

Summary

Repeatedly throughout the **Green Paper** much is made of the cost and/or difficulties compelling parties and their branches to meet reporting standards that would enhance transparency.

No such angst is shown when demanding that business, including small business comply with complex and onerous reporting requirements.

I asked my accountant to explain to me the difficulties that a political organisation would face in keeping a record of all donations received and providing a regular update for publication.

Effectively his answer was,: ‘What difficulties?’

Compelling political parties to move into the 20th century could well prove revolutionary, — or perhaps terminal for some of the more ossified — but would in any event prove beneficial to Australia.

Political parties are a business. Registration of a party ought to automatically give it the status of a corporation and make it subject to the same regulations and requirements pertaining to that status.

Funding

An issue not addressed in the **Green Paper** is the use of personal funds in a campaign.

The expenditure of personal funds ought to be restricted to percentage of donations received.

Donations ought to be limited to \$1000 per elector, per annum, restricted to being made only to a candidate holding or running for office within the electorate in which the elector has their primary residence.

All donations ought to be declared and the donor identified

Ideally there ought to be an on-line register where all those eligible to receive donations are named, party affiliation, etc, and a donation list identifying the donors which is required to be updated within 48 hours of the end of each month, immediately upon the calling of an election and updating being weekly within the period of the election.

Party members would be permitted to pay an annual membership fee, with a maximum of not more than \$100.

Enticements in the form of cash or benefits ‘in kind’ offered to individuals to become ‘members’ of a party ought to incur real and substantial penalties.

Disclosure

No donations ought to be able to be made, nor accepted, within ten days of an election. That is the total disclosed upon the tenth day before election day must be the same as the update given within 24 hours of the election being held.

Neither a corporation or an organisation can vote. Corporations advance their interests by lobbying ministers, or having their association lobby governments. The position of unions and most organisations is similar.

Imposing caps or bans on private funding also raises constitutional issues. Sections 7 and 24 of the Constitution require that Senators and members of the House of Representatives be 'directly chosen by the people'

Any person on the electoral roll is entitled to contribute/donate to the candidate of their choice within their electorate, to the maximum allowed, and is required by law to cast a vote at any election.

That, to my untutored mind fulfils the conditions as set out :

It cannot be said to be democratic, or a democracy, if the mere possession of wealth or indeed 'position' confers upon the holder a greater say in who is elected than the lowliest serf enjoys.

Third parties

This is a vexed question, and I do not pretend to have any complete answer.

As an example, Gunns in their battle for their pulp mill have expended tens, or is it hundreds of thousands (millions?) of dollars on promoting the proposed mill. Include the cost of access for lobbying to government and it is clear that 'community groups' cannot possibly compete on any comparable scale.

A further example. **GetUp**, I am given to understand has over 300,000 members. They therefore have the potential to raise substantial amounts of money. They also have access to (most?) ministers.

(If we are to be a democracy, it ought not be case that those with the most money can shout the loudest.)

How to define?

Overseas experience indicates that where parties' spending is restrained, similar restraints must be imposed on other participants in the political process,

There is also the question of whether an organisation that is community based and driven can, or ought to be lumped in with wealthy individuals, companies or corporations or even unions, all of which represent a narrow self-interest, or at best a limited sectional view.

Offences in force during an Election

Where candidates are involved their candidacy ought to be immediately terminated, and all those convicted ought to be automatically debarred from any position in any political party for ten or twenty years.

Media

While the media collectively is unquestionably of a 'to make a profit' enterprise, a case can be made for that they have a privileged position and that over and above the social responsibilities required of any good corporate citizen they have a wider obligation to the community.

For the run up period all media could be required to provide equal coverage — equal in timeslot/space/page/ equal in quality, with an independent panel empowered to access that this was being adhered to.

Fixed terms

While this is not identified as part of the discussion paper, it is difficult to address funding while ignoring it completely.

Four years is far too long to leave any administration without review. The difficulty is that for some administrations four weeks is too long!

There is no good reason that the advantages accruing to the incumbents over the competing parties ought not be reduced or negated by every means possible.

Without doubt fixed terms go a long way toward this objective.

The cost of campaigns

The modern phenomenon of permanent campaigning is expensive and increasingly so.

This is an issue entirely within the province of the parties themselves to address. Like any other entity they have the responsibility to live within their means, show some initiative by cutting costs, improving the return for each dollar spent and changing the manner in which they conduct their business.

Funding the candidate

To stand, a potential candidate ought to not only be required to prove the support of X number of electors, but also to illustrate that that percentage of electors have each contributed not less than \$100 to the campaign fund.

If candidates have to get out and persuade people to put their hand in their pockets, kissing baby, mumbling that they support the party policy, or standing on a corner and shaking a tin will not cut it.