

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA-TASMANIA) INC.



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Submission to the Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee on its [Inquiry into Electronic Voting](#)

1. Qualified support for electronic voting: PRSAV-T Inc. supports increasing the use of off-line [electronic voting](#) and vote counting, provided that those electors that prefer not to use electronic voting are not disadvantaged or discriminated against, and legitimate concerns about scrutineering, traceability, integrity and security are fully satisfied. Australian public elections began using electronic voting and vote counting when the ACT Electoral Commission introduced those procedures [in 2001](#). PRSAV-T Inc. provides a [vote-counting service](#) that uses offline electronic counting. It has been used by [a variety of organizations](#), and has been trouble-free.

More recently, the NSW Electoral Commission's [iVote® system](#) has gone beyond that, and has offered a limited form of voting online. PRSAV-T Inc's view on online electronic voting is that there are further [real security concerns](#) that would need to be satisfied before online electronic voting could be acceptable. Such concerns include data loss or theft leading to the potential for electors to be bribed or coerced over their vote, and manipulation. The debacle with the first use of an online option for Australia's national census in 2016 is an obvious example of the failure of that system to operate satisfactorily, and widespread public disquiet about its adverse possibilities, with at least three State senators publicly declaring that they would not participate in it.

Electronic voting has the potential to reduce and mitigate informal voting, by providing clear audible and visual warnings of when a voter may be on the point of casting an informal ballot, and moreover it can make the counting of polls much easier, faster and less error-prone – especially polls that use the [direct](#) and much more representative and democratic [single transferable vote](#) form of proportional representation.

2. Electronic roll mark-off: PRSAV-T Inc. also supports the introduction of electronic roll mark-off, as a very effective way of avoiding unauthorized voting, and unintentional (or even intentional) multiple voting. The issue of voter verifiability is important, and PRSAV-T Inc. suggests that, as electronic voting is introduced more widely, voter print-outs should be given as receipts on all occasions.

3. Informal ballots should be allowed: The ability for an electronic voting system to alert voters to their ballot being informal should reduce the incidence of inadvertent informal voting, but it should not be used to prevent voters that have been so alerted from deliberately casting an informal ballot, if that is their preferred action.

4. Reporting of informal voting incidence: Voters' use of that preserved possibility should be made contingent upon such voters being required to indicate anonymously that they are deliberately casting their secret ballot as an informal ballot, and anonymous statistics of the incidence of such informal ballots should be a legitimate and appropriate part of the public report of the election results.

5. Compulsory casting of a ballot ought not prevent blank or informal ballots: PRSAV-T Inc. supports Australia's laws, such as [Section 87\(3\)](#) of Victoria's *Electoral Act 2002*, that compel electors to receive and cast a ballot. Those laws equitably bring all electors to the starting line but, despite the injunctions on marking ballot papers in Sections [93](#) and [93A](#), such laws cannot at present, and should not in an electronic voting system, prevent the deliberate casting of a blank ballot, or an informal ballot, because there is, and should continue to be, a secret ballot provision that must make such prevention unenforceable.

Casting such a ballot is a much more desirable outcome than an elector being compelled to resort to a perfunctory marking of preferences that bears no relationship to the elector's assessment (if any) of the candidates, and can be essentially trivial or random. An electronic system should not eliminate any of a voter's present rights and possibilities, or be used as a pretext for such elimination.

Yours faithfully,

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Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc.