

LARGEST REMAINDER

(Not quite Quota Notes)

No. 8

May 2010

In this issue

- Editorial
- Letters
- Transfer Values
- Annual General Meeting
- Visit to the Museum of Australian Democracy
- Talk given by Stephen Lesslie to NSW Branch AGM, 10 May 2010

Editorial

We have heard in the last few weeks a lot of hysteria about the evils of proportional representation or single transferable vote (STV) ballots.

Its detractors cry, "You can't have STV because you will get a hung parliament."

Well, the British General election – a single-member constituency, first-past-the post ballot - has come and gone and the result is a hung parliament.

We hear that if the parties can't "overcome this problem" then it is likely that Britain will have another election. If that doesn't give the "desired" result, will they want another after that?

If the House of Commons is forced to another election all that will happen is that the third placed party in every Conservative and Labour constituency will run dead, or perhaps not at all, and the result will be another hung parliament. In every constituency the voters now know the best option for tactical voting.

The British election result is the worst possible, not because it resulted in a hung parliament, but because it is an unrepresentative parliament. Most voters have ended up with a MP for whom they did not vote. The British public does not "own" this result.

The United Kingdom should be renamed the Bitterly Divided Kingdom. In Scotland the Conservatives won only one seat

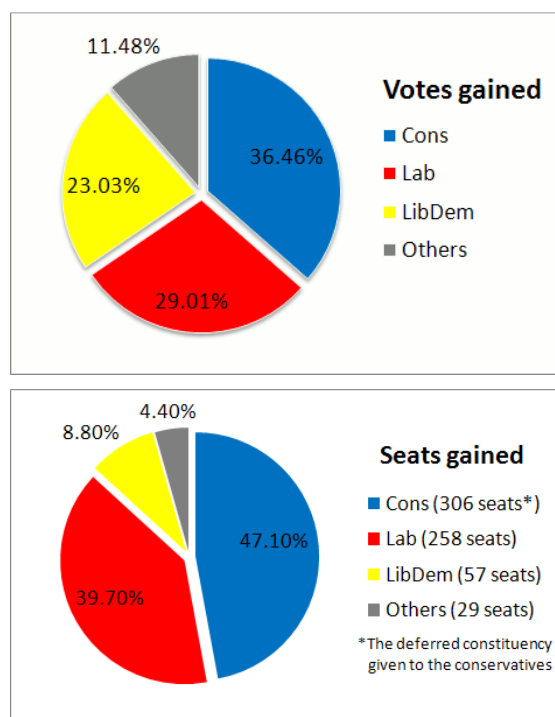
out of 59 but made almost a clean sweep of the South and South East of England.

Had the same result been delivered under a STV ballot, over 80% of voters would be represented by their candidate of choice, and all regions within the Kingdom would be represented by the three main parties.

It would have been understood before the ballot that it was unlikely that a single party would have an absolute majority. It would also have been clear that the voters expected their representatives to work together. Co-operation, not adversarial conduct, would be expected as the first option, not one to be grudgingly undertaken when all else had failed.

What is fair about an electoral system that requires voters to guess the outcome before voting in order to assess how best to vote tactically? In STV ballots, the best thing you can do to support your preferred party is to vote for it.

UK 2010 -- How the vote was shared



"A General Election should deliver a parliament that represents the public. But what we have is a lottery where Labour can be only 5% ahead of the Lib Dems but walk away with five times as many seats." – **Dr Ken Ritchie, Chief Executive of the Electoral Reform Society (UK)**

"I voted Lib Dem because I didn't want the Tories." -- **Disappointed voter**

Letters

Received by email 20 January 2010 in response to the Branch's submission on the Green paper on Electoral Reform: [*This email was sent in capitals, the electronic version of shouting! – Editor.*]

... when is the PR Society going to review the method of counting the ballot?

The last bundle and the method used by the Australian Government seriously distorts the results of the election and does not reflect the voters' intentions.

In Queensland the Greens were denied representation as a result of the system of segmentation used in counting the ballot.

Until this issue is properly addressed, the PR Society remains in disrepute in advocating a seriously flawed "last bundle" counting procedure.

Meeks or Wright must be adopted in a computerized PR count.

Anthony van der Craats

Dear Anthony,

We note that you made your own submission to the Green Paper (No. 59 which can be read at http://www.dpmc.gov.au/consultation/elect_reform/strengthening_democracy/submissions.cfm#subs

PRSA (NSW)'s submission was directed specifically at the abolition of above-the-line voting which we believe delivers a much greater distortion of voters' intentions, and one which can be manipulated by political groups for strategic rather than political gains.

