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To the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

29 February 2016

Dear Committee Secretary,

This is page one of three.

This organisation has until recently confined itself to pleading, as its name implies, for honesty in elections, i.e. for the elimination of Vote Frauds under the rules as they are.

We have avoided getting into issues of FAIRNESS, i.e. what the rules should be, lest our advocacy against Vote Frauds (which will unfortunately continue unabated in the next election) be diluted with messages re changing the rules. However of course our members do have substantial expertise in the way that the electoral systems have operated.

In the inadequate time available to comment, we briefly make the following points:-

- Australians like fairness and speak of “a fair go” and “fair dinkum”. The word “fair” does not appear in the terms of reference of this Committee, nor in the Bill nor in the Explanatory Memorandum.
- This Bill is UNFAIR in that it massively advantages the 3 major parties (Coalition, ALP and Greens) and disadvantages minor parties. It is a backwards step in our democracy, because it will reduce the diversity of views in the Senate.
- We urge that this Bill not be passed, and that there be an extended period of proper consultation to discuss improvements to our voting systems. (The JSCEM has failed)
- It will in effect disenfranchise about 25% of voters, because these votes will ‘exhaust’ and not be counted in determining the final outcome of Senators that get elected.
- This Bill will massively advantage the 3 major Parties (Coalition, ALP and Greens).
- It will make it so difficult to get Senators elected from other than the 3 major parties that it will effectively head us down the dreadful USA polarised status of being a “two-party-State” (i.e. ALP+Greens vs the Coalition).
- We deplore that this Bill is being rushed through the Parliament and a Public Hearing with limited participation of only half a day and held in only one location.
- **We attach** our Briefing Note “method to elect Senators and Senate voting trends”;
- this Briefing Note makes a positive suggestion as to how to improve the system
- **We attach** our Media Release dated 24 February, which includes inter alia what Senators Dastyari and Conroy said in the Senate on 23 February:- This Bill is “*the behaviour of a bunch of schoolyard bullies*”... “*the purpose of this Bill is to wipe out the cross-benchers*”.

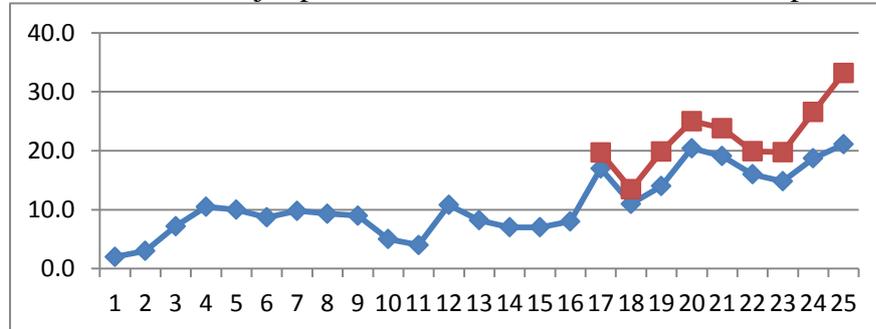
Yours sincerely

Lex Stewart, President, Australians for Honest Elections Inc

## ISSUE – the method to elect Senators and Senate voting trends

### BACKGROUND

The 2013 draft Bill to scrap Senate “Group Voting Tickets” and to have optional preferential above-the-line (ATL) voting needs to be understood in context. The first chart shows the % votes for non-major parties from 1951 for the House of Reps and from 1990 for the Senate.

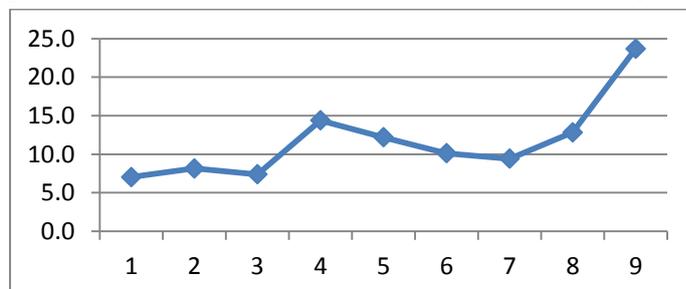


For years in each of the 6 States, there would either 3 ALP + 2 Coalition or 3 Coalition + 2 ALP Senators elected, with the 6<sup>th</sup> Senate seat going to a Democrat or a Green.

