



Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

I would like to present this submission to the Standing Committee in Electoral Matters.

While I endorse the concept of compulsory voting, I do not endorse the way preferential voting is conducted.

Giving candidates a preference must be completely optional, and every voter should have the right to grant, or not grant, their preferences to whichever candidate/s they choose. A preference is not a "right" of a candidate, it is simply a privilege available to the voter. To me, it is quite illogical to compel the voter to distribute preferences to every candidate, just as it is illogical to insist that every party be numbered on the Senate vote. The current senate voting option of choosing one party above the line or numbering every party below the line can create a distortion in the outcome.

I believe it is essential that each box in a voting paper needs to be filled in to avoid the risk of tampering with the vote. However, as used to be the case, it should be entirely appropriate for the voter to vote only for the candidate/s they choose and place a cross in the remaining unused boxes.

It is also very important that the voting papers be marked with a ball point pen and the use of pencils be prohibited. It is far too easy to tamper with voting papers when a pencil is used. Unfortunately, the AEC, and the electoral system, is not above suspicion that tampering does not occur. This is completely obvious, and the cost of a ball point pen would probably be the same as a pencil, if not cheaper. **There is no justifiable reason for the Commission to continue using a pencil unless they are prepared to allow Electoral officials the opportunity to tamper with the votes.**

That there is corruption within the electoral system is proven by the votes that went "missing" in the recent WA Senate election.

I also support the requirement for voters to present some identification when voting, but the definition of what constitutes "identification" would need to be clarified. I do not support the introduction of a compulsory and universal identification card.

However, any stipulation regarding identification would only be as effective as the Commission's ability to monitor multiple voting by any individual.

From current reports, such monitoring seems to be impossible unless it is in response to someone reporting alleged breaches.

The introduction of a totally electronically controlled voting system would seem the only efficient and effective way of monitoring cases of multiple voting.

However, from the experience of electronic voting in overseas countries, the system is fraught with anomalies and wide open to manipulation and corruption. Unless there are very rigid conditions put in place, and guaranteed measures to independently monitor any electronic system, such a system would have little hope of gaining public confidence and acceptance.

Some of the other issues that need to be addressed if there is any intention to instil integrity and confidence in the current electoral system, are as follows -

- **The AEC must not be involved in predicting election results and preferences must be distributed in accordance with the results of ballot counting only. It is totally improper for any Electoral Official to direct any other person in the allocation of votes or preferences. That practice must be outlawed and subject to criminal charges.**
- **Likewise, the AEC must be prohibited from announcing any results from the eastern States before voting in Western Australia, NT, and South Australia has been completed. This prohibition should also apply to the media if there is a possibility of the results influencing the outcome in those States.**
- **All ballots must be initialled by polling booth officials and all un-initialled ballot papers must be ruled informal. Currently, this is not the case, as all ballot papers, initialled or not, can be counted if they are properly filled out. Nobody should be allowed to submit an uninitialled voting paper as that is clear proof the paper has not been properly processed. Obviously, anyone who has access to an uninitialled voting paper has obtained it illegally.**
- **The AEC must provide all party scrutineers with a list of the names of polling booth officials, and their corresponding initials, to enable verification of officials' initials on ballot papers. There is absolutely no reason this information cannot be provided, unless there is some ulterior motive for not doing so.**
- **It is quite unbelievable that the AEC has not adopted the simple system of colour coding the ballots for each booth. This would be a very simple and virtually foolproof system to account for, and reconcile, the number of ballots issued at each polling station. Any discrepancies would immediately come to light and warrant a thorough investigation.**
- **Pre-polling starts up to 19 days prior to the election, and those votes are only counted the day after the election. As pre-poll votes represent some 20 %, or more, of all votes cast, every pre-poll voter should be provided with a distinctive colour coded voting paper according to his/her electorate.**
- **It should be considered a complete dereliction of responsibility not to provide proper, safe, security wherever pre-poll votes are stored. They must not be left unguarded to provide the opportunity of interference and "loss", as seemed to have happen in Western Australia.**
- **The current postal vote system is fraught with obvious anomalies that are open to misuse. While it is acceptable for the application forms to be sent to voters by a political party, or the candidate, the completed form must be sent directly to the AEC by the voter. The ballot papers must then be sent directly to the applicant/voter and not passed through the party or the candidate, otherwise, the process is open to all manner of manipulation.**
- **The AEC has an obligation to monitor death notices and the notifications from each State, and the responsibility to ensure all the names of all deceased people are removed from the rolls up to the time of their publishing, prior to elections.**

- **As there are relatively few Australians who are members of registered political parties, in the interest of being seen to be unbiased, no party members should be employed by the AEC in either permanent or temporary positions, especially if directly involved with the voting process. There are plenty of people in Australia who are unaffiliated with a political party to fill the demand for temporary employees at voting times.**

I respectfully make this submission in the hope that some of these suggestions might lead to a less tarnished image of the current electoral system. The AEC seems to be plagued with biased decision making, selective approval relating to election issues, and an obvious lackadaisical approach to integrity and security.

Yours sincerely

Graham L Paterson