

October 2024

Compliance Review Report

Curtin Independent Pty Ltd

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Purpose of this report

Pursuant to s 316(2A) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act), this report provides the financial controller of the Curtin Independent Pty Ltd (the significant third party) with the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) assessment of the level of compliance of the 2021-2022 annual disclosure return lodged on behalf of the significant third party with disclosure obligations under Part XX of the Electoral Act.

Disclosure obligations and foreign donation restrictions

Curtin Independent Pty Ltd is registered with the AEC as a Significant Third Party as well as an Associated Entity of Ms Kate Chaney MP. Registered significant third parties are required under Part XX of the Electoral Act to furnish annual returns. A significant third party that is also registered as an associated entity is only required to lodge a significant third-party return.

Section 314AB of the Electoral Act requires the financial controller of the significant third party to furnish a return within 16 weeks after the end of each financial year, disclosing:

- the total amount received by, or on behalf of, the significant third party during the financial year, together with the details specified by s 314AC of the Electoral Act.
- the total amount paid by, or on behalf of, the significant third party during the financial year.
- the total outstanding amount, as at the end of the financial year, of all debts incurred by or on behalf of, the significant third party together with the details specified by s 314AE of the Electoral Act.
- the total amount of electoral expenditure incurred by or with the authority of the significant third party; and
- details of any discretionary benefits received by, or on behalf of the significant third party from the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory during the financial year.

Section 314AC of the Electoral Act provides that if the sum of all amounts received by, or on behalf of, the significant third party from a person or organisation during a financial year is more than the threshold amount specified therein, the annual disclosure return must include the particulars of that sum.

Section 314AC(4) of the Electoral Act provides that where the significant third party is a person or organisation registered under the *Australian Charities and Not-for profits Commission Act 2012*, an amount received greater than the threshold does not need to be disclosed if no part of it was used during the financial year to:

- incur electoral expenditure; or
- create or communicate electoral matter; or

- reimburse the significant third party for incurring electoral expenditure or creating or communicating electoral matter.

Section 314AE of the Electoral Act provides that if the sum of all outstanding debts incurred by, or on behalf of, the significant third party to a person or an organisation during a financial year is more than the threshold amount specified therein, the annual disclosure return must include the particulars of that sum.

For the 2021–22 financial year, the threshold was for sums in excess of \$14,500.

Section 302D of the Electoral Act restricts significant third parties from receiving gifts from foreign donors. Section 302F further restricts gifts from foreign donors to significant third parties for the purpose of incurring electoral expenditure.

The Electoral Act is available in full [here](#).

Conduct of the review

The authorised officer of the AEC has authority under s 316(2A) to require the production of documents and giving of evidence for the purpose of assessing compliance with the disclosure obligations required of registered significant third party under Part XX of the Electoral Act.

Subsection 316(2A) requires the financial controller of a significant third party to produce the documents or other things referred to in a notice served by the authorised officer within the period and in the manner specified in the notice or to appear, at the time and place specified in the notice, before the authorised officer to give evidence, either orally or in writing, and to produce the documents or other things referred to in the notice.

As part of this process, the authorised officer of the AEC served a notice on the financial controller under s 316(2A) requiring the significant third party to provide its financial records and other documents in relation to its financial operations for 2021–22.

Scope of the review

The records which were requested by the AEC from the financial controller were limited to those which enabled the AEC to assess the following aspects of compliance with its disclosure obligations and foreign donation restrictions under Part XX of the Electoral Act:

- the timeliness of lodgement of the annual disclosure return
- that the significant third party has not received foreign donations restricted by ss 302D and 302F of the Electoral Act
- the completeness and accuracy of the following information disclosed in the significant third party's annual disclosure return for the 2021–22 financial year:

- total receipts
- total gifts in kind
- individual receipts above \$14,500
- total payments
- total debts
- individual debts above \$14,500
- total electoral expenditure
- discretionary benefits

With exception to assessing the controls in place to identify and appropriately manage potential donations received from foreign donors, the AEC did not examine other aspects of the financial operations of the significant third party such as the existence or effectiveness of internal controls.

