

## **Inquiry into the funding of political parties and election campaigns**

Submission from the Electoral Reform Society of South Australia June 2011

### **Equality**

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters has been asked to investigate options to improve the system for the funding of political parties and election campaigns.

In doing so, the Electoral Reform Society hopes that Committee members will use as their measuring stick whether the options considered ensure equality – **that is all voters must be treated equally and all candidates must be treated equally.**

The Society submitted comments on the Electoral Reform Green Paper - Donations, Funding and Expenditure (submission number 25), concluding -

*“In the Electoral Reform Green Paper a list of principles are given at the start of Chapter 2. The principle that is missing is **equality** – **all** voters must be treated equally and **all** candidates must be treated equally. Until this happens, Australia’s electoral processes will be questioned and found wanting.”*

### **Funding for the Australian Electoral Commission**

In considering this Inquiry, it is also hoped that the Committee will not ignore the fact that more funding is required for the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to be able to run election campaigns. This should be a much higher priority than considering how to fund political parties.

Much has been made of the high informal vote. The AEC needs sufficient funding to be able to conduct both educational and media campaigns explaining what is required for a formal vote.

It has been disappointing that measures trialled to help the vision impaired with their voting requirements have been discontinued as being too costly. Regardless of the cost, democracy is too important to be financially constrained.

There is also the need for sufficient funds so that the AEC can revamp its guide to Federal elections and produce one for each Federal electorate with details on polling places, candidates and ticket voting. If Australia is serious in encouraging participation in the political process now is the time to provide more details so that all electors can make informed decisions.

### **Third parties**

The Electoral Reform Green Paper - Donations, Funding and Expenditure defined third parties as “individuals or organisations that incur ‘political expenditure’ but who are not seeking election.”

The Electoral Reform Society questions if this is an adequate definition, as we are not sure if the Society could be classified as a third party. To date, our expenditure at election time has been minimal, but we have provided comments on political parties and candidates and sometimes (particularly for State elections) ranked these in relation to their electoral reform policies (see Appendix for an example).

As part of any definition of a third party, should there be a certain amount of expenditure that needs to be spent?

**Appendix:****Comments on the ALP Electoral Reform Policy 2010**

This analysis is based on examining the South Australian Labor Platform 2009.

The Electoral Reform Society of SA is impressed with the detail provided in the ALP Platform, under Chapter 9 “A responsibly governed South Australia” (see

[http://www.sa.alp.org.au/images/stories/Policies/sa\\_labor\\_platform\\_2009.pdf](http://www.sa.alp.org.au/images/stories/Policies/sa_labor_platform_2009.pdf) ).

While much of this Chapter contain well meaning statements, underneath this padding there are some commitments, such as Labor will continue to support proportional preferential voting in the Upper House [30] which this Society fully supports

Unfortunately Labor will continue to support preferential voting in the Lower House in single-member constituencies [30]. This is despite Labor stating that governments should be “democratically elected” [10] and each citizen should have “a vote of equal value to the vote of each other citizen” [11]. The Society argues that neither of these fine ideals can be achieved with single-member electorates.

Labor has some plans for their next term which the Society welcomes and looks forward to being involved with – this includes the following:

- allow the people to choose four year terms for the Legislative Council with a reduced number of Members [26]
- investigate provision of public funding based on the federal system [33]
- consider lowering the voting age to 16 years [282 in Chapter 4].

The Society notes that there is no direct mention of the Constitutional Convention held in 2003, the major event of the first Rann Labor State Government. However the Labor Platform does consider some of the outcomes from the Convention such as four year terms for the Legislative Council, and Citizen Initiated Referenda (Labor opposes this in any form [16]). And there is mention of the need for all to be involved in constitutional reform.

Interestingly at the last State election, not only did the Premier announce that he wanted to abolish the Upper House, but Labor also made some other important commitments which are now no longer mentioned such as entrenching proportional representation for the Legislative Council, keeping proportional representation as the method of voting for local government elections, investigating optional preferential voting for ballots for both houses, and investigating preferential ‘above the line’ voting for upper house ballots in addition to current preferential ‘below the line’ voting. It is very disappointing that these have been omitted in the 2009 Platform, and the question must be asked “Why?”

While the Society is pleased with the amount of detail in the ALP Electoral Reform Policy, it would appear that with the Government’s bid to hold a referendum on reforming the Upper House thwarted in the Upper House, the Government has lost its zest for any electoral reform if it is re-elected.

ASSESSMENT - 6/10