

To: Standing Committee on Finance & Public Administration Legislation
Committee

From: CIR Australia Inc

Concerning: Inquiry into Citizen Initiated Referendum Bill 2013

Date: 2013-04-08

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this very important proposal. I write as the President of CIR Australia, which is an organisation dedicated to the implementation of citizens' initiated referendums at all levels of government in Australia. We have a website at www.CIR-Australia.net and I hope you will be able to visit it at some time during your deliberations.

Our organisation strongly supports the Citizen Initiated Referendum Bill 2013 for all the reasons listed in your letter of the 20th of March:

- 1 It promotes greater openness and accountability in public decision-making.
- 2 Laws resulting from CIR are more clearly an expression of the people's will.
- 3 Government authority must be based upon the consent of the people.
- 4 All citizens should participate, or at least have the right to participate, in the political process.
- 5 Our Democracy has been hard won, is precious and should be encouraged in every way.

We need to do something to counteract the decline of Parliament brought on by the ascent of political parties. Our Westminster system of government, based supposedly upon the primacy of Parliament, has slowly withered as the political parties have slowly usurped all decision making to themselves. Parliament today very rarely acts as the body we all hoped it would be. Political power now resides with the currently dominant faction of the currently dominant political party. This means more and more power in fewer and fewer hands. It also means more and more resentment from more and more individuals.

This undesirable state is made worse by the fact that as the influence of political parties has *increased*, membership of political parties has, strangely, *decreased*. Today less than 1% of the Australian population is a member of a political party. This is probably as low as it has ever been. And there is no sign of a recovery.

CIR, even if fully implemented, would be but a small check upon this regrettable development. The limited CIR element of this Bill is very modest. It does not transfer any real power to the general population. It merely provides a mechanism for the asking of Parliament to consider a particular matter. There is no danger to anyone or anything in this Bill.

CIR Australia has studied the various forms of CIR around the world and we have come to the conclusion that for general legislation a petition signed by 2% of the electorate should be required. However, we agree with those jurisdictions which require a larger number of petitioners where the proposal relates to the constitution. May we therefore respectfully suggest that the reference to 1% of all electors in Section 10 (1) be replaced with 3% of all electors.

Also, could we please suggest that this might be an opportune time to consider the introduction of on-line petitioning. On-line voting cannot be very far away and on-line petitioning might be a way of slowly introducing this inevitable reform.

We hope very much that the Committee will support this Bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to put our views.

Ronald Evans

President CIR Australia Inc