

## Zoe Daniel Integrity Policy

Integrity is the foundation of good Government: it is central to the proper functioning of every aspect of our society. What could be more important than integrity among our leaders?

Without strong systems to ensure integrity, everything from the economy to social cohesion suffers. In 2018, The [United Nations](#) estimated that corruption costs at least 5% of world gross domestic product. In Australia, the cost of corruption is significant. We have [plummeted](#) in world rankings for integrity. In 2012, Australia received a score of 85 out of 100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. By 2021, that score was drastically reduced to 73. This corruption has a material impact on our prosperity, with Australia losing an estimated [60,000](#) jobs as a result.

Beyond the economic costs, there is also the grave moral issue that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are being [squandered](#) for party political gain, and that [deserving Australians](#) are missing out on critical services as a result.

We have seen the results of unchecked corruption elsewhere in the world. Everything from dire economic consequences to tears in the social fabric are the unfortunate, inevitable results. Integrity and transparency are not amorphous, lofty goals: they are what stand between us and a material deterioration in our quality of life. Australians deserve politicians who are held accountable. We must elect people who will ensure this takes place in the next Parliament.

Because our Constitution vests revenue-raising heavily in favour of the Commonwealth, it is at this level that the risk of corruption is highest, simply because corruption follows money (the Federal Government collects over 80% of taxes in Australia [ABS, Taxation Revenue, 2012-13])

This danger is exacerbated by a system, completely lacking in transparency. This creates an ideal environment in which shady deals - and problematic behaviour - can thrive.

To make matters worse, there is no adequate control of political donations or campaign expenditure; nor is there any requirement for immediate disclosure of donations. Myriad loopholes exist to conceal major party donors.

There is growing consensus that Federal politics urgently requires the establishment of a strong National Integrity Commission (NIC). Its absence in Canberra, unlike Victoria's IBAC, NSW's ICAC, and various other state anti-corruption bodies, allows politicians to behave with impunity - at our expense. Under pressure from various stakeholders and commentators, the Liberal-National Coalition, has promised such a body, but has failed to deliver one.

The Coalition has taken every opportunity to stymie the establishment of any NIC - and seems especially determined to prevent one with the powers to implement genuine oversight. It has argued it can't move forward because Labor refuses to support the package. This argument is transparently dubious.

The Coalition's shelved proposal for a Commonwealth Integrity Commission (CIC), was launched over 3 years ago by then Attorney-General Christian Porter - himself the beneficiary of a million dollar [blind trust](#) to pay his private legal fees in a defamation case against the ABC.

The proposal contains serious weaknesses which can be summarised as:

The Liberal-National CIC is proposed as two parts, one comprising law enforcement and the other, covering parliamentarians and their staff, and public servants. While proposed powers in relation to the first group are very strong, powers for the CIC in relation to the second group are very weak and would make uncovering corruption very difficult.

- The definition of corrupt conduct is too limited. Specifically, the CIC could only investigate potential criminal offences, whereas there is a considerable range of corrupt conduct that does not constitute a criminal offence.
- The proposal excludes anyone outside the public sector who dishonestly or improperly tries to, or does, influence public decision-making.
- Important direct channels for lodging whistle-blower complaints are prevented.
- There would be no public hearings in the public sector division and parliamentarians are similarly protected

If elected, I would join with fellow cross-bench colleagues to insist on the establishment of a strong NIC. Given the likelihood, after the coming election, of either a hung Parliament or a slim majority, and consensus among independents on this matter, it is highly likely that we will achieve this aim.

For these reasons, I am running on a platform that places integrity, and stamping out corruption and rorts, at the very centre of my candidacy.

If elected, I intend to propose an NIC that is workable and effective. Its vital components would comprise the following:

- It must be a fully independent statutory body, headed by a Chief Commissioner appointed on the recommendation of a bipartisan parliamentary committee.
- It must be properly funded.
- The NIC must have all the powers of a Royal Commission.
- Its jurisdiction must be broad, as must the definition of 'corrupt conduct'.
- It must be able to hold public hearings

I do not agree with PM Morrison's view that the NSW hearing of the Berejiklian matters was a 'kangaroo court' – on the contrary, I saw it as a healthy shining of light on a subject of important public interest.

- It must have broad jurisdiction to investigate not only criminal corruption, but misconduct that could impact the honest or impartial exercise of public administration.
- It must be required to act fairly and have proper oversight: there should be an inspectorate, be under the purview of a bipartisan parliamentary committee, be overseen by the Federal Court, and there should be rights of appeal against incorrect findings of fact.

In addition to the NIC, I would be a strong advocate for the recommendations delivered by The [Human Rights Law Centre](#), which has recently released an important paper on how powerful interests are corrupting our democracy.

In this context, I favour an “Integrity system’ that goes beyond the workings of the NIC with legislated measures to hold our elected representatives accountable.

These would include:

- A code of conduct for elected representatives
- The requirement of timely disclosure of all contributions over \$1000 to politicians.
- A ban on large, corrupting financial contributions to politicians altogether.
- The requirement that all lobbyists register and disclose their meetings with politicians and advisers and that ministers publish their diaries.
- The introduction of an enforceable 3 year cooling off period for ministers, staff, and bureaucrats seeking employment in private sector industries over which they had legislative or regulatory influence while in Government or the public service.
- The introduction of caps on spending by candidates, political parties, and entities that campaign in elections, to even the playing field.
- Whistleblower protection
- Truth in political advertising

We are grateful to Stephen Charles AO QC for his contribution and insights