

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY INTO A BILL TO REVISE THE ELECTORAL ACT
Kammy Cordner Hunt, Founder, ONE PLANET political party (Reg'd AEC, 2019)

03/07/2020

Kammy Cordner Hunt has been a Mansfield Shire Councillor, a political candidate at State and Federal Level, and started a new Climate Action political party in 2019. With close affiliation with electoral processes over the last two decades, she has ideas for reform that will benefit all Australians and enhance our democracy.

ONE PLANET party draws urban and regional people from Victoria and around Australia together to focus on a range of public-interest issues and to act effectively on the Climate Emergency, and, most expressly, to also maintain accountability, transparency and honesty in government for Australians and to educate voters in the importance of understanding proper use of the preferential voting system.

This submission to the Parliamentary Committee to review the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2020 is an individual submission with inputs from others.

This submission is to suggest reform to increase transparency, fairness and democracy for all by targeting familiar practices that have been steadily getting out of hand during campaign time and on election day.:-

1) DESIGN AND FORMAT OF SENATE PAPERS

Senate Papers at the last Federal Election were outrageously large, unwieldy and confusing.

This is a result of more candidates - owing to growing populations, growing awareness of issues, a growing range of issues - and therefore is a healthy sign of democracy. But the design of these papers must be updated to reflect this increase. The average voter cannot be expected to handle this situation well or effectively, and in fact will experience distress and anxiety. Until recently only a single digit was required above the line, so inserting 6 digits (which I believe is an improvement) gets even harder.

As a trained teacher interested in the psychology of learning, I have read many studies that examine how the human eye roams over pages and processes information.

The most recent very long paper listing parties/candidates on a left-to-right axis was very counter-intuitive to facilitated processing for the human eye. The eye roves across and down a page, so pages are generally designed in a vertical frame ("portrait orientation"), as that is the most natural and intuitive way to present information to the eye in a way the brain can most easily process.

When the eye has to travel a long way L to R, the brain cannot effectively retain the information ingested early in the scan, and gets "lost" along the way, needing to return and start again. When the eye travels down the page, it can flick back up to the start of the page, up to the early information and remain oriented within the page at all times (not "lost").

The design of Senate Papers needs to be changed in consultation with educational academics and psychologists. Font sizes and empty spaces could also be reviewed.

An A3 page could house the candidates in a series of rows across and columns down the page, making it more intuitive to psychology and much more manageable for the vast majority of voters.

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2) THE PAPER WARFARE AT POLLING BOOTHS

This is an antiquated, loathsome practice which is in drastic need of update and reform.

There should be no need to have thousands of people at booths around the country handing out millions of leaflets. The human resources, logistics are bad enough, but the **environmental cost is NO LONGER ACCEPTABLE.**

A booklet - of submitted information from each party - could be compiled and printed by the AEC, and thus lodged in each polling booth dangling from a string.

The same booklet could be made available in small numbers – 10 or 20 - to voters queueing outside, to be perused while waiting, and handed in on arrival at sign-in and returned to the outside queue.

Alternatively, booth managers could receive a collection of papers from all parties and these How To Vote cards could be pasted around the interior of every polling booth.

Both these methods would make every candidate equal at the booth regardless of party wealth.

The resultant absence of party personnel at booths may mean AEC will need to deploy an extra person at each booth to answer queries and help with voting directions. This process would increase our democracy by ensuring the equal exposure of candidates on election day.

3) NORMALISATION OF COMMUNITY HELD “MEET THE CANDIDATES” FORUMS

The opportunities for campaigning in the lead up to elections are very limited and prohibitively costly for all candidates except those standing for the main parties with big bank balances (and big donors). Advertising, leafleting, letter boxing and posters are big budget items (requiring large memberships to help) where the main parties drown out everyone else. Invitations to talk on the media are restricted to the main parties and celebrity candidates.

The new and growing interest in community-held candidate forums is the most democratic and egalitarian way to give candidates a platform and voters a chance to assess the merit of those candidates standing.

The AEC should publicly endorse and encourage these forums while putting limits on advertising. Offering small community grants to enable forums (for example, up to \$500 to assist with venue hire) will stand as endorsement and encouragement, as well as a NORMALISATION of this process for ensuring fair and democratic elections.

4) SIGN PROLIFERATION AT POLLING BOOTHS

In Victoria, laws have been introduced by the VEC that have eliminated ugly proliferation of major party signage, ribbonage, colour-bombing etc at all booths. No signs within 15 metres of entrance and only one sign per party. The atmosphere was so less frenzied and so much more friendly, giving much less of an impression of bullying, intimidating and pushing side by side by the big parties. The contrast, returning to an EAC election with the old, unrestricted style, was really confronting and

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unnerving.

Most voters are very intimidated by the whole process of voting, the Victorian initiative made the experience so much better for them. The other initiatives suggested by me, above, will be even more conducive to a de-stressed experience at the booth, enabling people to give the best of themselves when they vote, and ensuring a fair and democratic process.

5) PARTY DONATIONS TO BE ERADICATED

Party donations can only diminish our democracy, diminish us as a nation. The system is abused and rorted, and no person gives millions of dollars to a political party expecting nothing in return – and no party ever feels as if they *don't* owe a big donor a favour if they have successfully gained power

6) DELIBERATELY MISLEADING AND DISHONEST SIGNAGE, AND ANY PRACTICE INTENDED TO DAMAGE OTHER CANDIDATES.

Deliberately misleading and dishonest signage - such as those put up near polling booths in both Kooyong and Chisholm electorates (signs in the AEC purple colour, recently taken to court, which were in Mandarin, telling voters that the correct way to vote in the last election was to vote 1 Liberal, and others slandering the opposition leader with lies) – should be specifically disallowed.

It diminishes the Australian People as a Democratic Nation when the lowest forms of electioneering – dishonest, misleading and damaging to candidates - are allowed to run rampant.

7) THE ACT SHOULD HAVE AN HONORABLE MISSION

Highlight integrity, accuracy, transparency and expectations of candidates, voters, supporters of candidates and parties and opponents of candidates and parties, which measures need to include **immediate** and **strong action** to remedy breaches of the Electoral Act, rather than long drawn out processes, with few sanctions of penalties issued. This should include voiding an electorate's result. It will only have to be done once or twice to bring parties into line.

This Bill must be withdrawn and another drafted, based on one vote, one value, and open and transparent mechanisms for elections that keep the democratic power with voters, not businesses or foreign government interests.

I would be willing to present to the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this democratic process.

Yours sincerely

Kammy Cordner Hunt

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