We note that your submission also seeks to modify above-the-line voting.

We feel strongly that arguing for or against different ways of determining transfer

values has the effect of making people's eyes glaze over and it is therefore better to promote bigger-picture concepts that the average person can understand and appreciate. PR is already regarded as being "too hard" – why make it seem harder?

Editor

Transfer Values

But while we're on the subject of transfer values - apart from an absolute opposition to any random sampling the PRSA (NSW Branch) has not taken a position on its preferred model for transfers.

What do you, the Reader, think?

Is the "last bundle" procedure as seriously flawed as Anthony maintains?

To get the ball rolling, some thoughts from Stephen Lesslie:

The "last bundle" method is certainly easy and quick, enabling non-profit and community organisations to run PR ballots in-house. There is a certain comfort in being able to follow a count with mental arithmetic or a calculator.

However, just because something is easy and quick is no reason to support or keep it. First past the post voting is easy and quick but definitely not worth supporting.

The system is STV or single transferable vote and is designed to elect the voter's most preferred individual and not a series of half or quarter candidates. Every vote for a successful candidate remains in the candidate's tally contributing to the election of that candidate.

If a candidate receives over a quota on the first count then all transfer methods give the same result.

If a series of transfers from unsuccessful candidates eventually raises a candidate's tally to exactly a quota then all the votes transferred will contribute to the election of the voters next most preferred individual candidate. Every voter would be able to determine where their vote stopped.

If, after a series of transfers, a candidate's tally is raised above a quota it is not unreasonable that only the votes transferred from the last candidate to be excluded should be transferred. After all, the

last candidate to be excluded was the most successful of the losers. Note that the votes of the earlier excluded candidates are not lost, they are still working in the tally of the now successfully elected and their next most preferred candidate.

The basic principle is that the voters' wishes must be respected. A voter chooses a number of candidates in order and when the vote reaches a candidate it should stay with that candidate for as long as possible.

Annual General Meeting, 10 May 2010, 7:30pm

The AGM was held on Monday 10 May.

Stephen Lesslie addressed the meeting; his address is included in this issue.

The meeting elected the Committee for the next 12 months The office bearers and committee for 2010/11 are :

- President: Susan Gregory
- Vice Presidents; Stephen Lesslie, Mark Rodowicz
- Secretary/Treasurer: Patrick Lesslie
- Committee John Webber, Peter Palethorpe, John Baglin, John Alexander and Marian Lesslie.

The Committee Meeting which followed the AGM considered the motion carried by the Council of the PRSAV-T relating to transfer values, the UK election and other matters.

Visit to the Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, Canberra

Susan Gregory and Marian Lesslie travelled to Canberra in February to visit the Museum of Australian Democracy in Old Parliament House. The visit was undertaken in order to fulfill the Branch's desire to know whether and how PR was presented in the Museum.

Though the Museum is excellent and very interesting – the building itself seems to hold so many ghosts - mention of PR was limited to its association with Catherine Helen Spence. Her picture and its caption are reproduced:



Portrait of Catherine Helen Spence. nla.pic-an14617296. National Library of Australia.

'Catherine Helen Spence (1825 – 1910) was Australia's first female political candidate and an influential social and political reformer. Spence was committed to the introduction of proportional representation and was one of the leaders in the campaign to grant women the vote in South Australia.'



The Museum of Australian Democracy.

While in Canberra Susan Gregory met informally with National President, Bogey Musidlak.



NSW President Susan Gregory and National President Bogey Musidlak.

Talk given by Stephen Lesslie to the NSW Branch AGM, 10 May 2010

Proportional Representation : Updating for the Twenty First Century

Proportional representation, in its purest form, does not exist in Australia, at least not in a parliamentary context. Not the parody of proportional representation you find in Local Government and not the politicians' proportional representation system used to elect the Senate.

In Australia the best example is the ACT Legislative Assembly, followed by the Tasmanian House of Assembly. All the rest are basically list systems and would achieve the same results (without the hypocrisy) even if candidates' names were not shown on the ballot paper. Most also allow unrepresentative micro parties such as Family First, DLP, Shooters Party, NDP and CDP to be elected.

For a truly representative proportional representation system a number of ingredients are essential.

