

Disappointing 2010 federal elections report

On 7 July 2011, the tabling of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters [report on the conduct of the 2010 federal elections](#) brought profound disappointment to advocates of effective voting.

No attention was paid to the distorting effects on the campaigning and other political behaviour attributable to the plethora of safe single-member electorates, nor to the high levels of wasted votes and regional and statewide *winner-take-all* distortions of voters' wishes. For instance, Labor won 26 of the 48 NSW House of Representatives seats (54%) with just 37.3% of the first preference vote, and just 48.4% of the two-party-preferred vote.

Rather than making it simpler to cast a formal vote, the Committee again endorsed the prevailing requirement for full marking of preferences for House of Representatives polls, without any *below-the-line* easing for Senate polls. It recommended increased deposits to deter frivolous candidates for both House and Senate nominations.

A Committee majority expressed alarm that about half the House informal votes were most likely unintentional, and suggested that as many as possible of those be "saved" through the South Australian Assembly mechanism of candidates being allowed to register *how-to-vote* tickets. Although it would be illegal to advocate anything but the marking of all preferences, incomplete ballot-papers would be deemed to follow a ticket order whenever their numbering (*usually just a single "1", tick or cross in practice*) remained consistent with the start of that ticket.

Coalition members of the Committee raised constitutional doubts about such deeming provisions qualifying as [direct election by the people](#) when ticket deeming information could not be presented to voters, and said that the most straightforward way of just saving votes would be through optional preferential voting.

The same Committee majority recommended that administrative data including that from the Australian Taxation Office be automatically used to update enrolments when individuals leave an address but fail to lodge a new form, and that individuals be allowed to notify new particulars as late as election day instead of being allowed to advise changes only until the close of the rolls. It also suggested that postal vote applicants not be allowed to send their forms through political parties, which usually ensures they are sent just that party's *how-to-vote* material.

Although submissions and evidence, including [No. 85](#), from the [Electoral Reform Society of South Australia](#),

pointed out the unsuitability of the unweighted approach to defining transfer values in Senate elections, this matter did not even get mentioned in the report. It appears that only a clearly iniquitous outcome will prompt the remedial action or consciousness of the problem already achieved in the Western Australian and Victorian Parliaments.

UK Government proposes using Quota-Preferential PR in House of Lords reform

Following consideration of possible reform by a cross-party committee, the United Kingdom Government released a White Paper and [House of Lords Reform Draft Bill](#) on 17 May 2011 that proposes the use of quota-preferential proportional representation for electing members of a reformed House of Lords, and also seeks to completely remove the connection between the hereditary peerage and membership of the House of Lords. No change is proposed to the constitutional powers and privileges of the House once it is reformed.

The Bill proposes that there be 240 elected and 60 appointed members, although the Government is not ruling out a wholly elected House of Lords, nor PR systems other than the quota-preferential Single Transferable Vote in the Bill. The Bill proposes that those elected or appointed receive a salary and normally serve a single non-renewable term equal to three Commons terms, a third of the House usually being renewed concurrently with the Commons.

The Bill provides for the 5 most senior [Church of England bishops](#) and eventually just 7 other bishops selected by the Church at each periodic election to sit as *ex officio* unsalaried members. At present all 26 of the Church's bishops sit as [Lords Spiritual](#). The remainder of the present 789 members of the House are entitled to sit as [Lords Temporal](#). Nearly all the latter are life peers, as a [1999 Blair Government law](#) left the House with only 90 hereditary peers, elected by all hereditary peers.

The appointed members will be recommended to the Queen by the Prime Minister, after nomination by a statutory Appointments Commission, and are expected to participate in a non-partisan manner. There will be a minimum allowable of three members per district for those elected, and electoral districts in England will usually have from five to seven members. Electoral boundaries will not cross any border of the UK's four constituent countries.

The Bill proposes fully optional preferential voting, as did Australia's original [1902 Bill for PR for its Senate](#).

Where a vacating member stood as a party member, the casual vacancy will be filled by the available unsuccessful

candidate from that party whose final progress total was highest during the original scrutiny, and otherwise the available unsuccessful candidate with highest final progress total. The person filling a casual vacancy will hold the seat only until the next periodic election, with that seat being added to the number to be filled then, rather like Australia's [original provision](#) for filling Senate casual vacancies.

