

Submission to Committee on Electoral Matters

23.8.2019

Terms of Reference

That the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquire into and report on all aspects of the conduct of the 2019 Federal Election and matters related thereto.

I live in the electorate of Warringah. All the statements in my submission refer to the electorate of Warringah with the exception of Clive Palmer (point 8).

1) Negative and Misleading Advertising About Another Political Party

I propose that each party can only advertise for their own candidate and their own party but not against another candidate nor against another party on all marketing material, including billboards, campaign A-frames, leaflets/brochures, t-shirts.

During the last federal election the Liberal Party engaged in a relentlessly negative campaign against Zali Steggall in the seat of Warringah. There was more negative advertising against Mrs Steggall than positive advertising for Mr Abbott. It was everywhere: on huge billboards, on shopfronts, of trucks being towed across the electorate, on volunteer t-shirts, on leaflets and newsletters, in online ads ... the list goes on.

In addition to the negativity of the campaign, the campaign was extremely misleading and false. The main slogan "A vote for Steggall is a vote for Shorten" was not true. A vote for Zali Steggall was a vote for an Independent candidate, not for any of the other parties. As it turned out on election night, Bill Shorten did not become PM in spite of Zali Steggall being elected.

Another often repeated and printed claim that Zali Steggall was funded by GetUp was also completely false.

The negative and misleading campaign led to a high degree of insecurity in the electorate with many voters, who preferred Zali Steggall but did not endorse Bill Shorten or did not support GetUp, generally confused. In general, negative advertising has been shown to lead to an overall decline of trust in our politicians.

My proposal:

- For the next Federal Election every candidate should only be able to advertise for what he/she stands for, not against other candidates.
- As an absolute minimum, all political slogans should be true and not based on misleading claims. There should be a 'truth in advertising' requirement at the federal level. The Australian Electoral Commission should be given the authority to approve or reject electoral communications for publication, including online.

2) Disturbing the campaign events of another political party

In the last federal election various Liberal supporters took turns dressing up as a big yellow chicken which wore a Zali Steggall supporter t-shirt. This 'chicken' turned up at many of Mrs Steggall's campaign events disrupting the peaceful, positive atmosphere.

I take special offence at the fact that 'the chicken' was misleadingly dressed in a Zali supporter t-shirt while holding a hand-painted sign saying "Zali supports Labor" or "A vote for Zali is a vote for Labor".

My proposal: It should be illegal to disturb another party's campaign events as well as to wear their campaign merchandise with a misleading intent.

3) 3 week period of pre polling

The three-week-period of pre-polling is excessive and especially difficult for minor parties in terms of extra campaign funding and recruiting extra volunteers.

My proposal: One week of pre polling is sufficient to offer people who are working or away on Election Day the opportunity to vote in person, rather than via postal vote.

4) The organisation of Pre Polling

The behavior that was displayed at the pre polling centre in Brookvale (but also at other centres) was absolutely ridiculous and disrespectful to the AEC and other parties. The main culprit was the Liberal party:

- The Liberal supporters arrived hours before the AEC office opened and plastered the area with their own signs, leaving hardly any space for any of the many other candidates.
- The Liberal volunteers did often not adhere to the boundaries set by the AEC officer, e.g. to not walk across the car park and address people as they were exiting their cars. The AEC officer became understandably upset many times and threatened that no party would be allowed to be anywhere near the car park if this continued. When other parties reminded the Liberal volunteers of the AEC rules, they were mostly ignored.
- Half of the signs displayed by the Liberal party were misleading signs with the slogan "Steggall = Shorten" (see above). Misleading advertisement should not be allowed anywhere but especially not at a pre polling centre.
- The behaviour of [REDACTED], was appalling. Not only was she wearing the "Steggall = Shorten" t-shirt, but she would also move to stand right in front of other party volunteers (distance 5cm) so that they could not hand out how-to-vote cards anymore or had to move to the side. Furthermore, she would talk over the top of other parties' volunteers and showed no respect to them. So bad volunteer behaviour was endorsed from the top, 'leading by example'.

My proposal: I strongly advocate for very strict rules at pre polling that:

- a) Limit the number of signs any political party can put up and the time of day they are allowed to put them up (e.g. only when the AEC office opens, not before)
- b) Empower the AEC officer to expel volunteers of one political party only if they are the culprits and not apply the punishment to all parties
- c) Do not allow negative campaign material against other political candidates to be displayed or handed out at pre polling
- d) Opportunity for party volunteers to complain to a supervisor when they feel harassed by another party's volunteer

5) Election Booth

My proposal:

The rules outlined for pre polling should also apply to the booths on election day.

In addition:

It is ridiculous that the Liberal party machine will send their volunteers out the day before or at night to plaster the election booths in plastic banners and signs and then pay security guards to watch them.

My proposal: Party volunteers should only be allowed to put up campaign decoration on the morning of the election, at 6am the earliest.

6) Advance Australia's campaign intervention

Advance Australia declares itself as an independent third party (on their website: "Advance Australia is independent of all political parties,"), when it clearly only exists to support the Liberal and National Party. Their campaign was relentlessly negative as well, leading to the sexist campaign video with 'Captain Getup' rubbing Mrs Steggall's breast on one of the misleading Steggall = Shorten billboards. This is an absolute disgrace.

The website of Advance Australia is full of factual mistakes, which they continue to spread via newsletter and emails.

My proposal: To demand transparency and clarity of who is behind Advance Australia (apart from the Board of Directors) and who funds it. To demand that Advance Australia only engages in positive support for their preferred candidate rather than slandering other candidates, especially that they refrain from sexist, untrue advertising.

7) Online trolling by fake social media accounts

During the last federal election there was relentless online trolling by fake social media accounts - users who pretended to be from the electorate of Warringah but lived far away, often inter-state, posted relentlessly negative comments about Mrs Steggall.

My proposal: Look at possible regulation of impersonating another person online with the intent to influence an election outcome.

8) Clive Palmer's \$60 million political advertising campaign

My proposal: Limit the amount a candidate can spend on a campaign, including advertising, and also limit the amount a party can spend. See more detailed coverage of this issue: <http://theconversation.com/after-clive-palmers-60-million-campaign-limits-on-political-advertising-are-more-important-than-ever-117099>