

Releases (/releases)

(Little, A., 2019)

SHARE THIS

3 DECEMBER 2019

Government to ban foreign donations

Hon Andrew Little

Justice

The Government is taking action to protect New Zealand from foreign interference in our elections by banning foreign donations to political parties and candidates, Justice Minister Andrew Little announced today.

Legislation will be introduced to Parliament this afternoon and passed under urgency.

“There’s no need for anyone other than New Zealanders to donate to our political parties or seek to influence our elections,” Andrew Little said.

“The risk of foreign interference in elections is a growing international phenomenon and can take many forms, including donations. New Zealand is not immune from this risk.

“The Justice Select Committee has heard there are credible reports of interference campaigns in the elections of other countries, and these attempts are increasing in their sophistication.

“A recent Canadian Government report found half of all advanced democracies holding national elections had their democratic process targeted by cyber threat activity in 2018. That’s a threefold increase since 2015. We must protect New Zealand as best we can from this risk to our democracy.

“We need to protect the integrity of our elections. These changes will reduce the risk of foreign money influencing our election outcomes.

“We don’t want our elections to go the way of recent overseas examples where foreign interference appears to have been at play.”

Other countries ban foreign donations. Foreign or anonymous donations cannot be accepted in Australia over \$1,000, Canada over \$20 or the United Kingdom over £500 respectively.

The Bill contains a minimal threshold of \$50, to ensure that small-scale fundraising activities such as bucket donations and whip-rounds won’t be affected. But big donations will be gone.

The Bill also introduces a new requirement that party secretaries and candidates must take reasonable steps to ensure that a donation, or a contribution to a donation over the \$50 foreign donation threshold, is not from an overseas person. The Electoral Commission will issue guidance on what ‘reasonable steps they might take to check the origin of the donations.

The Bill also requires Party Secretaries to reside in New Zealand, to make it easier to enforce parties’ compliance with the donations rules.

It also extends the requirement to include name and address details on election advertisements to apply to election advertisements in all mediums.

“We’ve seen in other countries an avalanche of fake news social media ads that contain no information about who is behind them. That’s not fair and we don’t want to see it repeated here,” Andrew Little said.

“Anonymous online advertisements aimed at interfering with our democracy will be prohibited. If someone wants to advertise online they need to say who they are, the same as if the ad was published in a newspaper.

5th

Policy work in this area is ongoing. We look forward to receiving the Justice Committee’s recommendations to address the risk of foreign interference in New Zealand from its Inquiry into the 2017 General Election and 2016 Local Elections,” Andrew Little said.