



NEW REPORT LOOKS AT CHANGING NEEDS OF VOTERS

A newly released parliamentary report has recommended sweeping changes to how Australians are provided with information before a referendum.

The Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has released its report, *A Time for Change: Yes/No?*, which found the written material provided to all electors before a referendum is insufficient and a greater range of communication is needed to properly inform the public.

The Committee made 17 recommendations in this report, with the key recommendation being to establish a Referendum Panel prior to each referendum. The Referendum Panel would be independent of government and would be responsible for developing an overarching communications strategy for the referendum.

While a Yes/No pamphlet would still be sent out to all households, the Panel could also draw on a range of other communication technologies, such as the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and text messaging so that electors of all ages can make an informed vote.

The Chair of the Committee, Mark Dreyfus QC MP, says it is important to modernise how electors are informed given new communications technology.

“We’ve had Yes/No pamphlets for nearly 100 years, and there have been significant changes in both communication technologies and the needs of voters during that time,” Mr Dreyfus said. “We need to address these changes to ensure that information campaigns are effective for all Australians.

“Slogans like ‘Don’t know? Vote no!’ rely on ignorance and misinformation – the Government must do everything it can to ensure electors understand proposals to change the Constitution,” Mr Dreyfus said.

The Committee also recommended that:

- The Yes/No Pamphlets be retained but should be sent to every household rather than every elector;
- Parliamentarians continue to authorise the Yes and No arguments;
- A national civics education program be developed to improve knowledge of the Constitution.
- The Machinery of Referendums Act provisions be consolidated and harmonised with the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

The report is to be tabled in Parliament on Monday 8 February, and a Government response to the report is expected later in the year.

For interview:

Contact the Committee Chair, Mr Mark Dreyfus QC, MP on (03) 9769 1955, or Mr Dreyfus’ media adviser, Brett Collett on 0421 201 954.

For background information please visit the inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/laca or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 2358.