Democrats move to ban databases
Correspondents in Canberra
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A KEY tool used by political parties to win over voters could be scrapped under a move by the Australian Democrats. The Liberal and Labor parties maintain databases, known respectively as Feedback and Electrac, which contain private information about voters collected by MPs' electorate offices.

The extent of the databases, which are exempt from privacy laws, was revealed by Perth-based political researcher Dr Peter Van Onselen in a recent academic journal article. They are used to identify swinging voters, analyse key concerns and target messages.

Democrats privacy spokeswoman Natasha Stott Despoja said today she would introduce an amendment to privacy laws to cover the databases.

"The decision of the major parties to exempt themselves from this legislation shows just how hollow their commitment to privacy protection really is," Senator Stott Despoja said in a statement.

"These parties should explain to the public why they are not prepared to stick to legislation which they are happy to impose on others."

She said members of the public should be free to express their views to MPs and the media without the fear that their opinions would be recorded on a database.

"Because these databases are exempt from the Privacy Act there is no obligation to ensure that the information they contain is correct and up to date and no rules governing the way that information is used by political parties," she said.

The Australian Electoral Commission is also believed to be interested in the databases after it was reported they were being on-sold to candidates. The law bans electoral roll data being used for commercial purposes.

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