1. No Above-the-line Voting and No Registered Group Voting Tickets.

The only benefit of above-the-line voting is that it has substantially reduced the excessively high informal vote. However above-the-line voting is the most stasiocratic (political party friendly) method of doing this as it also removes the power of choice from voters and gives it to politicians. The power to give preferences, or not, should be the sole responsibility of the voter. It is registered group voting tickets that allows political parties to override the will of their own voters and make unconscionable deals.

No party should be represented in parliament unless they actually represent a reasonable percentage of the electorate. 1.8% of the vote, when the quota is 14.29%, is not a reasonable percentage! Who actually believes that 90% of Victorian Labor voters preferred Family First over the Greens? Without above-the-line voting and registered group voting tickets Senator Fielding would never have been elected. Above-the-line voting gives too much power to unelected and unaccountable party apparatchiks. Did anyone in Victorian Labor get the sack or have to face embarrassing questions over the blunder to swap preferences with Family First? No! The reason no one got the sack is that it was a group decision; they probably knew the risks, but any risk is worthwhile if it gives a seat to one of their mates. The Labor party also tried it in Tasmania and it was only those Labor voters who voted below the line that thwarted their foolish actions. With these games the party has to succeed. If they fail as they did indifferent ways in Victoria and Tasmania then the party must face either a Senator Fielding or a Senator Milne. Senator Fielding must know his election win was the result of a cynical ploy gone wrong and would not need to show any loyalty to the Labor Party and Senator Milne would need to be a very tolerant person to work with the party that has just targetted her.

The abolition of group voting tickets would substantially reduce the number of groups. Bogus groups now know that they can deliver up to 98% of their preferences as they wish and that preference harvesting is possible. These bogus groups are prepared to

lose their deposits in return for delivering a stolen vote to their preferred party or in the hope that preference harvesting will pay off in an opportunistic election victory. What's a couple of thousand dollars to a six year Senate term?

It is sophistry to pretend that, under the current rules, voters can easily express their preferences by voting below-the-line. With the requirement to number every candidate, and the potential for over a hundred candidates, Informal is the clear winner. Not every voter will believe that their preferred party is likely to be both unprincipled and stupid and that to ensure preferences are cast in a sensible manner they will need to vote below the line.

Removal of the above-the-line voting boxes and the distracting big black line would make the ballot paper smaller, cleaner and more user friendly.

2. Candidates to be Grouped in Party Groups and Each Group to be Rotated Internally so that all Candidates Share the Top Position Equally.

The Robson rotation is the flavour of the month but any simple linear rotation where the party chooses the order of the candidates would work equally well.

The rotation, any rotation, of the candidates on the ballot paper is essential. It is the rotation of candidates that prevents micro party candidates such as Senator Fielding from being elected. Without this rotation all the party's votes are lumped with the lead candidate and all the quotas cascade in whole numbers down the list until only the remainder is left with the last candidate. This remainder is often insufficient to enable that candidate to remain in the count long enough to avoid being eliminated. A party with 1.5 quotas, or two candidates each with 0.75 quotas, has more than twice the votes and is more entitled to two seats than a party with 0.6 quotas is entitled to one. However, under current voting procedures with fixed party lists these two parties would gain one seat each. In the 2007 NSW Legislative Council election the Greens with 2 quotas and four times the vote is more entitled to three seats, instead of its two, than the Shooters, with 0.5

quotas, are entitled to one seat.

It is also important to have more candidates than can be elected to ensure replacements if casual vacancies do occur.

3. Electorates Returning Large Numbers of Members.

The greater the number of members to be elected the harder it is to gerrymander the electoral boundaries. If all the members are elected from the one electorate such as the Senate or Campbelltown Council then it is impossible to gerrymander the boundaries.

Nine is the lowest I would envisage for an electorate and I have no trouble increasing the number to nineteen or more. With nine in an electorate the quota for election is 10%, with nineteen the quota is 5% (Tasmania would be better as a single electorate of twenty five instead of five electorates of five each. Quota 3.86%)

The greater the number of members to be elected the less likely an electorate will be in electoral stasis. Electoral stasis is the STV equivalent of a safe seat and occurs when an electorate can not realistically change its political composition regardless of the swing occurring in a general election. A five member electorate where the two party preferred vote is 60:40 is in electoral stasis. The result is guaranteed to be 3:2. A 10 % swing is required to make it 2:3 and a 6.67% swing to make it 4:1. A minor party gaining a quota (16.67%) or close to it, may leave the electorate in electoral stasis at 2:2:1 This is likely to be the outcome in Tasmanian elections in the future; individual members may change but party representation is likely to be in electoral stasis. Party strategists would ignore the electorate and the concerns of the voters would receive little consideration. In a proportional representation system for the Australian or NSW parliaments based on 5 member electorates, it is highly likely that all regional electorates would be in electoral stasis. In regional areas the Lib/Nat vote is approximately 50-60%; ALP 30-40% ; Other 10% – resulting in Coalition 3: Labor 2 everywhere. No party would bother to campaign outside NSW (Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong). Similar results would occur in every mainland state (except perhaps

