



GetUp Submission to Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold) Bill 2020

GetUp welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry and we support this Bill as a step toward comprehensive electoral finance reforms. GetUp has been a strong advocate for lowering the donation disclosure threshold as a part of our longstanding campaign for democratic integrity reforms.

GetUp's vision for our democracy

We believe that everyday people working together and chipping in what they can afford to help create the change they want to see is democracy at its very best. Australia must rebuild a completely transparent system of political finance that amplifies the small donations of everyday people.

GetUp believes these reforms should cover political parties, independent candidates, associated entities, and political campaigners - such as GetUp, the Minerals Council of Australia, and the Business Council of Australia.

Together, these reforms will help to foster a rich diversity of voices whether they be political parties, candidates, charities, non-profits or individuals, competing in a vibrant battlefield of ideas – a vision set out in our Constitution's guarantee of representative government.

Five point plan to rebuild our democracy:

Stop the money game: Cap the amount any individual or corporation can donate per financial year, and introduce expenditure caps on election campaigns to remove incentives to amass huge political fighting funds.

End the shroud of secrecy: Lower the threshold for donation disclosure, and to be disclosed in real-time, including donations to and from associated entities.

A corruption watchdog with teeth: Create an independent federal corruption watchdog with broad investigative powers.

Close the revolving door: Prevent Members of Parliament from engaging in lobbying work while they are in office and for a period of three years after they leave office.

Disinformation: While upholding the principle of Freedom of Speech, political actors must be held accountable for disseminating misleading material. This is an area of concern for GetUp and more consultation needs to be undertaken.



GetUp and Transparency

GetUp goes above and beyond our legal and regulatory requirements for transparency, and is more transparent than political parties.

Since the introduction of the *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Act 2018*, GetUp's disclosure requirements with the AEC as a Political Campaigner are the same for political parties and associated entities.

But GetUp also takes additional voluntary steps - such as having a lower threshold for disclosing large gifts and real-time disclosure of ALL income. We disclose all donations over \$10,000, whether they are one-off donations or in aggregate.

GetUp's donations are transparent, and while it certainly throws us open to increased scrutiny, we believe it's the standard that all major political players should meet. You can log onto our website at any time and see a real-time snapshot of what our members are up to and how much has been donated.

GetUp strongly supports Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold

GetUp believes this Bill can be a good step towards the comprehensive reforms that include expenditure caps on electoral expenditure. These reforms are essential to restore community confidence in our democracy that has eroded over the last decade. Political parties in particular have been able to hide the source of their donations under the current indexed threshold (currently \$14,000 for the 2019/2020 financial year). According to media reports, over \$100 million in donations to Labor and the Coalition parties was hidden from the public view.¹

However, we believe the bill should be amended to make sure it captures the membership fees of corporations to industry groups who campaign in elections. Corporates are currently able to make massive, undisclosed 'donations' in the guise of membership fees to industry bodies like the Minerals Council of Australia or the Business Council of Australia which are then used on election campaigns.

It also should be noted that other jurisdictions have a donations disclosure threshold of \$1,000. NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT all require disclosure of donations of \$1,000 or more. Thus, this bill will go some way to harmonising electoral finance laws across Federal, State and Local Government elections.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/11/more-than-100m-donated-to-political-parties-from-hidden-sources-in-election-year>