

**PHAA ADVOCACY WORKSHOP NO.2**

**POLITICAL MECHANISMS**

**SEPTEMBER 2006**

## **Advocacy and the use of political mechanisms**

There are two very distinct types of advocacy:

- **“Party Political”** – advocacy that takes a political stance, usually that of one political party or coalition of parties, and then uses available mechanisms to advance the party or coalition in order for their advocacy goals to be met;
- **“Non-party political”** – advocacy that while making use of political mechanisms to advance goals, does not align with one political party or another and does not involve advancing the party as a means of advancing the advocacy goal.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with either approach to advocacy. Some organisations or individuals may declare themselves to be non-party political. In doing so they are declaring that they will seek to advocate for their goals without resorting to using political parties against each other. Other groups or individuals may feel that all means necessary should be used for advocacy or for advocacy on a specific issue. They are in effect declaring their intention to use political parties as part of their advocacy tools.

The information provided in this paper addresses political mechanisms, some of which would normally only be used under party political advocacy, and others that would be more suitable for non-party political advocacy. This paper provides information on the political mechanisms that are available for advocacy. It does not determine which mechanisms may be most appropriately used by organisations or individuals or for which causes.

All the mechanisms detailed below can be misused. It is important to know that the majority of legislative change in the Commonwealth and other parliaments occurs jointly, in a bipartisan manner. Being able to tap into bipartisan policy development and legislative change is at least as important, if not much more important, than being able to advocate in an adversarial manner.

### **1. When and how do you advocate via politicians and how do you advocate via bureaucracies?**

It is easy to view government as one amorphous mass, without distinguishing between the political elements and the administrative or bureaucratic elements. At all three levels (Commonwealth, State/Territory, Local) of Government in Australia, there are distinctions between these two elements and each afford different possibilities for advocacy. While there is no well-delineated boundary that can be used on all occasions, it is useful to think of politicians as setting “policy”, and bureaucrats as being responsible for the day-to-day administration of the policy, that is the programs that sit under policies.

#### **Bureaucracy**

It is tempting to think that change can only be made by a Minister or by a Prime Minister, the Premier or the Mayor. While it is true that there are occasions when going directly to the top can resolve an issue, it is also important to remember that if you take

your issue to the top and are unsuccessful, there are very few if any other places that you can then go.

The bureaucracy at any level of government helps to propose and formulate policy that is considered by politicians. Bureaucrats are not responsible for whether or not a specific policy is adopted, but they can provide a major avenue for changes to policies and programs to be discussed. Firstly, while not always at the “coal face” of issues, there are many times when bureaucrats hold considerable knowledge about:

- Overarching frameworks (eg. zero budget growth and departmental budget frameworks)
- Existing policies and their detailed application
- Other policies and programs that could be applicable to your issue
- Current political priorities
- Ministers or other politicians more personal agendas.

It is important to tap into as much of this information as possible before deciding that you need or want to approach any particular politician. As much as anything else, senior bureaucrats frequently have areas of discretion whereby they can make decisions within predetermined parameters. Sometimes it is possible to use this capacity to change an administrative rule, provide approval for an exception, or to realign programs or processes to give a better outcome under a policy.

Where your advocacy is issue or topic based, and you are advocating for change over a long period, maintaining open relationships with bureaucrats is essential to your ongoing success. “Political parties and particular politicians will come and go in different positions, but the bureaucracy remains”, or so says the rumour. Your interaction, or the interaction of your organization with the bureaucracy is part of government’s ‘corporate history’, and the more you are part of the existing history, the greater the chance that you will be consulted, or at least provided with opportunities to provide input and comments on issues as they arise. And as any salesperson knows, once you have the foot inside the door its all about clinching the deal.

To summarise:

- The bureaucracies at all levels of government hold information that may be useful to your advocacy;
- Senior bureaucrats frequently have discretion to make exceptions to rules or to vary rules by some degree, and to make one-off decisions where a good case can be made for them;
- If your advocacy is sufficiently cogent, evidence based, and able to bring about desired outcomes, it is possible on occasions for your cause to be taken up by bureaucracies, through their processes with their political masters. This can be a very powerful way of undertaking advocacy on specific issues.

### **Politicians**

When deciding to advocate directly to politicians, it is important to look for two distinct types of argument, both of which you will need.