Queensland)

The greater the number of members to be elected the greater the choice that must be offered by the parties. In the above example the dominant party may only stand three candidates. "Keep it simple and don't confuse the voters with too many choices." These elected members, like our current Senators, would be beholden to the party and not the electorate.

With more members to be elected the less likely a party is to offer limited choice.

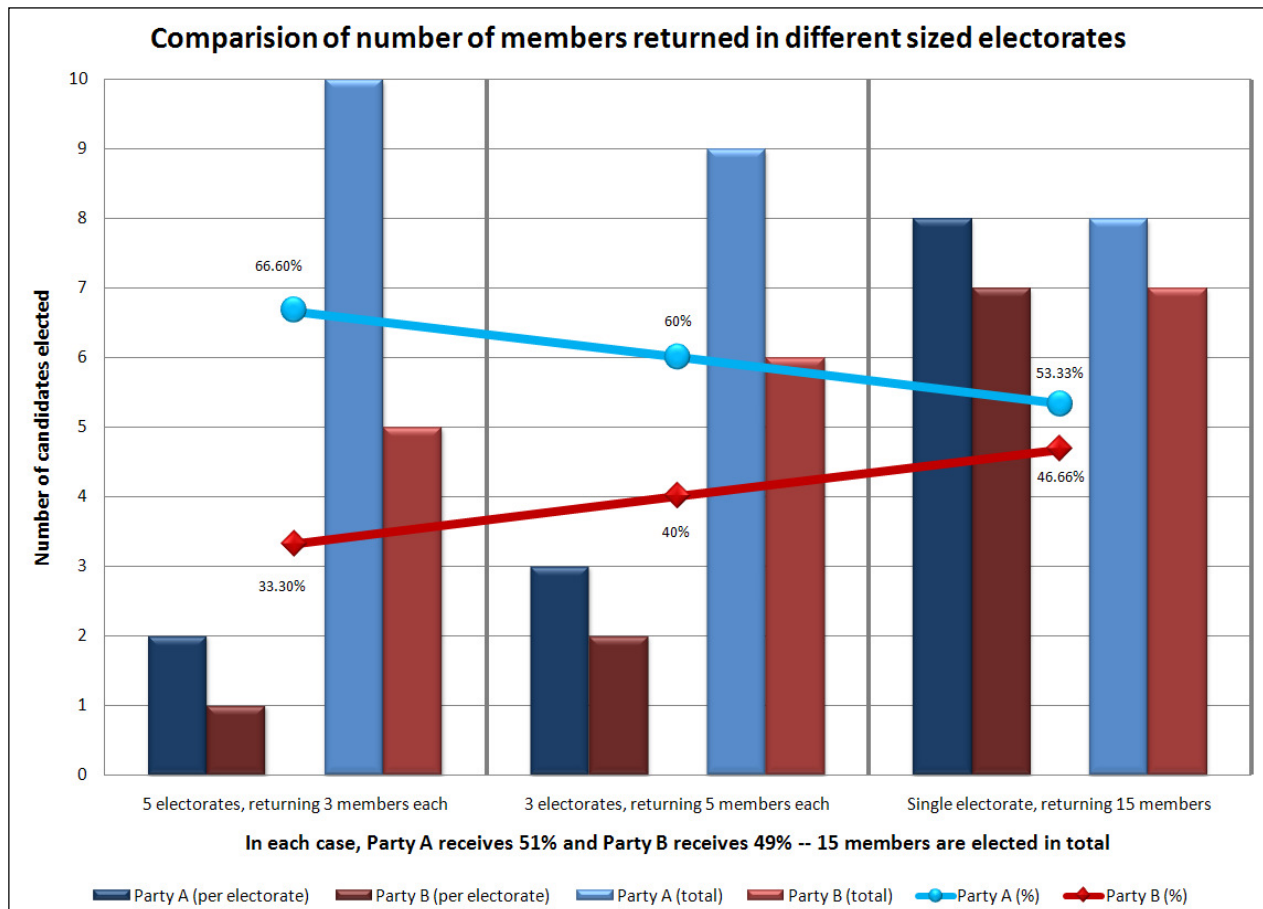
4. Electorates within the Same Jurisdiction to have the Same Number of Members Regardless of the Geographic Size of the Electorate.

