

LARGEST REMAINDER

(Not quite Quota Notes)

No. 12

July 2011

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Annual General Meeting: 16 April 2011

The Annual General Meeting of the NSW Branch was fortunate to be attended and addressed by Bogey Musidlak, National President of the PRSA. Bogey spoke on the steady progress made over the years by the PRSA in various states and territories, and on the possibilities for electoral reform in New South Wales, focusing on what makes NSW different from the other states. He answered questions from Branch members formally, and then informally at a barbecue.



NSW Branch life member, John Alexander, and Bogey Musidlak, PRSA national President

Committee Meeting: 20 June 2011

The Committee elected the following office bearers for 2011/2012:

- President: Susan Gregory
- Vice Presidents: Stephen Lesslie, Mark Rodowicz
- Secretary/Treasurer: Patrick Lesslie.

The Perils of Pauline

by Stephen Lesslie



Pauline Hanson is right to feel aggrieved with the result of the NSW Legislative Council election of March 2011. Not because of the allegations of her bogus witness – the PRSA has no doubt whatsoever about the integrity and professionalism of the NSW and Australian Electoral Commissions – but because the votes of thousands of her supporters were declared informal because they voted below the line and failed to fill in the mandatory fifteen votes. The NSW Electoral Commission was obliged by law, even though these voters had expressed a clear preference, to declare the votes informal.

Even so, she still had a very good chance of getting one of the last two seats. The eleventh Coalition candidate won by only 1306 votes and the third Green candidate by only 2437 votes.

Who can take the credit – other than a flawed electoral system (to be discussed later) – for her defeat? The tens of thousands of voters who voted below the line, that's who! Voters who trust their own judgement; voters who don't necessarily care who is elected but know who they do not want elected, and voters, who in the past, have been betrayed by political parties and no longer trust them not to make unprincipled deals.

A large number of these voters – more than enough to make the difference – put Hanson after both the Greens and the Coalition (and probably Labor and most of the other groups).

As it turned out, she wasn't elected, but who would have received the blame if she had been?

Two obvious candidates spring to mind: Arthur Chesterfield-Evans and John Hatton. These two men are both former NSW politicians who decided to make a comeback at the State election and, despite an assumption that they understood political realities, both failed miserably. Hatton received 1.28% and Chesterfield-Evans only 0.83% of the vote. Both will lose their deposits.

The large number of candidates – a minimum of 15 – required to field a team can mislead voters into thinking that, by voting for a team, their vote will not exhaust. Hatton ran a full team of 21, and Chesterfield-Evans fielded 18. Unfortunately for those who voted for Hatton or Chesterfield-Evans by placing a single [1] above the line or by stopping at either 15 or 21, their vote then exhausted. An examination of the full Legislative Council count shows that at count 302, 76% of Chesterfield-Evans's votes exhausted, and at count 305, 73% of Hatton's votes exhausted. Had the exhausted vote been only slightly larger, Hanson would have been elected. Is that what Chesterfield-Evans and Hatton would have wanted when they put in their nominations?

An examination of the votes of those who voted for Chesterfield-Evans and Hatton and ensured that their vote did not exhaust, shows that the vast majority did not want Hanson elected.

Count 302

Arthur Chesterfield-Evans excluded 35271 votes distributed

Group	Party	Vote	%	Rank
A	Liberal/National	1329	3.77	3
B	No Parking Meters	304	0.86	6
C	Hatton	534	1.51	4
F	CDP	281	0.8	8
G	Family First	294	0.83	7
H	Labor	1432	4.06	2
I	The Greens	3312	9.39	1
J	Hanson	238	0.67	10
O	Fishing	349	0.99	5
P	Shooters	249	0.71	9
	Exhausted votes	26950	76.41	

Count 305

John Hatton excluded 55276 votes distributed

Group	Party	Vote	%	Rank
A	Liberal/National	3268	5.91	2
F	CDP	1325	2.4	4
G	Family First *	809	1.46	5
I	The Greens	6266	11.34	1
J	Hanson	2283	4.13	3
O	Fishing *	399	0.72	7
P	Shooters	423	0.77	6
	Exhausted votes	40503	73.27	

[*] Only the votes received by Family First or the Fishing Party had the potential to be distributed to Hanson at a later count.

This pattern applied when the last candidate was excluded from every group. Most votes exhausted, but for the votes that were distributed, Hanson generally received little support and in many cases received the fewest votes.

