

## Submission on Electoral Act Amendments

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon Amendments to the *Electoral Act 1992 ACT*.

I note two of the terms of reference relate to funding matters, indeed the 15 recommendations of the Elections Act *Report on the ACT Legislative Assembly Election 2012* almost exclusively relate to funding or related matters.

I have no comment upon these matters save to support the tidying up recommendations 2, 7 and 14 and to agree the penalty fine for failure to vote at ACT Legislative Assembly elections be increased. I would favour \$200 in recognition of the importance of Assembly decisions in the life of ACT residents – on a day-to-day basis probably of more importance than Federal pronouncements.

The third term of reference (“The public position of the Labor Government and the Liberal Opposition that the membership of the Legislative Assembly be expanded to 25 members at the 2016 election”) has my wholehearted support, accepting the increased membership is achieved by five electorates each electing five members.

Although to date public criticism of this suggestion has been minor it must be expected to grow as the matter is debated and hopefully passed by the Assembly. The major objection will be cost and to this *there is no defence*.

Instead justification for the increase, although already widely even exhaustively covered, must be repeated. It must be explained to people Canberra cannot continue to receive service from elected representatives at the same high level we expect unless the Assembly numbers increase.

Reasons for this include:

- With currently some 256,000 voters the original one member to 10,000 voters which established the existing 17 member legislature (in 1989 there were approximately 170,000 voters) would be maintained,
- A growing population places increasing responsibilities upon ministers who in the 17 member Assembly and the government and opposition parliamentary system, are limited in number. Currently with five ministers three hold down four portfolios and two have six,
- Opposition shadow ministers are not much better off, holding between three and six portfolios each,
- The important committee system equally imposes unreasonable demands, especially upon government members. In the current 17 member body two of the three government backbenchers serve on five committees, the other member upon four,

- The number of portfolios held by individual members of the 17 member body deny all the opportunity to develop detailed expertise in any area of community responsibility,
- A larger Assembly would provide more choice in Ministerial appointments,
- An increase in the size of the Assembly could increase the overall expertise,
- The five by five proposed electorates will enable members to concentrate more effectively upon smaller electorates,
- As has been demonstrated in recent elections five member electorates do not disadvantage the election prospects of minor parties,

I regard the foregoing points as self-evident in the need to increase the membership of the Assembly and must enjoy the bi-partisan support of all Assembly members and their Party to succeed. However we should not move to this sensible decision without also considering other initiatives – after all such a major even momentous move will not occur often and we should take advantage of the opportunity to further improve election procedures.

In no particular order:

- Introduce electronic voting in all polling booths. The figures quoted in the Elections ACT report show 82.3 percent pre-poll and 83 percent polling day votes were electronic at the six polling booths nominated for electronic voting. Elsewhere the report stated one in four votes were made electronically.

Given the expense of the Western Australian Senate rerun the cost of introducing electronic voting, even if only for ACT elections, is negligible – and it is inevitable, so why not now.

- Introduce Party how-to-vote pamphlets *into* polling booths, either as posters around the walls or, for privacy considerations, in the voting box. The Hare-Clark Robson Rotation system checks individual how-to-vote pamphlets so major Parties volunteers outside polling booths offer no advantage.
- In conjunction with the above point the 100 metre rule could be abandoned And all canvassing outside polling booths banned. (Although it is of no concern of Elections ACT the growth of Canberra inevitably leads to more polling booths and more difficulty in finding volunteers to man the booths. It is a moot point whether democracy is better served with *no* Party guidance provided or whether such guidance is much followed).

In any event the 100 metre rule needs to be reconsidered because with the security fences now erected around many schools (usual polling places) voters are channelled to the school gate often beyond the 100 metre distance, defeating the purpose of the original ban.

- If we are to avoid a repetition of the minor Parties ambush of the recent Senate

election the ACT needs to substantially increase from 100 the numbers needed for registration to nominate. This is not a denial of a democratic right as most are single issue Parties or candidates and thus their contribution to the wider responsibilities of governance is questionable (and if their particular issue has merit could be incorporated into major Party platforms). Again as has been demonstrated the independent with broad grassroots support has nothing to fear from this change.

The foregoing suggestions are not exhaustive, nevertheless they represent attempts to improve the electoral system for the people it was designed for, ie. the voters. By taking the opportunity presented by this significant change to our Assembly representative numbers we simultaneously can introduce much needed revisions to our 20<sup>th</sup> century electoral methods and laws.

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