ACT Legislative Assembly has two 5 member electorates (quota 16.67%) and one 7 member electorate (quota 12.5%) Why should the voters of Molonglo have the good fortune (or misfortune depending on your politics) to elect two Greens to the Assembly when with

There is also the potential to gerrymander the electorates as it is perfectly legal to have Brindabella or Ginninderra as the seven member electorate and the same Territory wide vote could well give a different overall result. The ACT should be a single electorate of 17 members (quota 5.55%) Ginninderra and Brindabella, and probably Molonglo, are also likely to remain in electoral stasis for some time.

It is unfair to allow regional electorates, because of perceived fears of geographic size, to be represented by electorates returning smaller numbers of members. This is the STV equivalent of malapportionment.

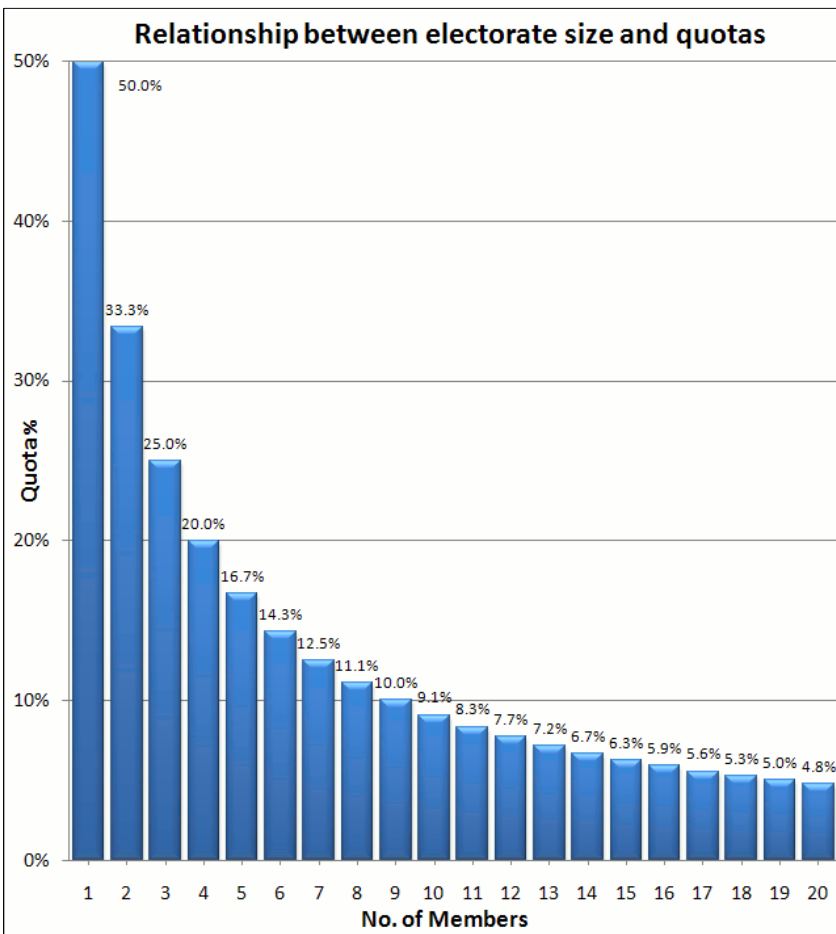
In a Federal context it may not always be possible to divide a State into equal divisions. The Australian Constitution (S.24) requires the States to be represented in the same ratio as their population. Victoria is entitled to 37 seats, NSW will have 47 seats if it loses yet another seat and Queensland will have 31 seats if it gains another. All these



the exact same percentage in Ginninderra or Brindabella voters will get only one Green.

numbers are prime numbers (*Tasmania (5) and South Australia (11) are also prime*

numbers and should be single electorates, Ed.) and can not be divided equally but if the size of the electorate is large enough the problem is minimised. A twelve member electorate has a quota of 7.70% a thirteen member electorate's quota is 7.15%. In comparison a three member electorate's quota is 25% and a five member electorate's quota is 16.67%. (See graph below for comparison of different quotas.) Note: everyone agrees, even the author, that electorates returning 2,4,6,8 and possibly even 10 members are likely to return equal numbers of government and opposition members and is an inappropriate use of proportional representation. In Australia however the socio-economic divide is sufficiently great that a 12 member electorate could well divide 7:5. A 6:6 split, in two party terms, in an electorate based on Sydney's North Shore would be a disaster for the Liberals as a 6:6 split in Sydney's Western suburbs would be a disaster for the Labor Party.



the ACT and Northern Territory are elected by proportional representation from electorates returning only two members. However rotating the candidates (see 2 above) would at least allow voters to choose the better of the parties candidates.