- Evidence – you need to be able to clearly articulate the problem that concerns you, the current state of affairs, the effects or lack of effects of current policy on the issue and the changes that you are seeking. If you have a possible cost for those changes that should also be included. It is critical that you be able to do this succinctly and without overwhelming the politician with science. It is very useful if you have a one- maximum-two-page summary of these points that you can leave for further consideration.
- Impact – it is useful to provide politicians with information about the impact of them not changing a policy or not taking the action that you have suggested. The more that this can be illustrated by personal accounts, preferably in the politician’s own electorate, the better. It is very important to leave politicians with contacts names and addresses of people who can speak from personal experience as well as organizational contacts in order to have maximum effect.

Overall, the more senior the politician, the broader the viewpoint and interest. For example, local members will usually chase up an issue for a constituent. Ministers, Prime Ministers, Premiers and Mayors will frequently pass individual cases to more junior politicians, or more often to the bureaucracy. Their focus is much more strongly on the frameworks in which their’ policies sit and the overall effects of the policies (does it meet 90-95% of cases). It is important, therefore, to differentiate the topic, the type of evidence and the expectation that you have in consulting/advocating with different politicians.

It is important to note that governments at the State/Territory level and the Commonwealth level are party based. Some local governments are non-party political, others are strongly party based. Where the system that you will be advocating in is strongly party political, this is an important consideration in developing your advocacy strategy. Here politicians are most likely to hold a “party-line” on any issue. Consequently, it becomes vital to know what the various party policies are on your issue. Politicians rarely “cross the floor” in Australia.

On occasions you will find that the issue that interests you either is not subject to party policies or the party policies are similar. In these cases it is very important to talk to politicians from all parties and to encourage cross-party, or bipartisan approaches to the issue. As noted above, an enormous amount of political work is accomplished via the parties working together.

It is important to know which politicians will be open to your issue, who is neutral and who will oppose you. This cannot always be distinguished on party lines, and the building of common belief and desire for change across parties can be a very effective, if longer-term strategy for some advocacy issues. The major places that you can readily access to find our individual politicians views on particular issues are:

- electoral offices
- websites (especially their personal websites)
- local newspapers (their electorates)
- maiden speeches
- their own newsletters.

## **2. What are the critical political mechanisms available to be used for advocacy in the different levels of government, and how can they be accessed?**

The mechanisms that are available at different levels of government vary, but essentially address the same phases in delivering services to Australians – policy development, program development and implementation and evaluation and revision. This paper is focused on the policy development mechanisms, although we acknowledge that advocacy can be undertaken through both program and evaluation mechanisms.

### **Political mechanisms – what are they**

Policy development as represented in this paper is the prerogative of governments and other political parties. Policy is developed by political parties to provide a framework in which they can hold specific issues, including program delivery. It is the key to understanding what it is that any government is willing to deliver and what it is not willing to deliver. Political mechanisms include:

- party policy development;
- petitions;
- budgets;
- inquiries;
- submissions;
- Ministers
- staffers
- independents
- backbenchers
- electorates
- elections
- lobbying

### **Party policy development**

Every political party has its own mechanisms for the development of its policies. Some are more centralised than others, but each sets the agenda for the party over a period of several years, usually a period associated with the electoral cycle. This is the fundamental mechanism by which political parties advise their constituents of their overall policy framework, and then to varying degrees the detail that sits under that framework.

The easiest and simplest way to be a part of party policy development, is to be part of a political party. As a member of a political party, opportunities will be available to you to advocate for specific issues, policies and program outcomes. However, to be successful in developing policy and having it adopted from inside a political party takes both time and resources. Usually an individual would be asked to be part of a committee looking at a specific issue and they could expect that they would be required to undertake research, and be prepared to provide both written and oral arguments for the policy being sought. It is usually a mechanism that is used by an individual who is deeply dedicated to a particular outcome, rather than an organisation with multiple and potentially conflicting policy goals.

The research required in this arena goes far beyond what we might call the ‘evidence or scientific base’. Political parties have a fundamental goal – to be in power so that their policies can be instituted. Consequently, the evidence base on which they depend goes beyond the scientific evidence base to include polling of the popularity of policies, the electoral effects of specific policies and potential perception of political skills or ineptness (eg. the Labor Party is often written about in the media as economically inept, so consideration of a policy framework and individual policies will often be couched within the party’s desire to overcome this image).

