

Electoral Reform Australia

the NSW Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia

President's report 2013-2014

Electoral Reform Australia has 3 ongoing aims on which I have reported each year -

1. To adopt a public campaign to abolish above-the-line voting in federal, state and local government elections;
2. To take action against the undemocratic single-member wards in Botany Bay Council; and
3. To campaign for the adoption of a genuine STV electoral system for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, and for all state and federal houses.

On the issue of above-the-line voting, we have had an almost unprecedented opportunity to lobby for its removal from Senate elections with a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) investigation into the conduct of the 2013 federal election.

There was much angst in the community, reflected in the media, about the election of “micro party” candidates with a very small proportion of the primary vote. This concern has grown since the election of Steven Fielding in 2004 but does not seem to have achieved a mass critical enough to convince the major parties that it is time for radical change.

Unfortunately the JSCEM seems to favour the retention of above-the-line voting with the addition of optional preferential voting above-the-line.

One of their favoured options appears to be the removal of the necessity to vote for everyone below the line and its replacement with voting for “as many as there are to be elected”. This measure may appear to decrease the informal vote but paradoxically could increase it by forcing all groupings to run at least 6 candidates and therefore making the ballot paper bigger!

Unfortunately politicians and many psephologists seem to have a basic misunderstanding of the causes of informal and exhausted votes. They seem to be unable to trust Australian voters to make up their own minds about their preferences.

The case continues ...

With the next New South Wales local government election due in September 2016, it's time to renew our efforts to democratise the electoral system for local government elections, in particular the unique single-member wards in Botany Bay Council.

We will need to campaign to retain STV for council elections and to ensure that any council amalgamations do not result in undemocratic ward structures.

We have taken a number of opportunities to promote STV.

The fall-out from the 2013 federal election brought media appearances for Vice President Stephen Lesslie who was interviewed for ABC Radio and appeared on Channel 10's Meet the press in a segment with Senator Nick Xenophon.

We made a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on the conduct of the 2013 election.

We have published 5 Largest remainders in the last year and have had a number of contacts through the website www.electoralreformaustralia.org

Vice President Stephen Lesslie was again appointed Returning Officer for 2014 for the Sydney University Postgraduates Representative Association, and conducted the annual ballot for the Association for Good Government.

Again my thanks to the Committee for its ongoing support, particularly to Patrick Lesslie for his continuing dedication and good humour.

Susan Gregory, President