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THE INFLUENCE SEEKERS

POLITICAL LOBBYING IN AUSTRALIA

Mark Sheehan & Peter Sekuless

AUSTRALIAN SCHOLARLY
To the contributors of this volume I am extremely appreciative and fully aware of the generosity of the personal time and effort they have invested in this project. Their expertise, knowledge and vision have resulted in a work of high quality and academic rigour.

I also wish to record my thanks to Alison Baker for her sage advice and tireless assistance in editing many of the chapters in the book. Thanks also to Georgia Iredell for her original artwork and the endless tweaking that produced the cover for this volume.

I am grateful to my father-in-law Jack Hanlon for access to his vast political library, his advice and selection of appropriate volumes in addressing my chapter contents.

At work and at home this book was allowed to take priority, and for that I am indebted to my colleagues in Public Relations at Deakin University – Deirdre Quinn-Allan and Bronwyn Kirby – for their encouragement and assistance during the planning, writing and editing of this text.

To my daughters Emily, Eliza and Alice, my thanks for their forbearance as they spent a summer minus their father and a holiday. To my wife Jo, whose serenity, patience and support I cannot do without.

Mark Sheehan
LOOKING AT LOBBYING

Mark Sheehan

In assembling this book and gathering the contributors the editors were mindful of the many books on lobbying that have preceded it over the last three decades. Co-editor Peter Sekuless said of his two previous books, *The Lobbyists: using them in Canberra* (1984) and *Lobbying Canberra in the Nineties: the government relations game* (1991), that they were little more than manuals on how to lobby, which carefully avoided giving away too many trade secrets. Many before and since have not been so reticent. Peter Cullen’s *No Is Not an Answer* (1991), Katherine Beauchamp’s *Fixing the Government* (1986), Fitzgerald’s *Lobbying in Australia: you can't expect to change anything if you don't speak up* (2006), or ex-senator Guy Barnett’s *Make a Difference* (2011) all provide the reader with a how-to approach to lobbying. *The Influence Seekers* examines lobbying from the twin perspectives of those who undertake this work as professionals and those who teach in the area and whose job it is to provide a reflective basis of the practice itself. Many previous books have chosen to concentrate on tactics rather than strategy. This volume addresses the broader strategic issues of lobbying and government relations and, in doing so, breaks new ground.

A criticism of lobbying has been its clandestine nature, its ‘wheeling and dealing behind closed doors with the movers and shakers of the political party in government’ (Harrison 2011, p. 870), the behind-doors scenes featuring a network of old connections. In some instances this was the case but, as is evidenced by the chapters in this book, this style is now decades out of practice and the stereotype is undeserved.

The processes are now better understood by public, politician, bureaucrat and lobbyist. The constant growth and presence of how-to-lobby books and websites show us that the process is anything but hidden. This volume provides readers with an understanding of the processes involved in lobbying; these chapters inform readers that public accessibility is available to any section or group in society and is one of the fundamentals of lobbying’s democratic function.
without direct political representation. Geoff Allen’s chapter on the Business Council of Australia is the first published examination of that peak business organisation’s history and role. His firsthand account of the beginnings of an organisation which in its time did ‘bestride the narrow world’ is fascinating and forensic. This is as good as being there thanks to Allen’s elephantine, insider knowledge. The reader feels like a very privileged fly on the wall as Keating, Hawke, the business dynamos and trade-union luminaries of the 1980s hit their straps, reminding us that government relations and the politics of the past were more than merely interesting.

Professional associations play a distinct and influential role in Australia’s civil society, as detailed in the chapter on the Pharmacy Guild. This in-depth case study by Peter Sekuless of one of Australia’s most powerful and successful lobbying organisations provides a textbook example of how to conduct sustained, skilful government relations. Based on interviews with the current CEO of the Pharmacy Guild, this chapter outlines its long history of successful government relations over several regimes and in the face of industry-threatening challenges.

In the chapter ‘Lobbying under Liberal and Labor governments’ the authors identify and explore similarities and differences between the two main parties across a number of areas including policy, ideology, attitudes towards the public service and the relative roles of business groups, trade unions and other networks and what these mean for influence seekers. Turnbull and Shamier conclude that the new lobby environment is often unpredictable, with little space for comfortable assumptions about who conducts what sort of campaign for and against which governments.

Geoff Allen examines the insider and outsider systems as they have played out in Australian policymaking over the past four decades or so in chapter 10. The author’s unique insider experience over many years, interspersed with salient anecdotes, clearly illustrates the gradual evolution of a policy advocacy system more dependent on sound research, modelling and evidence-based approaches than a drink and a nod between mates.

The penultimate chapter focuses on practical case studies and examples of the best and worst in lobbying practice in modern Australia from the perspective of a practitioner in a global strategic communications firm. Australian democracy is enhanced by a vigorous and innovative corps of consultancy as exemplified by one of the new breed, Feyi Akindoyeni of leading Canberra lobby group, Kreab Gavin Anderson. From her box seat
and new regulations, including lobbyist registration and other recent upheavals in government relations and lobbying practice. Her contribution not only describes lobbying the Rudd and Gillard governments but also covers modern practice in considerable detail.

In the final chapter Geoff Allen brings his substantial experience to bear on this examination of the growing strategic importance of the in-house corporate government relations specialist. Tracing the development of this specialisation across several decades, Allen illustrates the deep interdependencies between companies and broad political forces, and the growing recognition that in-house specialist government relations practitioners are best placed to navigate them.

_The Influence Seekers_ had its genesis at the inaugural International History of Public Relations Conference (IHPRC) in Bournemouth, UK, in 2009. Peter Sekuless' first book, _The Lobbyists_ (1984), was written in the wake of the Combe affair, which set the foundations for lobbying regulation in Canberra. His 1991 text, _Lobbying Canberra_, was still being used in university courses. At the IHPRC both editors agreed that it was time to produce a book that reflected the changes in lobbying practice and regulation, especially in the last few years, but also to reflect on the growth in lobbying in Australia and perhaps to adjust what is sometimes a misaligned view of its role. _The Influence Seekers_ is the result of these ideas.

**References**

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