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State Elections in Victoria and NSW

Australia's two largest States have held their quadrennial general elections within the last six months.

The Legislative Council results in both States, where quota-preferential proportional representation applies, showed a close match between the votes cast and the seats won.

The results for the Legislative Assemblies, where MLAs are elected by winner-take-all contests in single-member electoral districts, showed a much poorer correspondence between votes and seats when all parties are considered.

In each State, Liberal MLCs were an absolute majority of the MLCs elected. That reflected a widespread loss of support for Australian Labor Party MPs, most strongly in NSW, after the ALP had held power for more than a decade in each State.

In the November 2010 Assembly election in Victoria, the common "winner's bonus" or "landslide" exaggeration of seats for the group that gained government surprisingly did not occur. The effect is shown most easily by comparing the figures achieved by the pair of parties, the ALP and Greens, that came closest to having the Coalition lack a majority in each house. That pair's results were, in first preference votes:

Victoria	LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY		LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL	
	ALP-GREEN	OTHERS	ALP-GREEN	OTHERS
% Votes	47.5	52.5	47.4	52.6
% Seats	48.9	51.1	47.5	52.5

As the table shows, the Coalition's main opponents' joint Legislative Assembly vote was only 0.1 percentage point above their Legislative Council vote. However, their seat total (all won by the ALP) in the Legislative Assembly was 1.4 percentage points **above** that in the Council. Mostly losers do worse in the non-PR Assembly.

In New South Wales, the elections on 25 March 2011 resulted in the more usual pattern in single-member electorate systems. The incoming Coalition Government in the Legislative Assembly received some 74% of the seats for its 51% of the votes state-wide. The outgoing ALP

Government received some 22% of the seats for its 26% of the state vote.

The 21 Legislative Council seats (*half of the full house of 42 MLCs*) that were subject to election - by the whole of New South Wales voting as a single electoral district - were in contrast filled very much in proportion to the votes cast, as a result of the proportional system used for that house.

The Coalition, together with groups that would generally support it over Labor and the Greens, won an absolute majority of those Upper House seats. With 19 seats overall, it is in a good position to negotiate passage of legislation through the Upper House, just as its ALP predecessor did.

Proposed Restoration in District Magnitude for Tasmanian Assembly has been deferred

Tasmanian party leaders have recognized that the 1998 experiment that reduced the number of members to be elected for each of the five electoral districts for its House of Assembly from seven MHAs to five has not been a success.

The Proportional Representation Society of Australia supported a number of groups at the time that campaigned against the reduction, but a combination of both of the largest political parties ensured that the change did occur.

In September 2010, the then ALP Premier, David Bartlett, the Greens Leader, and the Liberal Opposition Leader signed an agreement that they would take to their respective party rooms a recommendation to support a restoration of the district magnitude to seven MHAs per Assembly district.

Shortly after David Bartlett stepped aside as Premier and was replaced by Lara Giddings, the need for extensive public sector cuts was announced. The Liberal party room then voted against proceeding with the proposed restoration at present even though that had been a campaign platform.

The next day, the Premier announced that restoration was not possible without tripartisan support. *The Mercury* regretted that, given the 12-year experience with the smaller Assembly. The Greens still support this overdue restoration.

The question has also arisen of what corresponding change, if any, should be made to the size of the 15-member

Legislative Council. It had consisted of 19 members when the Legislative Assembly last had a membership of 35, in 1998.

UK Referendum in May 2011 offers Preferential Voting to replace Commons First-past-the-post

Legislation this year by the UK's Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government requires a national referendum to be held in the United Kingdom on 5 May 2011.

The legislation resulted in a compromise between the policies of the two Coalition partners. The larger partner, the [Conservative Party](#), favours the present system of election of members of the [House of Commons](#) in single-member electoral districts with the result in each being determined by first-past-the-post counting.

The smaller Coalition partner, the [Liberal Democrats](#), favours introducing multi-member electoral districts, with the result in each being determined by quota-preferential proportional representation counting, known in the UK as the Single Transferable Vote (STV).

The [Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011](#) specifies that the question to be asked is "At present, the UK uses the "first past the post" system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the "alternative vote" system be used instead?" The alternative vote system is identical to the optional preferential system used in NSW and Queensland.

The Act requires the [UK Electoral Commission](#) to provide explanatory material about the question to be asked, and to encourage public participation in the referendum.

The [Victoria-Tasmania Branch](#) of the PRSA has donated £500 to each of the UK's [Electoral Reform Society](#) and [Yes to Fairer Votes!](#) campaign, as the Branch considers that an electorate's familiarity with preferential voting would be a major asset if ever the UK has to choose between a crude party list form of PR and the far superior [STV form](#).

New Zealand's lack of experience with preferential voting made it easier for groups that wanted an end to ongoing first-past-the-post excesses to pursue an unfortunate mixed member proportional ([MMP](#)) [hybrid](#) system instead of STV.

Queensland Local Government Electoral Inquiry

The PRSA made a [written submission in August 2010](#) to the Law, Justice and Safety Committee of the Queensland Parliament during [its review](#) of election arrangements for all Queensland councils except for Brisbane City Council, after the Committee Secretariat drafted an excellent issues paper.

As the Legislative Assembly motion that initiated the review required an inquiry into electoral systems, including proportional representation, the submission gave examples of low vote effectiveness under current arrangements, and

outlined how this could best be rectified under systematic application of voter-empowering principles and default procedures for setting boundaries.

PRSA National President, Bogey Musidlak, gave [teleconference evidence](#) to the Committee's Public Hearing in Brisbane that focused on arrangements around the nation, boundary-setting and [countback](#), and mentioned postal packs of information about to be dispatched in South Australia.

Other matters examined by the Committee and referred to in the PRSA submission included the existing provisions for the popular election of mayors, which prohibit candidates standing for positions of mayor and councillor concurrently.

The PRSA pointed out the merits of Tasmania's *Local Government Act 1993* in [providing fairly](#) for such popular elections in conjunction with the proportional representation polls that apply for all Tasmanian councils.

That Act requires candidates for mayor (and deputy mayor) to be an existing continuing councillor, or be elected at the election in question as a councillor, in order to be eligible to be elected mayor (or deputy mayor as the case may be).

Despite evident problems and PR now being the major system used for municipal elections in most Australian states, the final report of the Committee stuck fairly closely to the *status quo*, and did not recommend any introduction of proportional representation for Queensland local government. The [Queensland Government's response](#) on 28 February 2011 did not give reformers early cause for optimism.

First PRSA Honorary Life Members

Three PRSA members were admitted as the first ever [Honorary Life Members](#) of the PRSA earlier this year. Each of those members had become eligible by having first been admitted as an Honorary Life Member of a PRSA branch.

The longest-standing of those members was Mr Edward Goode, who designed the PRSA logo, and in many earlier decades worked actively to spread the PR message.

Hon. Neil Robson AM, whose health unfortunately worsened earlier this year, is well known in electoral circles and for his instigation of the Robson Rotation system used in Hare-Clark elections in Tasmania and the ACT.

The immediate past Treasurer of Victoria, Mr John Lenders MLC, was admitted as a PRSA Honorary Life Member for his fine work in championing the introduction and legislative entrenchment of PR for Victoria's Legislative Council.