



Supplementary remarks—Ms Sophie Panopoulos MP

Chapter 7

Accountability in government is not better served through prolonging the term of the House of Representatives. The proposed four year term for the House of Representatives has been discussed without the consequences for the Senate being properly considered or addressed.

In the case of the Senate, longer terms as canvassed in Options 1 and 2 of Chapter 7 create either of the following situations:

- i) An unacceptably long term of eight years for Senators
- ii) A diminution of the role of the Senate as a continuous chamber, merely for the convenience of the House of Representatives.

It is through no accident of history that the Senate is one of the most powerful upper houses in the democratic western world, and the proposal of the Committee is that the Senate be nothing more than a pale imitation of the House of Representatives.

There has been a creeping sense of disillusion in politics and political processes and this will not be solved by increasing the terms of government. The greater sense of 'ownership' that the people feel they have of their representatives, the stronger the sense of unification with the democratic process. This is best achieved through regular elections - not through lengthening parliamentary terms.

In Question 1 of the 1988 referendum, the people were asked 'to alter the Constitution to provide for 4 year maximum terms for members of both houses of the Commonwealth Parliament'. The proposal was convincingly rejected.

The benefits of a shift to four-year terms - where one of the oft-quoted reasons in their favour is that it would 'enhance business confidence' - seem entirely speculative. Our current constitutional arrangements have not negatively affected business confidence or the performance of the Australian economy. Three year

terms – or even two and a half year terms – have not dented the reforming agenda of the Howard Government.

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