



Commonwealth Election 2013 - Call for Commitment to strengthen government integrity and its openness and accountability

At the 2007 and 2010 federal elections, the Accountability Round Table (ART) sought commitments from the Parties and candidates to improve open and accountable government and to address the serious risks of corruption, and the aggravation of those risks, by the ever-increasing heavy reliance by the parties on corporate donations, the methods employed to obtain them and the inadequacy of present regulation and controls.

Important progress was made in both of the subsequent Parliaments. Focusing on the 43rd Parliament, the progress was mixed. It delivered the Parliamentary Budget Office. It passed effective legislation to encourage and protect the vast majority of public sector whistleblowers, but there are significant gaps in that legislation's coverage. There was a lost opportunity to develop Codes of Conduct for Members of the Parliament and to deliver greater transparency and reduce corruption risks in relation to both political funding and lobbying. There were modest but important extensions to the jurisdiction of ACLEI. We still rely, however, on the failed "multi-agency" approach to address corruption.

At the same time, during the 43rd Parliament, there were some very important developments which require further attention. They should have a significant impact on progress in these areas in the 44th Parliament.

First, the Government, in honouring Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), committed to the preparation of a National Anti-Corruption Plan. It also committed to, and is involved in the preparation of the G20 Anti-Corruption Plan. In May this year it committed Australia to joining a new international organisation, the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the founding members of which include the USA and the UK. It already has more than 50 members. Australia's immediate obligation is to prepare an Action Plan. Parliament rose before any of these Plans were completed. As a result, these responsibilities will pass to whatever Party or Parties are elected to government at the election and to all members of the 44th Parliament.

Accordingly, we seek the following commitments from all who are seeking election to parliamentary office.

We call on them to undertake that:

1. they will commit to Australia's continued membership of the UNCAC, G20 and the OGP and compliance with its obligations to prepare, complete and publish the required National Anti-corruption Plan, G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan and the OGP Action Plan as quickly as possible and within 12 months;

2. those Plans will include specific proposals which will significantly strengthen the Commonwealth Government Integrity System, including provision for;
 - a) an independent anti-corruption body covering all Commonwealth entities and agencies and people and corporations providing government services by and/or for the government;
 - b) contemporaneous transparency of political funding and of the lobbying of government and members of parliament,
 - c) retention of the present Code of Conduct for Ministers, its extension to Shadow ministers, and Codes of conduct for all other members of the Parliament, all to be legislated,
 - d) Creation of the office of Parliamentary Integrity Commissioner,
 - e) Extension of the operation of the Public Disclosure Act 2103 to protect whistleblowers
 - who disclose wrongdoing by Ministers, Members of Parliament and Judicial Officers
 - who are staff of Members of Parliamentand reduction of the exclusion of intelligence agencies and their information to that which poses a direct risk to the nation's security.
 - f) Reforms in law and in administration to better advance the right to know objective of the FOI Act.

We ask also that they will do so within specified time lines and will identify, and commit to, the resourcing needed for effective operation of the federal Government Integrity System.

We seek your response.

As in the past, we will place our correspondence seeking these commitments on our website together with the responses received.

ART intends to make further representations on these and similar issues when Parliament resumes.

Yours sincerely



Hon. TH Smith QC
Chair Accountability Round Table
www.accountabilityrt.org