

Chapter Eleven

Reforming Government

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Australia's system of government has served us well for more than a century. But in more recent years public confidence in government has been in decline. To restore public confidence and tackle the challenge of the future, we need to reform our system of government and improve the openness, transparency and accountability of parliament, government and the public service. In government, Labor will reform Commonwealth/State financial relations, end the blame game between different levels of government and engage in ongoing reform of the tax system

Principles

1. Government must respond to the complex social needs of a modern, technologically rich society and to the economic insecurities citizens are experiencing. Labor reaffirms its commitment to:
 - the idea and practice of government intervention to promote social democratic goals and to ameliorate the consequences of market failure; and
 - remaining responsive to community opinion, with a continuing emphasis on consultative processes of government.
2. Government must be truly representative if it is to realise the aspirations of all Australians. Labor believes governments should reflect the diversity of our society through their representatives, appointments and decisions.

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Accountable and Accessible Government

3. With the growing perception that decisions affecting the lives of citizens are increasingly being taken beyond national borders, it is imperative that people should have access to and confidence in their national governments. Labor believes this can only be achieved if:
 - governments are truly accountable to parliament and the electorate;
 - citizens' rights to an independent review of administrative decisions are guaranteed; and
 - transparency of government decision making is facilitated by effective measures such as freedom of information.

Efficient and Effective Government

4. Labor has always believed that its goals are best achieved if government services are delivered in the most efficient manner possible. Because of the universal difficulty in matching government revenue raising capacity to required outlays, the premium on efficiency is greater than ever.
5. Labor recognises that community support for an active role for government in the achievement of social and economic goals requires that government programs deliver the expected results.

Commonwealth–State Financial Relations

6. Many of Australia's biggest policy challenges involve the intersection of Commonwealth and State government responsibilities. In government, reforming the Federation will be an important priority for Labor. The cost shift and blame shift between governments costs

Australian taxpayers billions of dollars each year. There is too much ambiguity about which level of government is responsible for a particular government program. This often creates difficulties for Australians who want to access the range of services shared by governments, in areas such as health care, aged care, childcare, disability services, and dental care. It is also often a significant problem for Australian businesses in dealing with conflicting and costly regulatory environments between Commonwealth, state and governments.

7. Accordingly, Labor will:

- Review areas of overlap and duplication of responsibility between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, with the aim of eliminating inefficiencies and clarifying responsibilities;
- maintain a comprehensive system of horizontal fiscal equalisation based upon the per capita relativity recommendations of the Commonwealth Grants Commission;
- maintain a system of general purpose funding to local governments which provides adequate funding for their needs;
- continue to support specific purpose payments to States and Territories where these are appropriate to meet national objectives or ensure national standards, and ensure that those payments are used for the purpose for which they have been allocated; and
- ensure that State, Territory and local governments and their authorities are able to maintain and steadily improve their economic and social infrastructure.

8. Labor will also:

- seek to eliminate inappropriate duplication between Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local government functions and activities;
- support arrangements to voluntarily harmonise revenue bases and tax administration between the Commonwealth, States and Territories; and
- support arrangements to voluntarily integrate the administration of Commonwealth and State and Territory taxes and charges, where this has the potential to lead to economic benefits such as lower compliance costs for business.

9. Labor opposes companies shifting jurisdictions to avoid their OHS and workers compensation responsibilities and obligations. Labor will stop this.

Respect for the Constitution

- 10.** The Constitution is the fundamental compact between the Australian people and their government. The Constitution and the powers it vests in the three arms of government—the parliament, the executive and the judiciary—all draw authority from the Australian people.
- 11.** A healthy and open democracy in which government is held to account by the people is dependent upon a participative and active population. Our democracy's ability to respond properly to the priorities of people is diminished if people feel they are not part of that society or that it has nothing to offer them.
- 12.** Labor is committed to addressing issues such as economic deprivation, geographic or cultural isolation and language barriers that contribute to people's social exclusion.
- 13.** Through citizenship education and lifelong learning, Labor is committed to empowering Australians to understand the operation of our system of government, and to the need for ongoing constitutional reform to ensure that our legislatures are properly equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

- 14.** To continue to meet the increasingly complex economic, environmental, political and social needs and aspirations of the Australian people, Labor believes that the Constitution must be flexible and readily capable of alteration.
- 15.** Australians have only rarely amended the Constitution. History shows that referenda are only likely to succeed when they receive broad support across the political spectrum. Accordingly, Labor will seek to build a broad consensus for constitutional reform both with other political parties and among the Australian people as a whole.
- 16.** The Constitution was not set in stone at the time of Federation. It must be adaptable and acquire meaning from the needs of the day. Labor acknowledges that it is the role of the High Court to interpret the Constitution in context, rather than relying on any expression of original intent made at the time of Federation.

