

**Response to Complaint Made by Jeremy Buckingham and David
Mallard Re: Crikey and The Power Index items published on 7
February 2012**

On Friday the 3rd of February 2012, I received a text message from Alison Orme in Senator Lee Rhiannon's office. She asked me to ring her in order to discuss a response to an item by Paul Barry on Crikey the previous day.

I contacted Alison that day and we discussed the Paul Barry item on Crikey. I had not had time to read the item when I received Crikey the day before.

Alison asked if I would be willing to submit under my name a rebuttal of Barry's item in which he stated Lee was being hypocritical in a 1 February media release (<http://leerhiannon.greensmps.org.au/content/media-releases/new-donations-data-highlights-why-major-parties-block-funding-reform>), in which Lee criticised the major parties for accepting considerable money from donors, when the Greens had accepted \$1.7 million (according to Barry) from Wotif founder Graeme Wood.

I was informed that the rebuttal was being written in Lee's office and would be emailed to me.

At that time, I agreed to do this since I knew that Lee had nothing to do with the acceptance of the Wood \$1.68 million donation.

Later that day, I returned home to find an email from Lee's office with an attached copy of the rebuttal article. At about the same time, I received another text message from Alison Orme informing me Lee was making further changes to the rebuttal and that a revised copy would be emailed to me.

In the meantime, I emailed the editor of Crikey Sophie Black and said I would like to submit a rebuttal of Paul Barry's item. She replied that she would appreciate that and would also send it to The Power Index.

Alison Orme sent through the revised copy of the article to me mid-afternoon of 3 February. In her email to me, Alison said I could make reversions if I wished.

The deadline request from Crikey for the article to be submitted was close so I submitted it without any editing on my part. I regret that I did not consider my agreement to submit this rebuttal in my name more carefully and, following subsequent events, wish to apologise for being part of what I believe was both critical of the Greens and damaging to the party.

On Saturday morning on the 4th of February, approximately 20 people met in Lee Rhiannon's Sydney senate office to discuss the Greens response to the government's new electoral funding bill that had passed the lower house and was coming to the Legislative Council.

Those present included Lee, four of our NSW MLC members and about 15 of us from either the Electoral Matters Working Group or the Industrial Relations Working Group. During our meeting, I was quite shocked by the hostility directed toward Jeremy Buckingham over his statements in a 20 January Sydney Morning Herald article by Jo Tovey – "Greens split over O'Farrell's policy on donations".

When the meeting ended, I approached Lee and said that what we had done in regards to the Crikey item was basically the same as what Jeremy had done. Her response was that they were different issues because the article she had written and I had agreed to put my name to was a federal matter and that Jeremy's comments was a state matter. We weren't able to discuss this further due to the large number of people milling around the office.

However, I believed that the situations were very similar because Lee and I had criticised the Australian Greens in the media and this was damaging to our party. This was the same argument being levelled at Jeremy.

I was especially concerned that I had not removed the following sentence written in Lee's office prior to submitting the paper: "Now it appears the Greens are in the same league as the old parties."

My partner and I flew to Melbourne on Sunday, 5 February. I was contacted by Alison Orme while in Melbourne on Monday the 6th of Feb that the Crikey item had not been published. I emailed Crikey editor Sophie Black about this and she replied later that day to confirm that the article would appear the next day, 7 February.

I regret I did not take the opportunity to withdraw the article at this point.

Following the publication of the Crikey article, I learnt there was to be a major session at the February SDC regarding Jeremy Buckingham's media comments.

By mid February I had conducted considerable work into the process by which the Greens response to the O'Farrell bill on electoral funding had been carried out.

I don't know Jeremy well, so I am not fully aware of his motivations for speaking with Jo Tovey at the SMH. However, the findings of my research completed just prior to the Feb SDC support the position on NSW Greens policy that Jeremy took, which is to accept contributions only from individuals and banning all contributions from corporations and other organisations.

I was ill the weekend of the February SDC and did not attend. During the next week, I learnt of many disturbing issues about the use of proceedings during the discussion of Jeremy speaking to the press. Members contacted me to express their alarm at the conduct of the session and the heavy-handed approach taken with him. I must say it disturbed me that this sort of thing happened in the NSW Greens.

I believe double standards were applied in relation to what Jeremy did and what Lee and I did. I approached Lee about this several times beginning in February 2012. The last time this was very briefly discussed was in a meeting Lee organised for us to meet in Darlinghurst for coffee in late March. At that time it was made clear to me that further discussion was not going to happen.

I remain concerned about what Lee and I have done, to the point that I have seriously considering resigning from the party.

It was only when a few members asked questions on the senate preselection blog about this issue and my reading of several candidates' responses that I decided to answer the question Sandra Heilpern put to me in a completely honest manner.

I was wrong in agreeing to submit the item to Crikey.

In regards to mediation that the NSW Greens co-convenor mentioned in an email to me earlier, I stated in my reply to her that "I'm not certain of the purpose of this since I have admitted I did the wrong thing." I've thought further about mediation, and I can see no purpose in this. What is there to mediate? I'm totally in the wrong.

I wish to apologise unreservedly for any harm I've contributed to, to the NSW Greens and especially the Australian Greens. I believe our party is crucial for a vibrant democracy in our country and I have no desire to hurt the Greens in any way.

Norman L Thompson



3 May 2012