

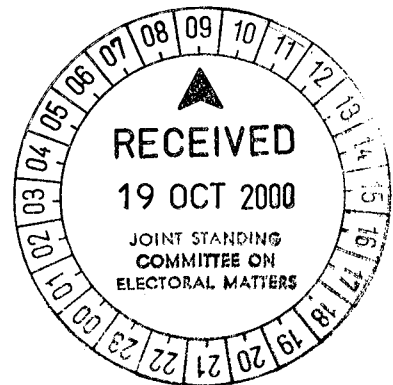

CANCER FOUNDATION
of Western Australia Inc


Heart Foundation

334 Rokeby Road, Subiaco WA 6008

10th October 2000

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on
Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

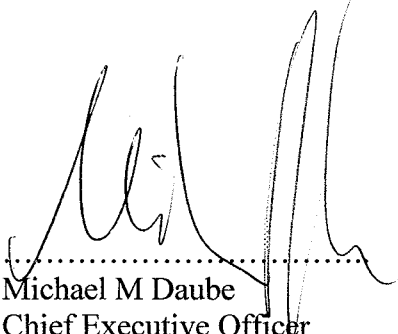


Inquiry into Electoral Funding and Disclosure

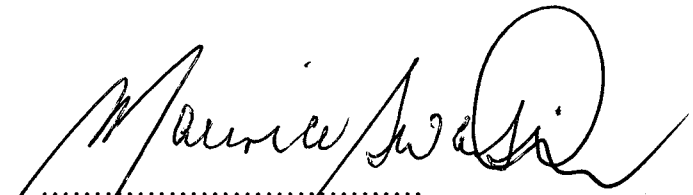
1. This submission is presented by the Cancer Foundation of Western Australia and the National Heart Foundation (WA Division).
2. The focus of this submission is on contributions by tobacco companies to political parties in Australia.
3. Cigarette smoking is the largest preventable cause of death and disease in Australia, responsible for over 18,000 Australian deaths each year from cancer, cardiovascular disease and other causes. Since the publication in 1950 of irrefutable evidence on the lethal nature of smoking, tobacco has caused the deaths of more than 827,000 Australians. The lethal nature of smoking has been known for more than fifty years, yet tobacco companies persist in their efforts to maintain the highest possible levels of smoking. There is overwhelming evidence that tobacco companies seek to undermine the efforts of governments and health agencies, and that they have been both ruthless and cynical in their determination to promote their products to all sectors of the community including young people. The three main tobacco companies active in Australia, BAT Australasia, Philip Morris and Imperial Tobacco are all controlled from the UK or the US. They are part of a worldwide tobacco industry whose products are currently responsible for more than four million deaths each year. The costs to community in terms of the human toll of premature death and disease and suffering, as well as economic costs, are enormous.
4. Cigarettes are by far the largest cause of drug deaths in Australia, responsible for well over 80% of all Australian drug mortality. Tobacco is not a product that can be legally sold to the entire community. It is illegal to sell cigarettes to minors, and there can be no doubt that were cigarettes a new product, they would not be permitted on the market.

5. While there are various constraints on tobacco industry activity in Australia, the tobacco companies are desperate to prevent any further legislation or other controls, as well as other activities that might significantly reduce smoking.
6. There is now clear evidence that a comprehensive tobacco control program could dramatically reduce smoking in the community, but the tobacco manufacturers are adamant in opposing measures that might be effective, even though these would result in the saving over time of tens of thousands of lives.
7. Information available from the Australian Electoral Commission website shows that the Liberal, Labour and National parties all accept tobacco funding. It is a matter of the utmost concern to health agencies that political parties still accept contributions from tobacco companies. We believe that the parties should refuse such funding on principle, given that tobacco companies are responsible for so much death and disease. It is entirely inappropriate that political parties should accept contributions from companies peddling drugs responsible for far more deaths than all of Australia's other drugs combined.
8. Tobacco companies contribute to the political parties for a number of reasons: access, influence, credibility, the capacity to promote their policies and a belief that these contributions will persuade political parties and governments to adopt policies more sympathetic to the companies than might otherwise have been the case. A survey undertaken for the Cancer Foundation of WA and the National Heart Foundation (WA) has shown that there is a very good understanding in the community of reasons for tobacco company contributions to political parties.
9. We have requested the political parties to refuse tobacco company funding, just as they would refuse funding from other drug peddlers, or from other groups responsible for literally tens of thousands of deaths. Unfortunately, the parties seem unable to rid themselves of their addiction to tobacco funding. We therefore recommend in the first instance that tobacco companies should not be permitted to contribute to political party funding.
10. If it is not possible to accept the recommendations above directly, or if political parties are unwilling to make the necessary ethical decision to refuse tobacco company funding, we propose that public funds should be made available to replace their current level of funding from tobacco companies, on the basis that political parties would then be precluded from seeking or accepting any tobacco company funding. This funding should be made available in such a manner as to supplement public funding currently received by the political parties. In the interests of equity, it may be appropriate for a system to be developed to ensure that all parties receive funding to the level of the highest contributions from tobacco companies.

This is a matter of detail that could be relatively simply worked out. Our concern is in the first instance simply that tobacco companies should not be permitted to contribute to political parties; that political parties seem unwilling or unable to decline tobacco funding; and that replacement of tobacco funding from the public purse would be relatively inexpensive, and would deprive the tobacco companies of the opportunity to obtain access to or influence with political decision makers.



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