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04 January, 2013

Inquiry into the future of Victoria's electoral administration Submission in response to the Discussion Paper of November 2012

Dear Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry Discussion Paper, I have provided comments on all the points but I feel particularly strongly about electronic voting and the use of technology. Electronic voting is a desirable facility it should be viewed as eventually replacing most early and absentee voting. Increasing potential for people to vote early should be regarded as desirable only in the short term, In the medium to long term People should be encouraged to vote electronically.

The use of social media as a political campaign tool is inevitable Parliament and the VEC should be working on ways to utilise it and manage it. Social media campaign content should be subject to the controls as other campaign materials. Parliament and the VEC should be embracing new technology and should be using to get to more people and make it easier for people to vote.

Finally I strongly believe that falling participation should be seen as commentary by the electorate about the performance of politicians and political parties and an indication that the electorate want to see changes in the behaviour and performance of parliamentarians.

Please see further comments below.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nigel Caswell' with a flourish underneath.

Nigel Caswell
President, PwMS Vic
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Inquiry into the future of Victoria's electoral administration
Submission in response to the Discussion Paper of November 2012

1. Discussion Point one: direct enrolment

- 1.1. I am unable to offer any comments regarding direct involvement in any other jurisdiction.
- 1.2. I support the enforcement of direct involvement in Victoria however I consider that direct involvement alone will not be fully effective unless it is accompanied by increased effort into education and publicity about the importance and the benefits of people being enrolled.
- 1.3. I also support the imposition of fines for failure to maintain and update electoral enrolment details.

2. Discussion Point two: Compulsory voting

- 2.1. Compulsory voting is not undemocratic it does not require people to vote for any of the candidates; In effect the current legislation only requires people to attend the polling booth .
- 2.2. It is important that voting continues to be compulsory;
- 2.3. the lack of a compulsory requirement to vote does not provide people with any grounds for not voting it merely provides people with an excuse for not voting
- 2.4. Civic education should be a required component of school curriculum

3. Discussion Point three: Informal Voting

- 3.1. Informal votes should be recognised as an important category of votes
- 3.2. Informal votes should be regarded as acceptable and recorded as a form of objection or protest.
- 3.3. Candidates and political parties should regard as informal votes as indication that none of the candidates and/or policies are supported
- 3.4. The best way to reduce informal votes is for candidates and political parties to ensure that they and/or their policies attract votes
- 3.5. Voting papers should provide for people to record non-votes
- 3.6. Education programs focussed on voting should be a compulsory requirement of all school curriculum
- 3.7. **Optional Preferential Voting** is a good way of simplifying voting for those people who wish to take advantage of (Optional Preferential Voting should encompass the distribution of preferences as per the candidate's party)

4. Discussion Point four: Early Voting

- 4.1. Increasing potential for people to vote early should be regarded as desirable only in the short term
- 4.2. In the medium to long term People should be encouraged to vote electronically
- 4.3. The information available on the VEC website should progressively promote electronic voting rather than early voting
- 4.4. In the short term eligibility to vote early should be available to people unable to work on the day due to physical disability, work, health, or physical absence

4.5. Early voting need not and should not impact on political campaigning it is in my view undesirable that isolated incidents in the few days before elections should have significant impact on the result

5. Discussion Point five: Engagement in the electoral process

- 5.1. Falling participation in the electoral process does not indicate lack of interest on the part of the electorate
- 5.2. Falling participation should be seen as commentary by the electorate about the performance of politicians and political parties and an indication that the electorate want to see changes in the behaviour and performance of parliamentarians
- 5.3. Politicians and parliamentarians should spend more time addressing policy issues and less time parading and grand-standing, and
- 5.4. Politicians and parliamentarians should raise the quality of debate and language
- 5.5. Changing the name of Victoria's Upper House would be an expensive waste of time the best way to raise awareness and interest in the Upper House would be for its members to put effort into demonstrating its usefulness

6. Discussion Point six: Electronic Voting

- 6.1. Electronic voting is a desirable facility it should be viewed as eventually replacing most early and absentee voting
- 6.2. Eligibility should be progressively increased to make it available for people for whom attendance at a polling booth is difficult
- 6.3. Electronic voting should be more secure than attendance voting after all there is no actual check that voters attending the polling booth are who they claim to be whereas application to vote electronically can involve some identification and the voter should be required to specify a pass-code.
- 6.4. Technology should be used to make it easier for people to vote

7. Discussion Point seven: Social Media and Electoral Administration

- 7.1. The use of social media as a political campaign tool is inevitable Parliament and the VEC should be working on ways to utilise it and manage it.
- 7.2. Social media campaign content should be subject to the controls as other campaign materials
- 7.3. Parliament and the VEC should be embracing new technology and should be using to get to more people and make it easier for people to vote

Nigel Caswell
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