Constitutional Reform

- 17.** Labor is committed to engaging the public in a process of ongoing constitutional reform to remove outdated and inappropriate provisions from the Australian Constitution, to modernise our democratic structures and to make public administration more efficient and effective by facilitating cooperative schemes between Commonwealth and State governments.
- 18.** The Constitution should:
 - reflect Australia's status as an independent nation and as a federal parliamentary democracy;
 - use simple language and reflect actual practices and conventions of our system of government, including that the head of state should act on the advice of the government enjoying the confidence of the House of Representatives;
 - provide the most suitable framework for the economic, environmental, social and political development of Australia as a federation;
 - recognise an appropriate division of responsibilities between all levels of government to facilitate national planning and the effective delivery of public services; and
 - protect the independence of the judiciary;
- 19.** Labor supports the inclusion of a new preamble to the Constitution which recognises Indigenous Australians and the core elements of Australia's history and democracy and appropriately expresses the values, aspirations and ideals of the Australian people.
- 20.** Labor believes that the monarchy no longer reflects either the fundamental democratic principles that underpin the Australian nation or its diversity. Labor believes that our head of state should be an Australian who embodies and represents the traditions, values and aspirations of all Australians.
- 21.** Labor recognises the difficulty of advancing constitutional reform if the Australian people are not fully involved in the process and unless bipartisan support is obtained.
- 22.** Labor is committed to consulting with the Australian people, other political parties, the States and the Territories as to the form that the Republic should take. Labor will promote community debate about the advantages and disadvantages of the various republican models.
- 23.** Labor will conduct plebiscites to establish support for an Australian head of state and the preference for different forms of a Republic. When a preference has emerged Labor will initiate an appropriate referendum under section 128 of the Constitution.
- 24.** Labor believes that every Australian citizen should be eligible to be our head of state.

- 25.** Labor supports Australia's continued membership of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Participation in the Democratic Process

- 26.** Australians must be entitled to participate equally in the democratic process and in public life and administration. Labor supports constitutional reform to entrench the principle of one vote, one value for all elections, to ensure equal participation for all regardless of place of residence.
- 27.** Labor will pursue new and innovative measures designed to foster greater participation and engagement of the Australian population in the political process.
- 28.** Labor supports simultaneous, fixed four-year terms for the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- 29.** Labor supports repealing subsection 394(1) of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, which would then not prevent the States and Territories from moving their electoral systems into line with the Commonwealth, should the Commonwealth establish fixed four year terms.
- 30.** Labor supports constitutional reform to prevent the Senate rejecting, deferring or blocking appropriation bills.
- 31.** Labor supports constitutional reform at the Commonwealth, State and Territory level to remove the barrier on election to parliament of a person holding an office of profit under the Crown, provided that office is relinquished on election.
- 32.** Labor supports constitutional reform to allow all Australian citizens to contest Commonwealth elections.
- 33.** Labor supports the removal from the Constitution of provisions no longer having any effect.
- 34.** Labor will seek to remove racially discriminatory provisions from the Constitution, in particular to delete section 25 of the Constitution and to amend placitum 51(xxvi) to ensure it cannot be used to discriminate against Indigenous Australians.

