


Integrity & Trust

Restoring faith in
Australian politics
with policies to
create checks
and balances.

Catch the wave
of opportunity



Foreword from **Zali Steggall,** Independent MP for Warringah

Allegations of corruption, lack of accountability and integrity in Parliament have plagued the Government over the past three years.

In parallel, the argument for a national integrity commission has intensified, and the flaws of the Government's proposed model have been exposed. Without a strong system of governance and accountability, we cannot restore the trust in politics that we are so severely lacking.

Australians have had enough

The Australia Talks survey found that 56 per cent of us agree that "Australian politicians are often corrupt", 89 per cent of us are confident that "most politicians in Australia will lie if they feel the truth will hurt them politically". And 94 per cent of us also believe that a politician should resign if they lie.

We also firmly believe politicians should resign if they take a bribe (98 per cent), if they mislead parliament (95 per cent) and if

they engage in pork-barrelling (77 per cent).¹ Despite this and numerous allegations of each of these offences levelled against ministers, there have been very few resignations.

Bring back trust

Let's bring integrity and accountability back into Australian politics by supporting a strong Federal Integrity Commission, stop misleading political advertising and reduce the influence of money in politics.

Let's ensure that public funds are fairly invested in projects that stand up to scrutiny and deliver public value and long-term sustainability.



Zali Steggall, OAM MP

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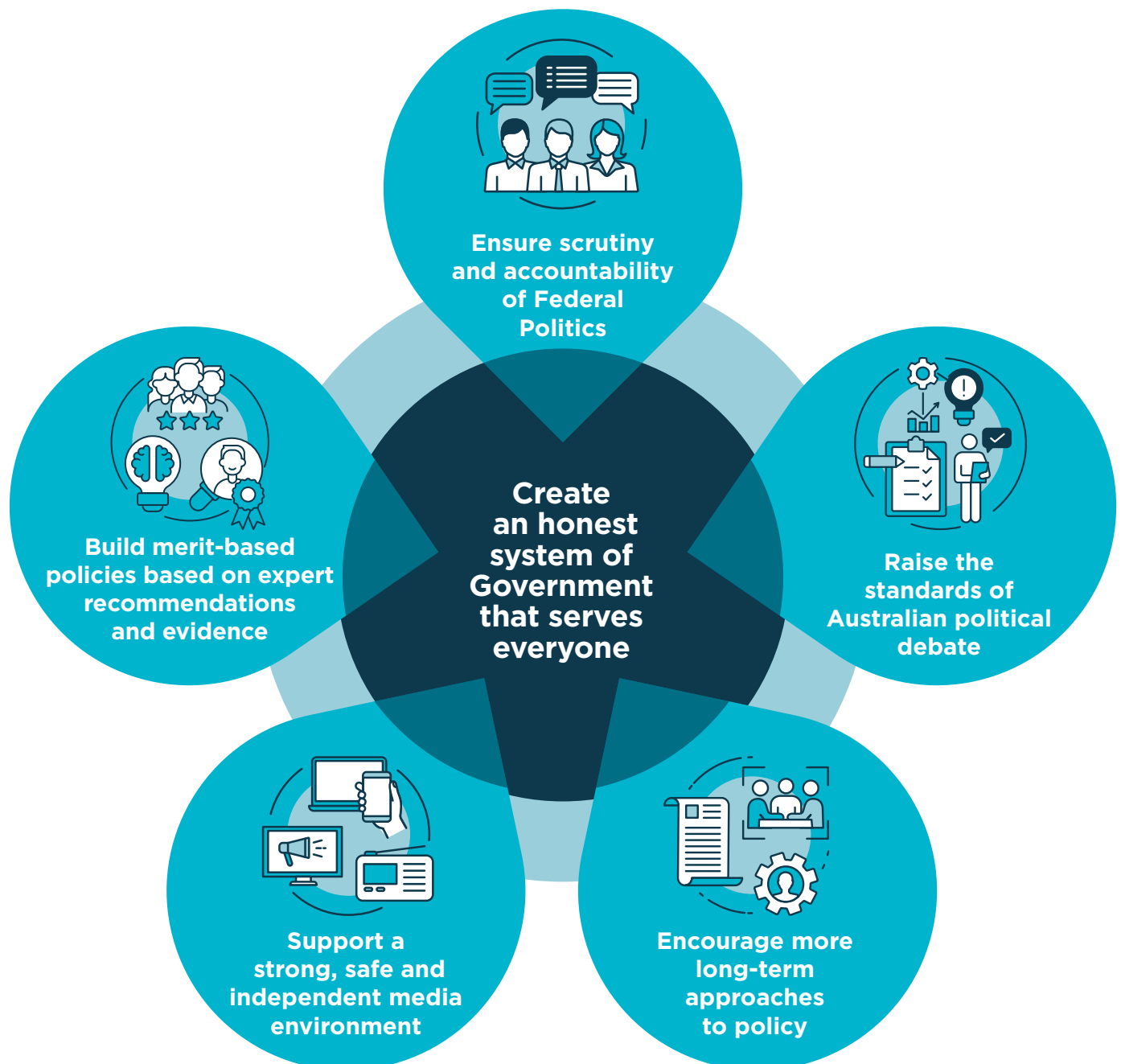
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“It’s time to stand up for integrity and accountability to restore trust in Australian politics.”