Similarly, contributions to party policies are all dealt within the light of an overall budget and budget goals (eg. deficit, balance, surplus) and a party’s values. The consequence is that it is very rare for any policy proposal to be accepted fully – all decisions are subject compromise. While a policy proposal may be acknowledged as having great benefits and as meeting the party’s stated values and goals, it may not be deemed to have sufficient priority. Consequently, it can be lost in compromises made over other outcomes, often outcomes that are not even related to your proposal.

Clearly to work in this arena requires the capacity to both work out compromises and to come back again and again without losing sight of your end goal.

There is another way in which input can be provided directly to political party policies. This is continuous discourse with political parties and the members of political parties who may or may not be politicians. This is essentially lobbying. (See lobbying below).

### **Petitions**

Any individual or group of individuals can place grievances directly before the Parliament. This is known as Petitioning Parliament and is different from any other form of communication with the Parliament as it does not involve communicating through a parliamentary representative (Member or Senator) or a parliamentary committee. (Petitions do require the involvement of a member to present the petition to the House but the Members cannot alter the terms or place his or her interpretation on it.)

A Petition is a request for action – for example, petitions may ask the House of Representatives to introduce legislation, or repeal or change existing legislation, or to take action for a certain purpose or for the benefit of particular people. Less commonly a petition from an individual may seek the redress of a personal grievance such as the correction of an administrative error.

There are House of Representatives imposes rules on the form and content of petitions, so care must be taken in the wording used. A recommended form of a petition to the House of Representatives is on their website and similarly information on appropriate forms for petitions can be found on institution websites. Only one signature is required on a petition, but the greater the number of signatures the greater the reflection of public feelings.

A Petition can only be presented to the House of Representatives by a Member of the House. This does not have to be the petitioner's local member, nor does it have to be a Minister. It is the practice of the House that the Speaker does not present petitions but rather arranges for another Member to do so on his or her behalf. Although a Member is not bound to present a petition sent for presentation, it is traditionally accepted that he or she will present it, irrespective of personal views. At this time the House of Representatives does not accept electronic petitions. Other governments may have similar rules.

The value preparing a Petition and gaining signatures a means of advocacy are:

- in obtaining the signatures the issue has been raised with the broader public;
- where sufficient signatures are obtained, all political parties are made aware of the numbers of people who feel the issue is significant;
- the issue is placed before the house in a non-party political manner;
- the raising of the particular issue is documented in Hansard and is a matter on public record;
- the issue is raised before the press gallery.

### **Hansard**

Hansard is the name given to transcripts of parliamentary proceedings. These are available to the public and in most cases via the internet. Hansard is important to politicians as it is the record of their public commitments and decisions. It is valuable to advocates as a source of information on political stances, issues that politicians think are important and as a means of recording both questions and answers that have been made by politicians to each other (either on their own or others behalf).

### **Budgets**

Budgets are the mechanism used by governments to announce their intentions for funding over a coming period (usually three years). There are a variety of advocacy opportunities that surround the development and announcement of budgets.

Firstly, budgets are in the making at least twelve months ahead of their announcement. Early, proactive and continuing advocacy around an issue with both bureaucrats and politicians, can help them to take up a policy, provided it is appropriate to the needs and priorities of the Government. Some issues require continuous advocacy for years before they are taken up in budgets and some never are, but unless you provide information to the ever-changing individuals in these arenas, there is little to no likelihood that your issue will be taken up. Such input does not have to be in any specific format, nor do you have to calculate the costs of putting your proposed policy or program or changes to existing programs. However, the more accessible you make the information on purpose, need, potential outcomes, losses if not put in place and to what ever degree you can, costs, the easier it is for your proposal to be picked up. Similarly, dividing complex proposals into modules can help.

Secondly, as time approaches closer to a budget announcement, the public release of a budget submission can help to generate public interest and subsequently political party interest in your proposals. Most governments will call for budget submissions about six months out from the budget announcement. Often work on the government's budget has

been well progressed by this stage. Consequently, the submission should be viewed as 'a second bite at the cherry' and an opportunity to make public your issue and proposed policies. This can be particularly powerful where there is a coalition of organizations with a common goal providing the submission.

Thirdly, the budget lead up period is a time when the media is constantly seeking any information it can find out about the budget. Where little information is available, some media outlets will look to see what well-regarded organizations believe should be or will be in the budget. Again this provides an ideal opportunity to bring your issues to the public in general. Over recent years a number of governments have used this period to 'test public opinion' on a variety of possible budget inclusions. If you are able to provide comment, especially that which includes estimates of consequences of the proposed policy, this again is an ideal opportunity to educate both the public and politicians about your issues.

