

# LARGEST REMAINDER

(Not quite Quota Notes)

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## Editorial

Suddenly Labor politicians are worried about the increase in the informal vote.

The Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, has apparently asked for a report on the advisability of a change to compulsory preferential voting in state elections.

Michael Danby, the Federal Member for Melbourne Ports, thinks that the higher informal vote in federal elections within in NSW and Queensland is caused by those state's having optional preferential voting in state elections. He may be right, but since he is a Labor member he has probably discounted the fact that both these States also have long term and, according to the polls, highly unpopular state Labor Governments; many "informal" votes may have been a deliberate choice not to choose.

In the last NSW state election the informal vote was 2.8%; in Queensland it was 2.2%. These figures are incredibly good, considering that voting is compulsory and that not everyone is interested in politics (hard to believe though that is!). It should also be remembered that NSW achieved its figure despite voters also being handed an Upper House ballot paper with 333 names on it.

So what is the solution to the informal vote?

It is certainly not a solution to impose compulsory preferential voting at the state level on the states with already exemplary

voting records. The logic is Orwellian.

If you genuinely want to reduce the incidence of informal voting in the House of Representatives, the solution is to introduce optional preferential voting for federal elections.

Don't mess up what works well in NSW and Queensland state elections.

Give everyone the right to get it right.

## So you think you live in a Democracy...

In our last edition we arrogantly predicted the results for 100 of the 150 Federal electorates for the 2010 Federal election.

Well, we were only 97% accurate. Can voters living in safe seats now breathe more freely because there is a chance that their vote might actually mean something?

No! If an amateur in Sydney's Inner West, armed with only the Australian Electoral Commission figures and published opinion polls, can be 97% accurate, then the apparatchiks in the political parties with all the resources of targeted private polling can be very confident of getting it right.

The more confident political parties are, the more they will be able to direct their spending and tailor their policies. No money will be spent on, and no policies will be aimed at seats not considered winnable.

Let's look at the seats that we did not accurately predict.

### 1. Bennelong (NSW)

We said Labor would hold the seat but it was won by the Liberal Party. This was clearly an error on our part and one that no political party would make. It demonstrates the danger of being too close to the action. Bennelong is located on Sydney's lower North Shore; the

author lives in the adjoining seat and is well aware of the work that Maxine McKew did as the local member. But the size of the swing in the Sydney metropolitan area was not to be denied. The swing in Bennelong (4.5%) was only half that in the adjoining seat of Reid where the lacklustre local member, John Murphy, retained the seat despite a swing of 8.16%.

## 2. Denison (Tas.)

We said Labor would hold this seat but it was won by the Independent Andrew Wilkie. Denison is centred on Hobart and was held by Duncan Kerr, the retiring Labor member, with a two party preferred 15.63% margin. Wilkie won this seat because he was lucky enough to have the top position on the ballot paper. As a result he received the donkey vote in both of its manifestations. Firstly, those ignorant voters who simply vote sequentially down the page, and secondly, when the Socialist Alliance, Green and Liberal candidates were excluded he received substantial preferences from these candidates when many of their voters completed the ballot paper to comply with the legal requirements for compulsory voting by numbering the other candidates from the top.

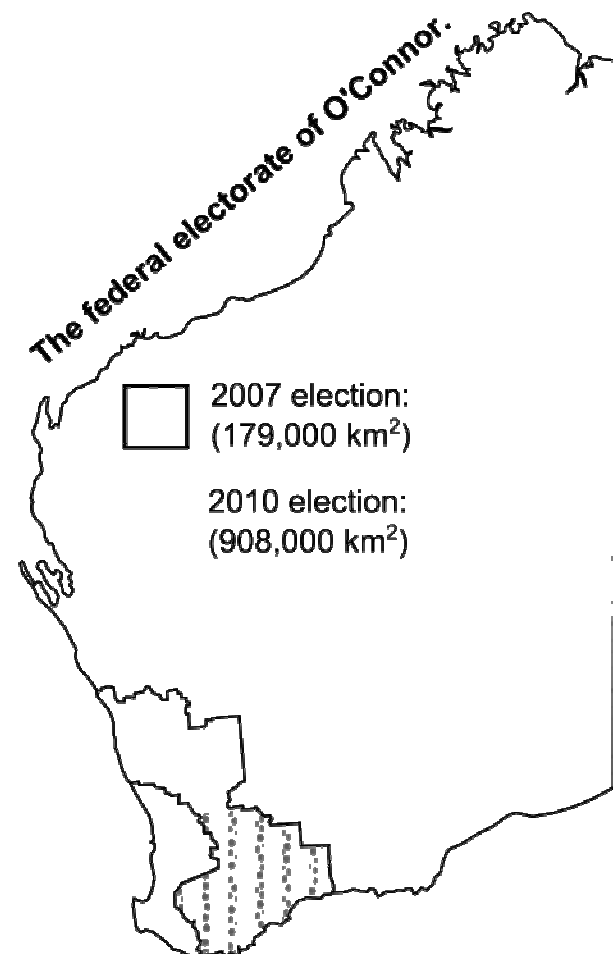
Andrew Wilkie would not have won the seat had he been placed after any of the Labor, Liberal or Greens candidates. And he would not have won the seat had the ballot paper been arranged according to the principles of the Robson rotation.

