

Guidelines for political neutrality and local issues

In the second half of 2023 there are two significant civic and political matters creating public debate and at times division within the Tasmanian community: the national Voice referendum, and a proposed new AFL stadium in Hobart.

A healthy democracy thrives when a society can respectfully share and consider different views and interests when making decisions. All electors, including those that work for the Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC), are entitled to investigate, develop and take a view on any civic and political matter that impacts them or is important to their communities, which will assist them in how they vote. Indeed, as electors we are all legally required to vote.

However, the way in which a person decides to take an active role in their community, or express or action their political views may become an issue for working with the TEC. This is because sometimes expressing or actioning your views, particularly if it is by public engagement, can become or seen to be support for (or against) a political position that could align with a political party or candidate.

Working at the TEC

TEC staff must agree they will be impartial, uphold the TEC's independence, embrace the TEC's values and not comment on political matters.

Regarding involvement with family, friends and the community in discussion and debate about civic and political matters, staff need to be mindful that their actions or behaviour live up to these agreed behaviours, values and standards.

The TEC political neutrality form, which all staff need to be accountable to, includes the following questions:

- » Are you or have you previously (in the past 5 years) publicly engaged in conduct promoting a political position in respect of a current political issue (including participating in social media commentary of a political nature)?
- » Are you or have you (in the past 5 years) been a member of a lobby group (not being a union or professional association) which promotes a political position for an issue currently before the electorate?

Answering "yes" to either of these questions does not automatically mean you have undermined your political neutrality. It may simply depend on the context.

Some examples of activities that may be interpreted as conflicting with political neutrality, include:

- » letters to the editor of a political nature,
- » social media posts and comments on public social pages, of a political nature,
- » doorknocking or distributing electoral material or displaying political advertising on your property,
- » donations of money, time or goods to political parties, candidates or lobby groups, and
- » employment by a party, member or candidate.

From a more practical perspective, ask yourself:

"Will my action: influence, persuade or engage others in a political matter?"

If so, you may be undermining your political neutrality.

If you think you may have undertaken activities that could undermine your political neutrality

If at any stage throughout your employment, circumstances arise that may impact on your political neutrality, please notify your manager or TEC contact promptly.