Fourthly, the post budget period is a time for providing comments on policies, both positive and negative, and to formulate new strategies for your advocacy actions. It may be that some of the budget announcements have provided new opportunities to explore, or they may have completely ruled out approaches you sought. This effort can be public or private depending on your advocacy philosophy and the issue. It may also be that the way a policy is structured under a budget makes explicit that some part of what you are advocating for must come from another level of government. It is essential that if you are going to advocate with any level of government, that you have and know how to read and interpret their budget papers.

Lastly, each budget provides an opportunity to review the trends across years of what is and is not being funded in your area of concern. Budgets usually contain information on not only what is being funded in the coming financial year, but also proposed funding for a number of out-years (usually three). By reading the papers you will be able to determine which programs are due to close, and advocate for them to remain if they are important and successful. You can also look at the amount of funding provided in each year and by reviewing this against the annual reports from departments, determine whether or not the funding has actually been spent. It may also be important to keep an eye on the funding going to administer programs versus the money spent on the programs themselves.

### **Inquiries and Submissions**

All levels of government can undertake inquiries and/or call for submissions on particular issues. Sometimes these will be called consultations or committees or by other names. There are usually standing (on-going) committees and issue or single purpose committees that undertake these inquiries and there are some special types of Inquiries such as Royal Commissions and bureaucratic inquiries (such as those conducted by the Productivity Commission)..

Standing Committees are put in place by Governments, usually at the beginning of their term, although there is nothing preventing them adding new ones or changing existing ones. Committees investigate specific matters of policy or government administration or performance. Many of them operate at the same time and their reports are made to

the appropriate Government body (eg in the Commonwealth it is the House of Representatives or the Senate or both). Parliamentary committees are one mechanism that can be used to find out about and discuss the government's activities. Committees have extensive power to call for people, including public servants, and documents to come before them to be investigated.

The advantage of Committees is that each committee has its own defined area of operation and is able to develop a body of expertise amongst its members. They can focus on government administration and service delivery, may call the public service or government to account for their actions and ask them to justify or explain administrative decisions. Committees can contribute to better informed policy making and legislative processes. They help politicians access a wide range of community and expert views and they provide a public forum for the presentation of various views.

The powers of committees and any calls for submissions are usually advertised and all Committee make-up can be accessed via the web at the national and State/Territory levels. Similarly information on Terms of Reference and requirements for submissions are published on web sites.

The power of committees for advocacy stands in the following areas:

- calls for an inquiry – loud and public calls for inquiries may not always achieve the desired outcome, but they will raise awareness of your issue. Softer behind the scenes discussion can often encourage politicians to call for inquiries into particular matters, although when these are announced, it is usually government that is lauded as having the desire to investigate the particular matters;
- terms of reference – the terms of reference for an Inquiry are as important as having the Inquiry called. Once an Inquiry is called it is usually hard to impossible to have the Terms of Reference changed. Consequently, it is important for advocates to think carefully about the issues that need to be covered and the advantages and disadvantages of having some topics covered or not. Early discussion with those thinking about Inquires is essential if you hope to influence the terms of reference.
- submissions – submissions become the legal property of the Committee and are generally made available to the public. It is critical that evidence be put forward honestly and without bias in submissions. Committees can make comments about the information they received in their reports and can condemn an individual or organization that they believe has misrepresented the evidence. This can be done under Parliamentary Privilege and can affect an organizations reputation. Submissions become part of the public record.
- Giving evidence – committees can call for people to give evidence about their submissions. Sometimes they will group organizations and individuals who have presented similar arguments and ask them to give evidence at the same time. It is critical that when this happens, you consult with the other organizations and individuals and work out a strategy to succinctly get the most critical points across to committee members. The real power in presenting evidence lies in the possibility of discussion backwards and forwards with the politicians. If you anticipate that the majority of members will have a counter

view to your own, you must be prepared for some degree of argument, and it is essential that where technical issues are in dispute that you have your technical experts there and ready to provide advice.

- Reports and recommendations – reports and recommendations provide the opportunity for publicity, not just for the committee and its members, but also for those who have provided submissions. If you believe that the report and in particular the recommendations are what you want, then you need to say so loudly and clearly as these are only recommendations, not commitments by the government to take them on. Depending on how important the recommendations are, they can form the basis of a further advocacy strategy on your issue.