Naturally the 12.37% drop in the Labor vote was a contributing factor, but under normal circumstances this would have returned by the way of preferences. The most significant factor, after the ballot paper draw, was the collapse of the Liberal vote from 30% to 22.65%. This very low vote enabled the combined Independent and Green vote to push the Liberals into third place and it was Liberal party preferences which put the former Iraq War whistle blower into Parliament.

## 3. O'Connor (WA)

We said that the sitting Liberal member, Wilson Tuckey, would be re-elected but he was defeated by the WA National Tony

Crook. In the 2008 redistribution of Western Australia the electoral commissioners, in effect, combined the former divisions of O'Connor and Kalgoorlie and then divided them into northern and southern electorates. O'Connor is the southern electorate. Both the new and old O'Connor electorates are safe conservative seats and Wilson Tuckey had been O'Connor's only member since it was created in 1980. The Liberal Party vote dropped by 10% to 38%, but the significant factor was the 9% drop in the Labor vote to a mere 17%; it appears that most of these voters switched to supporting the National candidate, putting him into a comfortable second position where he was able to collect the majority of preferences from the other candidates. Tuckey suffered the same fate as the Labor candidate for Denison – he was a victim of the collapse in the other major party's vote..



Tuckey was not helped by the decision of the Electoral Commissioners. He might like to ponder on the concept of Western Australia as a single electorate, returning 15 members, and

not subject to gerrymander.

## Tasmanian 2010/2014 elections

The Tasmanian Government is currently considering a proposal to increase the size of the House of Assembly to 35 members. It currently has 25 members. With 5 multi-member electorates Tasmania is limited as to how it can increase (or decrease) the size of its Parliament. If it wishes to keep the same number being returned from each electorate, which is sensible, it must increase the Parliament by units of five.

From 1909 until 1959 Tasmania returned six members from each of its five electorates. This resulted in the Labor and Liberal parties being tied at 15 members each on a number of occasions. To overcome this problem the size of the House of Assembly was increased to thirty five, or seven members per electorate, for the 1959 election.

With the rise of the Greens as a third force in Tasmanian politics in the late 1990s the "problem" of hung parliaments again arose. To solve this perceived problem the Labor and Liberal parties combined to reduce the size of the House to twenty five, or five members per electorate. If the aim was to reduce the influence of the Greens, then it worked. At least temporarily! But at the 2010

election the Greens were back with five seats and the balance of power.

Now that the Greens are back, and probably likely to always win at least one seat in each electorate, the politicians suddenly see a need to increase the number of members in the House of Assembly.

The proposal to increase the size to seven members per electorate will not make a majority Parliament more likely and it probably won't even change the ratios of the parties, as on current figures the most likely result will be 14 ALP: 14 Lib: 7 Green (currently 10 ALP: 10 Lib: 5 Green)

Tasmanians, now with over 100 years experience with proportional representation, are comfortable with the system and are able to utilise it to best advantage.

The Tasmanian Government needs to consider abolishing all the electorates and to elect its members in the same way as Senators are currently elected, with the State as a single electorate. As with the election of Senators, every Tasmanian would have an equal vote and the House no longer need have either 25 or 35 members but any of the, preferably uneven, numbers between.

It is true the quota for election would be much smaller, dropping from 16.67% (5 member

### Six different scenarios where the number of people to be elected changes from 25 to 35 in a single multi-member electorate.

*Figures from the 2010 State election.*

	Quota	ALP	Lib	Green	Wilkie*	Other
Quota (25)	3.85%	9.58 (10)	10.13 (10)	5.61 (5)	0.43	0.2
Quota (27)	3.58%	10.32 (10)	10.91 (11)	6.04 (6)	0.47	0.23
Quota (29)	3.34%	11.06 (11)	11.69 (11)	6.47 (7)	0.5	0.25
Quota (31)	3.13%	11.79 (12)	12.47(12)	6.91 (7)	0.53	0.27
Quota (33)	2.95%	12.53 (13)	13.25 (13)	7.34 (7)	0.57	0.28
Quota (35)	2.78%	13.27 (13)	14.03(14)	7.77 (8)	0.6	0.3

[\*Andrew Wilkie's vote does not include those votes he would have received from electorates other than Denison but does include votes given to him that may have gone to candidates from other parts of Tasmania. He is currently the Federal Member for Denison, but should he lose that seat and stand for the Tasmanian Parliament at the 2014 election and readers consider that his support is sufficiently high for him to take a seat in this proposal, then it would most likely be at the expense of a Greens candidate.]

electorates) or 12.5% (7 member electorates) to between 3.85% (25 members) and 2.78% (35 members) but, because there are fewer wasted votes, the number of voters required for a candidate to reach a quota will rise. The reduction in the quota allows a much more subtle expression of the voters' wishes.

