

## MEDIA STATEMENT

19 March 2025

### Public Information Referrals

*Auditor-General's Report to the Legislative Assembly No 3: 2024-25*

The Auditor-General, Mr Jara Dean, tabled today his report to the Legislative Assembly on three reviews conducted under the *Public Information Act 2010* relating to:

- Social media posts shared by four Government ministers concerned with the cost of implementing a new digital health system (Acacia).
- An invitation by the Leader of the Opposition to a function in Parliament House.
- A poster placed on a bathroom wall in the ministerial wing of Parliament House.

The reviews found that the content of the social media posts contravened the Public Information Act. The poster and the invitation were found to be outside of the Public Information Act.

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The Auditor-General noted that the Territorians' right to know the policies and activities of their government extends to knowing the decisions and actions of the previous administration. However, when taxpayer funds are used in providing that information, it must be sufficiently detailed, factual and free of political bias. The social media posts did not meet these standards.

The social media posts were found to promote the current Government's political interests, omitted important facts about the funding of the project's increased costs and implied behaviour that was wrong or dishonest. One minister had already removed the post. The other three ministers did not respond to the Auditor-General's request for comments and the recommendation to delete the posts from their social media accounts.

The Auditor-General acknowledged that reviews under the Public Information Act have a narrow scope. 'I am not disputing the fact that the cost of the Acacia project is notably higher than its original budget, that ministers are responsible for the actions taken by their portfolio departments or the lack of publicly available project expenditure and progress data,' Mr Dean explained. 'These are topics worthy of an audit and I will consider them when developing my next work program.'

The Auditor-General's review found that the graphics shared by the ministers in their social media posts were created by the Communications team within the Office of the Chief Minister. The review also confirmed previous reports that the poster placed on the wall of a bathroom in Parliament House was created by staff in the Office of the Leader of the Opposition.

'I would not be doing my duty if I did not call out the waste of public money in producing both the social media meme and the poster, plus the time and resources spent by my Office in reviewing and reporting on these matters and the cost of having to divert already limited resources away from the core purpose,' Mr Dean said. The Auditor-General had decided against reproducing any of the images in the report so as not to further publicise the materials.

The Auditor-General received a further 16 requests for reviews under the Public Information Act in one day last week. Mr Dean echoed the comments made in the recent strategic review of his Office that the Auditor-General's role in the Public Information Act be transferred to another independent statutory officer to stop his role from being politicised.

The complete report is available at: <https://ago.nt.gov.au/publications.php>