



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Select Committee on Caretaker
Conventions

Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into Caretaker Conventions

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Submitter: Australian Multicultural Action Network Inc.

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Written Submission to the Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions

By Ravi Krishnamurthy, President, Australian Multicultural Action Network Inc.

To:

Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
196 London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2601

Date: 16 April 2025

Introduction

As President of the *Australian Multicultural Action Network Inc. (AMAN)*, I welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions. AMAN is grassroots, community-led organisation dedicated to inclusive governance, civic awareness, and equal access to democratic processes - particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups in the ACT.

We commend the Assembly's decision to examine and strengthen the integrity of caretaker conventions. This review is timely, essential, and aligns with the growing need for public confidence in the apolitical nature of the ACT Public Service (ACTPS), especially during sensitive political periods such as elections.

Key Considerations: Pros and Cons

1. Symmetry of Information

Pros:

- Upholding symmetry of information—as mandated in sections 20C and 20D of the *Financial Management Act 1996*—ensures fair electoral competition and public trust.
- Equal access to financial updates and new developments empowers all candidates and parties to participate in post-election negotiations on an informed basis.
- It prevents the misuse or perceived misuse of privileged information that could skew electoral discourse.

Cons:

- There may be a risk of delays in critical service decisions if public servants are overly cautious during caretaker periods.
- An overemphasis on “symmetry” may unintentionally hinder urgent decisions, particularly in areas like health or emergency management.



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Recommendation: Clear protocols should be developed to fast-track urgent factual briefings to all relevant parties equally, without compromising caretaker principles.

2. Clarity in the Role of ACTPS

Pros:

- A well-defined role for the ACTPS protects its apolitical status and enhances public perception of neutrality and professionalism.
- Guidance on “Requests by Ministers” and “Consultations by Non-Government Members” (as per the 2024 Guidance) fosters transparency.

Cons:

- The current guidance lacks clarity on the *provision of unsolicited factual information* to ministers, which creates uncertainty and the potential for inadvertent breaches.
- Without specific directives, inconsistencies can arise, affecting the uniform application of caretaker conventions.

Recommendation: Additional clarity is needed within the Guidance to define acceptable channels and types of information flow, including unsolicited factual updates, during and leading up to the caretaker period.

3. Timing and Scope of Briefings

Pros:

- Expanding access to ACTPS briefings to non-government Members *up to six months prior to the pre-election period* is a forward-thinking measure. It ensures that all parties, particularly new or smaller ones, are better informed on matters of governance and policy delivery.

Cons:

- Managing such briefings could place an administrative burden on the ACTPS if not properly resourced.

Recommendation: Develop a centralised, transparent system for briefing requests and delivery, with fair scheduling and documentation of all sessions to maintain accountability.

4. Learnings from Other Jurisdictions

Pros:



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- Studying the practices of the Commonwealth and other Australian states will offer valuable perspectives to ensure the ACT's conventions are robust, future-proof, and reflective of best practice.
- Such benchmarking can lead to improvements in both the length and quality of caretaker protocols.

Recommendation: Where feasible, align ACT conventions with best practices in other jurisdictions—while preserving the unique character and scale of ACT governance.

5. Community Confidence and Inclusion

Pros:

- A robust caretaker framework promotes transparency and trust in governance, especially for CALD and marginalised communities who may feel disconnected from political processes.
- Ensuring equal access to timely, factual information reinforces a culture of inclusivity and informed participation.

Recommendation: The conventions must explicitly include provisions that safeguard against the exclusion of independent or community-based candidates, who often lack the same institutional access as major parties.

Conclusion

The review of caretaker conventions presents a valuable opportunity to reaffirm democratic integrity and uphold the ACTPS's neutrality. AMAN fully supports initiatives that enhance transparency, equal access, and public confidence - especially during the sensitive period of electoral transition.

We urge the Committee to take a bold and inclusive approach that ensures *clarity, fairness, and practical applicability* of caretaker conventions. With thoughtful refinement, the ACT can set a national example for ethical, balanced governance.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if AMAN can provide further input, particularly from a multicultural or community engagement perspective.

Warm regards,

Ravi Krishnamurthy

President

Australian Multicultural Action Network Inc.