



## SFF: ADDRESSING THE INCREASING INFORMAL VOTE AND ENHANCING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

Dear Committee Members,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the increasing rate of informal votes and the apparent lack of comprehensive understanding among voters about our electoral system. This issue underscores the urgent need for a more robust educational initiative and fairer media coverage to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of our democratic process.

### **1. Increasing Informal Vote and Lack of Understanding**

Recent elections have shown a worrying increase in informal votes, which is indicative of a broader issue: a significant portion of our electorate does not fully understand how our voting system operates. This lack of understanding is particularly evident in the area of preference voting and the rights and responsibilities associated with voting.

To address this, we propose that we enhance efforts to educate students and the general public about the democratic process. Schools should be provided with additional resources and support to include comprehensive education on voting systems, the importance of preference voting, and the overall significance of participating in elections. Such initiatives will help demystify the process and encourage informed and deliberate voting.

A "Government Literacy" subject to be introduced in Tasmanian schools. This would not only cover voting but also essential life skills in how students will interact with government for the rest of their lives, such as submitting a tax return, understanding the differences between local, state, and federal governments, as well as the various responsibilities each has in the nation. Schools are meant to equip students with the skills needed for life, and there are few more critical factors in self-determination than understanding how our government works.

### **2. Inadequate Election Coverage and Media Bias**

It has also come to light that election coverage has often been inadequate and, in some cases, selective. A truly democratic process requires equitable treatment of all political parties and candidates by the media, especially public broadcasters. Media coverage should be impartial and should not favour specific parties or candidates based on financial contributions or other forms of influence.

The role of media in our democracy is to provide voters with fair and comprehensive information. This principle must be upheld to prevent the media from becoming a tool of selective coverage or "cash for comments" scenarios. Transparent and balanced reporting is crucial for maintaining public trust and ensuring that all political voices have an equal opportunity to be heard.



### 3. Enforcement of Political Advertising Regulations

There have been instances of deliberate breaches in political advertising regulations, with no apparent enforcement action taken. Such breaches undermine the credibility of the election process and disadvantage candidates who adhere to the rules. To preserve the integrity of our elections, it is essential that breaches are addressed promptly and effectively, with clear consequences for those who violate advertising standards.

### 4. Financial Influence and Electoral Equity

Lastly, the disparity in financial resources between candidates and parties can skew electoral fairness. Elections should not be won by those with the deepest pockets but rather by those who can present the most compelling policies and engage effectively with the electorate. Measures must be implemented to ensure that financial disparity does not undermine the value of the democratic process.

To strengthen our democracy, it is crucial that we address these issues comprehensively. By improving voter education, ensuring fair media coverage, enforcing political advertising regulations, and addressing financial inequities, we can enhance the integrity and effectiveness of our electoral system.

We urge the Committee to consider these recommendations and take necessary actions to ensure that our democratic process remains robust and truly representative of the will of the people.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

For more information contact

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