Respect for the Parliament

- 35.** Parliament is the central institution in our system of government and respect for parliament is an essential element of a healthy democracy. In Labor's view this respect is dependent on the extent to which parliament reflects the will of the people; the credibility, appropriateness and effectiveness of the institutions of parliament; and the standard, dignity and transparency of parliamentary proceedings.
- 36.** Labor reaffirms its belief in the primacy of the people's House (the House of Representatives) and believes that a government enjoying the confidence of that House should be able to govern without obstruction by the House of review (the Senate).
- 37.** Labor acknowledges the need for ongoing reform to ensure parliament is able to meet the changing needs of government and society.
- 38.** Parliamentary question time should be an opportunity for calling the government to account. Labor believes that all ministers should be in attendance and that there should be procedures to ensure that questions are adequately answered.
- 39.** Labor will support measures designed to enhance the independence of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

- 40.** Labor regards the parliamentary committee system as an important means for enabling parliament to exercise its responsibility to review draft legislation and oversee the implementation of laws, policies and programs.
- 41.** Labor believes that those holding public office should fully disclose their financial interests and any other interest that may conflict, or be perceived to conflict, with their public duty.
- 42.** Labor ministers will be required to adhere to a formal code of conduct which sets out the principles of ministerial responsibility under which ministers are answerable to Parliament for the discharge of their responsibilities, and action to be taken when conflicts of interest, or perceived conflicts of interest, arise and which prohibits behaviour likely to bring discredit to the government. Former ministers will be required to adhere to a twelve-month waiting period before they can take up employment in their most recent area of responsibility.
- 43.** In order to enhance the accountability of parliamentarians for their expenditure of allowances, Labor will table details of expenditure of travel and other allowances annually and will establish an independent auditor of parliamentary allowances and entitlements with appropriate powers of investigation.
- 44.** Labor will ensure that ministerial advisers are accountable to government, the parliament and the public.
- 45.** Recognising that every citizen should have a stake in the political process and that political parties need to be broadly representative, Labor endorses the maintenance of compulsory voting and registration.
- 46.** Labor will reverse the Howard Government's regressive and undemocratic electoral changes. In particular, the early closure of the electoral roll and unfair proof of identity requirements that are designed to disenfranchise many Australians.
- 47.** In order to guarantee effective representation of the community in the national parliament, limitations on the opportunities for Australian citizens to offer themselves for election to the parliament should be minimal. Labor will work towards removing unnecessary barriers, and in particular will support reforms to terminate the constitutional ban on election to parliament of a person holding an office of profit under the Crown, provided that office is relinquished on election.
- 48.** Labor believes that the cost of participation in the political process should be shared between the wider electorate and political organisations and their supporters. To achieve this Labor believes public funding is central to ensuring an open and participatory democracy.
- 49.** Labor supports public transparency of political donations. Labor will therefore reverse the outrageous changes instituted by the Howard Government to limit public disclosure of political donations. Labor will not support millions of dollars being hidden from public scrutiny.
- 50.** Labor will introduce measures to ensure:
 - all fundraising bodies and trusts assisting political parties, politicians or candidates fully and promptly disclose their accounts and the source of their income;
 - the definition of 'associated entity' in the Commonwealth Electoral Act more accurately reflects the activities of political parties;
 - political party annual returns are accompanied by a report from an accredited auditor; and
 - the Australian Electoral Commission has the power and resources to ensure compliance with disclosure laws, including the power to fully audit organisations or people it suspects

have not disclosed gifts or other resources given to political parties, politicians or candidates.

- 51.** Labor will abolish the tax-deductibility of political donations, and reverse the Howard Government's attempt to hide donations by lifting the disclosure threshold from \$1500 to \$10,000.

