

**From:** James Hatfield [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 3 January 2013 11:58 AM  
**To:** Electoral Reform  
**Subject:** Electoral Reform Discussion paper: January 2013

To the Attorney General, The Honourable Jarrod Bleijie MP,

I wish to voice my opinion on some aspects of this paper. I will refrain from commenting on other aspects about which I do not fully comprehend the issues (such as political donations).

Firstly and most importantly, compulsory voting.

"The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in its report on the conduct of the 1996 federal election 60 recommended that 'if Australia is to consider itself a mature democracy' compulsory voting should be abolished'. It argued that voting could not truly be considered a 'right' if people could not exercise a 'right' not to vote. The committee did not make this recommendation in its reports on subsequent federal elections."

It is perhaps a telling factor that the committee only made this recommendation in 1996 and not subsequently. Voting is not only a right, it is a responsibility as well. We live in a democratic country with one of the best voting systems in the world. It is our job to make an informed decision once in a while to make sure all the policies, services and regulations of said democracy are reasonable to all citizens in the governed region/s.

Non-compulsory voting embraces apathy, and invariably leaves certain portions of the population under-represented, and this usually tends to be those in poorer or lesser educated demographics. Politicians then tailor policies to those who vote most, rather than to everyone. This ideally would not happen, however politics is what it is, and realistically it is important that everyone forced to be represented so that political parties do not develop (more) policies towards specific demographics.

It's only a few hours a year at most. Most people probably spend more time looking at pictures of cute animals, or reading magazines. A vote is a lot more important.

Despite all this, I am aware that optional voting has been used to great effectiveness in many countries and appreciate it does have advantages in grass roots politics and mobilizing voters around an issue. However if non-compulsory voting is to happen, I feel it must be first a federal decision as this is more representative of the populace and reduces confusion for electors. This would, I feel, need to be put to a referendum vote (Irony yes, but still).

Further opinions:

- OPV is a better system as not all candidates have well advertised policies and hence it can be difficult to make an informed decision on full preferences. Also, most of the advantages listed for FPV are not reasonable, such as "it is reasonable to expect voters to express a full ordering of preferences, even when they have a philosophical or intellectual inability to differentiate between candidates", which is false, and "it eliminates the potential OPV has to undermine democracy by voters simply following party instructions to vote for one candidate and not allocating preferences out of ignorance or unfamiliarity", which would be avoided by parties specifying preferences to voters, and in fact would undermine democracy as more people would vote fully along party lines.
- Electronic Voting: Adapting the NSW system seems like a good idea. It would require regulation to ensure that voters were actually meeting the criteria, and extreme vigilance in terms of programming to ensure the security and accuracy of the ballots. I would strongly recommend against making this system available for all voters as many electronic voting systems have been hacked and a full state-

wide would provide a large target for this activity (and hackers, when challenged, tend to win).

- Postal Voting: While I advocate ease of voting and different avenues of voting (and ideally support the availability of postal voting for all), I also have a different perspective. Having worked on multiple federal and state elections, postal (and pre-poll) voting requires a lot of time and effort by electoral staff compared to polling booth ballots. I feel expense and time limitations around elections must be considered highly if any changes are to be made to postal or pre-poll voting.

I encourage you to consider all available opinions and possibly make this more of a public decision with a vote (even if optional) before changing compulsory voting. This is a huge issue and deserves full publicity and consideration.

Regards,  
James Hatfield