### **Ministers and their staffers**

Ministers are senior politicians who have been appointed by the Prime Minister to take responsibility for enacting the Government's policy in a particular area. Short of the Prime Minister stepping in (which happens very rarely) the Minister for a portfolio is the most senior person, and is held accountable for the policies under his portfolio. The Secretary of a Department is held responsible for the administration of the policies of the Government. That said, these lines which were clearly set under our Westminster style system, are blurring as we adopt some more American style political and administrative conveniences.

It is rarely the case that Ministers should be the first contact in an advocacy strategy. Should a Minister reject your proposition there really is nowhere else for you to go. Ministers generally hold large-scale pictures of policy within their portfolio, and may or may not know the details in legislation. Their staffers, however, will know that detail and between them and departmental briefings, Ministers are rarely left without the knowledge they need to discuss an issue from within their portfolio with you. It is important to maintain relationships with ministers' staffers as they will on occasion take you advice to the Minister, and certainly will have some effect on whether or not you are able to see and talk with the Minister.

The critical issue for an advocate to decide is whether an issue needs to go to a Minister or whether it can be dealt with by his staff or departmental staff. Ministers are generally short on time, and won't interact with you for a second time if they feel you have wasted their time on a previous occasion. If you are able to see a Minister it is essential that you are able to concisely lay out your issue and are able to leave him with a written brief, remembering that he will already have been given a brief by his Department.

Reasons for advocating directly with a Minister include:

- You have tried other mechanisms and have not achieved the change you desire
- There is no time to work through bureaucratic or other strategies (eg a legislative change is proposed with little notice);
- You have ready access to the Minister and the issue is of sufficient concern to raise;
- You have a ready solution that is likely to be acceptable to the Minister.

Reasons for advocating with the Ministers staff include:

- Seeking to build a relationship over time;
- The issue is not subject to a critical time limit;
- The solution you are seeking is not obvious and may require you provide a detailed background;
- The issue you are raising is not obviously one that the Minister would consider to be under his portfolio.

It is very important to remember that Ministers are frequently visited by those who want him to do something for them. If you see your or your organizations mission as advocacy and are genuinely in for the long haul, then it is essential that you remember that you must provide Ministers with opportunities to express their views and the successes of their portfolio and policies. Invitations to address conferences, letters of support when your issues have been taken up, opportunities to use your venues for announcements or undertake launches of government policies, programs or reports are always useful, especially where you can give a Minister an appropriate backdrop to their announcement. The immediate quid pro quo is that Ministers inevitably bring media to the event and to your organization. They also lend weight to your occasion and to your organization on some occasions (eg conferences).

### **Members of Parliament**

When developing an advocacy strategy, it is tempting to think that change can only be made by a Minister or the Prime Minister. This begs the question of what to do if the Minister, or the Cabinet expressed a view that is different from that which you would like. Under these circumstances it is essential to think about the power of backbenchers.

The power of backbenchers sits firstly in the activities that they undertake. While Backbenchers do not carry the responsibility for particular portfolios as Ministers do, they are usually members on a variety of committees that are examining issues for their party, for the Senate or for the House of Representatives. In most cases politicians have a website, if not based in Parliament, based in their electorate. These will usually list the committees on which the individual politician is sitting. Similarly, most politicians have newsletters or weekly/fortnightly/monthly columns in their local newspapers. Again these will provide details of the issues to which that politician is contributing.

Senate and House of Representative Committee membership is shown on the Parliamentary websites. However, it should be remembered that many politicians attend hearings and committee meetings without being voting members of the committees. A search of these websites can generally provide a good first list of who is interested in your issue and the views that they hold on the issue.

Once you have a list of who is interested in your issue, and have some idea of the various views held. There are a variety of ways that you can seek to reinforce views, and to change views. In some cases there will be formal mechanisms such as providing submissions, or attending hearings that you can use to state your case. Where this opportunity exists, you should make use of it, even if your submission is short. You can always request the opportunity to expand upon your submission at a hearing.

However, there is nothing to stop you from writing about your issue, or seeking private meetings with members of committees, your own local member or other politicians, if you think that you can help them to develop a better understanding of an issue. All politicians acknowledge that hearings are time limited and that complex issues can be hard to understand completely within limited time periods. Consequently, many welcome well thought through private discussions that can help them develop their understanding of a complex issue. If you are going to approach a politician for a private discussion there are some basic rules to remember. The most important of these are:

- Don't lie, exaggerate or provide a biased view point;
- Understand opposing viewpoints and have a short paper you can leave with the member explaining why these views are deficient/inappropriate;
- Leave a short brief on your approach
- Don't overstay your welcome;
- Get an appointment, do not accost a member on an opportunistic basis.

