Chief Commissioner, Greg Melick AO KC

Ethical lobbying of politicians is both a legitimate activity and an important part of the democratic process. Lobbying conducted in secrecy, however, is contrary to the public interest. In Tasmania, such lobbying will continue until the Parliament chooses to legislate in favour of transparency.

Currently, the Tasmanian public has no way of knowing any details of the frequency, type or subject of lobbying undertaken.

The Integrity Commission took over administration of the Lobbying Code in 2022. It had never been reviewed by the Government.

By late 2023, we had developed a new model for lobbying oversight designed to substantially enhance the transparency of lobbying in Tasmania, informed by extensive research and stakeholder input.

A transparent lobbying oversight regime avoids secrecy while still allowing some privacy for public officials engaging with constituents, advisers, staff, the public sector, and lobbyists.

We consider that the Code we developed represents a very sound model for future adoption. It reflects the transparency enhancements the Tasmanian community deserves and expects.

Importantly, those who are lobbied should be required to disclose publicly who has lobbied them and why.

All Members of Parliament and senior officials should disclose when they have been lobbied, not just members of the Government. Our preferred model ensures that the administrative burden of reporting is proportionate to the aims of the regulatory framework.

Regulation should apply to so-called 'third party lobbyists' who represent the interests of their clients, as well as to in-house lobbyists representing their employers' interests.

Throughout our reform project, we actively tried to tailor the scope of the reforms to allow for buy-in from stakeholders. For example, we took into account late feedback from the Government and the Opposition in December 2024 and narrowed the scope of the definition of 'lobbying activities'.

We prepared to launch the new Code initially on 1 January and then on 1 July 2025. Each time, as the new Code was about to commence, the three major parties raised concerns about various aspects of the proposed model, some of which had been in place for at least 2 years. Some of the concerns raised were misconceived, demonstrating a misunderstanding of the proposed model.

It became apparent that there was no real possibility it would receive the necessary support. We decided not to proceed with the launch.

It is not reasonable or practical for the Integrity Commission to continue modifying the Code, especially as fixed term funding for three positions was not renewed for 2025-26. In our view it is now appropriate for the Parliament to legislate a model that it believes strikes the right balance between transparency and privacy. This would allow Parliamentarians to consider, debate, and agree on a model that they believe would work.