

to be a concrete commercial objective, and the equivalent for an NGO. That's not to say awareness raising isn't important – it can be a major component of selling your idea to government, but it's a component, not the objective.

Even NGOs' cause marketing or political marketing and communications should be the same. There should be an explicit or implicit drive for changed behaviour, and, somewhere in the marketing mix, new behaviour needs to be made convenient.

The changed behaviour you want from government, and which lies at the core of your message, might include:

- staying the course when change is being considered
- changing course or revising plans when circumstances make it necessary or desirable for you
- adopting new policies or practices in response to advocacy efforts
- proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation that impacts you
- acknowledging the relevance of new information, stakeholders, or alliances, or the irrelevance of old
- deployment of the other policy instruments discussed elsewhere in this book.

## **When to 'go political'**

When should you make your business or community issue political?

'Never' is the answer from which you should start.

Time and again, business and community groups have become frustrated by government's response, have taken their issue to the opposition or crossbench Members of Parliament, and asked them to pursue it. Or they say to their lobbyist, 'How long do we have to put up with this? Let's go political!' Sometimes when clients say 'go political', they mean going to non-government Members of Parliament, and sometimes they mean publicly attacking the government.

If those non-government Members of Parliament take up your issue, the nearly inevitable outcome is you lose any capacity to deal with the government.

Why? Because the day-to-day business of non-government Members of Parliament is built around questioning and probing what the government is doing, looking for errors, gaps, negligence, and so on. The approach of a government to comments made by non-government Members of Parliament is often to look for the attack or threat that is assumed to be behind what is said – because it's usually there.

It is hard for an opposition or cross-bench Member of Parliament to break out of that way of thinking. Whatever they might say about your issue too easily descends into the language and framing of proving the government wrong, not delivering support for your issue. Your business becomes the battlefield.

Once an issue becomes the subject of partisan advocacy, it almost always becomes the subject of partisan claims, demands, and arguments – it is then a political issue. The government of the day and their opponents thereafter prosecute the case for and against in exactly the same way as they do any other political hot potato. This means the merits of your issue are forever after in dispute; compromise becomes impossible because it would

be characterised as political weakness or a political victory or defeat for one side or the other.

This outcome is just about inevitable, and it is tough to retrieve the situation – by going to non-government MPs you are almost always locking yourself into support from one side of politics only, and you are pinning your prospects of success entirely on a change of government.

It's the same when an advocate for a project publicly attacks the government for a decision or lack of support – the government almost always goes into defensive mode, and a re-evaluation of their position becomes nearly impossible, because it would be characterised as weakness, or defeat, or they would be attacked for the original decision.

Thus, your project is delayed: possibly for years, possibly forever.

A good lobbyist will always recommend going to government with a business case which makes sense to the government of the day, and sometimes they recommend going to all Parliamentary Parties at once, with arguments constructed to make sense to each Party or Member of Parliament.

Going political is nearly always done out of anger and frustration. Your stakeholders deserve a more measured and professional approach.

There's an exception worth mentioning. With each of the ministers I have worked for, at least once and sometimes more often, a non-government Member of Parliament has approached the office or the minister with an issue impacting that Member of Parliament's constituents, and the minister and their staff were able to, in a collegial way, work on the issue and do their best to come up with a satisfactory solution. How the

minister responds when such an issue is raised depends in large part on how it is raised.

## **Watering the grass(roots)**

Australia's unions, and many community-based organisations, often build membership and community involvement into campaigns aimed at persuading government to do something. Occasionally companies will become involved in this sort of campaign, too.

This is a legitimate tactic when used correctly for the right issue. It can be significantly more influential if an impacted resident can talk about a local development issue, for example, or if an affected employee can talk about the real impact of workplace change, rather than a union official or community campaigner simply repeating what they have been told. Authenticity is easy to see!

Generating broad-based activity also provides media opportunities and can help build coalitions or wider community support. It can help develop leaders from among supporters and help sustain a longer-term campaign.

But there's also a potential downside to activating this kind of campaign. You can lose control of what's being said, and this can mean you end up with something different from what you are after. In more extreme cases, you can lose control of what is being done, and that will harm your cause.

Some politicians and public servants will characterise this kind of activity as an attempt to bully. They can often respond negatively to mass phoning, or postcard- or letter-writing