



## Dissenting Report – Senator Bob Brown, Australian Greens

The committee has let a worthwhile opportunity pass by choosing not to make a recommendation about my Commonwealth Electoral (Above-the-Line Voting) Amendment Bill.

This Bill aims to make our electoral system more transparent, fair and democratic by taking the power to allocate preferences out of party backrooms and into the hands of voters.

Opponents of the bill foreshadow a rise in informal votes if it goes ahead. However, there is no evidence to indicate this will happen. The 2003 NSW experience of the introduction of above-the-line preferential voting resulted in a decrease in informal votes on 1999 results. The informal rate for state elections is higher in NSW than for federal elections, but this is also the case in Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia.

What the NSW experience does show is that there may be interest from voters for above-the-line preferential voting: in 2003 there was a 3.7% increase in the number of above-the-line ballot papers.

Any new system of voting needs to be explained clearly for people of all literacy levels. This will go a long way to ensuring the number of informal ballot papers do not rise substantially. As voters get used to allocating preferences, we may also see a decline in any initial spike in the number of informal ballot papers. In Tasmania where proportional representation is the norm in the lower house, below-the-line voting in Senate elections is around the 20% mark compared to 3% in most other states.

**Senator Bob Brown**