

Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025

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I am writing to lodge a formal objection to the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025. While the stated aim of the Bill is to restore fairness, several of its proposed amendments risk weakening transparency, increasing the potential for conflicts of interest, and undermining public confidence in Queensland's electoral system. Taken together, these changes represent a significant retreat from reforms that were deliberately introduced to address integrity failures and undue influence in Queensland politics.

Of particular concern is the proposal to remove the ban on political donations from property developers and related industry bodies for State elections. Property developers have direct and substantial financial interests in government decisions relating to planning, zoning, infrastructure, housing supply, and land use, many of which are determined or heavily influenced at the State level. Allowing such entities to fund political campaigns creates an inherent conflict of interest, regardless of whether any explicit quid pro quo exists. Queensland's existing restrictions were introduced in response to well-documented corruption risks, and narrowing the ban to local government elections alone fails to acknowledge the scale and significance of State-level decision-making in this sector.

More broadly, I hold the view that political donations should be limited to individuals who are eligible to vote. Elections exist to represent the will of the electorate, and democratic accountability depends on candidates and parties being financially accountable to voters rather than commercial or corporate interests. Businesses, corporations, and industry bodies do not vote and exist to advance private or commercial objectives. Permitting such entities to fund political campaigns risks distorting democratic equality by amplifying the influence of financial power over individual citizenship and civic participation.

The proposal to apply political donation caps to financial years rather than electoral cycles also raises concerns about cumulative influence. While caps are intended to limit undue influence, restructuring them in this way may allow organised and well-resourced donors to exert sustained financial pressure over time, undermining the original intent of these safeguards. Donation caps, while important, do not fully address the structural influence created when commercial entities are permitted to participate financially in the electoral process.

Allowing loans from financial institutions to be used for electoral expenditure further risks entrenching inequities within the political system. This change is likely to advantage established parties and candidates with existing financial backing or access to credit, while disadvantaging independents and smaller parties. Without strong transparency and accountability mechanisms, this reform may increase financial barriers to political participation and concentrate political influence among those with greater economic resources.

The proposal to enhance the independence of registered political parties to conduct preselection ballots without oversight from the Electoral Commission of Queensland also warrants careful scrutiny. While internal party autonomy is important, preselections play a critical gatekeeping role in determining who appears on ballot papers and ultimately who can be elected. Removing independent oversight risks reducing transparency and public confidence in the fairness of candidate selection processes, particularly where disputes or allegations of irregularity arise.

Finally, the proposed amendments to authorisation requirements for election materials and how-to-vote cards, including permitting the use of post office boxes or other prescribed addresses, risk weakening transparency and accountability in political communication. Clear authorisation requirements are essential to allow voters to identify the source of campaign material and assess its credibility. Any reduction in these safeguards increases the risk of anonymous, misleading, or deceptive campaigning.

In combination, the measures proposed in the Electoral Laws (Restoring Electoral Fairness) Amendment Bill 2025 risk shifting Queensland's electoral framework away from transparency, accountability, and voter-centred democracy. Rather than restoring electoral fairness, these changes may increase the perception and reality of undue influence, reduce oversight, and erode public trust in democratic institutions. I respectfully urge the Parliament to reconsider these reforms and to retain the existing safeguards that protect the integrity of Queensland's electoral system.