



## **Lobbyist register welcome reform for transparency**

**Becher Townshend**

*The recent decision by the State Government to introduce a lobbyist register is a positive step for Tasmania and will help ensure accountability in dealing with government. It will provide the necessary transparency to ensure the integrity of both government and those who deal with government is preserved.*

### **The importance of lobbying in government**

Lobbying is a vital element of any democracy, as it ensures that government hears the voices of those that are impacted or may be impacted by government decisions.

While often labouring under the misconception of being a corrupt business, mainly due to scandals that undermine its true purpose, at the heart of modern professional lobbying is the serious and valuable process of research, strategy, analysis and importantly communication of public opinion to decision-makers.

Lobbying allows individuals, community groups and businesses to have a say in the decisions that affect them. Governments deprived of the views of their constituents cannot accurately represent the beliefs of the publics they stand for.

### **Lobbying in Tasmania**

For many years the line between acting on behalf of an organisation and attempting to influence the operations of government have been blurred in Tasmania, with no clear boundaries set.

Tasmania is a small state and people's networks often cross over between their personal and professional lives. With this in mind, the introduction of a lobbyist register is therefore appropriate and timely to guarantee that clarity and accountability in lobbying activities exists.

## **How lobbyist registers work to ensure transparency**

A lobbyist register is a public document that contains important information about lobbyists who make representations to government on behalf of their clients. The Australian Government adopted a lobbying code of conduct and established a lobbyist register in May this year.

All registers differ to an extent, but generally speaking they include the business registration details and trading names of each lobbyist, including where the business is not a publicly listed company, as well as the names of the owners, partners or major shareholders.

Additionally, they list the names and positions of the people employed, contracted or otherwise engaged by the lobbyist to carry out the lobbying activities as well as the names of the clients on whose behalf the lobbyist is conducting these activities.

In Tasmania, those seeking to register will be required to adhere to a lobbying code of conduct, outlining clear guidelines for any contact between lobbyists and government representatives.

## **A step in the right direction for Tasmania**

The Tasmanian business community has a right to expect that it can share its views and concerns with fairness and equity and the lobbyist register will ensure that all those engaging in professional lobbying declare their interests upfront with government and the rest of the community.

The Bartlett Government is to be congratulated for the move.

*Becher Townshend is the Managing Director of Font Public Relations – one of Tasmania's largest public relations firms, providing communications assistance to a range of organisations in the business, community and government sectors.*