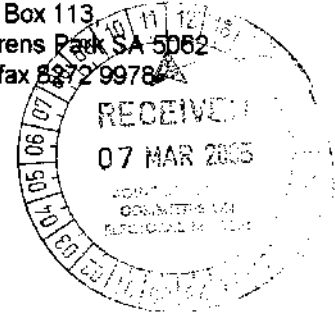


1/3/05

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	19
Date Received	7-3-2005
Secretary	<i>[Signature]</i>

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Bev Forbes, Secretary,
 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters,
 Suite R2.105 Telelift 10.3,
 Parliament House
 Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Forbes,

Inquiry in the conduct of the 2004 Federal election

Many people in the community including myself are concerned at the continuation of the single member electorate system for election of members to the House of Representatives, and its failure to result in proper representation of the diversity of interests in the community. A **multi-member electorate system**, or single electorate for each State or Territory, with random rotation of names on ballot papers, is long overdue after over a century of debate over existing undemocratic practices. The Australian Constitution allows that "each State shall be one electorate" in the absence of other provision (s29). In view of that clear intention, it is difficult to understand how undemocratic and unrepresentative single member electorates can have continued as long as they have. Multi-member electorate(s) could be instituted without Constitutional change, and this is thus the preferable option.

However, even within the status quo of the **single member electorate system** there are extraordinary inequities in the numbers of people in electorates, both *between* States and Territories, and *within* each State or Territory. These result in the votes of some Australians being grossly undervalued, and infringing the internationally recognised principle of one vote one value.

Comparing *between* States/Territories, based on electorate sizes published in *The Australian* 11 October 2004, the national average number of people in an electorate is 86,815 people. However in the ACT the average number per electorate is 112,448, 29.5% above the national average. In the NT the average number in the electorates is 55,824, 35.7% below the national average. Further details are on the attached chart.

In fact only NSW and Qld have around the national average of people in electorates (0.9% below and 1.3% above the national average respectively). Two out of eight States/Territories is a pretty disgusting score! Victoria and WA might be deemed barely passable (2.5% above and 5% below the national average respectively). But in SA the average number of people per electorate is 95,533 or 10% above the national average, while in Tasmania it is 67,917 or 21.8% below the national average. The yawning gaps between individual States and Territories also start to look wholly unacceptable, with the SA average 15% different from WA, or 32% different from Tasmania.

Within States/Territories, NSW diverges most in electorate numbers, with Reid having 78,039 people compared to Mitchell's 95,065, an amazing 21.8% difference. Tasmania has the least variation between seats (5.7%); ACT and NT have around 7%; while SA,

Qld, WA and Vic all vary by over 10% (11.6%, 14.5%, 14.6 and 16.1% respectively).

What does all this mean in terms of equal votes and equal value? In blunt terms, voters in the NT get a vote worth about twice that of voters in the ACT. In SA it takes 10 voters to have the same say as 9 in NSW or Qld, or 7 in Tasmania. It takes 20 South Australians to have the same say as 17 West Australians. Within each State or Territory people can also get a significantly different amount of say. Detailed further study would be necessary to determine if this favours either major party. If we are going to stick with single member electorates, at least they should be of equal size. In the age of computers this could be easily achieved.

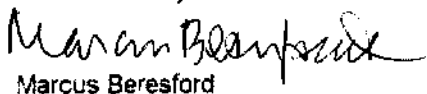
The Australian Constitution provides for a minimum number of 5 members of the House of Representatives from the existing States (s24). Representation from Territories is "on the terms which it [Parliament] thinks fit" (s122). In view of these provisions, surely the best approach would be to take the number of people in the two NT electorates as the benchmark for the rest of Australia. If that would lead to too many new seats (83), then the Constitutionally binding provision that Tasmania has 5 seats could be the benchmark for numbers of people in each electorate (leading to about 40 new seats). At the very least, inequities between mainland States and Territories should be addressed.

In section 24 of the Australian Constitution there is a formula for calculation of State and Territory entitlements to representation in the House of Representatives, which is based on population numbers and the number of Senators in each State/Territory. These provisions are leading to the inequity in democratic representation as outlined above, and they must be reformed as a matter of urgency.

There is also the argument that the age of populations in each State/Territory distort representation, with higher numbers of people under 18 leading to higher comparative population (upon which representation is based) but a lower comparative enrolment. This may indeed be a partial explanation for disparities in electoral numbers. If so it needs to be addressed by either basing representation on numbers of electors, rather than using population numbers, or (partially) by lowering the voting age. With regard to the latter, our laws regard 16 as the age of majority in regard to sexual offences so it is difficult to understand the choice of 18 for voting. Many people under 16 have just as much political acuity as older people, and the current age seems redolent of patriarchy.

In **summary**, the 2004 election is based on a fundamentally flawed and undemocratic system of representation in the House of Representatives. This could be partly remedied without Constitutional change by making each State/Territory one electorate, or a number of multimember electorates, indeed the Constitution clearly suggests the existing *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* has perverted the founders intentions in this connection, and should be reformed forthwith. As regards the serious under-representation from my own State of SA, this requires Constitutional amendment of s24. The under-representation from ACT could be amended without Constitutional change.

Yours sincerely


Marcus Beresford

ELECTORATE NUMBERS BY AUSTRALIAN STATE/TERRITORY

Region	No. voters	No. seats	Average No.	Nat. avge.	Smallest	Largest	Difference	%
NSW	4,302,122	50	86,052	-0.9%	78,039 (Reid)	95,065 (Mitchell)	17,026	21.8/17.9
Victoria	3,292,509	37	88,986	+2.5%	81,769 (McMillan)	94,897 (McEwen)	13,128	16.1/13.8
Queensland	2,463,404	28	87,978	+1.3%	81,562 (Fadden)	93,416 (Hinkler)	11,890	14.5/12.7
WA	1,237,349	15	82,489	-5%	75,368 (Moore)	86,354 (Stirling)	10,986	14.6/12.7
SA	1,050,859	11	95,533	+10%	90,256 (Wakefield)	100,691 (Barker)	10,435	11.6/10.4
Tasmania	339,589	5	67,917	-21.8%	65,492 (Lyons)	69,212 (Braddon)	3,720	5.7/5.4
ACT	224,896	2	112,448	+29.5%	108,369 (Canberra)	116,527 (Fraser)	8,158	7.5/7
NT	111,649	2	55,824	-35.7%	53,873 (Solomon)	57,776 (Lingiari)	3,903	7.2/6.6

NATIONAL DATA

Australia	13,022,377	150	86,815
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