

27 November 2009

Electoral Reform Secretariat  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
PO Box 6500  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

## Electoral Reform Green Paper Submission

This submission has one principal advocacy - '*Keep it simple!*'  
This submission is brief to remain consistent with that advocacy.

Present Australian systems are complex and expensive. For example, very few Australians understand the arcane, complex and slow Senate electoral system. Invention of 'above the line' voting in a simplistic attempt to bypass the complexity effectively disenfranchises voter choice of candidates in favour of political party candidate predetermination and preference negotiation. The high 'above the line' voting pattern is a foreseeable outcome of electoral complexity and is more in the interest of political parties than in the interest of voters.

The Hare-Clark system is one way to reduce complexity. The Hare-Clark multi-representative electorate system is reported to be preferred by voters as it enhances their freedom of electoral choice, but abhorred by political parties as it reduces their political manipulative powers. It is submitted that elections should be about maximising voter choice and franchise rather than optimising political parties' ability to maximise their chances to acquire political power. *Prima facie*, the Hare-Clark system offers advantages over the present Australian electoral system.

However, the present-day Hare-Clark system includes some of the abovenoted complexities, lags, costs and significant potential for perverse outcomes due to inclusion of the 'Droop quota' system and 'Gregory method' vote counting approaches. 'Droop' and 'Gregory' adversely affect electoral outcomes through being subject to political party preference lobbying and 'how to vote' card nominations rather than up-front voter preferences.

**This submission advocates** a simplified version of the Hare-Clark system as a preferred alternative approach - three (*or* five) member multi-representative electorates similar to the system used in Victorian local government municipal elections. Eliminate preferential voting, the 'Droop quota' system and 'Gregory method' vote counting. Each elector has up to three (*or* five) equal votes to cast by marking a box adjacent to his or her preferred candidates, leaving the other boxes unmarked. Electors may use none, one or all of their allowed votes, as they see fit, but voting cards with more than the allowed number of voting marks would be declared invalid. Completed voting cards can be optically counted and computer-summarised for speed and simplicity. Candidates receiving the highest number of valid votes in a form of 'first past the post' voting would be eligible to be declared elected. The voting system advocated in this submission would also be suitable for future computer kiosk- or Internet-based electoral systems.

On the issue of unicameral *versus* bicameral system, the bicameral system has proved its worth over the years through providing checks and balances on inappropriate use of political power in the Federal Parliament. While some adverse events associated with some unicameral jurisdictions in Australia might have been avoided with bicameral review, the political process in action will always pose uncertainties. Although Australia has been reported to have more political representatives at federal, state and local government levels per voter than other nations, the issue of 'excessive government' is not perceived as forming part of the present review.