

# Tips on lobbying a politician

## 1. **Be informed**

Most parliamentarians are in political parties and you should start by finding out what the policy of that party is on your issue. Most will have this on the website. You should also find out if the MP or Senator has spoken in the parliament on the issue – search Hansard online - or if he/she has made public statements – check their personal website. If the organisation or individual you represent has corresponded with the MP it would be useful to have that information too. Let the MP know you already have this information at the outset.

## 2. **Be honest**

Nothing will ruin your efforts at getting the MP to take up your case more than giving false or incomplete information. It is also useful to be prepared with the counter arguments and provide them. Tell your MP if you are meeting with other MPs as well but be prepared for them to be less inclined to work for you if you have asked others to do the same thing.

## 3. **Don't waste time**

Use your knowledge about your MP's awareness of the issue to determine what you need to say. Do not turn up with 8 people, all of whom want to make a speech! If there is already a high level of awareness, use what is likely to be the brief time you have available to discuss the action you want taken. Bring a short, clear fact sheet that can be left with your MP together with contact details.

## 4. **Be sure to know what you want**

If you leave a meeting having only explained the problem you will have achieved very little. All MPs have more than enough issues to keep them busy so you must make it easy for them to pick up yours. Some options might be:

- a. **Make a speech in the parliament.** Having the issue on the public record (on Hansard) may be a useful tool in spreading the word to others and it will be an attractive option to your MP if you undertake to circulate it widely, put it on the website, etc.
- b. **Approach the relevant minister on your behalf.** Government backbenchers will probably be best placed to do this. You could ask others to write letters to the minister.
- c. **Put questions on notice to the Minister.** This is a relatively simple but effective mechanism at getting attention to the issue within the minister's department and may elicit useful information. It will go on the Hansard too so can be circulated, as can the answer when it comes (The Federal Government has 30 calendar days to answer questions on notice although rarely does since the sanctions are not very effective.)

- d. **Put questions without notice during parliament.** A less attractive option if you want a proper answer but the press pays more attention so could be useful in raising awareness
- e. **Put up a motion.** This option is easier in the Senate where there is no limit on the number of motions. Motions are voted on but not debated. Government Senators generally don't put up motions unless they are uncritical of government.
- f. **A Senate inquiry.** This is a big ask because it requires the agreement of the whole Senate and commits Senators to an enormous amount of effort and time but is a highly effective means of bringing big issues to the fore.

## 5. Say thanks

You might be surprised at how often this doesn't happen! Saying thanks and acknowledging your MPs efforts, eg in your newsletter, is in your interests because they will be more inclined to do more for your issue in future.