Stakeholder engagement

The AEC's general practice is to communicate with the relevant officer of the significant third party by phone, email and/or face to face meetings as appropriate to cover the following topics:

- financial reports and documentation available from the significant third party's accounting system.
- compliance issues arising from the AEC review of the financial reports and documentation provided by the significant third party.
- required and suggested amendments to the annual disclosure return which arise from the compliance review.
- potential enhancements in the financial controller's understanding of disclosure obligations and accounting processes to improve future compliance.

During the review the financial controller provided documentation to the AEC as requested and within set timeframes.

A draft compliance review report was issued by the authorised officer of the AEC on 13 September 2024. The entity was provided with an opportunity to comment on the draft report by 20 September 2024. On 16 September 2024 the entity advised they had no comments.

Review outcomes

1. Timely lodgement

Subsection 314AB(1) of the Electoral Act requires the financial controller of the significant third party to lodge an annual disclosure return with the AEC within 16 weeks after the end of the financial year. As lodgement occurred on 2 September 2022 which is before the due date of 20 October 2022, the return complied with the requirement under s 314AB (1) to lodge a return for the significant third party within 16 weeks after the end of the financial year.

2. Foreign donations

Under sections 302D and 302F of the Electoral Act, significant third parties are restricted from:

- receiving gifts of \$100 or more where:
 - the recipient knows the donor is a foreign donor; and
 - the recipient knows that the foreign donor intends the gift to be used to incur electoral expenditure, or for the dominant purpose of creating or communicating electoral matter; and
- receiving gifts of \$1,000 to the disclosure threshold without obtaining a written affirmation that the donor is not a foreign donor; and
- receiving gifts equal to or above the disclosure threshold without obtaining written affirmation and appropriate information to establish that the donor is not a foreign donor.

If a significant third party receives a donation from a foreign donor in contravention of the restrictions in the Electoral Act, the Electoral Act provides six weeks from the gift being made for it, or an equivalent amount, to be returned to the donor or transferred to the Commonwealth.

Enquiries were made of the entity to determine if effective controls exist to ensure foreign donations are identified and treated correctly for the purposes of this division. After examining the information provided by the entity for the review, the authorised officer of the AEC identified no issues relating to compliance with foreign donation provisions under ss 302D and 302F of the Electoral Act. Further, there were no foreign donations in contravention of the Electoral Act in the 2021–22 financial year.

3. Accuracy in reporting – amendments

The financial controller for the significant third party informed the AEC that the entity is acting as the agent for Ms Chaney. The significant third party conducts the election fundraising and campaigning activities and incurs electoral expenditure for Ms Chaney. The donations received and expenditure incurred by the significant third party in its capacity as an agent of Ms Chaney during the 2021-22 financial year are disclosed in Ms Chaney's candidate return for the 2022 federal election.

After examining the documents provided by the financial controller for the review, the authorised officer of the AEC identified no issues relating to the significant third party's compliance with disclosure obligations under ss 314AB, 314AC and 314AE of the Electoral Act.

Conclusion

The authorised officer of the AEC for the purposes of s 316(2) of the Electoral Act has assessed the 2021–22 annual disclosure return for the significant third party lodged with the AEC on 2 September 2022 complied with the requirement under s 314AB (1) of the Electoral Act to lodge a return for significant third party within 16 weeks after the end of the financial year.

An authorised officer of the Australian Electoral Commission has assessed the 2021–22 annual disclosure return lodged on behalf of the significant third party accurately includes the information required to be disclosed under the provisions of sections 314AB, 314AC and 314AE of the Electoral Act.

An authorised officer of the AEC has assessed the significant third party's compliance with foreign donation requirements under ss 302D and 302F of the Electoral Act in relation to the financial year 2021-22. No issues have been identified.

Joanne Reid
Assistant Commissioner
Australian Electoral Commission

10 October 2024