The UK Government expects the two Houses to establish a Joint Committee to report on the draft Bill, and it is committed to introducing a Bill for enactment in time to provide for the first elections in 2015.

Antony Green speaks on UK's referendum and NZ's November 2011 plebiscite on MMP

In late August, [Antony Green](#), the popular Election Analyst for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, was the Guest Speaker at the 2011 Annual General Meeting of the [PRSA's Victoria-Tasmania Branch](#).

Mr Green spoke firstly about his experience of visiting the United Kingdom to observe its [May 2011 referendum](#) on whether the House of Commons' longstanding [plurality voting](#) system should be replaced by the alternative vote, which is equivalent to the [fully optional preferential voting](#) used to elect MLAs in New South Wales and Queensland.

He noted the oddity that preferential voting in single-member electorates was a compromise, and was not the first preference of any of the political parties, as their members tended to want either the *status quo* or a proportional system, and said that made YES votes hard to achieve. His talk on that, and on November's NZ plebiscite, can be heard via a hyperlink on the [PRSA home page](#).

Mr Green also explained [the background](#) to the present New Zealand National Party Government's desire to put the Mixed Member Proportional system's future to voters, and said it is hard to forecast the outcome of either plebiscite question. The first is, "Should New Zealand keep the MMP voting system?" The second asks voters to choose one of four replacement systems if New Zealand decides to change from MMP; first-past-the-post in single-member electoral districts, preferential voting in single-member districts, the single transferable vote in multi-member districts for 3-7 MPs, and a supplementary member system (*with a 25% list component that does not attempt to correct single-member distortions*).

If a majority votes NO to keeping MMP, the Government may, on or before the day of the next general election, hold a referendum to choose between MMP and the alternative option that has received a [plurality](#) of votes. If a majority votes to continue MMP, the appropriateness of its current features will be assessed by the NZ Electoral Commission.

PRSA notes that STV is used for hospital board and some municipal polls, but NZ appears to lack an organized campaign for STV as a specific replacement. A self-styled

[Vote for Change](#) group, some of whose prominent members support a supplementary member system to minimize the prospect of coalition negotiations following a general election, was quickly embarrassed by [revelations](#) that one of its founding members was a white supremacist, followed by early resignation of another with a Labour background.

In view of the vast amounts that business interests poured into unsuccessful television advertising at the referendum that adopted MMP, there is a spending limit on plebiscite campaigning. Reported [public opinion polls](#) have generally shown support for MMP's retention at around 50%, with 10% of voters still undecided.

Melbourne University abandons Nanson's pioneering PR for a plurality system

A great campaigner for quota-preferential proportional representation for Australian elections was Edward Nanson, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Melbourne from 1875 to 1922. [Professor Nanson](#) was, for a long period, Secretary of the Proportional Representation League of Victoria (PRLV), and was an active member of the University's Senate, later renamed the Committee of Convocation and, in 2011, the Alumni Council.

Nanson campaigned for PR before and after Australian federation. His 1899 booklet, [Electoral Reform](#), was most influential at various levels. He, with the PRLV's President, Sir James Barrett, convinced the University's Senate that it should use PR for its polls. Its PR system stayed until it was replaced this year by a system of filling prescribed [single vacancies by a first-past-the-post](#) system.

As the flawed [first-past-the-post \(plurality\) count](#) was what Nanson strove to replace, the PRSA's Victoria-Tasmania Branch wrote stating its concerns. The University's Secretary, Dr Christopher Stewardson, replied that the University Council approved the change after consulting the Committee of Convocation and others, but he gave no reasons why proportional representation was abandoned.

Call for Nominations for Elections of the four PRSA Office-bearers for 2012-13

The Returning Officer is Mr Martin Dunn of the [PRSA's ACT Branch](#). Under the [PRSA Constitution](#), the Returning Officer rotates among the Branch Secretaries. The order, by precedent, is VIC-TAS, NSW, SA, WA, and the ACT.

Nominations, for [President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer](#), need be signed by the candidate only, as consent to nomination, and must be with Mr Martin Dunn, at dunnmj@ozemail.com.au or 41 Benaroon Circuit, AMAROO ACT 2914 by 14 November 2011.

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