



Xenophon takes two steps backwards on Senate voting reform

Senator Xenophon should be ashamed of the self-interested regressive steps he is taking in relation to Senate electoral reform after his more promising efforts in 2013, according to the Proportional Representation Society of Australia, which in 1983 found a flaw in proposed amendments that could have resulted in the wrong number of senators being elected.

In 2013, although he couldn't bring himself to abandon party boxes, Senator Xenophon proposed that six below-the-line preferences be enough for a formal vote. Now he's demanding at least twelve, or the marking of at least three party boxes.

In 1948, Labor wouldn't heed Liberal pleas or amendments aimed at making it easy to cast a formal vote for the Senate when proportional representation was introduced. High levels of informal voting persisted.

In 1983, Labor and the Australian Democrats brought in party boxes and group voting tickets, instead of just making it much easier for electors to do their own formal numbering. House of Representatives informal levels trebled in 1984. Submission of multiple group voting tickets is likely to be unconstitutional, spawning an unusual contingent deeming provision.

"One clear lesson from the self-seeking misadventures of the past is that no-one should try to create electoral advantage by monkeying around with what constitutes a formal vote," said Proportional Representation Society president Bogey Musidlak.

"Another is that keeping things simple will let the Australian Electoral Commission advertise primarily that the marking of preferences is just an instruction about the order in which what's still unused of our single transferable vote can help candidates.

"Senator Xenophon's revised proposal bears no obvious connection to each elector having a single transferable vote. Were it adopted, no matter what the AEC did in its advertising, House of Representatives informality would rise sharply this year, just as it did in 1984.

"The NSW experience of regular bloated Legislative Council ballot-papers tells us we could also expect greater clutter as most parties and groups nominated at least four candidates.

"Senator Xenophon must relate his regressive revised proposal to the simple principles of the single transferable vote and explain why he is complicating rather than simplifying his original reform proposal. For instance, why should electors marking eight preferences all be robbed of their vote at the outset when just the first four or five might need to be examined?

"There's nothing worthwhile or of benefit to electors in Senator Xenophon's second thoughts," concluded Mr Musidlak.

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