

SUBMISSION NO. 87



Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. 87
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Secretary

179 Sydney Rd
Fairlight NSW 2094
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Honorable Members
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

I make this short submission as a person who has, throughout the past 20 years, coordinated the handing out of How to Vote leaflets and run informal training sessions for volunteers working at polling booths in support of both Independents and Greens candidates at Senate elections.

Based on that experience, I strongly believe that the Senate Voters' Choice (Preference Allocation) Bill 2004 is important in restoring democracy at Senate elections.

As observed in Senator Brown's Second Reading Speech, above-the-line voting and the 'deals' that are done between often-philosophically non-aligned parties in the negotiation of Registered Tickets is a corruption of the democratic process.

Parties with misleading names that do not reflect their policies or philosophies, and legitimate expectation by many in the community that political parties and groups will exchange preferences with other like-minded parties or groups, has brought the Above-the-Line voting system to a point where it is farcical. And, because of confusion or disinterest associated with these perversions and often extremely large ballot papers, more than 90% of voters get caught up in this undemocratic process by voting Above-the-Line.

With only 24 or 48 hours to negotiate preferences for Registered Tickets between the close of candidate nominations and the registration of preference flows, many smaller parties have little capacity to research the credentials of all parties and groups, and so are also misled by the use of inappropriate party or group names. As a consequence they may be persuaded to direct Registered Ticket preferences to others with whom they have little in common.

That the Above-the-Line voting system dependent upon Registered Tickets is undemocratic is perhaps best demonstrated by the 1999 NSW Legislative Council result referred to in Senator Brown's Second Reading Speech. In that instance, a party receiving less than 0.5% of the primary vote was able to manipulate preference exchanges around a large number of small parties with misleading names, and so to gain a position in the Legislative Council.

Another example, less dramatic only in its extent, is the result in the Senate election in Victorian in 2004. In that election a Family First candidate who polled only 1.88% of the primary vote was elected, while the Australian Greens candidate who polled 8.79% of the primary vote (clearly, and by almost 7%, ahead of any other candidate except the ALP and Liberal-National Coalition) remained unelected.

In the interests of restoring real democracy to the Senate election, and enabling the voter, rather than political parties, to determine the election outcome the Senate Voters' Choice (Preference Allocation) Bill 2004 should be supported.

I note, however, that the sample ballot paper provided at Schedule 1 to the Bill, appears to contain an error. Instructions on voting Above-the-Line, provided immediately below the boxed word "*either*" should, I believe read:

Number the boxes from 1 to [*here insert number of candidate_ groups*] in the order of your preference.

With this adjustment, I urge members of the Standing Committee to recommend to the Parliament, their support for the Bill as presented by Senator Brown.



(Dr) Judy Lambert