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To: Committee, EP (REPS)

Subject: submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	111
Date Received	31-3-05
Secretary	<i>And</i>

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Chairperson

I am making this submission on behalf of the Tasmanian Greens. Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

The most immediate concern of the Tasmanian Greens relates to the allocation of above the line preferences. Our members have consistently reported incidents where the allocation of preferences before the election by parties has resulted in misinformation by people offering 'how to vote' cards or misunderstanding of the system by voters generally. The election process should empower voters not disenfranchise them.

To this end, the Bill being introduced by Senator Bob Brown is commended for your support.

Senator Brown is proposing that each voter allocates preferences above the line, not parties. The aim of this legislation is to make sure that voters know precisely where their preferences will be allocated. As I have stated above, the present system means that not only voters, but also volunteers, and officials at polling booths, misrepresent party positions because there is little public information about

- a. the process of allocating preferences
- b. the outcome of preference allocations or
- c. the possible result of allocating preferences according to the present system.

The aim of the legislation is also to prevent parties from skewing the vote by support which is obtained through private contracts between parties. Such private dealings have the effect that candidates are elected whose policies are incongruent with the candidates whom the voter has supported with a primary vote. Supporting the Senate Voters' Choice (Preference Allocation) Bill 2004 would allow control of preferences 'above the line' to be retained by voters as it is 'below the line'.

Another area which needs reform is that of election advertising. The Electoral Commission needs to have the power to vet advertising to ensure it is truthful.

The vicious anti-Green campaign in 2004, which included misleading and false claims, was able to occur because election advertising is virtually unregulated. Election advertisements should be at least as tightly regulated as normal advertising. As a minimum, they should be required to be truthful, with a rapid adjudication mechanism for contested material.

In addition, public funding for all campaign advertising should be made available so that all political parties have not only a set limit but also a common funding base. One way this could be done is for an amount to be set according to the percentage of votes gained at the last election.

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Finally, there is a need to ensure media airtime and print space is provided by public funding to all recognised parties commensurate with the percentage of votes cast and not just the two major parties as is current practice.

Yours sincerely

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