

# ICAC: NSW Liberal figures and businessmen tried to evade political funding laws, report finds

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PHOTO: [The ICAC has recommended the DPP consider charges against Chris Hartcher \(L\) and Joe Tripodi.](#) (AAP)

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**The New South Wales Director of Public Prosecutions should consider charges against former Labor minister Joe Tripodi and former Liberal minister Chris Hartcher, the state's corruption watchdog says.**

A number of prominent businessmen and MPs in NSW tried to evade election funding laws, the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) found.

They include former Liberal police minister Mike Gallacher - who remains an MP in the state's Upper House, but left the parliamentary Liberal Party after being named at the ICAC inquiry.

The [ICAC has handed down its long-anticipated findings from Operation Spicer](#), an investigation into banned donations from developers to NSW Liberal Party figures and campaigns.

It found that:

- Mr Tripodi engaged in serious corrupt conduct by "misusing his position as a member of Parliament to improperly provide an advantage to [developer] Buldev", and should be prosecuted for misconduct in public office;
- the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) should consider charges against former NSW energy minister Mr Hartcher for an offence of larceny; and
- the DPP should also consider charges against former Charlestown Liberal MP Andrew Cornwell and his wife, Samantha Brookes, for giving false or misleading evidence.

## NSW election funds channelled to Liberals: report

The report found that the Free Enterprise Foundation was used to channel donations to the NSW Liberal Party for its 2011 state election campaign.

It also found undisclosed political donations were channelled through a business called Eight By Five to benefit the Liberal Party's 2011 state election campaign on the state's Central Coast.

The ICAC named a string of people who it found acted with the intention of evading election funding laws, which govern public disclosures and bans on donations from developers.



PHOTO: [The ICAC said the DPP should consider charges against Samantha Brookes and Andrew Cornwell.](#) (AAP: Paul Miller, file photo)

Along with Mr Hartcher, Mr Cornwell and Mr Gallacher, they include:

- former Liberal MP for The Entrance Chris Spence;
- former Liberal MP for Newcastle Tim Owen;
- former Liberal MP for Swansea Garry Edwards;
- former Liberal Londonderry MP Bart Bassett;
- former Liberal Port Stephens MP Craig Baumann;
- former Liberal Wyong MP Darren Webber;
- former Newcastle lord mayor Jeff McCloy; and
- solicitor Nick Di Girolamo.

Labor leader Luke Foley said the commission had "uncovered an orchestrated scam from the Liberal Party in this state to evade the electoral funding laws of New South Wales".

### 'Larceny', leaks prompt advice to consider prosecutions

The commission found Mr Tripodi provided a confidential NSW Treasury report, about proposed land use at the Port of Newcastle, to Buldev director Darren Williams in 2011.

"Mr Tripodi had obtained this report through his position as a member of Parliament and provided it to Mr Williams to ingratiate himself with the management of Buldev in the hope he could secure future benefit from Buldev," the report said.

It is not the first time Mr Tripodi has been found to have engaged in corrupt conduct by the ICAC.

In 2014, [the commission found he acted corruptly](#) by concealing former Labor minister Eddie Obeid's interests in lucrative Sydney cafe leases, which Mr Obeid lobbied to have renewed in 2009.

Mr Tripodi was expelled from the Labor Party as a result of the previous finding.

Today's report also found the DPP should consider charging Mr Hartcher over several donations that were intended for the NSW Liberal Party's 2011 election campaign totalling \$4,000.

It said the cheques were paid into a trust account for Mr Hartcher's old law firm, Hartcher Reid, and the firm then paid \$4,000 to a business owned by the partner of Mr Hartcher's electorate officer, Ray Carter.

"After the \$4,000 was deposited into that account, it was withdrawn in cash by Mr Carter and given to Mr Hartcher," the ICAC report said.

["These steps are inconsistent with an intention on the part of Mr Hartcher to apply the \\$4,000 for the benefit of the NSW Liberal Party."](#)

The report also recommended the DPP consider charging property developer Timothy Gunasinghe, Eight By Five proprietor Timothy Koelma and PW Saddington and Sons director William Saddington with giving false or misleading evidence.

Ten Liberal MPs left the parliamentary party after being named in the inquiry, which primarily investigated allegations about the use of slush funds to disguise the donations.

From other news sites:

- [The Sydney Morning Herald: ICAC's Operation Spicer report live: the findings revealed](#)
- [News.com.au: ICAC report on NSW Liberals due](#)
- [9 News: Corruption watchdog reportedly tells former NSW Liberal MPs to repay illegal donations](#)
- [The Australian: Nathan Tinkler and ex-MPs corrupt, says ICAC](#)
- [The Australian: Witnesses weigh NSW ICAC legal options](#)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-30/independent-commission-against-corruption-icac-spicer-report/7796928>