

Election-preference harvesting under scrutiny

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The Victorian upper house has called on the government to seek an independent review of the state's controversial group voting system that allows candidates a seat in parliament with minuscule support.

Greens leader Samantha Ratnam's motion yesterday received majority support, including from the opposition and the Legalise Cannabis and Animal Justice parties, but it is not binding and will not compel the government to act.

Victoria is the last jurisdiction in the country with a system that allows micro-parties to harvest preferences from people who vote above the line to elect MPs who have at times polled less than 1 per cent.

It has been widely criticised as undemocratic by election experts such as psephologist Dr Kevin Bonham and the ABC's Antony Green.

Group voting led to scandals during the November state election.

Leaked video emerged of "preference whisperer" Glenn Druery – who creates a bloc of micro-parties to exchange preferences and leapfrog more popular candidates to secure upper house seats – spruiking his cash-for-seats business.

The Animal Justice Party used Druery's system against him to elect Georgie Purcell in Northern Victoria by accepting preferences from his bloc while directing preferences away from it. Purcell was elected with the smallest share of first preference votes this term, at 1.53 per cent. She supported the Greens motion yesterday.

The Greens motion calls on the government to "urgently establish an independent expert panel to review Victoria's undemocratic group voting system and make recommendations to parliament on options for reform".

A government spokeswoman said: "The government has no plans for group ticket voting reform." Druery declined to comment.

Labor MP Sonja Terpstra told the house the motion was disingenuous and merely showed the Greens wanted more seats.

"It just shows the immaturity of a fledgling political party who likes to make out that they're of more significance than they actually are," she said.

Terpstra said election reviews should be examined by the parliament's electoral matters committee, but Ratnam said Labor dominated the committee and "obstructed" reviews of group voting.

Ratnam said it was the first time the upper house had acknowledged the need for reform.

David Davis, shadow special minister of state, said group voting was akin to a lottery system. "I think the time for reform has more than arrived," he said.

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