

The Electoral Commission says the government's lobbying..

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The [Electoral Commission has published its commentary](#) on the [government's lobbying bill](#) this morning, which it will be responsible for enforcing. The commentary is damning, not helped by the fact that they were not consulted in advance on the bill. They say:

Key points for Second Reading

It is important that, where non-party campaigning takes place on a scale that could have a significant impact on elections, it is transparent and controlled. Inadequate controls could ultimately result in voters losing trust in the fairness and effectiveness of the UK's overall framework for regulating political campaigning. We regulate the general rules relating to this type of campaigning.

The Bill both widens the scope of the current rules on non-party campaigning that affects parties and groups of candidates, and imposes some additional controls on such campaigning. In our view, as drafted, the Bill raises some significant issues of workability that you may wish to explore at Second Reading.

Areas that you may wish to focus on in particular include that:

1. the Bill creates significant regulatory uncertainty for large and small organisations that campaign on, or even discuss, public policy issues in the year before the next general election, and imposes significant new burdens on such organisations
2. the Bill effectively gives the Electoral Commission a wide discretion to interpret what activity will be regulated as political campaigning. It is likely that some of our readings of the law will be contentious and challenged, creating more uncertainty for those affected. While we as the independent regulator should be free to decide when the rules have been broken, and how to deal with breaches of the rules, we do not think it is appropriate for us to have a wide discretion over what activity is covered by the rules
3. some of the new controls in the Bill may in practice be impossible to enforce, and it is important that Parliament considers what the changes will achieve in reality, and balances this against the new burdens imposed by the Bill on campaigners.

The wording is diplomatic but the message is clear. They think this is a badly thought out bill for which there is no apparent policy objective which is backed by impact assessments which the Electoral Commission clearly think are risible.

But will the government listen? If not, kiss goodbye to democracy.