Approaching one politician, even the Chair of a committee, will only have a limited effect. The second power of members is that which they hold influence as a group within government and opposition structures. Occasionally in the news you will hear about 'backbencher revolts' or 'backbencher rumblings' on a particular subject. Members often have some of the more marginal electorates, and consequently they are more sensitive to issues that they believe their electorate is concerned about or that they believe will effect their electorate in a negative manner. It is, therefore, useful on some occasions to write to or email all members about a specific issue that may have widespread negative effects. It is best if you can quantify the degree of negative impact to have maximum effect.

The third power of backbenchers lies in their ability to pressure within their party for a conscious vote or to choose not to vote with their party. These are not actions that are taken lightly by politicians. In effect all politicians, except independents, have chosen to work within a party structure. They have chosen the party with which they believe they are ideologically aligned and on which they depend for policy and political advice and electoral help. They are, by and large, creatures of their parties. So, to choose to advocate within a party for a conscious vote usually means that the issue cannot be delineated along party lines, or that some politicians have fundamental values that may be at odds with their party on the particular issue. Only part leaders can declare a conscious vote, but these leaders will be guided by the pressure they receive to do so by their fellow politicians.

For a politician to cross the floor on a vote is to invite his/her party's censure. Consequently, such an action is not taken lightly or often.

The fourth power of members lies in their capacity to influence party policies. As discussed earlier party policies are usually developed well ahead of debates within Parliament and can be used as a means to establish a particular policy, or in which a program can be developed.

The fifth power of members lies in the camaraderie between politicians, across party lines. Most of the work of Parliament is achieved through consensus, although this is

not the way parliamentary activity is portrayed in the media. Some issues can be approached on a cross party platform. This is particularly the case where an issue has a 'public good' outcome (such as large scale vaccination against a threatening influenza epidemic). It doesn't pay to always assume that your issue will necessarily be dealt with differently by different political parties. It is important on most occasions to approach all politicians interested in your issue, no matter which political party they come from.

The sixth and least known power of members is that if you issue sufficiently appeals to them they can use Parliamentary facilities to further your cause. For example, members are able to use rooms and to use their party's resources to organize talks, lectures, seminars, workshops or even conferences to be held at Parliament. The quid pro quo for the Member lies in being able to take the information gather forward within the political arena. This can vary from providing information to fellow politicians via party mechanisms, through to reports to the Senate or the development of protocols that attendees can pledge to.

Important things to remember when approaching Members of Parliament (or Council) are:

- Their time is limited and it is important to make appointments;
- You will need to show that the issue you are raising is relevant to the Member and their electorate;
- You must be able to show what the member will get for their effort.

### **Independents**

Independents are members who are not aligned to any political party. Frequently in recent political history in Australia, independents have held what is known as the balance of power. This is where the numbers of members of the major parties is such that either party requires the vote of the independents to achieve outcomes in either one or both houses of Parliament. On these occasions the independents are the people to convince about your issue. It is critical to remember that their power extends beyond just those issues that are on the legislative agenda. They have the capacity to seek concessions on non-related issues in exchange for their vote. This is a very powerful capacity and independents are generally one or two issue politicians, so make sure you are aware of their issues and stances before approaching them about your issues. They may well seek some effort from you on an issue of interest to them (eg. They may ask you to use your lobbying capacities with other members or particular parties.)

### **Elections and electorates**

Elections are the single best-known political mechanism. They provide opportunities for all parties, and independents to clearly state their policies and for people to express their views on these. These are periods in which media coverage of issues is high.

Well before the announcement of elections, there will be opportunities in which you can feed policy options to political parties. This can be done selectively or across the board. Once an election has been announced, you need to be able to quickly respond to any policy issues that affect your cause, clearly, concisely and with authority. This may mean choosing someone other than you leader to articulate the policy – preferably

someone who is familiar with the media and who is able to provide cogent evidence based arguments about the impacts of the announced policies versus your organizations position.

