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Submission to the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into the Conduct of the 2024 General Election of Members of the House of Assembly and the 2024 Legislative Council elections.

To electoralmatters@parliament.tas.gov.au

Overview

Proportional Representation Society of Australia Inc. has long supported the Hare-Clark voting system, also known as proportional representation with the single transferable vote. Since the introduction of proportional representation for all the divisions of the House of Assembly in 1907, Tasmania has been, and in a very real sense remains, the leader in best practice democracy not just in Australia but around the world.

Since 1980, the already excellent system in use for the House of Assembly has been much improved by the introduction of Robson Rotation, which eliminates any influence of the so-called "donkey vote".

Although modified STV systems are in use for several Legislative Council elections in Australia, and for the Australian Senate, the Hare-Clark system in Tasmania is significantly better in that it also includes the filling of casual vacancies by countback, a system that ensures that all members of the Assembly are directly elected by the voters.

Summary

PRSA Inc's submission makes four main points:

- (i) The Hare-Clark system is the best way to truly represent the voters' wishes and give voters the fullest control over which candidates are elected,
- (ii) The Tasmanian Electoral Commission managed the election very well, and the election was in every sense free and fair,
- (iii) PRSA Inc. is strongly opposed to Premier Jeremy Rockliff's proposal for a bill to have MPs that change parties expelled from Parliament, and
- (iv) Stronger education measures may be necessary to ensure that voters meet the requirement for voters to mark 7 preferences on ballot papers in House of Assembly elections.

Just before the election, Mr Rockliff proposed a bill to have MPs that change parties expelled from Parliament. Such a bill, were it to be passed, would remove the power of voters to decide who their elected representatives are and transfer that power to the Parliament. It would allow a majority in Parliament to expel a member that has not committed any wrongdoing and it interferes with the principle that Members of Parliament are and always have been elected as individual candidates. One of the greatest strengths of the Hare-Clark system is that it gives voters the power to elect the individuals they want from within a party or as Independents. Given the recent 'removal' of MHAs Miriam Beswick and Rebekah Pentland from the Jacqui Lambie network, it is clear that such a bill would be unworkable and unreasonable. Concern has been expressed that the informal rate in the House of Assembly rose from 5.14% in the 2021 election to 6.31% in the 2024 election. That is largely attributed to the increase in the minimum number of squares to be numbered from five to seven as a result of the expansion of the Assembly.

PRSA Inc. suggests that at every election there needs to be a concerted campaign to inform voters that their preferences are what makes their votes more powerful, that a minimum numbering of 1 to 7 is required, but that numbering as many squares as possible will give that voter more power and more influence over the final result.

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