

Submission to Parliamentary enquiry into strengthening government in Victoria

Accountability and responsibility have been insidiously disappearing from the political and social culture of Australia. The most prominent, models of this decline are in our governments. No longer do government ministers take responsibility (other than in occasional rhetoric) for a range of mistakes, poor decisions, negligence, and even collusion in wrong doing (take the AWB saga for example). No longer is telling lies considered unacceptable; indeed it is becoming the expected way of government leaders to behave (think of non core promises, the children overboard fiasco). This too provides a model at the highest level of management of the country to ordinary citizens that telling lies is 'normal'. We see this in business and in government services constantly. We are on a slippery slide to 'anything goes', as long as you can get away with it. And increasingly they/we do get away with it.

Integrity in government should not be optional but fundamental to democracy. Failing to provide an example of good and honest governance and failing to be accountable for one's actions and one's failures is destructive of the whole social fabric.

What can our young people conclude when everyday they heard and read about the leaders of their country trying to escape responsibility. This is contemporary Australia. Such an insidious and damaging process needs to be recognized, acknowledged and halted.

Governments need to fulfill their promises and intentions, and to monitor and be accountable for their decisions and behaviours, so that people's trust in them can be restored.

While this submission is to the Victorian government, and I applaud the fact that they have set up this very significant Inquiry, it needs to be emphasized that the messages here are for all governments. It is good to see the Victorian parliament leading the way.

As a basic minimum starting point for reform:-

we require of all political parties, government members and public servants the restoration of accountability of our governments by the introduction of legislation to:-

1. establish a Parliamentary Standards Commissioner to monitor and enforce accountability which should apply equally to all ministers at all times;
2. codify ministerial responsibility and make clear the extent of ministerial accountability and how the appropriate processes should operate;
3. amend the freedom of information acts to limit exceptions to rules;
4. control and monitor the lobbying industry by requiring registration of all lobbyists and by preventing ministers, their personal staff and senior public servants from acting as lobbyists until they have left their positions for at least 2 years.

I fervently hope that this inquiry will lead to action to deal with this fundamental problem and not become a document in a file drawer.

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