THE ELECTORAL REFORM SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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27 February 2013

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While we wish to congratulate those involved in preparing the Discussion Paper on *Electoral Reform*, it was disappointing that in the Section on Voting Systems the only Option canvassed was to move to full preferential voting.

A quick examination of the outcome of the last State election in Queensland (held in 2012) shows that the Liberal National Party with 49.7 % of first preferences won 88% of the seats in the Legislative Assembly. This is hardly democratic. And yet this is not mentioned in the Discussion Paper.

The Electoral Reform Society of South Australia advocates proportional representation for all elections.

Of course, no electoral system is perfect. However, we believe that the quota-preferential or single transferable vote (STV) system of proportional representation (PR) in multi-member electorates would be best for Queensland. It would allow political parties to be represented in Parliament in proportion to their electoral support. And more importantly it would maximise the number of electors who would find that their votes elected the candidates of their choice.

Such a system could be modelled on the Hare-Clark system in Tasmania, by incorporating the following features:

(a)   five, seven, or nine members per electorate;

(b)   marking of preferences to be fully optional, at each voter's discretion;

(c)   candidates' positions in each party group to be equally rotated as the ballot- papers are printed;

(d)   casual vacancies to be filled by recounting the votes that elected the original members, to determine which runner-up is next preferred by those voters (a by-election to be held only if such recount fails);

(f)   no "party-box" ticket-voting option; and

(g)   the number of voters per member to be equal (within a margin of plus or minus 10%) in every zone and every electorate throughout the State.

The Hare-Clark system we have recommended –

(a)   will ensure broadly proportional results, without reducing the accountability of MPs to their electorates or encouraging the growth of splinter parties;

(b)   will allow each voter a wide choice of candidates and every constituent a wide choice of representatives; and

(c)   will ensure that every electorate and every region of the State has MPs on both the government and the opposition benches.

An example of what the results may have been with proportional representation for Queensland is shown at http://www.prsa.org.au/qld2001m.htm based on the 2001 State election.

In relation to some of the aspects discussed in the Discussion Paper, we make the following comments:

- **Public funding for elections**

    Under either of the options suggested, if the calculation of the public funding to be given is based on the number of votes received, then for equity and fairness to all electors and candidates, there should not be a threshold. Why should an elector who votes for a candidate who receives less that 4% of the first preferences be denied the benefit of knowing that their vote will give funding towards their preferred candidate?

- **How-to-vote cards**

    Given the experience in the last South Australian election with so-called 'bogus' how-to-vote cards, we would support the banning of the distribution of all how-to-vote cards on election day. In South Australia how-to-vote cards are on display in each voting cubicle and this should be considered as an alternative.

    If there must be how-to-vote cards, the Society supports the requirement for how-to-vote cards to be published in the ECQ website. At election time, all Electoral Commissions should be distributing material about the election to all electors, including details about the election and where to vote, details about the candidates (including contact details), and details about how-to-vote cards. Putting how-to-vote cards on the ECQ website is going to allow electors to have this detail to assist in determining how they will vote.

- **Electronic voting**

    All options detailed should be introduced – initially for options a and b, but eventually for all voters.

- **Postal voting**

    There is merit in considering changing completely to all postal voting (as now used for local government elections in South Australia).

    The ECQ should be the only organisation allowed to distribute and receive applications for postal votes.

- **Voting system**

As indicated at the start of this submission, the voting system for Queensland State elections should be changed and proportional representation introduced.

In relation to the comments made in the Discussion Paper in this section, optional preferential voting should continue.

To counteract the claim that this becomes a de facto first-past-the-post system, if how-to-vote cards are used, there needs to be a stipulation that these cards must show preferences for all candidates, or at least more than one candidate. This would encourage electors to consider marking more than a '1' only. Having over 60% of ballot papers with only a '1' is unacceptable and voters need to be aware that they can and should mark as many preferences as possible.

Deane Crabb

Hare-Clark.......fair and democratic