Integrity and Openness in Government Administration

- 52.** In government, Labor will ensure the highest standards of integrity, transparency in decision making, openness and accountability are maintained.
- 53.** Labor will seek to encourage and lead public debate on important public policy issues by publishing appropriate, taxpayer-funded research.
- 54.** Labor will not support the use of government advertising for political purposes. Labor will introduce legislation to ensure:
- government advertising campaigns only occur after government policy has been legislated for by parliament;
 - all government advertising and information campaigns provide objective, factual and explanatory information, free from partisan promotion of government policy and political argument and in an unbiased and objective language;
 - all advertising campaigns in excess of \$250,000 are examined by the Public Service Commissioner, who will report to ministers on whether the proposed advertising complies with Auditor-General's 1998 guidelines on government advertising; and
 - the cost of government advertising is minimised by the targeted use of media other than television advertising.
- 55.** Labor will promote transparency and open government through improved freedom of information legislation. Conclusive certificates will be abolished and internal working documents that do not compromise national security will be accessible. Reports on the operation of government and government-funded agencies will be regularly tabled in parliament.
- 56.** Freedom of information provisions should be available to all. Labor will ensure that the costs involved in using freedom of information procedures do not put them out of reach of the community.
- 57.** Labor will ensure that considerations relating to outsourcing, privatisation, notions of commercial confidentiality and corporatisation are not used as excuses to allow government and government-funded agencies to escape the requirements of open government and accountability. The rights of clients and other recipients of such services, including rights to access to information, privacy, correction of inaccurate information and, where necessary, redress, will be maintained.
- 58.** Labor recognises the responsibility of government to provide the necessary regulatory frameworks to ensure people, particularly clients and other recipients of services, are protected.
- 59.** Labor recognises that where the government acknowledges responsibility to provide a service, it must guarantee delivery standards. This will require that the performance of service providers, whether they be public or private sector, be subject to examination by the Auditor General. Labor remains committed to a strong, independent and well resourced national audit office capable of providing objective and balanced audit advice and assurance to the parliament, government and public sector entities.

- 60.** Labor believes that all government and administrative decisions should be subject to administrative review or judicial challenge, including through the continued effective operation of the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act.
- 61.** Labor will defend the integrity of the office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and, with commensurate funding, boost its powers and responsibilities, including the power to commission public inquiries, to ensure standards of governance can be independently scrutinised.
- 62.** It is essential for the integrity of the review process that tribunals and other bodies should maintain their independence from the agencies under review.
- 63.** Labor supports public participation in government decision making through consultative processes such as advisory bodies, that are representative of community views.
- 64.** Labor recognises that public interest disclosures are a legitimate form of action in a democracy and will support legislation to provide effective protection for public interest disclosures in the public sector.
- 65.** Labor is opposed to relinquishing control of the nation's public services, including health and education services, in the General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations and negotiations on bilateral free trade agreements. Labor will not support changes that undermine affordable access to public services or ongoing government rights to regulate services in the public interest. Nor will Labor support changes that require the privatisation of public assets.

High Quality Government Service Delivery

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- 66.** The Australian Public Service and the public sector generally plays a crucial nation building role, promoting our economic and social objectives in a publicly accountable way.
- 67.** Labor will revive the concept of a career in the public service by making the APS a model employer, a place where Australians want to work, and by limiting and reducing non-ongoing employment in the APS. Labor will revive skills in the public sector and reaffirm the historic role of the public sector in national affairs.
- 68.** Labor is committed to working with the community and the trade union movement in order to develop quality public services for all communities throughout Australia. These will be balanced across a range of issues, including re-investing in the community, services generated for service rather than profit, commitment to growth in service, and meeting the community's expectations.
- 69.** Labor will boost the powers of the Public Service Commission and its Commissioner. This would provide for greater coordination in whole-of-service issues, such as workforce planning, recruitment, and greater in-service training. The Commission will take responsibility for core industrial relations matters, including a framework agreement. The Public Service Commissioner will also examine proposed government advertising campaigns in excess of \$250,000, and report to ministers on whether the proposed advertising complies with the Auditor-General's 1998 guidelines on government advertising.
- 70.** Given the rapid ageing of the APS workforce, and the shrinking number of young people joining the service, Labor will place particular emphasis on the recruitment of young people to the APS workforce, and will ensure that older Australians who wish to remain in the APS are able to do so.

