

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

From Philip Laird

23 February 2016

The terms of reference note that it is intended to introduce measures including “to reduce the complexity of the Senate voting system, by providing for partial optional preferential voting above the line, including the introduction of advice on the Senate ballot paper that voters number, in order of preference, at least six squares”

This writer strongly supports the above measure and related recommendations.

A good place to start is the preface of the Committee’s 2014 report that commences as follows “The 2013 federal election will long be remembered as a time when our system of Senate voting let voters down.”

It continues to note in part “This has resulted in voters being required to contemplate and complete a difficult to manage ballot paper a metre long. At the last election 44 parties or groups were listed above the line and 110 candidates below the line on the NSW ballot paper. At a metre long, the Senate ballot papers were the maximum printable width, which meant the printed size of the names of parties and candidates was unacceptably small. “

To this writer, the 2013 half senate election showed what had been obvious for some years, that Senate voting was in need of reform. The 2013 result was one where in many States, the sixth place went to a person or a party that had gained a very low percentage of primary votes.

The New South Wales Legislative Council had a system of voting in the 1980s that needed reform. In time this reform was done to produce a simpler and more equitable voting system for the NSW Upper House.

It is now time to reform Senate voting, and in time for the 2016 election.

P G Laird