

Political Governance

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE: REGULATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES ELECTORAL MATTERS & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The fact that political parties wield very considerable influence over all Australians and that they receive public funding, demonstrates the need for stronger regulatory controls. Since they control the legislature, political parties have made sure that regulation of political parties is largely perfunctory, in marked contrast to the much stronger standards of accountability and transparency rightly demanded of corporations and unions. This lack of regulation has led to a significant level of public distrust and apathy in the political process and in politicians, a situation that is undermining Australian democracy.

“We have 2262 pages of laws to regulate the conduct of companies, 1440 pages to regulate unions, but no rules to govern how our most important political institutions, political parties, are run.”

Senator Andrew Murray
Spokesperson on
Electoral Matters & Public
Administration

Our Action Plan

- Continue to push for legislative reforms to ensure that political parties are suitably regulated through sound and solid political governance.
- Campaign for the passage of the Australian Democrats' Electoral (Greater Fairness of Electoral Processes) Amendment Bill 2007.

Reforms necessary to make political parties open and accountable

It is in the conduct of political parties that public interest resides and where corrupted processes can result in real dangers. Corrupted processes are most evident in issues such as branch stacking, preselection rorts, and abuses of party political power.

The Democrats believe the following reforms are necessary to bring political parties under the type of accountability regime that befits their role in our system of government.

- The *Commonwealth Electoral Act* should be amended to require standard items be set out in a political party's constitution to gain registration, in a similar manner to the requirements under Corporations Law for the constitution of companies.
- Party constitutions should be required to specify: the conditions and rules of party membership; how office bearers are preselected and elected; how preselection of political candidates is to be conducted; the processes that exist for the resolution of disputes and conflicts of interest; the processes that exist for changing the constitution; and the processes for administration and



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at
www.democrats.org.au

Last updated 31/08/2007

Political Governance

management. A party should be free to determine the content under each heading, subject in some cases to certain minimum standards being met.

- Party constitutions should also provide for the rights of members in specified classes of membership to: take part in the conduct of party affairs, either directly or through freely chosen representatives; to freely express choices about party matters, including the choice of candidates for elections at genuine periodic secret ballots; and to exercise a vote of equal value with the vote of any other member in the same class of membership as the member.
- Party constitutions should be open to public scrutiny and be updated at least once every electoral cycle.
- The Australian Electoral Commission should be empowered to oversee all important ballots within political parties so that proper electoral practices are adhered to. At the very least, the law should permit them to do so at the request of a registered political party. The law should be proactive and also cater for the future possibility of an American primary type system for selecting party candidates.
- The AEC should be empowered to investigate any allegations of a serious breach of a party constitution, and be able to apply an administrative penalty.
- All donations above the disclosure level (recently raised from \$1,500 to \$10,000) must be fully disclosed to the AEC. This will require closing many loopholes currently exploited by the major parties (see the Political Donations Action Plan).

One vote one value

'One vote one value' is a fundamental democratic principle recognised by Article 25 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. To achieve registration, political parties should be compelled to comply with this principle in their internal organisations.

At least one political party in Australia (the ALP) has internal voting systems that result in gerrymandered elections for conventions, preselections and various other ballots. This is largely a result of exaggerated factional voting and bloc power of union officials who are able to use large union memberships, most of whom are not Labor party members, to achieve and exercise power within the party.

If 'one vote one value' were translated in political party rules, no member's vote would count more than another's. It would also do away with undemocratic and manipulated preselections, delegate selections, or balloted matters.

The aim of all the above reforms is not to limit the range of views espoused by political parties. Instead, they represent measures to ensure that all parties, irrespective of their ideologies, meet minimum standards of accountability, good governance and internal democracy. Given the public role of political parties and that they are publicly funded, it is perfectly proper to insist that these standards be met. The public deserve no less.



CONTACT US

(03) 9416 1880

Lv 1, 62 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne VIC 3002

inquiries@democrats.org.au

Authorised by Jack Evans, 5 Poinciana Place, Wanneroo WA 6065
Printed by Senator Lyn Allison, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600