

Strengthen our Democracy campaign

Clare Power

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) is running a Strengthen our Democracy campaign. Of the many reasons for this, one of the most telling is that the Liberal, National and Labor parties received more than \$2.1 million in donations from gas, oil and coal interests (\$1.3m to the Coalition parties, \$794,880 to Labor) last year. These industries have accounted for over half of the total donations to the major parties since 2015. Not only this, but there is a lack of transparency with millions of dollars worth of donations being undisclosed due to poor regulations and weak laws. Furthermore, 38% of the money that funds Australia's major parties has no identifiable source.

The aims of the campaign, otherwise known as #OurDemocracy, are to stop fossil fuel money 'distorting our democracy', to improve integrity and to make the system more transparent.

The #OurDemocracy network designed the Framework for a Fair Democracy – a series of eleven clear and common sense reforms to boost integrity, stamp out corruption, and make our democracy clean and fair. The vision behind the Framework for a Fair Democracy is for 'political system where our elected representatives reflect the values and concerns of our communities, decision making is balanced and fair, and people and the planet are at the heart of every decision'. The proposed reforms are:

1. Stamp out corruption – i) Create a strong federal integrity commission, ii) Introduce an enforceable code of conduct for politicians, iii) Strengthen the institutions that keep the federal government in check, iv) Introduce a merit-based process for appointing government advisors.

These measures would mean the implementation of a strong federal body to investigate allegations of corruption among politicians, to enforce ethical standards in politics and to ensure advisory bodies are not stacked with political allies and industry representatives

2. End cash for access – i) Make lobbying transparent, ii) Stop ministers moving into industry jobs, iii) Ban corrupting political donations,

iv) Shine a light on secret donations.

These measures would mean mandating a public register of professional lobbyist meetings, having a cooling off period for ministers before they can take up industry positions, banning large donations to politicians altogether, and requiring all donations over \$2500 to be declared publicly.

3. Level the playing field in election debates –

i) Stop corporations from spending millions on campaigning against regulation, ii) Limit political party spending on election advertisements and iii) Introduce standards of honesty in election campaigns.

These measures mean putting limits on how much anyone can spend on trying to influence the outcome of an election, limiting how much candidates and political parties can spend on election campaigns so as to open up more space for diverse voices, and penalising politicians and other campaigners who clearly and deliberately mislead the public in an effort to influence the election result.

To read more and sign the open letter to politicians calling for 'getting big money out of politics' go to <https://www.acf.org.au/.democracy>

The image below was created by Jess Harwood (@jessharwoodart for the Australian Conservation Foundation.

