



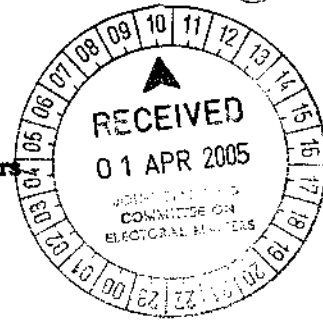
The Liberal Party of Australia
FEDERAL SECRETARIAT

SUBMISSION NO. 95

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| Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters |
| Submission No. <u>95</u> |
| Date Received <u>1-4-05</u> |
| Secretary <u>[Signature]</u> |

31 March 2005

Beverley Forbes
Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Beverley

On behalf of Federal Director Brian Loughnane, I enclose the submission of the Liberal Party of Australia for the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the conduct of the 2004 election.

Yours sincerely

JOHN BURSTON
Deputy Federal Director

Submission by the Liberal Party of Australia
to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Conduct of the 2004 Federal Election

The Liberal Party is pleased to make this submission to the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the conduct of the 2004 election. We seek to offer concise comments on a number of matters that arise out of the 2004 election campaign and we commend our suggestions to the Committee.

Postal Voting

The Australian Electoral Commission's problems in managing postal voting became a matter of public notoriety late in the campaign when significant problems, particularly in New South Wales and Queensland, became evident. The details have been recorded elsewhere and so we do not repeat them here. We do want to say that the whole episode casts serious doubts on the AEC's capacity to manage its contractual arrangements satisfactorily. Feedback from Liberal campaigns and candidates was that the AEC seemed to be slow in responding to this issue after it had begun to be raised.

Disclosure of Donations

We have previously sought increases in the thresholds for the disclosure of donations. We welcome the fact that the Government sought in 2004 to legislate to lift the thresholds to \$3,000. It is deplorable that there was not the support from the ALP and others in the Senate for this sensible reform to be passed. We urge that a further attempt be made to legislate for lifting the thresholds to at least \$3,000. In fact, we remain of the view, as put by us to this Committee in the past, that it would be reasonable to lift the thresholds to \$10,000. It is not realistic in 2005 to think that donations below this level could raise any question of undue influence.

Prisoner Voting

We welcome the Government's legislation in 2004 that sought to deny the vote to prisoners. The Senate approved some tightening up of the provision while not fully agreeing to the Government's objective. We believe that the matter of stopping prisoners voting, as in the Government's legislation last year, should again be brought before the Parliament.

liberals for forests

We express great concern at the confusion caused to voters by the activities at the 2004 election of the party called liberals for forests. There are two aspects to this. Firstly, the name of that party is potentially confusing and can mislead voters into believing that liberals for forests has some connection to the Liberal Party or gives its preferences to the Liberal Party. While we welcome the improvement to the Commonwealth Electoral Act passed by Parliament last year to clarify the provisions governing registration of party names for new parties applying for registration, there remains an issue about confusion caused by the name of liberals for forests which is already registered, and we suggest that this problem is something deserving attention from the Committee.

The second aspect is the conduct of people working on behalf of liberals for forests on election day in 2004. These problems arose in various seats, including, significantly, Parramatta. The Liberal Party received information indicating that workers for liberals for forests acted in ways that sought to mislead voters into believing that their how-to-vote material was in fact material that could be followed by those wishing to vote for the Liberal Party.

Both aspects warrant consideration by the Committee. We believe that ways need to be found to prevent this sort of activity by liberals for forests.

Provisional Voting

An area we recommend to the Committee for its consideration is the matter of provisional voting, which remains a matter of concern. No doubt the AEC will be able to give the Committee its assessment of the impact of the legislative changes on provisional voting and reinstatement to the roll that were made in the last Parliament. For our part, we continue to suggest that some further tightening of the legislation may be needed. We do not wish to see any possibility of abuse occurring in the use of provisional votes in the future.

Prepoll Voting

Reports from some electorates indicated that there was a degree of confusion about the opening of pre-poll centres. Our local campaigns in these instances reported that pre-poll centres opened and began operations without notification in advance. It is important for the AEC to ensure that candidates or their campaigns are advised in advance of the opening of these centres.

Close of Roll

The integrity of the electoral roll remains a central concern for us, and in that regard we express our support for the attempts made by the Government to legislate for closing the roll to new enrolments on the day of issue of the writs for an election. That the ALP and others in the Senate have blocked this reform in the past is something we condemn. We continue to be of the view that a flood of new enrolments in the days after writs are issued, at a time when they cannot be properly checked, are to the detriment of the integrity of the roll. Our view therefore remains that Parliament should pass legislation to close the roll to new enrolments on the day of the issue of writs.

Assistance to Voters

The attempts by the Government to legislate to exclude scrutineers from assisting voters who seek extra assistance are welcomed by us. We deplore the fact that the ALP has led the way in the Senate in rejecting this in the past, and it is our wish to see Parliament pass such a measure.

Role and Structure of AEC

It would be worthwhile for the Committee to interest itself in the structure and composition of the Australian Electoral Commission itself (currently a 3-person commission) in the context of improving the accountability and efficiency of the whole bureaucracy for which the Commission is responsible.

Location of Divisional Offices

We express concern about any attempt by the AEC to pursue the co-location of AEC Divisional Offices. There is value in these Divisional offices being located within the electorate for which they are responsible. Accordingly, we do not wish to see any resumption of a program for further amalgamations.

Tax Deductibility of Political Donations

The present limit of \$100 for tax deductibility for political donations is quite inadequate. A significant increase in that amount needs to be made.