



Proportional Representation Society of Australia Inc.

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Letter to all South Australian MPs

Dear XXX,

‘A landslide’ is how many headlines described the result of the South Australian election. Candidates of the governing Labor Party won 34 seats out of the 47 available, the strongest election win ever by Labor. But what kind of landslide is it when little more than one-third of voters gave Labor their first preference vote?

How should the nearly two-thirds that didn’t vote for a Labor candidate feel about this result?

Let’s be clear: the election for the House of Assembly was conducted with complete honesty, using the same rules that have applied for more than 100 years.

Some have argued that the reason Labor candidates won so many seats is because of preferential voting. They couldn’t be more wrong. If South Australia had ‘first past the post’, Labor candidates would actually have won more seats. A Labor candidate topped the poll in every one of the 34 seats that Labor won, and also in Kavel.

The reason for that distortion is the single-member electoral system. South Australia is divided into 47 electoral districts and each district elects one member. That member is the person preferred by most of the voters, so what’s the problem?

And, moreover, Labor candidates have won a handsome 57% of the ‘two-candidate preferred vote’, because in a big majority of those districts (seats) most voters preferred Labor candidates to any of its main competitors. SA voters got the government they preferred by a large margin, so what is the problem?

In Adelaide, Labor candidates won all but one seat. Thus, in every part of the Adelaide metropolitan area, there is a Labor MHA, except for the Liberal MHA in the Bragg electorate around Burnside. Of the 33 seats that are mostly in the Adelaide metropolitan area, 32 are Labor seats, that is 97% of the seats are for Labor.

Yet, in those 33 seats, 44.0% voted 1 Labor. In metropolitan Adelaide, all but one seat is held by a party that did not win an absolute majority of the votes. And the party that came second in the Adelaide metropolitan area with 20.8%, One Nation, did not win a single seat.

Conversely, outside of Adelaide, Labor holds only one seat (and part of Mawson).

Do we want a democracy where voters are satisfied that their voices are being heard? PRSA Inc says **yes**. To achieve this, Australia has been a pioneer of ‘proportional representation’. That means the voters’ will is represented in Parliament at the levels that voters asked for. It would mean that with 22% of the vote, One Nation would get about a quarter of the MHAs; with 10% of the vote, the Greens would get about a tenth.

Proportional representation can be combined with local representation by putting together districts electing, for example, 5 members each. And when we apply that principle to the votes cast in the election last month, we find two things:

- In every district, there would be Labor MHAs, but also One Nation, Liberal and sometimes Greens MHAs, in the proportion the voters asked for, and
- Overall the Assembly would give Labor a lot more seats than any other party, but not an absolute majority. It would reflect the voters' will, as the 37.5% of votes Labor received is certainly not an absolute majority of all the votes cast.

MHAs from the Labor Government may be astounded by this idea, having just won their biggest ever victory, with a big 'two-candidate preferred vote'. Why should they consider changing the electoral system that has given Labor such a great victory? PRSA Inc. suggests that all MHAs should take a longer-term view. An increasing number of voters are dissatisfied with our democracy, and one of the reasons is that they don't feel that Parliament is fully representing them. At some point we have to consider whether the current electoral system is fit for purpose. Or is a change to a system that genuinely mirrors the voters' will the best way forward?

Such an electoral system ([Hare-Clark](#)) is already used in Tasmania and the ACT. Even though both currently have minority governments, they have had the longest-serving governments in Australia. Voters get what they vote for, a system that we suggest does truly deserve being called **democracy**.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Stephen Morey
Secretary
PRSA Inc.