Bottom Line

The defeat of Hanson probably reflected the wishes of the NSW voters, but this was achieved more by luck than anything else.

There were two large errors in assessing electoral support which did not quite cancel each other out. The first was the undercounting of Hanson's votes because of their failure to meet rigid and unreasonable formality requirements. The second was the failure of many voters, including Hatton, Democrat and Labor supporters, to ensure that their votes did not exhaust due to the excessive number of candidates and the user unfriendliness of the ballot paper.

Elections should not be a matter of luck. They should be the vehicle by which voters can express themselves to achieve a Parliament that accurately reflects their wishes.

How can we achieve a result which reflects the views of the people without requiring luck?

TRUST THE VOTERS and let the proportional representation system work.

After all, whose parliament is it? If an emperor or dictator nominates a parliament it does not belong to the people, but if a parliament is elected by the people it belongs to the people and should reflect their views.

Changes that need to be made

1. Abolish above-the-line voting

The ballot paper immediately becomes smaller and loses the distracting horizontal black line.

If the aim of above-the-line voting is to ensure that more voters participate in the election, then it is a failure. At the 2011 Legislative Council election, 5.34% voted informally and 7.67% of votes exhausted. This means that 12.6% of voters did not meaningfully take part in the election.

2. Introduce fully optional preferential voting

Any single [1] should count as a formal vote and groups should no longer be required to run a minimum of fifteen candidates. This would reduce the number of candidates from 311 (333 in 2007) to approximately sixty, or even fewer.

This would also remove the misleading impression that voters may receive when they number 15 or more below the line and think

their vote will not exhaust.

3. Increase the electoral deposit and make it payable per candidate not group.

This will, by self assessment, further reduce the number of candidates standing and eliminate makeweight candidates. It is an insult to the voters to have candidates standing for election who do not actually want to win.

4. Introduce the Robson Rotation

This will reduce the number of exhausted votes because votes will be spread across successful groups instead of piling up with the last in the group and being lost from the count when that candidate is excluded. Australian Capital Territory experience shows that whilst there are candidates left in a group, very few votes exhaust. Even when the last candidate in a group is excluded the majority of votes will transfer to another group.

The Robson rotation allows the proportional representation system to work, as candidates from groups who fail to reach a quota will find it harder to be elected. No longer can these candidates just expect to be elected with the largest remainder.

The Robson rotation also helps reduce the number of candidates standing because parties will not want to spread their vote too thinly.

Conclusion

These simple reforms will greatly reduce the size of the ballot paper, allowing voters to make more informed choices. It will be easier for voters to find the candidate or party they wish to support; the candidates or parties to whom they can give second preferences; and, if they so wish, the candidate or party they may want to put last. This will encourage voters to make an informed vote and decrease the likelihood that their vote will exhaust. The participation rate of voters in the election will therefore increase.

Candidates and parties should not have to predict the outcome of an election before deciding whether to stand. We live in a democracy. Mr Hatton, Dr Chesterfield-Evans and anyone else should be able to stand for election without risking the possibility that

their very candidacy will help elect someone who is not to the liking of their supporters.

Post Script

The usual response to the problem of aberrant results and increased exhausted votes is to increase the requirements for a formal vote. All that will happen if this path is taken is an increase in the informal vote, denying even more voters their democratic right. Senator Bob Brown should take note of this and reconsider his compulsory above-the-line voting proposals for the Senate. (See *Largest Remainder No. 6.*)

A Proportional Representation Analysis of the 2011 NSW State Election

by Stephen Lesslie

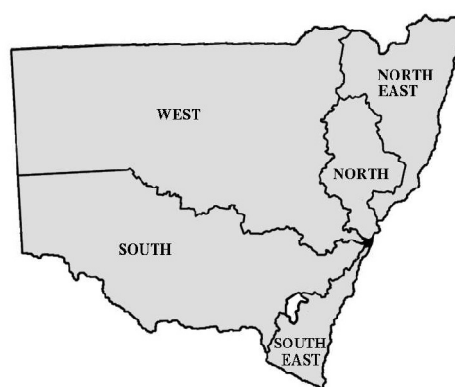
The March 2011 NSW State election, based on single-member electorates, gave a distorted result. In straight voting terms the Liberal Party is over represented, the Labor Party slightly under represented and The Greens grossly under represented. Outside Sydney, Labor only holds five seats. (Wollongong, Keira, Shellharbour, Cessnock and Wallsend) The only opposition to the Liberal/National coalition in regional NSW is from two Independents. (Northern Tablelands and Lake Macquarie). Every regional Labor and Green supporter is unrepresented in the Legislative Assembly.

