

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting

Inquiry into political donations and disclosure

Melbourne — 23 July 2008

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Witness

Mr B. Walsh, president, Kew Cottages Coalition.

The CHAIR — I welcome members of the public and thank them for attending the more informal part of the proceedings — that is, comments from the floor. The Electoral Matters Committee would like to give members of the public an opportunity to address the committee. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act 1975 and the Parliamentary Committees Act, protected by parliamentary privilege. I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearings may not be protected by parliamentary privilege. The committee today is hearing two inquiries: the inquiry into political donations and disclosure, and the inquiry into voter participation and informal voting.

In terms of procedure, please wait to be acknowledged by the Chair or executive officer before speaking; please clearly state your name and address before making your comments; please keep your comments brief, 2 to 3 minutes, and to the point. The committee members will take note of your comments but will not in general ask questions. Please note that this is a public hearing and that your comments will be recorded and included in the transcript of the hearing, which will become a public document. You will receive a copy of the transcript in about a fortnight. Obvious errors of fact or grammar may be corrected but not matters of substance.

Mr WALSH — My name is Brian Walsh. I am president of the Kew Cottages Coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I think your meeting is very timely, as you would have seen from the *Age* investigations by Royce Millar last week, under the headline 'Political donations linked to developers, contractors'. Kew Cottages features on the front page of that as well as in other articles throughout the week.

In our view, in a sense, as far as your investigation goes, I think you should look on Kew Cottages as the canary down the Victorian mine shaft of political donations. We think with your help there is still time to breathe some fresh air into the mine shaft, because Kew Cottages is a live issue. It is a case study, I would recommend to you, that can be significantly improved by shedding light on what is happening and has happened there in terms of the political donations.

There are three points essentially I would like to make to you today: we are not just talking about political donations; we are talking about when political donations become bribes. Bribes in politics are like drugs in sport. They are unfair, they buy unfair advantage, they buy bad decisions — corruption buys bad decisions. The decisions that have been revealed in the *Age* in terms of Kew Cottages and other planning development decisions are not just linked, as Royce Millar has linked them, in terms of time to government decisions, we would say they are bad decisions. It is in no-one's interests, as in other evidence put to you today, to have bad decisions made by government. It is in no-one's interest to have an unfair system. We say, just like you can now look to new developments to root out the problem of drugs or bribes in sport, you could very easily and very quickly make things a lot better in rooting out bribes in politics, out of corruption in politics in Victoria.

Victoria is a soft option compared to other states. We do not have an anticorruption commission, and we should do. We would recommend you suggest that Victoria should get one as soon as possible. It needs to look at patterns of donations. We say that, as far as we can understand it — we have been looking at this for five years — there has been no monitoring of donations linked to contracts, land zoning, planning decisions.

Although, as we have heard, the AEC has records of donations and so on, there has been no parliamentary follow-up, we understand, until, for example, in the case of another committee of your Parliament, the Public Land Development Committee, started looking at issues such as Kew Cottages. There is evidence there, and the monitoring needs to be done of that. There has been no monitoring of lobbyists like Brian Burke in Western Australia or friends of Brian Burke like Graham Richardson, who has been involved here in Victoria now, and there should be.

We say you should also be monitoring the barriers that the executive government of the day has put in place to stop such monitoring — for example, the executive government's current attempt to stop the Select Committee on Public Land Development inquiring into what has been termed 'public land' by the upper house of this Parliament and which the executive government seeks to narrow the definition of. If that monitoring was in place, if you had an anticorruption commission to enforce it, then we say the situation would be a lot better. It needs to get better.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your input.

Witness withdrew.