



Dear Committee members,

***Inquiry into the Electoral and Referendum Amendment
(Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2005***

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) is an ecumenical council of member Australian Christian Churches.

The relationship between church organisations and the government sector in Australia is one of great synergy. Churches and church organisations often receive financial or other support from governments, and the personal support of current or former politicians, in their official or private capacities, is of great importance. Conversely, church organisations lessen burdens on public resources and contribute expertise and diverse viewpoints to public policy processes.

The NCCA would like to express our concern that these vital and productive relationships would be impaired by the proposed third party disclosure requirements in the Bill. In particular, we are concerned that the proposed requirements would (1) require disclosure of expenditures that bear no reasonable relationship to elections, politics or government; (2) fail to provide clear guidance on compliance obligations; and (3) undermine the timeliness, relevance and transparency of third party electoral disclosures.

In light of the above concerns, the desirability of moving to an annual third-party electoral disclosure requirement should be carefully reconsidered, taking into account the additional administrative burdens. Further, if the purpose of the disclosure provisions of the Electoral Act is to ensure timely and transparent provision of information about expenditures related to federal elections, it makes more sense to retain and improve post-election disclosures than to use annual returns, which will in effect delay the provision of such information.

If the Committee nevertheless determines that a shift to an annual disclosure system is warranted, section 4(9) of the current Commonwealth Electoral Act should be deleted, leaving the definition of "electoral matter" simply as "matter which is intended or likely to affect voting in an election." Furthermore, the drafting of section 314AEB should be improved to provide certainty on the expenditure thresholds and disclosure requirements, and to rationalise, simplify and clarify the relevant categories of

expenditure. Those categories should be limited to materials that, taking into account all of the circumstances in which they are produced and disseminated, indicate a purpose or likely effect of substantially influencing how voters in a federal election might vote.

Yours sincerely,

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