Zali Steggall





Ensure scrutiny and accountability of Federal Politics

Support the establishment of a national integrity commission with real powers and a professional Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians.

We urgently need an effective national anti-corruption body, and the current government proposal² falls far short of what is needed.³

I have supported the establishment of a National Integrity Commission along with all members of the crossbench throughout this last term of Parliament and I seconded Helen Haines' Australian Federal Integrity Bill on two occasions.

We need a National Integrity Commission

Regular surveys show that over 80 percent of Australians support the establishment of a National Integrity Commission.⁴ It is no wonder given the string of failures in political integrity during the last five years.

Members of the federal government have real power. They have the opportunity for nepotism and favouritism in appointments and the granting of contracts, the misuse of confidential information, conflicts of interest, misuse of entitlements, decisions that favour political donors, and cross-over appointments between industry lobbying and parliament. Yet there is no criminal sanction against any of these actions.

The reality is that a Federal Integrity Commission would provide a forum for proper investigation and inquiry – an opportunity for wrongdoers to be exposed and for those wrongly accused to be exonerated.

Similarly, a professional code of conduct is required for all parliamentarians, not just ministers. We need our public representatives to agree to a standard of behaviour and be accountable to that code.

Policies and actions we need to implement to ensure accountability in Federal politics

- ✓ Pass Australian Federal Integrity Commission Bill
- ✓ Establish professional code of conduct for Parliamentarians



IT'S PERFECTLY
LEGAL TO
LIE IN A POLITICAL AD

Raise the standards of Australian political debate

Prevent misleading and deceptive political advertising.

If we are to safeguard our democracy and empower our citizens to participate in an informed way, we need to ensure that politicians and political campaigners tell the truth. This might seem self-evident, but political parties and their affiliates often tell lies, and misrepresent the truth without consequence.

We are at risk of a democratic crisis in which elections become battlegrounds for competing disinformation campaigns, which will continue to erode public trust in institutions and democracy itself. That is why I introduced the Stop the Lies Bill in October 2021, which amends the Commonwealth Electoral Act to make it an offence to publish misleading or deceptive content.⁵

We're in a confidence crisis

Just one in four Australians have confidence in their political representatives ⁶ By 2025, if the trend continues, only 10% of the public will trust politicians. We must reverse this.

Polling conducted by the Australia Institute shows, 89 per cent of Australians support truth in political advertising laws.⁷

Another mechanism to prevent the spread of misinformation is the introduction of expenditure caps on election campaigns to stop the fundraising “arms race” and limitless advertising spends.⁸ Without expenditure regulations, parties that spend the most gain electoral

advantage. This promotes undue influence from corporate interests. Those with large amounts can ‘buy’ the front page of major newspapers in the lead-up to the election. Clive Palmer, for example, spent \$67 million on advertising in the year prior to the election.⁹ Of the 683 advertising slots bought in the final week of the election campaign, 272 were negative.¹⁰

Capping or limiting media advertising spend would level the playing field. Central purchasing of advertising space via the AEC would prevent exorbitant pricing for advertising in the lead-up to an election. And limiting the available space per party and candidate could prevent editorial independence being swayed by large advertising spends from political parties, candidates or third parties.

