



Community and Public Sector Union

Melissa Payne ♦ Deputy National President

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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
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Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Secretary

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Donation Reform and Other Measures) Bill 2020

As the primary union representing Australian Public Service employees in the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is committed to providing a strong voice for our members in key public policy and political debates.

The CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Donation Reform and Other Measures) Bill 2020.

The CPSU supports strengthening public trust in the integrity of our democratic institutions. We share the broader community concern about the escalating costs of election campaigns and the potential for large and undisclosed sums of money to challenge our core democratic principles of fairness, transparency and free political choice. Effective disclosure methods that focus on transparency and accountability, ensure the community can determine the source of funds for political campaigns in a timely and accessible manner are required to protect these principles.

The CPSU is, however, concerned that this Bill's Explanatory Memorandum states there will be no financial impact and that *"any additional expenditure required of the AEC will be met from within existing appropriations, and offset against savings from improved efficiencies relating to the new automation of disclosures and simplified reporting regime."*

The Bill proposes the creation of inspectors to enforce compliance and additional responsibilities for the AEC including establishing an AEC Disclosure Portal and the management of electoral expenditure accounts on behalf of reporting entities. Properly implementing these changes will increase the compliance duties of the AEC and require additional resources if the ongoing work of the AEC is not to be affected.

The AEC has experienced funding pressures and been forced to reduce staffing levels to meet Average Staffing Level "targets". The AEC has seen a decline in Average Staffing Levels over the past three financial years from 809 in 2016-17 to 788 in 2018-19 and is expected to run at an operating loss in 2018-19.¹ Furthermore, the AEC is not exempt from the extension of the increased efficiency dividend to 2021-22, announced in May 2019.

¹ Australian Electoral Commission (2019). Annual Report 2018-19. Retrieved from <https://annualreport.aec.gov.au/annual-reports.html>

It is in the public interest for greater transparency and accountability when it comes to political donations and for an expanded role for the AEC to ensure any disclosure regime is administratively reasonable but the strengthening of the disclosure regime must be met by additional resourcing for the AEC and the end of the arbitrary Average Staffing Level cap.

The CPSU is happy to provide information on the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

For further information, please contact Osmond Chiu, Senior Policy and Research Officer via email or on

Yours sincerely

Melissa Payne
DEPUTY NATIONAL PRESIDENT