

The Renewable Energy Party's Submission to the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

The Renewable Energy Party opposes all of the proposed amendments to the Electoral Act except for the provision requiring a unique Registered Officer for each party.

The proponents of the reforms are prevaricating when they claim that the changes are required to eliminate 'backroom' deals and to put the control of preference flows in the hands of the individual voter. The reforms real intent is to eliminate all small parties and to leave only 4 parties represented in the Senate. Since, in the 2013 Senate election, 24% of the primary votes were cast for parties other than the 3 major parties the unsaid objective of the reforms is to ignore the wishes of, and to disenfranchise a quarter of the electorate. That sort of power grab is manifestly undemocratic.

We have an opinion that the voting reforms may be in conflict with Section 7 of the constitution requiring that candidates be 'directly' elected. A High Court challenge might well be mounted.

Since a single 1 (or a tick or a cross) in one box is to be allowed as formal then the indicated instructions to the voter to number at least six boxes on the ballot paper are wrong, irrelevant and deceptive. If it is to be 'optional preferential voting' as in the NSW Upper House ballot then it should be shown as such in the instructions on the ballot paper. You can't try to reduce exhaustion and informality by lying to the voter.

The inclusion of party logos on the ballot paper will create more problems than it solves. Can any one party claim a representation of the Australian flag? How is obscenity determined? Which Christian party will get first dibs on the cross? Why should the Coalition's joint ticket be gifted the advantage of having two logos? In the past, some parties have paid good money to nominate ten candidates merely to appear bigger on the ballot. Why should the Coalition get that for free? Potentially there will be more arguments and confusions about the logos than there have been about the words in a party name.

Since data entry will now be required for every single vote (13-14 million) the cost to the taxpayer will be greatly increased and the count extended.

The provision to not count the Senate ballots on election night at each polling place is particularly dangerous. If the ballots are to be transported, uncounted and unscrutinised, to some central location then this allows the possibility of Philippines type ballot stuffing to occur. Any small cost savings are not worth the removal of a vital safeguard against electoral fraud.

These reforms are not designed to empower the voter but are really designed to restrict Senate representation to just the three existing major parties. No new party will ever arise again unless it is bankrolled by very rich business interests. The proposition that new parties can be developed slowly at a 'grassroots' level is nonsense. Grassroots wither without being watered with electoral success. Who can say that the existing major parties will be

appropriate to whatever the political issues may be in forty years time? A healthy body politic requires that change can occur as the times require.

The Joint Standing Committee which recommended these reforms was comprised only of members of the three major parties. There were no crossbenchers on that committee. Nevertheless it shouldn't be politicians wanting to be re-elected who have the power to fiddle with the methods of election. Any reforms should be at the recommendation of a completely independent body and then be ratified by the Australian people at a referendum.

Graham Askey
Registered Officer
Renewable Energy Party
Tues 23 Feb 2016