

The Greens NSW

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The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	158
Date Received	12/8/02
Secretary	[Signature]

Dear Sir/Madam,

Following is a submission from The Greens NSW containing five proposals to improve the Federal Electoral system. In the 2001 Federal election, as part of the Australian Greens, our state party contested all 50 NSW House of Representatives (HoR) seats and the Senate for NSW.

1 Introduce Proportional Representation in the House of Representatives

The composition of the HoR is far from representative. In the 2001 Federal election, nationally the Coalition won 42.69% of the primary vote but won 54% or 81 of the 150 seats to form a majority government. The ALP won 37.8% of the vote which translated into 43% of the seats.

In comparison The Greens and Democrats each polled approximately 5% of the vote which was over half a million votes each, but won none of the HoR seats. Minor parties collectively won well over 15% of the vote or over 1.5 million votes but won no seats. Under our current election system the Coalition and the Labor party combined were thus awarded an extra 24 seats above what their national vote deserved. This was at the expense of the minor parties.

The HoR electoral system is blatantly unfair and undemocratic. It serves the electoral interests of the major parties.

Elections would be much more democratic if a proportional representation electoral system was created for the HoR. Single member electorates should be abolished and a Hare-Clark system based on multi-member electoral districts introduced.

This is an extremely serious issue and we call on the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to respond in detail and address the issue of lack of democracy and fairness in HoR elections.

2 Optional preferential voting for House of Representatives

We currently have a system where voters must direct preferences in a HoR ballot or their vote is informal. Prior to the 1990 federal election, The Federal Labor

Government legislated to make it compulsory for a voter to direct preferences. The motivation was of course to increase Labor's electoral chances.

The average field in a HoR seat is about eight candidates. It is a perfectly legitimate view, indeed it should be a right, for a voter to decide that they do not want to give preferences to a number of candidates. There is no ethical reason to deny voters the opportunity of making the point that they will not vote for particular candidates. An optional preferential voting system would allow them to do this.

It would also reduce the number of informal votes. The HoR election system is different to most state lower house election systems and this causes unnecessary confusion for voters. Optional preferential voting for the HoR should be reintroduced.

3 Fixed term elections

It is highly undemocratic for a Prime Minister to be able to determine the date of an election. As a candidate and member of a political party it is unlikely that the Prime Minister or Government of the day will be impartial when determining an election date. Politicians are almost certain to choose a date that will enhance the chances of retaining government. This will depend on political issues that are attracting media attention.

This power provides an unfair election advantage to the Government.

The best solution is to have a fixed term for parliament which is the case for NSW state elections for example.

4 Televised leaders debate to include other parties

Media coverage has a huge bearing on an election result and there is a main stream media bias in favour of the Coalition and ALP.

The nationally televised leaders election debate is perhaps the most glaring example of this media bias in operation. The leader of the Coalition and the ALP participate in the debate and the leaders of all other political parties are excluded.

It is blatant discrimination and highly undemocratic.

A fair televised election debate would include the leaders of all parties, or a coalition of parties, which were contesting more than half of the 150 House of Representatives seats. To contest that many seats is a substantial undertaking. This figure has been suggested because if a party won 76 or more seats it was contesting, it would be in government.

It would require federal legislation to compel a broadcaster screening a national leaders election debate to include leaders of other parties.

5 Number of entrances to each polling booth to be determined

A problem arises each election when the number of entrances to some polling booths change. Many booths such as halls only have one entrance and the problem mainly arises at booths that are schools where there are any number of gates to the school yard.

For example, a booth which has always had two entrances can suddenly have three and then revert to two the following election. The uncertainty of the number of entrances creates difficulties for candidates when they are organising a polling booths rosters so that how to vote cards can be handed out. Many party workers are often inconvenienced because they have to be shuffled from booth to booth to compensate for the randomness of the number of entrances to a booth. It is a particular disadvantage to new candidates or parties who do not have experience of how many entrances are usually open.

It is also inconvenient for voters who are seeking a particular how to vote card. If they have entered a booth through a gate which it was unnecessary to have opened, voters sometimes are forced to go to another gate to get the how to vote card they want.

It would be very helpful to candidates, parties and also the general public if the number of open gates/entrances to each polling booth were determined by the Australian Electoral Commission and made public to candidates with the list of polling booths.

Each returning officer at the next election could easily determine the number of entrances it is reasonably necessary to have open to facilitate orderly voting and report so that the information could be made public prior to the subsequent election. (Only for new booths would the information not be immediately available).

Yours sincerely,



Geoff Ash
Deputy Registered Officer and
Electoral Spokesperson
The Greens NSW