This is also a period in which you can help deliver strong messages to local politicians in their electorates. Many politicians only correspond to people within their electorates, and similarly they are more likely to take notice of an issue couched in terms of the impact within their local electorate. This is your opportunity to do just that – take the issue and make it personal to candidates local electorates. Let the politicians know about the issue and where possible get the issue and the electoral implications into local media. The more you make this happen, the more likely you are to get a local reaction. As a general rule, the higher the local reaction, the bigger the local candidates responses.

If your issue is one that requires a broad response that has whole of State/Territory or national implications, it is important to know something about the potential impacts of your policy on marginal electorates. It is a fact of politics that marginal electorates are more important than safe seats, and the potential impacts of your proposal on them is critical to the acceptance of your policy/program, especially at election times. If you cannot determine the potential impact, be prepared for those that you are lobbying to do so.

If you are approaching a candidate, especially an independent to take on your issue, be prepared to provide support for that candidate in exchange for their support. That support can be as simple as posting their reply to your request on a website, or as ‘political’ as helping with electioneering in a particular electorate.

One non-party political mechanism available during this period is to request all parties and independent candidates to answer a set of questions about your key issues and to then analyse the results and publish them. This can lead to some unexpected outcomes, such as the adoption of your policies by groups that have previously not known about them. This can, on occasion, extend to political parties.

The important things to remember about advocacy during elections are:

- To remain aware of the political enmity that you can generate readily by using party political approaches during this period;
- Know what you can and cannot do for an individual politician in response to their help on your issue and make this clear to them and your own constituency;
- Keep in mind that issues and your organizations reputation will extend beyond the election period.

### **Lobbying**

Lobbying is taking your issues to politicians, whether in writing, by telephone or in person. In some countries there is a substantial professional lobbying industry. This is less the case in Australia, although industry use of professional lobbyists is increasing. Recently Client Solutions undertook a Lobbying survey. The major outcomes of the survey were:

- Don't make ambit claims – be specific about what you are seeking and why;

- Check your facts before you go – taking a badly advised brief will only tarnish your reputation and give individual politicians reasons to avoid you in the future;
- Show effective leadership – bring support from other groups under your banner or join another group rather than wasting politicians time with repetitions of the same issues and solutions;
- Follow-up with confirmation of issues discussed, backup material, contacts for other interested groups;
- Provide electoral information and focus wherever possible, especially with non-Ministerial members of Parliament;
- Do not lie, misstate or provide biased interpretation of facts;
- Appreciate the time constraints on members and make your interaction concise and solution motivated;
- Leave a well presented brief and stick to the brief in discussions;
- Do not waste time on peripheral or insignificant issues;
- Do not overstate your influence;
- Do not raise issues that the members has not indicated an interest in;
- Know who you are meeting and their electorates;
- Don't call too often and don't presume a familiarity that doesn't exist;
- Know how parliament works;
- Make appointments, do not take advantage of opportunistic meetings to lobby.

Advice from politicians frequently focuses on:

- the need for lobbyists to keep their arguments simple, but to be aware that 'One size' won't fit all occasions;
- you making the issue relevant to them;
- for you to know and use mechanism other than direct contact (eg committees);
- help them develop or adopt win/win solutions wherever possible.

### **3. What is the importance of the party political mechanisms, political party platforms and how do you use these to advocate for your cause?**

Party political mechanisms have been discussed in the opening paragraphs of this paper. It is an ethical and personal choice for organizations and individuals as to how political they are prepared to be in their advocacy. That said, party political mechanisms remain important for all advocates across all issues – it is always important to know who is aligned to your cause and who is not, and as importantly, who might be convinced to align with your cause..

The development of Party policies can draw on a wide variety of material, including material that you or your organization can make available through party members. Simply providing material for parties to consider doesn't involve you in being part of the party mechanism. However it is important to consider whether the material you provide will be available to all political parties/candidates or only a limited number.

Party conferences and major gatherings frequently provide parties with the opportunity to make their agenda publicly available. This is important to your advocacy strategies:

- You can provide input;
- You must be able to provide credible responses to proposed policies;
- Media interest can be generated for your cause;
- Announcements can provide an opportunity to visit you member or a particular politician/Minister.

Alignment between your cause and a political platform can be an important jumping point to being invited to join particular bureaucratic committees and working groups that advise Government. However, this needs to be balanced against having members or being an organization that has a credible reputation that is hard to ignore. The two do not necessarily preclude each other, but consideration must be given to potential effects to the whole organization as well as advocacy on individual issues.