



DPS ref: 12/29

Mr Geoff Lyons MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Procedure  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Lyons

### **Inquiry into Electronic Voting – DPS Input**

Thank you for your invitation of 14 February 2013 requesting input to the Inquiry into Electronic Voting in the House of Representatives Chamber. I note that due to the expected shortening of the current parliamentary sitting year and its other commitments, the Committee acknowledges that there is not sufficient time to undertake a lengthy inquiry into this topic, and therefore is not seeking a detailed response, but rather an outline of the major issues which is expected to provide useful background for a future in depth inquiry.

Last year through my attendance at the Inter-Parliamentary Union World e-Parliament Conference, I experienced first-hand how the advanced use of technology in many jurisdictions, including the use of electronic voting, was providing efficiencies in chamber processes and contributing to a more open parliament.

Electronic voting is one of the areas recently explored in the development of the Parliamentary ICT Strategic Plan being led by my department, the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS). This plan is nearing completion under the guidance of the Parliamentary Information Communication Technology Advisory Board (PICTAB). One of the aims of this plan is to provide an integrated and structured approach to the adoption of technology solutions across parliament, rather than the implementation of point solutions for specific purposes. At its most recent meeting (20 March 2013), PICTAB encouraged the aspirational adoption of technology in parliament, stating that as Australia is generally seen as a world leader in many fields usually reliant or supported by ICT, the Australian Parliament should be seen as a 'show case' example in the use of technology. Members of the Board also stated that Parliament should therefore now be setting the international benchmark on e-parliament through the delivery of the ICT Strategic Plan.

It is in this context that DPS supports the Inquiry and its terms of reference, confirming your observation that there have been considerable advances in relevant technology since the last inquiry. It should also be noted that whilst the cost of introducing electronic voting into the chamber in previous years may have been prohibitive, the cost of technology is continually decreasing, with now more than half the world's parliaments using an electronic voting system.

Some of the drivers for electronic voting include:

- adds efficiency into the parliamentary process;
- improves transparency of votes;
- provides a quicker outcome which can, in turn, be communicated instantly electronically;
- provides flexibility and options in how the results of the vote is displayed;
- potentially allows the ability to vote remotely (reducing the need for pairing);
- allows voting information to be efficiently reused in other systems and for public consumption and analysis; and
- improves communication between the parliament and the public thereby contributing to a more open and transparent parliamentary system.

In many ways, electronic voting is being seen as a natural element of more open and efficient parliaments. It is becoming increasingly popular, as evidenced through half of the world's parliaments now using it in one form or another. Consideration should therefore be given to conferring with the Senate Standing Committee on Procedure regarding the possible use of electronic voting to the Senate Chamber.

Attachment 1 provides a summary outlining the status of the adoption of electronic voting in selected locations and some of the technologies adopted. Parliamentary chamber voting methods vary considerably across the world<sup>1</sup>, and also reflect the timing of their introduction. As such, there are a variety of technology solutions available to meet specific electronic voting requirements.

Should the Inquiry decide in favour of implementing an electronic voting system, there are a range of ICT and related issues that would need to be considered including:

- how the electronic voting system interacts with parliamentary procedures and systems;
- security, privacy and authentication needs;
- the use of fixed or mobile devices (or both);
- the integration to backend systems;
- the nature of the platform; and
- a preference for wired or wireless.

The Parliamentary ICT Strategic Plan is characterised by an underpinning principle to enable access to parliamentary information and services anywhere, at any time, to any (approved) audience through a range of devices. Mobile devices (e.g. tablets, including the parliamentarian's own device) will be the most common access method for parliamentary information and services, and the Inquiry should therefore not preclude consideration where advances in technology will open a range of voting opportunities currently not available through traditional voting practices. For example, with the appropriate authentication, electronic voting could be extended to allow voting outside the chamber through mobile devices. This may be an appropriate method of voting in some circumstances.

Whatever the technology adopted to enable electronic voting, it will be important that the original design and heritage aspects of the Parliament House are maintained. Special consideration will need to be given to any fixed devices, including screens and associated wiring requirements.

---

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Voting Procedures in Comparison, June 2012

The available evidence is that the adoption of electronic voting is not limited by the capability of the technology, but rather the willingness to break from traditional methods and the acceptance of the cultural aspects of electronic voting systems, particularly in relation to how they may impact on parliamentary debate. In other words, from a technology perspective there are no reasons why an electronic voting system could not be implemented within Australian Parliament House.

DPS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this and any further inquiry into electronic voting as I see this as a component of a broader e-parliament model, resulting in improved transparency and efficiency of parliament. DPS can provide innovative and integrated options on technology solutions in line with the Parliamentary ICT Strategic Plan, and ensure that the implementation of the electronic voting system complies with the design and heritage aspects of Parliament House.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Carol Mills', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Carol Mills  
Secretary

17.4.13



Region	Country	Status	Commenced	Where used
Africa	Kenya	The Kenyan Parliament has an integrated system that comprises public address and electronic voting systems all in one console.	Aug-12	The National Assembly and the Senate
European Parliament	European Parliament – 23 member countries	The Parliamentary Voting Procedures in Comparisons Paper prepared for presentation at the 2 <sup>nd</sup> annual General Conference of the European Political Science Association provides an appendix with the Standard Operating Procedures for the final passage of votes. The table indicates the precise method of how the vote is taken. Seventeen of the twenty three member countries use an electronic voting machine (EVM).	Varies	17 of the 23 member countries use an EVM.
Europe	Belgium	The Chamber may vote in three manners. Firstly, the Chamber may vote by roll call. Voting by Roll Call is electronic. Secondly the Chamber may vote sitting or standing. In the event of doubt, the vote is taken again or done electronically.	Oct-12	The Chamber of Representatives and the Senate
Europe	Ireland	Voting is usually electronic, with deputies pressing either the Tá (aye) or Níl (nay) button on their desks. After the voting time has concluded a Division Paper recording the result and each Teachta Dála (Member of Parliament equivalent) vote is signed by the four tellers and given to the Ceann Comhairle, (Speaker equivalent) who declares the result.	2002	The National Parliament House of Reprs and Senate
Europe	European Union	Show of Hands then if unresolved an electronic vote is taken.	Unknown	Debating Chamber
Europe	Scotland	The Scottish parliamentarian's desk contains all the electronic voting equipment which records the outcome of parliamentary votes. 'Decision Time' takes place on sitting days at 5pm.	Unknown	Parliamentary Chamber
South America	Brazil	Indications that it does occur. IEEE have written a paper titled: "A Three-Ballot-Based Secure Electronic Voting System."	Unknown	Both Chambers
South East Asia	Singapore	The new Chamber features contemporary IT features like an electronic voting system, an integrated congress system, IT terminals and so on.	2000	Attorney General's Chamber
United States	United States Congress	Used in the House of Representatives - In the House, an electronic voting device is typically used to take recorded votes, although occasionally roll calls take place. When voting to override a Presidential veto, the yeas and nays are required.	Unknown	House of Representatives