

To: [Committee, EM \(REPS\)](#)
Subject: Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters - Restriction on voting freely
Date: Saturday, 4 January 2014 2:29:30 PM

FAO: Chairman - Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

This document is in regard to the problems I experienced during the general election on 7th September 2013, where I was prevented from casting my single vote to my chosen candidate as I believed to be my democratic right and obligation.

The case:

Prior to the election I contacted the Australian Electoral Committee to find out how I could cast my single vote for my chosen candidate.

The AEC was unable to assist me and directed me to other sources of information on various government websites.

After much research I discovered that not only is this simple democratic ideal not possible, it is not actually permissible under the current voting system.

My investigation revealed that I had only two 'approved' choices - vote above the line or vote below the line.

1. If I voted 'above the line', my vote could be used by other candidates to barter for their own advantage and agenda.
2. If I voted 'below the line' it was incumbent on me to research all of the many other candidates, many of whom are running frivolous campaigns, to rank them in exact order and therefore make my single vote count in relation to all of them.

Above the line - it would seem that it is actually possible for a candidate I expressly *don't* want to represent me to be voted in using my vote. This is absolutely unacceptable to me.

Below the line - Not only is the notion of researching 60-80 candidates and their policies in order to rank them unrealistic, it is simply impossible.

Further, the concept of making one mistake on the ballot form could not only result in a 'wrong' candidate being voted in, I might have all that effort scrapped if I made one written error (e.g. an accidentally duplicated or illegible number).

(How many vote-counters have had the conversation - "is that a one or a seven?" Result? vote not counted. That is why the single 'X' is fundamental to voting.)

Therefore, using either above the line or below the line options presented me with no way of placing my single vote in favour of my single candidate.

In an effort to find a way forward I made further enquiries. I tried to find out if I could vote, but register it as an abstention. Again I was not.

Unable to vote for my chosen candidate and unable to abstain, I had no 'moral' alternative open to me and therefore was left with no way to vote.

Argument 1:

We have a system of legally-enforced compulsory voting.

If a citizens can find no suitable candidate and wish to avoid fines and criminal charges, they have three choices:

1. They can vote for just anybody.
2. They can destroy the ballot paper.
3. They can pay the 'fine'.

Without the government offering any alternative, this system simply treats abstentions as criminal and the only thing being counted aren't the disenfranchised voters votes, but their 'abstention-tax' money

(I would be very interested to find out how many ballot papers were destroyed and how many fines were paid.)

Argument 2:

If a government uses the law to enforce a compulsory voting system on its citizens, then surely that government should be equally compelled to offer the voter one safe-water vote, an abstention.

And, as voting is compulsory, this vote must be counted in the tallies.

Argument 3:

The citizens who cannot find a suitable candidate cannot have their problems addressed properly in parliament.

A large abstention vote is a vote-of-no-confidence in the candidates on offer and should serve as a wake-up call to all politicians to work at motivating these disenfranchised people to vote by addressing their problems.

Instead, these people and their issues are being ignored, and we get a government with its own self-serving agenda.

Moral argument:

The political system where the ordinary voter selects their chosen representatives is

called a democracy – that which Australian's think they have, that for which our service personnel face our countries enemies.

A system where the combined pool of politicians have a forum to manipulate the votes for their own purposes may have another name, but it is most definitely not a democracy.

(If they could speak, I wonder what those who fought for our rights in the World Wars would say about how this system has become perverted in favour of the politicians? It is a truly disgraceful situation.)

Personal argument:

Apart from being represented by a government that hasn't been democratically voted into office by my peers, there is another personal side-issue to not being able to vote.

I have now been issued with a penalty notice for my failure to vote.

Here's the rub: I can make all it go away nice and easily for the bargain sum of \$20 or, I can go to court to defend my position.

The bus-fare to court is more than \$20, therefore I am being coerced to making it 'all go away' (and admitting wrong-doing) for this token payment.

However, if choose to I go to court and fail to defend my position, the fine for not voting becomes \$170, I would also have to pay court costs and a obtain a criminal record. This is all on top of my bus-fare home.

So, for the expedience of paying \$20 I am being manipulated into admitting that I am guilty of a crime. Which I am not.

My alternative is to spend considerably more than the \$20 on bus fare and, with no legal representation, take the chance to clear my name.

And is there any reciprocation on the part of the prosecuting authority?

If I win do they pay my expenses? Do they pay court costs? Do they have a criminal conviction recorded against them? I bet they don't. I'll bet the tax-payer picks up the bill for that.

This is coercion at its state-run worst and, democratically-speaking, terribly wrong.

In conclusion, my submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters is that the following changes be implemented:

1. The ballot should be restricted to a list of individual candidates names and also have a place for abstention votes - only one of which can be voted for using a simple 'X'

mark.

(No parties, no preferences.)

2. That abstentions should be declared in the results.

(This will qualify the winning candidates margin in real-terms and show the figures for the entire voting population, not just those who didn't opt-out using the \$20 get-out-of-jail free card.)

3. The system of fines and prosecutions should be reviewed.

(This will facilitate disengaged voters to vote and incentivise complacent party-protected candidates to offer real policies for real issues – not just letting them sit back and toe the party-line.)

If these changes cannot be implemented, I would be grateful to hear solid and substantial arguments that explain why they are **disadvantageous to the voting citizen**.

I formally request that this submission be considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

Thank you.

(I would also appreciate a response as soon as possible as I hope to use it as evidence in my impending trial.)

Kind regards,

John Storey