The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Division required?

Electronic voting in the House of Representatives

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

April 2016
Canberra

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Contents

Foreword v
Membership of the Committee vii
Terms of reference ix
List of recommendations xi

THE REPORT

1 Introduction 1
Conduct of this inquiry and structure of the report 2

2 Evidence 3
Arguments for and against electronic voting 3
Saving House time 5
Immediacy of results 6
Available technology 7
Use of electronic voting in other parliamentary chambers 9

3 Conclusion – the ayes have it 11
Saving House time 12
Transparency of the vote and immediacy of results 13
Procedural considerations 13
Technological proposals 14
Count administration technology 14
Voting technology 15
Other proposals 17

Conclusion 18

APPENDIX

Appendix A – List of submissions 21

Foreword

Electronic voting has been considered a real possibility for the House of Representatives for many years. Despite a number of inquiries, including by the Procedure Committee in previous parliaments, the House has not come to a final decision on the matter.

Throughout this inquiry, the Committee sought the views of Members and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Members are ready to embrace the technology available to enhance the efficiency and transparency of votes in the House of Representatives. Members are not willing, however, to completely disregard the traditions of the House in the pursuit of efficiency.

There is no question that Members must continue to attend the Chamber to vote, with the exception of nursing mothers who may vote by proxy. The Committee has also determined that the practice of Members dividing to the right and left of the Chair to indicate their vote, which is valued by both Members and observers of proceedings, should be retained.

After considering a range of technology options, the Committee is confident that a secure and reliable electronic voting system, suited to the needs of the House, is achievable. As such, the Committee has proposed that the option of Members using swipe or touch cards to vote from any seat be further investigated, with the clear intention of introducing electronic voting into the House of Representatives Chamber.

Modernising voting procedures will save the time of the House, will ensure immediate availability of accurate results and will send the message that the House is willing to embrace technological change while retaining valued traditions and practices.

Dr Andrew Southcott MP
Chair

Membership of the Committee

Chair	Andrew Southcott MP	
Deputy Chair	Michael Danby MP	
Members	Russell Broadbent MP	Scott Buchholz MP
	Ian Goodenough MP	Jill Hall MP
	Joanne Ryan MP	

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	James Rees
Inquiry Secretary	Siobhán Leyne
Research Officer	Naomi Swann
Administrative Officer	Penny Branson

Terms of reference

To inquire into and report on procedures for counting and reporting the vote in a division, in particular:

- the benefits or otherwise to the work of the House and the conduct of divisions by the use of electronic voting, including:
  - ⇒ the procedures for counting and reporting votes using an electronic voting system; and
  - ⇒ the cost of establishing and providing such a service.
- any other efficiencies to be gained in counting and reporting the vote in a division.

List of recommendations

3 Conclusion – the ayes have it

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that electronic voting to record divisions in the House of Representatives be implemented, provided that:

- voting occurs in the Chamber;
- the House maintains the practice of dividing to the right and left of the Chair;
- Members may sit anywhere on the side of the Chamber corresponding to their vote; and
- tellers continue to be appointed to report proxy votes for nursing mothers and to be ready to undertake a manual tally in the event that the voting system malfunctions.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the option of using a swipe or touch card (or electronic token) and readers that allow Members to vote from any seat to the left or right of the Chair be investigated.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the results of divisions be displayed in the Chamber.