

The Albanese Government's Integrity Report Card



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The Albanese Government's Integrity Report Card

As we near six months after its re-election, the Albanese Government faces serious integrity challenges. This report card from the Centre for Public Integrity assesses the Government's actions — and inaction — across key democratic safeguards: transparency, merit-based appointments, limits on undue influence, strengthening the public service, and support for the institutions that hold power to account.

At this early stage in its term, the Centre urges the Government to reset course — to honour its commitments to transparency, respect for Parliament, robust checks and balances, and action to stamp out corruption and undue influence. With genuine reform and leadership, the Government can still deliver the transparent and accountable democracy Australians were promised.



Commitment to Transparency

Leaning into a Culture of Secrecy

In July 2025, the Centre for Public Integrity released two reports assessing the Government's record on transparency. In respect of freedom of information, while we identified welcome progress in funding of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and some improvement in other important metrics, we also warned of a worrying increase in FOI application refusals.

Instead of fixing the problem, the Government doubled down. The Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2025 represents a serious and alarming step backward — expanding exemptions, re-introducing application fees, and banning anonymous requests. These changes are almost universally opposed, and would make it harder for journalists, whistleblowers, and the public to hold government to account.

The Centre calls on the Government to commission a full, independent review of the FOI system.

Cronyism

More Jobs for Mates

The Albanese Government has made little progress on one of Australia's most pressing integrity reforms: ending the culture of "jobs for mates" in public appointments.

A clear path forward already exists. The Transparent and Quality Public Appointments Bill 2023, introduced by Independent MP Sophie Scamps and drawing on research from the Centre for Public Integrity, offers a ready-made framework for open, merit-based appointments.

Yet the Government has shown little appetite for reform. It continues to withhold the 2023 Briggs Review of Public Sector Board Appointments — a review described by Finance Minister Gallagher when she announced it as "all about putting an end to the jobs for mates culture that defined the previous Morrison Government's public sector appointments". Meanwhile, appointments continue to be made without sufficient guardrails to guarantee transparency and independence — including that of the new head of the Office of National Intelligence, a former adviser to the Prime Minister.

The same issues are evident in new legislation. The Australian Centre for Disease Control Bill 2025 establishes a major public office with no provision for merit-based appointment, despite the Government's own acknowledgment of the need for such measures when passing the Administrative Review Tribunal Act 2024.

The Centre calls on the Government to release the Briggs Review and legislate transparent, merit-based appointment processes across the public sector.

Undue Influence

Failing to Rein in the Power of Lobbyists

The Albanese Government has failed to curb the undue influence of big business, leaving glaring loopholes in Australia's lobbying regime untouched. These loopholes are well documented, including in the Centre for Public Integrity's report, *A Seat at the Table* (July 2025) which set out a comprehensive legislative reform agenda.

Rather than improving transparency, the Government has blocked scrutiny — including refusing FOI requests for ministerial diary extracts related to the Federal Labor Business Forum, arguing such documents are not “official documents of a Minister.” As Geoffrey Watson SC, Director of the Centre for Public Integrity, said:

“These documents go to the heart of government dealings with business and industry — they're plainly of public importance and should be disclosed.”

Meanwhile, loopholes continue to exist. It has been reported that just two months after the May 2025 election, former staffers to the Prime Minister launched a “strategic advisory” firm offering political and policy advice. Under current rules, ministerial staff are banned from lobbying for 12 months, yet can freely provide such “strategic advice” to achieve policy objectives.

The Centre calls on the Government to close loopholes in lobbying regulations and introduce a transparent, comprehensive framework that promotes integrity, accountability, and equality of access.



Supporting Parliament and its Accountability Function

Cutting Support for Those Who Hold Government to Account

In a move that weakens Parliament's capacity for scrutiny, the Government cut staffing allocations for the Opposition following the 2025 election — continuing the pattern set after the 2022 cuts to independent MPs.

The Centre calls on the Government to restore staff allocations for Opposition and Independent MPs to ensure Parliament can effectively perform its oversight role.

Reducing Scrutiny of Indigenous Affairs

The Government's decision to remove the dedicated day for Indigenous affairs in Senate Estimates marks a clear step backward for transparency.

This scrutiny day, established after the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, has long provided an important accountability mechanism for policies affecting First Nations communities. Removing it reduces parliamentary oversight in one of the nation's most critical policy areas and undermines the Government's stated commitment to genuine partnership and accountability in Indigenous affairs.

The Centre calls on the Government to restore the dedicated Indigenous affairs Estimates day.

Executive Law-Making without Oversight

Despite repeated warnings from the Senate Standing Committee on the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation, the Government continues to exempt major executive instruments from parliamentary review.

A key example is the Help to Buy Program Directions 2025, which set out critical details of the Government's flagship housing policy yet were exempt from scrutiny and disallowance — echoing the overreach seen in COVID-era *Biosecurity Act 2015* Directions.

Important operational and policy decisions should be contained in primary legislation or at least in instruments subject to full parliamentary scrutiny and disallowance. The continued use of exemptions, such as exemptions for Directions issued by a Minister, under Regulation 9 of the Legislation (Exemptions and Other Matters) Regulation represents an unjustified carve-out from accountability, long criticised by the Senate Committee, the Centre, and other experts.

The Centre calls on the Government to implement the Senate Committee's 2021 recommendations: that any exemption from disallowance or sunset be made only through primary legislation, and accompanied by a statement justifying the exceptional circumstances.



Supporting an Independent Public Service

Frank and Fearless Advice — in Name Only

The Government's Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2025 expands exemptions for "deliberative processes", claiming to protect frank and fearless advice. Yet the reviews it cites — the Peter Shergold, *Learning from Failure* report (2015) and David Thodey et al, *Our Public Service, Our Future* report (2019) — offer opinion, but no evidence, that limiting FOI rights supports candour in the public service.

Instead, the Government has ignored key recommendations from the Thodey report that would structurally strengthen independence of the public service, such as reforms to the appointment and tenure of departmental secretaries.

The Centre calls on the Government to implement Recommendations 39(a) and (c) of the Thodey Report (2019) to support a truly independent, professional public service.

Protecting Whistleblowers

An Opportunity for Genuine Reform

The Government has taken a welcome first step with the release of the Exposure Draft — Public Interest Disclosure and Other Legislation Amendment (Whistleblower Protections) Bill 2025.

However, civil society organisations — including the Centre for Public Integrity — have raised concerns that the draft does not go far enough to protect whistleblowers. Key issues include ensuring the independence and resourcing of the proposed Whistleblower Ombudsman.

The Centre calls on the Government to strengthen the Bill to ensure robust, independent, and accessible protections for those who speak up about wrongdoing.

Conclusion

The Centre for Public Integrity issues this report card in the hope that the Government will seize the opportunity to lead on integrity reform. The solutions to Australia's integrity challenges are well-known and achievable — from transparency and accountability in appointments to stronger whistleblower protections and lobbying reform.

It is now up to the Government to act, and deliver the transparent, accountable, and trustworthy democracy Australians expect and deserve.

About The Centre for Public Integrity

The Centre for Public Integrity is an independent think tank dedicated to preventing corruption, protecting the integrity of our accountability institutions, and eliminating the undue influence of money in politics in Australia. Board members of the Centre include the Hon Anthony Whealy KC, the Hon Margaret White AO, the Hon Michael Barker KC, Professor Allan Fels AO, Professor Joo Cheong Tham, and Geoffrey Watson SC.

More information at: www.publicintegrity.org.au
