

16 May 2022

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By email: review@coaldrakereview.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir

Additional Response to the Review into culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information to the independent *Review into culture and accountability in the Queensland public service*.

As outlined in our earlier correspondence, the Australian Professional Government Relations Association's (APGRA) membership is made up of both consulting and in-house government relations practitioners from across the nation. All members uphold the integrity standards of the states and territories within which they operate, in addition to being bound by our stringent Code of Conduct. Our code assists in providing a strong co-regulatory framework for practitioners to ensure the profession continues to promote the highest ethical standards.

We have always promoted transparency and integrity and acknowledge our shared role in upholding the public's trust into the political process. As the national peak body for the sector we are committed to working with the *Review into culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector* to build further confidence in Queensland's integrity system.

We note the interim report released 21 April 2022, made a number of observations regarding lobbying activities in Queensland and discussed several suggested points of reform. On behalf of our members, we hope to offer up our perspective on similar reforms and/or regulatory frameworks which have been introduced in other jurisdictions. These include:

Changes to the contact log:

The interim report notes concern about the lack of detail often recorded by practitioners within the existing Queensland lobbyist register, as required under s 68 of the Integrity Act. While the original intent of the legislation is to ensure the purposes of meetings are recorded, the interim report identified vague descriptors, such as 'other' and 'commercial-in-confidence' were being selected at a high frequency.

While there is a clear and legitimate need for commercial-in-confidence protections at times we acknowledge other jurisdictions such as South Australia have taken steps to institute further elaboration from practitioners. APGRA would be open to consulting with government on similar changes.

The consideration of in-house lobbyists:

The interim report notes that other jurisdictions have adopted an approach of increasing regulation to capture the activities of in-house lobbyists and consultancies. Should the Queensland government seek to pursue the matter we recommend a similar structure to that existing in NSW. Currently in NSW the Lobbyists Code of Conduct¹ applies to third-party lobbyists and to all other individuals and bodies that communicate with NSW Government officials. A register for third-party lobbyists also exists alongside the Code of Conduct with a number of additional requirements for these entities.

The code contains the following ethical standards which apply to all lobbyists:

- *Lobbyists who seek a meeting to lobby NSW Government officials must disclose the nature of the matter to be discussed to officials prior to the meeting.*
- *Lobbyists who meet NSW Government officials must disclose to the officials before the meeting commences any financial or other interest they have in the matter to be discussed at the meeting.*
- *Lobbyists must not engage in any misleading, dishonest, corrupt or other unlawful conduct in connection with a meeting or other communication for the purpose of lobbying NSW Government officials.*
- *Lobbyists must use all reasonable endeavours to satisfy themselves of the truth and accuracy of all material information that they provide in connection with a meeting or other communication for the purpose of lobbying NSW Government officials.*

Given the top consideration when developing/refining regulation of lobbying should be transparency, the APGRA does not support the introduction of the establishment of a register of lobbyists for in-house lobbyists in Queensland. This is because it is very clear who in-house lobbyists are representing when they engage with government – either the company or organisation they work for.

Lobbyists with dual roles:

The interim report also notes that distrust among the public and concern regarding lobbying activities has been accentuated by the dual roles of some lobbyists. APGRA and its membership have never supported dual roles of lobbyists due to the conflicts of interest and perceived conflicts that arise.

As part of our Code of Conduct we strictly prohibit the mixing of political activities with their professional role and require members to submit a Code Compliance Statement each year to ensure their commitment to our standards. As outlined below:

Personal Political Activity

14. Practitioners will keep strictly separate their professional activities and any personal activity or involvement on behalf, or as a member, of a political party.

15. Practitioners will not serve in an Executive Role with a political party.

¹ Lobbying of Government Officials (Lobbyists Code of Conduct) Regulation 2014 [NSW] Schedule 1 NSW Lobbyists Code of Conduct. [LINK](#)

16. Practitioners will not play a senior management role in the conduct of an election campaign.²

Given these are standards our members already support, we would be supportive of similar changes being introduced in Queensland to return trust to the political process,

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide comment. Legitimate lobbying activities remain an important part of our democratic process, when conducted with integrity and transparency. We see the education of government officials and elected representatives on existing regulations, as critical to the ongoing integrity of Queensland's public service. As the peak body representing government relations practitioners, we would like to continue to support the Integrity Commissioner with education of key stakeholders about lobbying and the work that senior executives in our industry do.

Should you have any questions in relation to this submission or the APGRA more generally, please do not hesitate to contact us.

The APGRA is also available to meet, should you wish to find out more information about the key policy positions that we have outlined in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Executive Committee - Australian Professional Government Relations Association

² Australian Professional Government Relations Association, Code of Conduct, Clause 14-16, 2022. [LINK](#)