5. Optional Preferential Numbering of the Ballot Paper.

All of the above reforms will return power back to the voters. They will fail to achieve this ideal unless optional preferential voting is also introduced. Any single 1 must be counted as a formal vote. Any requirement for a minimum number of preferences is undemocratic, intimidating for the voter and dramatically increases the informal vote. What gives anyone the right to say "unless you vote for 2, 6, 15 or 148 candidates we will throw your vote in the bin". It is perfectly reasonable to advise voters to vote for more, perhaps half the number to be elected, but if they don't, or make a mistake

trying, their vote should still be formal. The vote would only exhaust if it was involved in sufficient counts for it to run out of numbers or when the mistake was reached.

The model used by the ACT Legislative Assembly is ideal.

The argument that too many votes will exhaust and therefore distort the final result is wrong. Most votes, currently declared informal because of incomplete numbering, would never exhaust.

Most voters vote for all of the candidates in their preferred party group. An examination of ACT Legislative Assembly elections confirms that very few votes become exhausted while there are still viable candidates left in the party group. A viable

It is a farce that Senators representing

candidate is one neither elected nor excluded

and therefore available to receive a preference. The number of votes that exhaust at this stage is smaller than the number of votes that otherwise would have been declared informal because of incomplete numbering. There is a net gain in voter participation.

With the rotation of candidates the probability that a single number 1 will fall to a viable candidate but never need to be distributed rises significantly. In Molonglo a single 1 to any of the Greens Party candidates had a 2/3 chance of contributing to the vote of a successful candidate. Neither of the successful Greens' candidates received a quota on the first count so these single number 1s were never distributed.

If more than one preference is required for a formal vote, there is a corresponding increase in the informal vote.

If the number of compulsory preferences required is small, say equal to the number of candidates to be elected, then each group will run as many candidates as is required to avoid votes being informal. This practice can be confirmed by observation of Local Government, NSW Legislative Council elections and the Greens in all Tasmanian House of Assembly electorates. This minimum requirement increases the number of candidates which then increases the informal vote. It also increases the exhausted vote, as voters feel that with a full team of candidates their vote will count right through to the end.

If the number of preferences required is excessive, the result is an unreasonable and discriminatory increase in the informal vote.

With fully optional preferential voting, parties can reduce the number of candidates standing in the group so as to maximise each individual candidate's vote. Electoral deposits should be payable per candidate and not per party. How many makeweight candidates would stand if likely to lose their deposit. Would the Greens run 21 candidates for the Legislative Council? (Of course thanks to Neville Wran they and everyone else must run fifteen candidates.) This reduction in the number of candidates lessens the intimidatory aspect of the ballot paper and in itself helps reduce the informal vote.

6. Conclusion

In summary, for a successful proportional representation system five conditions are needed:

- 1) No above-the-line voting and no registered group voting tickets.
- 2) Candidates to be grouped in party groups and each group to be rotated internally so that all candidates share the top position equally.
- 3) Electorates returning large numbers of members.
- 4) Electorates within the same jurisdiction to have the same number of members regardless of the geographic size of the electorate.
- 5) Optional preferential numbering of the ballot paper.

Only if all these conditions are met will the full diversity of Australian political opinion be able to be expressed and until that happens there can be no possibility of a reversal of the trend to cynicism and alienation being felt by the Australian voter.

Stephen Lesslie
10 May 2010

Future Meetings

The following dates in 2010 have been set for Committee Meetings at 7.30pm: August 9 and November 8, both are Mondays.

Anyone is welcome to attend. For details, please contact Susan Gregory at president@electoralreformaustralia.org or on 9181 5185 for the relevant information.

Comments and/or contributions are welcome:
president@electoralreformaustralia.org, or

PRSA (NSW Branch)
74 Thompson Street
Drummoyne NSW 2047

PRSA NSW Branch officers Susan Gregory – President Stephen Lesslie – Vice President Mark Rodowicz – Vice President Patrick Lesslie – Secretary/Treasurer
--