12 June 2007

The Executive Officer
Electoral Matters Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne 3002

Dear Mr Roberts,

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 May 2007 inviting The Nationals to make a submission to the inquiry into the conduct of the 2006 State Election by the Electoral Matters Committee.

The Nationals believe that the State Election held on 25 November 2006 was conducted in a very professional manner by the Commissioner and the Victorian Electoral Commission. However, there are a couple of matters that we wish for the Electoral Matters Committee to consider.

EARLY VOTING CENTRES
The Nationals received several comments from our people on the ground who were handing out How To Vote cards at Early Voting Centres, on the inflexibility of VEC staff in relation to conditions endured. As the election was held in late November, weather conditions in some of the northern areas of the state were very hot (35 degrees plus) and volunteers were often obliged to stand in direct sunlight rather than being able to take some refuge in adjoining shaded areas.

DISTRIBUTION OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BALLOT PAPERS
Changes to the Legislative Council election process have brought about a significant change in the size of the ballot paper.

The Nationals are concerned about the manner in which these ballot papers are distributed to voters at the polling booth. Many polling booth staff, when handing the ballot paper to the voter, would fold the ballot paper in half to make it easier to manage.

The issue of concern is that when the voter would mark the ballot paper, they would only mark the folded section that they could see, not realising that the ballot was folded and that more options were on the other side.
If a candidate or Party was positioned on the section of the ballot paper that was folded behind, then they were placed at a major disadvantage to those candidates and Party’s on the front side of the folded ballot paper.

This situation, if conducted on a wide spread basis, has the possibility of altering the result of the election in a particular Region.

POLLING PLACES IN COUNTRY VICTORIA
The Nationals would like for the Electoral Matters Committee to recognise the size of many of the country electorates and understand the need to maintain polling places in smaller towns to ensure that voters in these areas are not disadvantaged by the remoteness of the areas in which they live.

Any rationalisation of smaller booths would place a significant impost of time and expense on voters being forced to travel much greater distances to vote. These voters do not have the same access to Early Voting Centres due to greater distances.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Luke O’Sullivan
State Director