



South Australian vote savings provisions (Chapter 7)

KEY POINTS:

- There were an increased number of informal votes cast at the 2010 federal election. It is estimated that 370 000 of these votes were genuine attempts to cast a vote. **(see pages 98–99)**
- The South Australian ticket voting system, if applied to House of Representatives ballot papers, could save a significant portion of informal votes. For the 2010 federal election, this could have been as much as 42.12 per cent (307 156 votes), assuming that all the relevant candidates had followed the appropriate procedure and lodged tickets with their preferences. **(see page 139)**
- The system of voting in South Australia allows for votes to be ‘saved’ in certain circumstances where an informal vote has been cast. If a candidate lodges a voting ticket allocating preferences, then any votes cast that simply put a ‘1’, a tick or cross, or show partial preferences consistent with the ticket lodged, will be considered to have been filled out in line with those preferences and will be treated as formal. **(see pages 127–131 and Table 7.7)**
 - The committee recommended that Parts XVI, XVIII, and any other relevant provisions of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* be amended to include a savings provision for House of Representatives ballot papers, based on the South Australian House of Assembly ticket voting provisions. Such a provision should serve to save ballot papers marked by the use of a tick, a cross, or the number ‘1’, and which do not express preferences for all candidates, in cases where the first and subsequent preferences (if any) match an order of preferences lodged with the Australian Electoral Commission by a political party or candidate in the election. This will serve to reduce the impact of unintentional informal voting resulting from incomplete preferences being indicated by electors on House of Representatives ballot papers (Recommendation 25). **(see page 146)**
- Another feature of the SA ticket system is that it does not undermine the system of full preferential voting as it prohibits advocating other methods of voting, such as a ‘just vote 1’ campaigns.
 - The committee has recommended that Part XXI of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* be amended to specifically prohibit advocating the completion of House of Representatives ballot papers other than by full preferential numbering. The offence should attract a penalty sufficient to deter such actions (Recommendation 26). **(see page 147)**

BACKGROUND:

- At every election, it has been the case that some ballot papers do not meet formality requirements and so cannot be included in the vote count. This may be the result of a deliberate choice or a genuine mistake by the elector. The effect is that these electors are not having a say in who will be their representatives in Parliament. **(see page 97)**
- The 2010 federal election saw informal votes for the House of Representatives at 5.55 per cent (729 304 votes), an increase of 1.6 per cent on the 2007 federal election. Senate informality was 3.75 per cent (495 160 votes), an increase of 1.2 per cent on the previous election. **(see page 98)**
- Not all informality is unintentional. The Australian Electoral Commission analysis of House of Representatives informality revealed that 51.4 per cent of informal votes were assumed to be unintentional, with the remaining 48.6 per cent assumed to be deliberately informal. This means that upwards of 370 000 voters are attempting to vote, but for various reasons are failing. **(see pages 98-99)**
- Having differences between the voting systems for the Senate and the House of Representatives at the federal level itself, and with states and territories, can be confusing and pose a problem for voters trying to cast a formal vote. AEC statistics show a substantially higher informal vote (with people voting either '1' or with a tick or cross) in New South Wales and Queensland, where optional preferential voting is used in state elections. **(see page 116)**
- There are various options that could be explored to reduce the number of informal votes cast. The South Australian ticket voting system is the preferred option as it allows for a high number of votes to be saved without moving away from the full preferential voting system at the federal level. **(see page 145)**
- The South Australian voting system is full preferential, but has a savings provision for the House of Assembly which permits candidates to lodge one or two preferences ticket, and provides that some ballot papers may be rendered formal if a voter has only indicated some preferences on their ballot paper where the preferences indicated are consistent with the ticket or tickets lodged. **(see page 127)**
- In the 2010 South Australian state election, 32 638 House of Assembly votes were saved by South Australia's ticket voting system. In the two previous elections in 2006 and 2002, 43 553 and 37 897 votes were saved. **(see page 127)**

For media comment: please contact the Committee Chair, Daryl Melham, on (02) 6277 2054 (Parliament House Office).

Further information: contact the Inquiry Secretary (02) 6277 2374, email jscem@aph.gov.au or visit the Committee's webpage at <http://www.aph.gov.au/em>