- 71.** Labor supports the maintenance of a strong, unified, apolitical public service as a repository of knowledge and expertise in the development of government policy and the delivery of essential services to the Australian community.
- 72.** Labor believes there are characteristics, which are unique to the public sector, such as multiplicity of objectives, the need for higher standards of accountability and the need to respond to the changing requirements of governments and that there are limits to the extent to which private sector practices can or should be applied to the public sector.
- 73.** Under Labor, the focus of government will be on achieving benefits for the Australian community as a whole. While cost effectiveness will be an important consideration, equity, social cohesion and the provision of opportunities for all Australians will be of prime importance.
- 74.** Labor recognises that, in the drive to make Australia more competitive, there is a need for continuous improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of government service delivery. Labor is committed to achieving best practice in the provision of government services.
- 75.** As part of the process for improving the performance of public sector trading enterprises, Labor will ensure that they are provided with an adequate capital structure, including an adequate equity base.
- 76.** Labor believes that the purchasing power of the Commonwealth and other levels of government should be used to provide expanded opportunities for local industry and to achieve savings in the purchase of goods and services for the public sector.
- 77.** Labor recognises that for government programs to meet their stated objectives necessary tools and resources must be in place. Programs should be regularly monitored to ensure that they have the capacity to achieve their stated objectives.
- 78.** Labor is committed to improving transactions between the public sector and the wider community. It will strengthen the consultation between government agencies and consumers and will ensure that service delivery is simplified and better directed through the use of appropriate technology. It will favour changes to program design that enable recipients to exercise greater choice and control in their utilisation of basic government services.
- 79.** Labor recognises that, despite the potential for increased efficiencies offered by new technologies, access to personal service and expert advice locally will still be of great value in many circumstances, particularly in the delivery of services to regional areas.
- 80.** Labor will undertake audits of the provision of government services, including to regional, rural and remote Australia, and develop a strategy to ensure adequate service provision.
- 81.** Labor recognises that our institutions and systems of government were not designed to manage mega-issues, such as climate change. Labor recognises the need for institutional reform in order to responsibly manage long-term issues facing Australia, the likes of which were unimaginable to our nation's founders.

Access and Equity in Government Employment

- 82.** Labor is committed to a single, integrated, merit-based and non-discriminatory career public service that is able to respond to the changing needs of government and society.
- 83.** Selection and promotion in the public sector will be on the basis of merit. At the same time Labor reaffirms its commitment to ensure a rapid increase of representation, including at senior levels, of sections of the workforce who have been discriminated against, or who have special needs: namely women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrants and

people with disabilities. Labor also recognises the important role of the public sector in providing employment, training and career opportunities for young people.

- 84.** Women make up over half of the Australian public service workforce, but remain significantly under represented at senior and middle management levels. Women will remain under-represented in the senior public service unless they have the flexibility to balance work and family commitments. Labor is committed to addressing this inequality in the public service workforce.
- 85.** Labor reaffirms its commitment to the principles of participatory decision making and industrial democracy in the public sector.
- 86.** Labor supports collective bargaining within the public service and the role of relevant unions in bargaining processes.
- 87.** Labor is committed to ensuring that public servants are adequately represented in respect of workplace matters and will encourage union membership within the public service.
- 88.** Labor will encourage mobility between and within departments, particularly for the Senior Executive Service, and between the public service and other appropriate areas of employment.
- 89.** Labor recognises that the job insecurity faced by agency heads and department secretaries is a matter of serious concern and that it can lead to politicisation of the APS. Contracts for heads and secretaries will be for a fixed period of five years unless the appointee has a preference for a shorter period. Performance pay for heads and secretaries will be abolished and the jurisdiction of the Remuneration Tribunal to fix pay and conditions for heads and secretaries will be restored.
- 90.** Labor recognises that:
 - Australians want a career public service without partisanship;
 - public service employment must be fair and equitable;
 - there is necessarily a limit on, and need for public scrutiny of, top public service remuneration;
 - there must be an ethos of public service; and
 - outcomes are funded by public money.
- 91.** These special elements should be reflected in public service industrial relations arrangements by:
 - ensuring secure, comprehensive, service-wide standards and classifications;
 - ensuring secure superannuation arrangements;
 - emphasising training and career development;
 - enabling public servants to balance work and family responsibilities;
 - ensuring appeal and review rights;
 - ensuring that contracting-out is not used as a vehicle to cut wages and working conditions; and
 - establishing staffing levels commensurate with work loads, not arbitrary financial targets.
- 92.** Labor recognises that government appointments to board and statutory positions should be conducted in a manner that is designed to foster transparency, accountability and public confidence. In government, Labor will adopt principles and procedures to ensure that such appointments are underpinned by a system based on merit, equality of opportunity, public scrutiny and independence.

