

Introduction

- 1.1 On 14 May 2008 the Senate referred the *Commonwealth Electoral (Above-the-Line Voting) Amendment Bill 2008* to the committee as a particular part of its inquiry into all aspects of the 2007 federal election.¹
- 1.2 In summary, the bill seeks to amend the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to:
- remove the opportunity for parties or groups to lodge group voting tickets (GVTs); and
 - change the provisions relating to voting above the line in Senate elections so that an elector, who desires to vote above the line, is required to vote partial preferential by indicating at least four preferences above the line in a half Senate election or at least seven preferences above the line in a full Senate election.
- 1.3 The stated purpose of the bill is to ‘improve the democratic outcome of all Senate elections’.² By removing the opportunity to vote ‘1’ above the line and leave the preference distribution to the group voting ticket, Senator Bob Brown considers that the voter is advantaged because they are able to directly choose who is elected if his or her vote is not used, in full, to elect the party or group of first choice. An additional benefit of the changed arrangements cited by Senator Bob Brown is that there would also no longer be competition, inducement or cross-dealing by parties or groups over preferences, nor public uproar about preference deals.³

1 Senate, *Journals of the Senate*, No 12, 14 May 2008, p 390.

2 Senator Bob Brown, Senate Hansard, 14 May 2008, p 1778.

3 Senator Bob Brown, Senate Hansard, 14 May 2008, p 1778.

- 1.4 While the committee gathered evidence in relation to the bill as part of its broader inquiry into the 2007 election, this report specifically addresses the proposals outlined in the bill. Separate reports on electronic voting and the conduct of the 2007 federal election have also been produced by the committee.⁴
- 1.5 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* on 11 June 2008 and on the committee's website. The committee did not receive specific submissions in relation to the bill. However, evidence relating to the bill was included in submissions and at public hearings as part of the broader inquiry into the 2007 election.
- 1.6 The submissions and transcripts of evidence from the submissions and public hearings referred to in this report and are listed in appendix A and appendix B respectively. Copies of all submissions and public hearing transcripts for the 2007 election inquiry are available from the committee's website www.aph.gov.au/em.

4 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Report on the 2007 federal election electronic voting trials: Interim report of the inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 election and matters related thereto* (2009), Commonwealth of Australia; *The 2007 federal election: Report of the inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 election and matters related thereto* (2009), Commonwealth of Australia.