

## ACCOUNTABILITY

**Openness, accountability, truth and the public's right to know are essential principles and protections in a democracy.**

Accountability has been central to the work of the Australian Democrats in Federal Parliament for over 40 years and we have had many, many successes such as curbing secrecy in [government contracts](#) and initiating the first ever review of parliamentary entitlements. But ever since, the corruption and abuse of power has become normalised, systemic.

*The lines dividing government from big business have virtually collapsed under successive Coalition Governments*

Nick Feik, [The Monthly](#), Feb 2021

The Coalition Government shows contempt for accountability. There are no consequences for ministers found guilty of rorting or making serious mistakes like Robodebt or JobKeeper budgeting. Robodebt cost billions in payouts and untold damage to the people affected for which no member of government apologised, let alone, stood down.

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## Parliamentary accountability plan

### A National Integrity System comprising:

- National Integrity Commission (new)
- Office of the Australian Information Commission
- Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Whistleblower Protection Authority (new)
- Australian National Audit Office.

- Commissioner for Ministerial & Parliamentary Ethics
- Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity

A NIS must be independent, appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Parliament and funded as determined by a committee of parliament.

It must have the investigative powers of a royal commission and be able to conduct public hearings. It must be able to receive and refer complaints from the public .

It should make findings of fact, but not findings of corruption, and leaves questions of prosecution to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

### **Political parties and donations**

A financial cap on all electoral and campaign spending, per political party and per candidate and limits on amounts that can be donated, in line with NSW.

Disclosure thresholds reduced to \$1,500, accumulative, disclosure within 7 days and public release of data ahead of the election so voters know where the money comes from and what influence it might have on government decisions

### **‘Jobs for the boys’**

Entrench merit-based appointments by spelling out skills and backgrounds required, the basis on which candidates are appointed and ruling out those who are politically affiliated except in limited circumstances.

Introduce a mandatory 3-year post-ministerial ‘cooling-off’ period.

## **Conflicts of interests**

Conflicts of interest should not just be declared; they should be rigorously avoided. Where this is not possible, the individual concerned must not have influence over decisions made and the conflict must be recorded on a publicly accessible register.

This should apply to MPs and their staff, public servants, consultants and government appointees.

## **Reform of politicians' salaries and entitlements**

The Remuneration Tribunal to benchmark the resources parliamentarians require to do their job against relevant international standards and to conduct public hearings and any change agreed by a vote of parliament

Ban the use of electorate allowances for election campaigns and non parliamentary purposes

Tri-annual Audits by the Auditor General of the use of parliamentary entitlements

## **Codes of conduct**

Enforceable, statutory codes of conduct for ministers and their staff, developed by a joint committee of the parliament. These codes must make it clear that ministers must stand down from the ministry if found breaching the codes.

Ministerial staffers accountable to parliamentary committees in defined circumstances

Measures to protect the impartiality of public service advice and diminish policy-making by spin-doctors, eg. clearly documented and transparent channels of communication between ministerial staff and the public service.

## **Govt. advertising, data, and spin**

Strengthen the guidelines for government advertising and have ads approved for compliance by an independent body.

Ensure party logos do not appear on government announcements.

Require political parties to disclose how they use data for political campaigning and ban lies and misleading statements in political advertising.