NSW State election March 2011 results

If the votes of the State election are counted using proportional representation, the results of the election in terms of percentages of votes cast for the parties is

accurately reflected in the number of seats won by the parties.

The model used in this analysis is one in which the State is divided into five broad based electorates. Each electorate, as far as practicable, reflects the State as a whole and in particular each electorate includes both city and regional areas. The electorates return either eighteen (18) or nineteen (19) members. The method of election is by Hare-Clark or STV with the ballot paper arranged in party groups using the Robson rotation. Fully optional preferential voting applies without the use of above-the-line voting or any form of registered group voting tickets.



Readers who wish to see the detailed analysis of these results, including details of the

Electorate	Liberal	National	ALP	Green	Independent
North/East (19)	4	7	5	2	1
North (18)	12	1	3	2	-
West (19)	8	3	7	1	-
South (19)	9	2	6	2	-
South/East (18)	10	-	6	2	-
Total	43 (46%)	13 (14%)	27 (29%)	9 (10%)	1 (1%)

Note the extremely accurate representation in the Parliament when first preferences are recalculated after excluding all minor parties and Independents.

	Liberal	National	ALP	Green	Independent
2011 first preference result	38.6%	12.6%	24.0%	10.3%	14.5%
Seats (%)	51 (55%)	18 (19%)	20 (22%)	1 (1%)	3 (3%)
Recalculated (excluding minor parties and Independents)	45.1%	14.7%	28.1%	12.0%	n.a.
PR result	46%	14%	29%	10%	1%

current state electorates on which they are based, percentage vote and quotas obtained by the various parties, can request this information from the author at stephenlesslie@electoralreformaustralia.org

The results of the proportional representation election reflect very accurately the preference of the voters as expressed at the ballot box. It also disproves the notion that with proportional representation it is not possible to produce majority governments. The Liberal National Party coalition gained an absolute majority in all five electorates and because no votes were wasted in building up massive majorities in single member seats, the Coalition won thirteen of the eighteen seats in the North electorate.

The advantages of a PR system based on this model

1. The result of the election reflects to a high degree the wishes of the electorate.
2. There are no safe seats. All voters have an equal voice.
3. Parties are required, by electoral necessity, to offer a wide choice of candidates to the voters.
4. Parties are able to recruit "star" candidates who would be more willing to run in a multi-member electorate.
5. Each electorate has the same number of members and therefore the quota for each electorate is identical. (The model recommends that the number of members of the Legislative Assembly be increased to ninety five.)
6. Every Liberal voter can support a Liberal candidate. Every Labor voter can support a Labor candidate. National party supporters living in the city, if any, can still support the National party.
7. There is no distinction between city and regional electorates.
8. It eliminates the fake distinction between Labor and Country Labor.
9. Minor parties cannot hope or expect to be elected simply because they receive the remnants of the major party vote.
10. With optional preferential voting the informal vote drops significantly.
11. With the Robson rotation and the consequential spreading of the vote the exhausted vote drops significantly.
12. The Robson rotation eliminates the effects of donkey voting.
13. There is no arbitrary quota set, but the effect of the Robson rotation is that candidates with less than 4% of the vote would struggle to remain in the count when preferences are distributed.
14. Gerrymanders are impossible to produce.
15. No proportional representation electorates would be in electoral stasis. (*The PR equivalent of a safe seat*)
16. Once established, preferably based on local government boundaries, the electorates would be extremely stable requiring little or no adjustment for many years because the population drift from country to city would be contained within the same electorate.
17. Most voters, even up to 80%, would see the candidate to whom they gave their first preference elected, and 95% of voters would help elect a candidate to whom they gave a continuing preference.
18. It eliminates strategic voting. The best thing a voter can do to support their party of choice is to vote for it.
19. Casual vacancies can be filled by re-examining the original ballot papers, thus avoiding great expense and party manipulations when parties decide not to contest by-elections.

Future Meetings

The next meeting will be held on Monday 12 September 2011 at 7.30 pm

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:

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