policy and community interest. This erodes public confidence in the impartiality of government.

State-Level Decisions Carry Greater Risk: The proposal to limit the ban to local government elections ignores the reality that many of the most significant and valuable planning decisions are made or influenced at the State level. State governments oversee regional plans, approve major projects of state significance, and control the legislative framework that governs all development. The potential financial rewards from influencing state-level policy are immense, making this arena even more susceptible to the pressures of political donations than local councils.

Lessons from Past Inquiries: Public inquiries across Australia, such as those conducted by NSW's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), have repeatedly exposed the corrupting influence of developer donations on the political process. These inquiries have provided a wealth of evidence showing that such donations are not made out of civic duty, but as a calculated investment to gain preferential access and favourable outcomes. To ignore these hard-learned lessons would be irresponsible.

3. Opposition to Allowing Loans for Electoral Expenditure

Allowing loans from financial institutions to fund electoral campaigns introduces a serious and unnecessary vulnerability into our electoral finance system. It creates a loophole that can be exploited to circumvent donation laws and obscure the true sources of political funding.

Key Arguments:

A Backdoor for Undisclosed Influence: Loans can function as disguised donations. A large loan provided on non-commercial or overly generous terms (such as low interest rates or extended repayment schedules) is, in effect, a financial gift. Furthermore, if a portion of the loan is later forgiven, it becomes a substantial donation that has bypassed all disclosure requirements and donation caps. This mechanism allows for significant financial influence to be exerted by lenders outside of public view.

Creates Financial Indebtedness and Compromises Policy: When a political party is heavily indebted to a financial institution, its policy-making ability can be compromised. The need to repay a large debt could incentivise the party to make decisions that favour its creditor, rather than decisions that are in the public interest. This creates a clear conflict of interest and places the party's financial survival ahead of its duty to the electorate.

Regulatory Complexity and Lack of Transparency: Effectively monitoring and regulating the terms of loans to ensure they are genuinely commercial is exceptionally complex and resource-intensive. It would require the electoral commission to conduct sophisticated financial analysis of every loan agreement, a task for which it may not be equipped. This complexity creates loopholes that are ripe for exploitation by those seeking to exert hidden influence over the political process.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The proposed amendments to permit property developer donations and campaign loans represent a serious threat to the integrity of Queensland's democracy. They would weaken our defences against corruption, reduce transparency in political funding, and undermine public trust in government.

The existing prohibitions were put in place to protect the public interest and ensure that political decisions are made on their merits, free from the distorting influence of money.

Therefore, I strongly urge the Committee to act in the public interest by recommending the rejection of these two specific amendments from the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact a handwritten signature.