

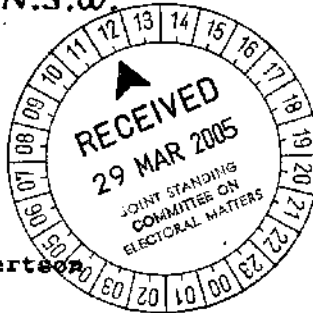
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SUBMISSION NO. 61

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	61
Date Received	29-3-05
Secretary	AKS / Phone / Fax (02) 43 695 705

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1st November 2004

Mr Jim Lloyd
Member for Robertson
GOSFORD

Dear Jim

Congratulations on your re-election. Obviously we Gosford electors are pleased with your electorate performance and as a minister in the Liberal Government, John Howard's four terms and Senate control are an extraordinary endorsement.

I write to seek your Government's amendment to the Senate above-the-line voting process,

It was a daunting task for me to have had to vote for 78 numbers below the line to lodge an intelligent formal vote.

This is not necessary for NSW Upper House elections. Here I can vote preferentially above the line with one or more numbers if I wish and still be formal.

I enclose Antony Green's SMH article which encapsulates my concerns also.

Could you please arrange Federal Senate voting process to accord with that developed for the Upper House in NSW? In this way our individual voting direction will not be lost and, better still, will not be distorted by party deals.

Yours sincerely

PETER JESSOP

61 2 43234555

SMH 29.10.04

Reform is needed of the Senate voting

Preference voting deals are starting to distort rather than reflect the will of the electorate, writes **Antony Green**.

ADVOCATES of the Senate have always argued that it is a more representative chamber than the House of Representatives. Even with each state being equally represented irrespective of size, the use of an electoral system based on proportional representation ensures it is not the "unrepresentative swirl" of Paul Keating's colourful phrase.

Even those expressing concern at the Howard Government's working majority in the Senate from next July should consider why a government in its fourth term, having won two clear pluralities in the primary vote, should not be entitled to a strong presence in a chamber elected by proportional representation.

There may now be a push by the Government to change the electoral system, per-

haps electing senators from electorates or by introducing minimum electoral quotas to keep minor parties out. Both proposals would be risky. They would make it more likely that a government could control the Senate, but equally deliver a hostile Senate under Opposition control. That could lead to a re-run of the constitutional imbroglios that dogged the Whitlam government.

Whatever occurs, the results of the election have revealed that the Senate's voting system, rather than allowing for the expression of the will of the electorate, has fallen under the control of party "bosses" engaging in complex preference deals designed to engineer electoral outcomes.

The problem is "above the line" or group ticket voting, introduced in 1984 to overcome the huge informal vote that had deg-

rad Senate elections. It also offered political parties a wonderful opportunity to control party preferences, as was shown when Labor and the Coalition saw common purpose in ensuring Peter Garrett did not win election for the Nuclear Dismantment Party.

This system was introduced for legislative councils of most states. With much lower quotas than for the Senate, the problems of group ticket voting became apparent.

In 1995 Alan Corbett, from a tiny party called A Better Future for Our Children, surfed into the NSW Parliament on strange preference deals. Nick Xenophon was elected with the same strategy in South Australia in 1997 after campaigning in opposition to the proliferation of poker machines.

The problem was revealed at the 1999 NSW election. On the "tablecloth" ballot paper consisting of 61 groups and 264 candidates, Malcolm Jones from the Outdoor Recreation Party harvested preferences from two dozen parties to win despite polling a mere 0.2 per cent of the vote.

10.04

system run by party bosses

NSW has acted to end this sort. While "above the line" voting has been retained, there are no longer registered tickets of preferences between parties. The only preferences are those listed in by voters, either for candidates below the line, or for parties above the line.

Some reform of this sort is required for the Senate. There were a record number of candidates and parties at this year's election, and parties engaged in some of the most Byzantine and ideologically questionable deals ever seen.

Tasmania has been the biggest beneficiary. Despite not polling enough votes to have their deposits returned or receive public funding, the party won a seat in Victoria, and almost in Tasmania, despite recording only a fifth of the support of the Greens.

The deals that produced the Senate outcome have shown that the group ticket voting system used is starting to distort rather than reflect the will of the electorate. Instead of parties lodging tickets that

reflect a logical listing of candidates in the order a party would like to see them elected, strange preferences are registered based on "show and tell" deals, strategic decisions made to engineer outcomes.

Voters, of course, have no idea of these deals. Trying to find out how a party will distribute its preferences is next to impossible. It requires time on the internet or a dogged interrogation of polling booth staff to get access to the register of preferences.

Yet voters have little alternative. In NSW, those voting below the line had to number 78 preferences. Who could say they knew anything about more than half of the parties or candidates on the ballot?

If elections are about voters expressing their will, then elections where you have to choose between a preference ticket deal you don't know, or give preferences to candidates you have never heard of, is clearly not fair. Reform is evidently needed.

Antony Green is an election analyst with ABC TV.