

INQUIRY INTO VICTORIA'S UPPER HOUSE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Organisation: Proportional Representation Society of Australia Inc.

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Proportional Representation Society of Australia Inc.



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Electoral Matters Committee,

Re: Submission to the Electoral Matters Committee: **Legislative Council of Victoria**

Dear Electoral Matters Committee,

Overview:

The Proportional Representation Society of Australia Inc (PRSA Inc.) has been invited to make a submission on four questions relating to the electoral system for the Legislative Council in Victoria.

We would like to commence our submission by making the very clear point that the current system of election in place for the Legislative Council, namely Proportional Representation using the Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) has led to:

- a chamber that is more representative of the diversity of opinion across the state
- diversity of representation in each of the existing regions, giving every Victorian voter a much greater chance of being represented by an MLC who has views in common with them

In general, we believe that, once Group Voting Tickets are removed, the remaining aspects of the current system (status quo) is fair and balanced and well represents the will of the voters.

Detail:

We were invited to make a written submission on any of the following questions:

1. Should Victoria be divided into regions to elect members of the Upper House or should all members be elected by the state as a whole?
2. If there should be regions, how many regions should there be and how many members should each region elect?
3. How many members of the Upper House should there be in total?
4. Are there other changes to the way that members are elected to the Upper House that should be considered?

It is the view of our organization that Victoria should remain divided into regions to elect members of the Legislative Council Upper House, and that, when group voting tickets are removed, we do not see any need for a constitutional amendment (by referendum) to change either the number of regions, or the number of members per region.

In answer to Question 3, we do understand that the work of members of Parliament is increasing as the number of electors they represent increases. There were 3,353,845 enrolled voters for the Legislative Council when the current system was put in place for the 2006 election, and this number had increased to 4,394,465 by the 2022 election. That means a million additional voters are represented by the same number of MLCs.

We accept that over the last generation or so, the idea of increasing the size of Parliament has become unpopular in some circles, but we suggest that the Committee should give thought to the challenges of ever increasing populations within electoral districts and regions. What does it mean for community access to their MPs and what kind of challenges are increasingly large electoral districts and regions presenting to the main aim of elections, that the opinions of the community are represented in Parliament? Do larger districts and regions make it increasingly harder for new community based groups to win election and for MPs to adequately represent their electorates?

The current Legislative Council, even with Group Voting tickets, is a much better mirror of the will of the voters as expressed in the election in November 2022 than the current Legislative Assembly. We concede that using the 'two party preferred' tool, the current government has a majority more or less appropriate to its support in the community, but, in present circumstances, 'two party preferred' is no longer an accurate or reliable gauge of community opinion. While the first preferences for the two major parties remained above 80%, two party preferred might have been a valid means of judging community opinion, by the time of the 2022 election, in the Legislative Council, only 62.5% voted for one or other of the 'two parties (actually three including the Nationals)' and the combined voted for non-major parties, at 37.5% exceeded the vote for the ALP (33.0%) and the vote for the coalition (29.4%).

As we see a decline in the number of voters supporting major parties, a move to proportional systems of election becomes ever more important so that the basis of our democracy is not discredited in the minds of voters. There are already voices claiming that parties with primary vote (1st preference) support in the mid 30s are not somehow properly elected governments. Since the 2022 election, we have been voices claiming that the ALP led by Premier Daniel Andrews was not legitimately elected with 36.7% primary vote in 2022, just as in the past there were voices saying the the Liberal and Country League led by Premier Henry Bolte with 37.5% primary vote in 1967 was not legitimately elected. These claims intentionally ignored the very important and valuable contribution of the preferential voting system. But they also point to a fundamental problem with the single member electoral system – that it leads to the election of governments with only minority support, and Parliaments that are not adequately representing minority views.

At this point in history, once the Group Voting Tickets are removed, the Legislative Council remains the more representative of the two Houses, and will be, in our opinion, more fairly representative than at any point in its history to date.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the President of PRSA Inc.

President, PRSA Inc.