



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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CROSSBENCHERS CALL FOR GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON PORK BARRELLING

Following the release of the Centre for Public Integrity's report into the Government's \$560 million invitation only Local and Major Community Infrastructure Program, crossbench MPs and Senators are calling on the Government to strengthen the Commonwealth grants system.

The CPI analysis raises serious questions about the way taxpayer money was spent, with funding heavily concentrated in a small number of Labor held or marginal electorates. The Government has failed to explain what criteria were used to issue invitations to the program.

Under the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles, competitive, merit-based selection is the default because it delivers better outcomes and value for money. Where another approach is used, the reasons should be documented and, for closed processes, there should be transparency about how eligible applicants were identified. The crossbenchers agree that the MLCIP is not consistent with these best-practice principles.

The crossbenchers say this must be a turning point, and that the Government must strengthen the grants system and restore public confidence.

The crossbench MPs are calling for:

- Mandatory, enforceable standards for grants administration, instead of a non-binding framework;
- Greater transparency about how funding decisions are made against selection criteria; and
- A non-Government chaired parliamentary committee, including crossbench participants, to oversee the administration of grants and compliance with the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles.

The MPs say these reforms would not stop governments from investing in local communities, but would help ensure public money is allocated fairly, transparently and in the public interest.

Comments attributable to Dr Helen Haines, Independent Federal Member for Indi:

"Sports rorts was pork barrelling by deception, this is pork barrelling by design.

Australians are increasingly fed up with a self-serving political establishment, and pork barrelling only further undermines trust in government and our democracy.

My private members legislation would serve as a safeguard and won't stop governments investing in local infrastructure. It would make sure funding is allocated fairly, transparently and in the public interest."

Comments attributable to David Pocock, Independent Senator for the ACT:

"Elections should be won and lost on a contest of ideas, not who can buy the most votes in marginal seats.

Those seeking to govern need to do so for all Australians and this kind of community infrastructure should be funded by a competitive, merit and needs-based funding arrangement open to all."

Comments attributable to Allegra Spender MP, Community Strong Member for Wentworth:

"Communities expect their taxpayer dollars to go to the programs that make the biggest difference to the lives of Australians, not just those that increase a party's prospects during an election. Both the major parties have treated these grant programs like their personal piggy bank and it's no wonder more and more Australians are moving away from them."

Comments attributable to Dr Sophie Scamps, Independent Member for Mackellar:

"Taxpayers around the country have every right to be angry that public money is being misused as the government's personal piggy bank to help them win elections. Both the major parties have been rorting the pork for way too long, it undermines trust in our democracy and needs to end."

Comments attributable to Dr Monique Ryan, Independent Federal Member for Kooyong:

"In 2022, Kooyong voted against the Morrison government's unwanted carparks and sports rorts. It's hugely disappointing to see the Albanese government go down this cynical, well-worn path for the political parties. Our community wants governments to spend public funds transparently, wisely and well, on the basis of need, not their own electoral prospects."

Comments attributable to Dai Le, Independent Federal Member for Fowler:

“Labor has the numbers in the House, but numbers are not a mandate to spend taxpayers’ money on themselves. Grants funded by every Australian should not be invitation-only. That is exactly how trust in government has eroded.”

Comments attributable to Kate Chaney, Independent Federal Member for Curtin:

“The Coalition had Sports Rorts, and now Labor is 'Park' Barrelling – money for parks and playgrounds, pools and sporting clubs, all promised to win votes.

Political parties should not make promises they can't keep ethically - taxpayer funds should be allocated competitively and transparently with clear criteria - any election promise to circumvent that approach is wrong.”

Comments attributable to Zali Steggall, Community Strong Member for Warringah:

“Public money should be spent on the basis of need, merit and value for money – not to gain political advantage.

We have seen too many examples of governments treating grants and infrastructure funding as a political tool, instead of a way to deliver the best outcome for communities. This is not unique to Labor – the Coalition has done the same in government.

Australians deserve to know how decisions about their money are being made. If a government departs from a competitive, merit-based process, there should be a clear reason, a proper record and independent scrutiny.”

Comments attributable to Rebekha Sharkie MP, Independent Member for Mayo:

“Government funding should be allocated according to need and merit, not according to the political interests of the government of the day.

It wasn't that long ago that Labor, when it was in opposition, was rightly outraged by the Coalition's sports rorts, arguing that taxpayer money should never be used for political advantage. What we're seeing now is on a much larger scale and so much worse because it's invite-only and most of the funding has gone to seats held by or targeted by Labor.

An invite-only grants program means communities that aren't invited aren't even given an opportunity to make their case. That's especially important in our regions where communities already face challenges accessing government funding and services. They shouldn't be further disadvantaged by a grants program that restricts who gets a chance to apply.

Public money belongs to everyone, and every community should have a fair opportunity to compete for funding based on genuine need – not political interests.”

Comments attributable to Nicolette Boele MP, Independent Member for Bradfield:

"These grants are paid for by every Australian, so every community should be able to apply for them.

For example, my office put a proposal to this program for a much-loved local theatre in Bradfield - a project with strong community backing and a clear case for support. We were turned down.

Bradfield understands the difference between a decision made on merit and a decision made on the electoral map. People here want public money spent where the need is greatest, with criteria published up front, and a proper record of how the call was made.

Decisions like this are why trust in our political system is at an all-time low."

Comments attributable to Jacqui Lambie, Senator for Tasmania:

"Both major Parties pork barrel - we all remember the coloured spreadsheet.

I don't care how the government spins it - using taxpayer money to buy votes or benefit Party followers should be seen as corruption because that's what it is!

Commonwealth Grants should be available to everyone, not 'pet projects' designed to buy support and favour for a select few; that model undermines our democracy and is bad for social cohesion."

Comments attributable to Lidia Thorpe, Independent Senator for Victoria:

"The news this week that the PM awarded \$6 million to a golf club in his electorate at the 2025 election by an invite-only grant comes while 15 Aboriginal families in Mt Isa face homelessness due to a failure of governance. I asked the PM to step in to save those homes with a Commonwealth grant and was met with silence. It's clear that the major parties use grants to buy votes at elections, rather than serving the people. This practice must end."

Comments attributable to Andrew Wilkie, Independent Federal Member for Clark:

"It's this kind of behaviour that has Australians searching for alternatives to the major parties. Australians expect integrity in public life, but they've been let down again and again."

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