Policies and actions we need to enforce truth in political advertising

- ✓ Pass the Stop the Lies Bill
- ✓ Introduce caps on electoral expenditure
- ✓ Cap or limit media advertising spend



Build merit-based policies based on expert recommendations and evidence

Reduce the influence of vested interest and big money in politics and the public service.

Our parliamentary democracy relies on our senior public servants being respected and empowered enough to offer advice to their Ministers 'without fear or favour'.

In recent times, however, heads of departments have been hired and fired on the basis of their perceived support for the government.

Further, the advice and recommendations of public servants and other experts have been cast aside by Ministers in preference for a political agenda. This leads to rorting and the development of colour coded spreadsheets for grant distribution based on the marginality of seats.

Merit-based public spending

Grants and policies alike need to be based on their merits, the evidence and the science to provide the most efficient and equitable distribution of resources. Ministers who approve grants against departmental advice to reject them should have those grants tabled within 30 days of approval rather than the current reporting requirement of once per year.

Grants are increasingly being distributed on political lines.¹¹ We need a Senate Committee for the Scrutiny of Grants to review and

oversee the allocation of public grant money and ensure they meet established standards.

Further Ministerial diaries should be made public as required in NSW and Queensland to allow for transparency of influence on decision makers.¹²

Policies and actions we need to introduce to ensure public money serves public interests.

- ✓ Disclose grant approval within 30 days where contrary to departmental advice
- ✓ Establish Senate Committee for the Scrutiny of Grants
- ✓ Disclosure of influence by donors and access by lobbyists to government
- ✓ Greater disclosure of conflict of interest arising from donations



Encourage more long-term approaches to policy

Look beyond the election cycle and advocate for fixed four-year terms of Government

Australia's three-year electoral term is very short by global standards. Of 77 countries with two houses of parliament, only Mexico, the Philippines and Australia have a three-year term.¹³ In practice, our terms average only 32 months since 1901 but this has fallen over the past 25 years to an average of just over 27 months.¹⁴ So, the parliament and public service is regularly unsettled as it either waits for, prepares for or recovers from an election.

Calls for four-year terms have often had bipartisan support. People in both major parties have argued that a four-year term would encourage longer-term decision making, create greater stability for business, preserve more time for actual governing rather than politicking, save costs, and align with the States and Territories (all of which are four terms).

It's time for a 4-year fixed term

The need for fixed terms has been amplified this term with the constant speculation about when the Coalition may call an election and capitalise on the handling of the pandemic. Fixed terms would give greater

certainty and provide for longer term policy planning rather than political expediency.

While 4-year terms would require constitutional amendment, the 47th parliament should voluntarily agree to run a full 3-year course as a trial for future fixed terms.

Actions we need to take for a long-term approach to policy

- ✓ Establish fixed 4-year terms of Parliament
- ✓ Agree to a voluntary, fixed 3-year term in the interim

A photograph showing the silhouettes of a film crew in a field at sunset. On the left, a person wears headphones. In the center, a camera on a tripod is positioned with a boom microphone extending over it. On the right, a person in a hat stands looking towards the camera. The background is a warm, golden sunset over a field.

Support a strong, safe and independent media environment

Increase funding to the ABC and support factual, unbiased reporting and Australian content. Update regulatory frameworks to evolve with the media landscape.

Australians know the value of our public broadcasters. The data shows the value of the ABC and reinforces the case for further investment in the service and content production:

- The ABC reaches the vast majority of Australians every month.
- ABC NEWS has now been Australia's number 1 digital news brand since January 2020, reaching 50%+ of the population each month, or around 12.6 million Australians.
- Across the year ABC teams won more than 60 local and national journalism awards
- ABC Radio, in the most recent survey achieved its highest share (26.5%) and highest reach (38.7%) since 2010.
- The ABC was the leading Australian radio network with the highest reach and share of listening.

On top of this outstanding record of the value of their content, the ABC remains the most trusted media organisation in the country with research revealing that 79% of Australians trust the information they were provided by the ABC. This is significantly higher than all other media institutions and information providers.¹⁵

The ABC, SBS and NITV create and broadcast content that commercial networks will not, because they prioritise people over profit. They tell Australian stories and provide quality content that reflects both community diversity and community needs.

Actions we need to take to strengthen media independence.

- ✓ Reverse funding cuts to the ABC, SBS and NITV
- ✓ Reinstate indexation of funding
- ✓ Change from a 3-year funding cycle to a 5-year funding cycle to help secure ABC independence

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