

Comments on the Electoral Reform Discussion Paper

Among the many issues raised within the discussion paper proposed by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, the one with the greatest potential to destabilise the democratic process in Queensland is that of making voting voluntary. Ensuring that almost all eligible voters are compelled to indicate their choice of political leaders is vital to ensuring that the Parliament, and by extension the Executive branch, is fully legitimate in the eyes of those they govern. Other issues raised in the discussion paper are also of concern.

While voting is a right enjoyed by all, the right not to vote is trumped by the need to protect all other rights that individuals enjoy. Governments of the day must implement policy over an ever-expanding range of areas of society and it is essential that individuals continue to provide input into that process. Elections are the only form of opinion poll, inquiry, feedback and submission that the political classes are forced to listen to and it is crucial to the continued functioning of our democracy that as many people as are able to exercise this precious right.

The right to vote has been won through the sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders and their fellow Australians and should not be simply disregarded by individuals who do not feel sufficiently engaged in the political process to form an opinion. If a lack of interest or participation is the main issue behind the high level of informal voting or a desire for the reform of voting provisions of the Electoral Act, then it is up to politicians to make a greater effort to communicate to citizens and prove themselves worthy of their support. The sacred privileges of the many should not be tinkered with simply to appease the few who lack regard for the security and sustainability of the democracy they live in.

The security of Queensland democracy can be strengthened by the discussion of other proposals contained in the discussion paper. Enrolment as an elector on polling day should not be permitted. Ample information is given to those eligible to the Electoral Commission on the important and logistics of enrolling to vote and sufficient public attention surrounds election periods that there is no fathomable reason why any eligible voter should not be on the electoral roll before polling day. Furthermore, it should be necessary to produce proof of identification at a polling station before an elector is able to cast their vote. While the discussion paper raises the valid point that identity checks are completed before citizens are entered onto the electoral roll, casting a ballot on Election Day is perhaps the most important government service which does not require any form of identification to access. Entering and leaving the country, accessing birth certificates and other information, obtaining additional identification and completing a number of other commercial and leisure activities requires the presentation of a form of photographic identification and it seems unlikely that those on the electoral roll lack any form of government issues identification that would confirm their eligibility.

It is therefore of great importance that the Queensland Government carefully consider the implications of any changes it chooses to make to the Electoral Act. I hope it keeps the most significant piece of Queensland's vibrant democracy – compulsory voting – intact while making other changes only where necessary or unproblematic.