An unfair feature of the system is that the quota for election of a Senator is one-seventh, not one-sixth, of the total formal votes. This means that after 6 Senators have been elected there is a ‘rump’ of one-seventh of the votes left over unused! Concerns were rarely expressed about the voting method while ‘leftwingers’ (Democrats or Greens) were getting the 6<sup>th</sup> seat using preferences from Group Voting Tickets, and the “rump” of votes leftover contained mainly conservative parties whose votes were ineffective in getting any representation.

### CURRENT SITUATION

The graph below shows the % votes after 1987 for parties other than the ALP+Coalition+Democrat+Greens, i.e. in overly-simplistic terms, these votes were largely for conservative parties, and votes below 14.3% were in the “rump” and were wasted:



With the recent rise in this graph, we now see significant numbers of Senators on the ‘cross-bench’ who are not of left-wing ideology. Although this diversity of views would be viewed as successful democracy in other countries, in Australia this is regarded as a threat to control by both sides of politics. They wish to change the methodology to “optional-preferential ATL voting in the Senate” – this method would unfairly favour the ALP+Greens+Coalition, and would make it more difficult for other parties to get elected.

Recent rage over the cross-bench thwarting the government fails to mention that for decades this has been done by leftwing parties (Democrats/Greens); now that parties other than them have an influence there is suddenly an apparent concern to change the system.

### RECOMMENDATION

Leave the voting system the same using Group Voting Tickets to distribute preferences.

For information contact Australians for Honest Elections phone 0424 077746

Media Release of 24 February was on AFHE letterhead, which does not fit in here

## Senate voting proposal avoids the really important issues

- **The proposed new Senate voting method will ‘wipe out’ minor parties**
- **but ALP points out cheating re donations to political parties is untouched**
- **but cheating to get false enrolments onto the Electoral Roll is untouched**
- **but cheating by multiple voting (18,770 at last election) is untouched**
- **but Electoral Rolls still in a shambles, as stated by the National Audit Office**

Yesterday’s “Matter of Public Importance” (MPI) debate on the government’s new Senate voting method proposal yielded the truth about it and some quotable quotes, according to elections-monitoring group, Australians for Honest Election (AFHE), which warns that all of the big problems in our electoral systems have been ignored while this minor side-issue of Senate voting methods is being pushed forwards. The topic of the MPI was “**The rushed changes to voting laws that will extinguish Senate diversity**”

*ALP Senator Dastyari said, “This is an electoral gerrymander masquerading as reform. Let’s be honest about the result – only 3 parties in the Senate and Xenophon. This is the behaviour of a bunch of schoolyard bullies ... Hypocrisy of the Greens ... The government wants a more compliant Senate. It’s not about openness and transparency. The introduction of optional preferential voting will result in massive exhaustion of votes.”*

*Senator Leyonhjelm pointed out the unfairness, “Many Australians feel not represented by major parties. One quarter voted for non-major parties, which led to us having only 11% of the Senate seats ... [in future] all of these people who vote for minor parties will see their votes exhaust [over a quarter of votes won’t be counted].”*

*ALP Senator Conroy said, “This is a deal that will exclude 25% of the voters who don’t want to vote Lib/ALP/Xenophon/Greens. Let’s be clear, the Gov’t and the Greens want to wipe out the cross-benchers; that is the purpose of this Bill.”*

*Senator Lazarus said, “This dirty deal ... wipes out the cross-bench”*

*Senator Lambie said, “This proposal is a distraction from the important business of the Senate. In all my time, I have never had anybody come into my office wanting changes to the Senate voting method; they talk about jobs, health, Medicare etc”*

*Senator Day said, “The unholy Liberal/ Greens/ National/ Xenophon cartel ... has issued the cross-bench with a death warrant”*

*“Democracy suffers. This organisation’s pleas to the government to fix up the vote frauds, about which we have provided abundant evidence, have been ignored. Instead we get this narrow proposal,” said Mr Lex Stewart, President of AFHE.*

*“For example, the Audit Office has pointed to huge deficiencies in the AEC and the **Integrity of the Electoral Roll** (which AFHE has found contains thousands of false enrolments), but there is no proposal to fix these deficiencies,” said Mr Stewart.*

**Contact: Lex Stewart, President, Australians for Honest Elections Inc.**

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