

MEDIA STATEMENT

Operation Kingfisher findings demonstrate abject failure of ACT procurement system for builders and taxpayers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canberra, ACT | Thursday, 23 July 2026

The following statement can be attributed to Anna Neelagama, CEO, Master Builders ACT.

'The findings of Operation Kingfisher demonstrate that unfairness, and challenges within the ACT procurement system are real. The threat of corruption and undue influence is also very real.

'Because of undue influence, including from the very union that is currently under administration due to widespread corruption, the business offering the best value for money for the Territory lost out.

'This proves what Master Builders ACT has been saying all along: that the procurement system in the ACT as it stands is not delivering value for money for the Territory, and that we need an urgent review of all processes to ensure fairness, transparency and to eliminate corrupt influence.

'The length of time taken to hand down these findings is also unacceptable. It has taken four years to deliver these findings, and justice delayed is justice denied, not to mention the considerable time and cost for the builders involved.

'Master Builders ACT agrees with the key recommendations from the report, which include strengthening procurement independence to ensure procurement operates free from political, ministerial, union or stakeholder interference.

Together, we build better. 

'We also agree with the recommendation to improve transparency around the Secure Local Jobs Code, including compliance being determined by the independent Registrar and preventing directorates from conducting their own unofficial assessments.

'We're renewing our calls for an urgent review of all aspects of the ACT Procurement process, including whether the officials and advisors are fit and proper.

'We're also urging the acceleration of the much-needed independent review of the Secure Local Jobs Code, and delivery on the Local Industry Participation Plan (LIPP).

'The findings of Operation Kingfisher sadly reflect the abject failure for both builders and taxpayers in the ACT.'

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Notes on background

The ACT Integrity Commission today (23 July 2026) handed down findings from Operation Kingfisher, which investigated whether the procurement for the Campbell Primary School Modernisation Project was conducted ethically, and whether it was affected by corrupt conduct.

The investigation found that:

1. the procurement process was compromised by improper influence from the Minister's office and the CFMEU, resulting in the selection of Lendlease over Manteena, despite Manteena being consistently assessed as the superior tenderer by independent evaluation teams.
2. Manteena was recommended by multiple Tender Evaluation Teams (TETs) and scored higher on value-for-money assessments.
3. External political and union influence affected the procurement process, contrary to procurement rules requiring independence and transparency.
4. Ms Katy Haire (Director-General) and Mr Joshua Ceramidas (Minister's Chief of Staff) were found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct.
5. Neither Manteena nor Lendlease was found to have engaged in any misconduct during the process.

The key recommendations from the report were:

1. Strengthen procurement independence

Ensure that procurement evaluation teams and delegates operate free from political, ministerial, union, or stakeholder interference.

2. Clarify the roles of Ministers and ministerial staff

Reinforce that ministers and ministerial advisors may set policy but must not influence procurement evaluations, recommendations, or contracting decisions.

3. Require full documentation of decisions

All departures from evaluation recommendations should be:

- fully documented
- supported by evidence
- approved through transparent governance processes

4. Prevent introduction of undisclosed criteria

Evaluation criteria must not be changed during a procurement unless:

- tenderers are formally notified
- equal opportunity is provided to respond
- the rationale is documented

5. Strengthen probity oversight

Introduce stronger and more independent probity reviews, including escalation mechanisms where political influence is suspected.

6. Enhance training for senior officials

Mandatory training should be provided on:

- procurement law
- probity obligations
- conflicts of interest
- appropriate interactions with external stakeholders

7. Reinforce Government Procurement Board oversight

Significant departures from evaluation outcomes should trigger independent review or Board scrutiny before any contract award.

8. Protect procurement delegates

Delegates and evaluation team members should be protected from external pressure through clear governance and reporting mechanisms.

9. Improve transparency around Secure Local Jobs Code (SLJC)

The report emphasises that:

- SLJC compliance is determined by the independent Registrar
- Directorates should not conduct their own unofficial assessments
- Union concerns should be managed through existing statutory processes only

10. Improve audit and investigation processes

Future probity audits should:

- Examine verbal communications and informal influence
- Consider political and stakeholder interactions
- Escalate significant concerns immediately