Financing Government

- 93.** Labor believes that the operation of the taxation system should be consistent with the criteria of fairness, economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, adequacy, simplicity, transparency, comprehensiveness and administrative efficiency.
- 94.** Labor is committed to a fair and progressive tax system characterised by:
- vertical equity, meaning that those with differing capacities to pay tax should face differing burdens, with a greater contribution from those with the greater capacity to pay; and
 - horizontal equity, meaning that those with equivalent capacities to pay tax should face similar burdens.
- 95.** Labor will ensure that the taxation system is fair by, in particular:
- recognising the costs faced by families in raising children;
 - ensuring that the interaction of tax and welfare does not act as a barrier for people to move from welfare to work;
 - providing appropriate resources to revenue authorities to ensure a high level of compliance with, and minimal avoidance of, existing taxation laws;
 - taking measures to ensure that high wealth individuals are not able, through family trusts and other income splitting arrangements, to avoid paying their fair share of taxation;
 - ensuring that the tax system does not subsidise excessive executive remuneration;
 - ensuring the integrity of the ABN registration system; and
 - addressing erosion of the PAYE tax base through incorporation and contrived independent contracting.

Economic Efficiency

- 96.** The design and structure of taxes can have a significant effect on the economic viability of particular industries, regions or indeed the whole nation. To maximise economic efficiency in the tax system, Labor will seek to ensure that it:
- encourages economic growth and employment;
 - encourages saving;
 - encourages new investment, and research and development;
 - assists the location of headquarters of international businesses in Australia;
 - facilitates the establishment of Australia as a major regional financial centre; and
 - maintains the integrity of taxation bases that are currently threatened.

Environmental Sustainability

- 97.** Labor will ensure that taxation leads to increased environmental sustainability and avoid taxation that leads to increased environmental degradation.

Adequacy

- 98.** Labor will ensure a level of revenue adequate for the rebuilding and improvement of the public services we are committed to providing by:
- achieving sufficient economic growth to generate revenue;
 - ensuring that the integrity of the tax base is maintained; and
 - ensuring that all taxpayers are contributing fairly, by appropriately designed tax measures and effective legislative and administrative action to minimise tax avoidance.

Simplicity

- 99.** Labor will ensure that the taxation law is as simple to apply as is practicable and consistent with the achievement of fairness and other objectives. Taxpayers should be able to determine their liability inexpensively and with reasonable certainty, and the authorities should be able to calculate and collect revenue equally readily.

Transparency

- 100.** Labor will ensure that the taxation system is as transparent as possible, with decision-making discretions reduced as much as possible and a comprehensive system of rulings maintained to keep taxpayers fully informed of the practice of the revenue authorities.

Comprehensiveness

- 101.** Labor will ensure that the tax base is as comprehensive as possible, consistent with the achievement of other objectives, in a way that ensures that all sections of the community pay their fair share and no one is disproportionately burdened. Labor believes that tax avoidance schemes used by wealthy individuals must be stamped out. Labor in government will require the budget papers to include an independent report from the Taxation Commissioner and the Secretary to the Treasury, identifying material threats to the tax base.

Administrative Efficiency

- 102.** Labor recognises that administrative efficiency is particularly desirable in the taxation system, in that it minimises the negative effects of taxation on the economy reduces the costs of collecting revenue, thereby providing more net revenue for government services and improves voluntary compliance by taxpayers.
- 103.** Labor will ensure that the taxation system minimises compliance and collection costs. Maximum use will be made of information technology to minimise the time and cost burden faced by taxpayers, in particular small businesses, in complying with their taxation obligations.

The Management of Assets and Non-Tax Revenue

- 104.** Labor believes that the management of public assets should reflect their contribution to the community beyond their financial worth. Labor is committed to the management of public assets to ensure that:
- consultation occurs when the use of public assets, including land, requires upgrading or review and that this involves the consideration of impacts on the environment, community amenity and access, transport, and regional or urban development;
 - interest and dividends are used to meet broad social and economic objectives; and
 - the services provided by the assets are reviewed and, if required, safeguarded by legislation.
- 105.** Labor believes public ownership of assets, services and infrastructure will continue to play a vital role in supporting and promoting a strong economy and a more equal society. Therefore, Labor is committed to the maintenance of, and investment in, public assets, services and infrastructure to ensure their long-term competitive viability.
- 106.** Any consideration of privatisation of assets, infrastructure or services, including through the application of national competition policy, will only occur where, after a period of genuine public consultation, it is demonstrably in the public interest.
- 107.** Such public interest tests will include:

- privacy of consumer information;
- accountability to, and scrutiny by, the public including unions and other stakeholders;
- reduced quality of service or access to service, cuts to jobs or employment conditions;
- detrimental effect on the environment or industry development (including regional industry clusters and supply chains);
- assessment of impacts on regional, rural and remote Australian communities;
- detrimental impact on skills development; and
- detrimental impact on maintenance, safety and productivity of associated industries services and infrastructure.

