

My name is Keith Jurd. I make this submission as a concerned citizen and voter in the federal seat of Canberra. I do not belong to any political party or associated organisation such as a union. My voting is driven by a desire to elect those who would produce the best medium to long term outcomes for Australia rather than any allegiance to a particular political ideology.

My submission addresses item 1(b) of the Terms of Reference dealing with truth in advertising.

I am aware through contact with the Australian Electoral Commission that the current truth in advertising provisions of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 were recently confirmed by the High Court to not include the accuracy of the content of political advertising but are limited to how it might affect a voter's completion of the ballot paper.

I find it incongruous that in the retail environment we prohibit false or misleading advertising in relation to the sale of products, but in the political arena where the task is selling ideas and information, false or misleading advertising is not only legal but seemingly condoned.

I submit that the current legislation is inconsistent with producing a fair election in that that it permits political organisations to essentially lie to the voters about the effect of their own policies or indeed the intentions of their opponents.

This permissive regime was exploited to new levels by what has become known as the Medicare campaign during the 2016 Federal and ACT Legislative Assembly elections. Voters were informed by this campaign in no uncertain terms that the LNP coalition, if returned to Government, would abolish Medicare. However, there had never been any LNP statements of intent or policies to that effect. To make matters worse some communications of this baseless contention were reported as falsely pretending to be from the Medicare organisation itself. This was more clearly demonstrated in the ACT election where false Medicare cards bearing the official Medicare logo were distributed. The content and delivery techniques of this campaign while not illegal under the current laws were clearly both inaccurate and misleading.

The apparent success of this dishonest campaign does not bode well for future elections. I would not be surprised to see by the next election that all political parties and the national political debate will have descended into a contest of who can sell the biggest and best lies. Voters will have little opportunity to access accurate information on which to make an informed decision on their vote.

I submit that it is time to review the truth in advertising provisions of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to prohibit false or misleading advertising and to make it illegal to make false representation in the delivery political messages.