### Close seats and the donkey vote



The donkey vote is generally held to be approximately 2%.

In the 2010 federal election the following seats were won by less than 2% and in every case the winning candidate had the higher position on the ballot paper.

Seat (State)	won by	%
Banks (NSW)	ALP	51.45%
Greenway (NSW)	ALP	50.88%
Lindsay (NSW)	ALP	51.13%
Robertson (NSW)	ALP	51.00%
Forde (Qld)	Lib/Nat	51.63%
Moreton (Qld)	ALP	51.13%
Hasluck (WA)	Liberal	50.57%
Denison (Tas)	Ind	51.21%

Had the *other* major party's candidates had the top position and the donkey vote gone to them, the seats would have been won by the other party! (except Denison – see separate article)

Had the Robson rotation system for ordering ballot papers been in place for this election the advantages accrued by the donkey vote would have been negated. Greenway and Hasluck would each have gone to the other major party, and the result in Robertson would have been extremely close.

Elections should reflect the will of the voters and not be a matter of luck. This donkey vote windfall should be eliminated from federal elections and the Robson rotation introduced immediately for House of Representatives ballots.

### Cheryl Kernot



Cheryl Kernot (picture obtained from her website: <http://www.changepolitics.com.au>)

We said in our last newsletter we would let you know how well Cheryl Kernot did in her quest for a Senate seat in 2010.

She received 7895 votes and her running partner received 70 votes. So she was only 158,136 votes short of having her electoral deposit returned and 585,136 votes short of gaining a quota.

She failed abysmally; but why the sarcasm?

Elections should not be used as a means to bolster ones' ego or to get a gig as an electoral commentator. We believe elections are held so that genuine candidates can offer themselves for election to public office, and that voters are able to make informed choices.

Cheryl Kernot was a Senator for seven years, including four years as Leader of the Australian Democrats, and a Labor member of the House of Representatives for a further three years. As a result she should have known that her candidacy was a joke. It was Gareth Evans who first described "attention deficit syndrome".

Does it matter at all? Yes, it does. With 84 Senate candidates in NSW, the minimum number of candidates that a voter must

number if they wish to vote formally below the line is 76 (90%). Had Kernot and all the other joke candidates (the groups and ungrouped candidates who received less than 1% of the vote) not stood, the number of candidates standing for election would have been only 29. A formal vote below the line would then be only 27. How many voters would now choose to vote below the line? How many votes were actually declared informal because, although they may have numbered at least 27, they did not reach 76?

The electoral deposit for a candidate for the Senate is \$1,000. The \$55,000 received from these 55 joke candidates would not even have paid for the increase in printing costs caused by the increased size of the ballot paper.

We live in a democracy; we can't, and should not prevent candidates standing. But voters have the right to expect the candidates to be genuine. The electoral deposit should be substantially increased and 25% of the deposit returned for every 1% of the formal vote gained. Joke candidates therefore would lose the whole deposit.

## Useful Election Websites

by Mark Rodowicz

At our committee meeting, I was asked to provide a list of election and topical political websites which are useful in terms of addressing, discussing and being informed on current political and electoral issues.

I use a number of these websites, and consider Pollbludger and Antony Green's ABC website to be the most useful. Some of the other sites are also very good.

Note also that for some of the sites you need to be registered if you want to post comments.

Here's the list:

- The Poll Bludger:  
<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/pollbludger/>
- ABC Elections (Antony Green)  
<http://blogs.abc.net.au/antonygreen/>  
<http://www.abc.net.au/elections/home/>
- The Tally Room (Ben Raue)  
<http://www.tallyroom.com.au/>
- Possum Pollytics:  
<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/pollytics/>

- Andrew Bartlett's Blog  
<http://andrewbartlett.com/>
- Democratic Audit of Australia  
<http://democraticaudit.org.au/>
- Electoral Council of Australia:  
<http://www.eca.gov.au/>
- Mumble:  
<http://blogs.theaustralian.news.com.au/mumble/index.php>
- Oz Politics:  
<http://www.ozpolitics.info/>
- Pandora Politics & Govt. Archive:  
<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/subject/6>
- Adam Carr's Election Guide  
<http://psephos.adam-carr.net/>
- Simon Jackson's Blog  
<http://jackman.stanford.edu/blog/>
- University of Western Australia Election Database  
<http://elections.uwa.edu.au/>
- Australian Social Science Data Archive  
<http://assda.anu.edu.au/data.html>
- First Blog on the Moon  
<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/firstblog/>
- Pure Poison  
<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/purepoison/>
- Rooted  
<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/rooted/>
- The Stump  
<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/thestump/>

## Future Meetings

Future meetings of the Branch are set down for Monday 21 February 2011, and Monday 18 April 2011 (the Annual General Meeting)

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

Comments and/or contributions are welcome:

[president@electoralreformaustralia.org](mailto:president@electoralreformaustralia.org), or

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<p><b>PRSA NSW Branch officers</b> Susan Gregory – President Stephen Lesslie – Vice President Mark Rodowicz – Vice President Patrick Lesslie – Secretary/Treasurer</p>
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