Outlays

- 108.** In addition to maintaining a taxation system which provides the primary source of revenue for meeting the needs of the Australian community, Labor recognises that the public expects government to continually review and assess public spending so that value for money in public expenditure is achieved and additional resources can be directed to high 153 priority objectives.
- 109.** Labor recognises that this can only be achieved by way of a rigorous and disciplined budget process and financial management system.
- 110.** Accordingly, Labor will implement a system which:
- establishes clear priorities and intended outcomes for spending, in line with announced policies;
 - seeks wherever possible to offset new recurrent expenditure with efficiencies in existing programs;
 - maintains world best practice and continuous improvement in the efficient delivery of high quality public services, and encourages innovative ways to achieve policy objectives at lower cost;
 - maintains accrual accounting, but makes it more transparent and rigorous and reports the underlying cash and fiscal balances;
 - improves the transparency of budget reporting at program level including by presentation of program information in the current budget year and the forward estimates;
 - rigorously evaluates all spending and tax expenditure programs to ensure that programs are efficiently and effectively achieving their objectives;
 - ensures the prudent financial management and accountability of public monies through a framework of strong fraud control measures, efficient cash management, optimal buying practices by government agencies and active asset management; and
 - maintains the role of the Auditor General as the sole auditor of budget funded bodies, ensures adequate resources for the Australian National Audit Office and provides comprehensive financial information throughout the budgetary cycle.
- 111.** Labor will do this while maintaining its commitment to a socially just Australia where all people can have a standard of living sufficient to enable them to live decently with dignity.

Resolutions

Electoral Act Changes

Labor condemns the Howard Government's recent changes to the Electoral Act which will affect thousands of Australians, particularly new citizens, renters, seasonal workers, Indigenous, homeless and young people.

These regressive and undemocratic changes include:

Early closure of the electoral roll

By closing the electoral roll for most new enrollees on the day the writs are issued and only giving existing enrollees three days to correct their details, the government will severely limit a crucial period for Australians to ensure they are correctly enrolled. If it had been implemented for the last election up to 160,000 Australians may have been unable to enrol to vote and up to 280,000 people in total, could have been affected by having a substantial fault in their enrolment.

Greater identity requirements for enrolment

This will make it harder to enrol and therefore to be part of the democratic process. It will increase the administrative burden on the AEC and disenfranchise thousands.

New requirements for provisional voters to prove their identity

Voters on election day who aren't listed on the electoral roll are able to cast a provisional vote, that is then enveloped. After election day the bona fides of these ballots are investigated by the AEC and if they should be admitted to the count, they are. The Howard Government intends to force those who cast a provisional vote to provide additional proof of identity. If they are unable to do so their vote will be excluded. Over 180,000 Australians cast provisional votes at the last election.

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Increasing the declarable limit for disclosure of donations from \$1,500 to \$10,000

A huge jump in the limit required before donation details must be made public. Massive sums of money will go into party coffers without the public knowing. Over 80% of donations would disappear from public view. In 2003-04 over 12 million dollars across all major parties would vanish from public scrutiny.

Increasing tax deductibility for political donations from \$100 to \$1,500

This will provide a massive windfall to Coalition donors.

In the history of our country, there is not and has never been any evidence to show that any election outcome has been affected by fraud.

The Howard Government should be condemned for making it easier to donate to influence the political process, but a lot harder to exercise your democratic rights.

Labor will amend the Electoral Act to restore these rights, including reinstating the seven day period for enrolment after the issuing of the writs.

Labor will undertake a positive campaign to inform Australians of their rights to participate in the democratic process.

Federal Labor will also work with the States and Territories to keep our electoral roll properly maintained. As part of this process, Labor will commit to exploring new strategies to ensure our electoral roll is kept up to date as an essential part of our democratic system.