

From: Jeff Waddell
Sent: Friday, 26 February 2016 2:13 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: RE: Invitation to make a submission: Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

To: The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
House of Representatives

Dear Sir

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to make a submission into the provisions of this proposed Bill. To what extent this submission keeps to that subject is another matter.

I'm sure other people who also contributed to the JSCEM may expand on more issues than I will, however there are a couple of issues that I want to ensure are at least tabled.

The first issue relates to preserving votes that - whilst some votes will inevitably contain some numbering errors or omissions – all possible measures must be put in place to ensure that each vote is preserved as long as it possibly can be – and if it is eventually excluded, it's preferably excluded as an exhausted vote rather than an informal one.

The second issue - and for me the most important issue I wish to table - may not strictly comply with the provisions of the Bill, but must be considered as a part of this amendment being adopted.

With the advent of Optional Preferential Voting, Above The Line (OPV ATL) and the abolition of Group Voting Tickets (GVT's), some changes to how votes are counted and how quotas are determined may need to be considered.

As someone with over 20 years in the IT Industry, I have had lots of experience applying "What If" scenarios. For me, this means dotting every "i" and crossing every "t" including the consideration of even the most unlikely scenarios.

To that extent I foresee a significant increase in the number of votes that will exhaust during the Senate Counting process. If Quotas continue to be allocated and determined using the existing process, it is possible, that when determining who is elected to the final Senate spot that neither candidate will end up with sufficient votes to achieve a full quota. And if the difference between the two is only a handful of votes; what then? A full recount?

To determine the number of votes that are likely to be exhausted during the count I referred to the 2015 State Election results for both NSW and Queensland. As both have OPV for the lower house, I felt this would be a good indicator of the number of exhausted votes likely to be encountered during Senate counts.

It should be noted that the voter exhaustion percentage at the Queensland State Election was 8.6%. For Lower House candidates in the NSW State Election the exhaustion rate was 11.7%

With an average exhaustion rate near enough to 10%, the validity of the current methodology on how Quotas are calculated and when they are applied may need to be considered.

I propose that Quotas are not determined once the number of formal votes has been determined for each State or Territory. Rather the counts should proceed eliminating the candidate with the lowest number of votes and continue until only [7 State/3 Territory] Groups or Candidates remain.(*). At that time the number of remaining live votes are counted and the Quota determined from that count.

(*) This assumes a half-Senate election. The numbers would be 13 State and 3 Territory at a double-dissolution election.

To my way of thinking, it is CRITICAL that each and every Senator elected by a State or Territory is elected with the same number of votes – regardless of whether they are the first elected or the sixth elected.

The Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016 is a significant step in the right direction to reforming Australia's electoral process. But I believe there are many more changes that still need to be made. However, they are for another time.

Sincere Regards

Jeff Waddell