

Citizens Electoral Council of Australia's

Policy document on electoral reform

Background

The Citizens Electoral Council of Australia (CEC) is a grass roots, mass-based political party, which was established in Queensland in 1988. For over twenty years, we have participated in numerous State and Federal elections.

Currently, the CEC is registered as a non-parliamentary party in Western Australia and Victoria as well as with the Australian Electoral Commission. The CEC over the years has been exposed to the numerous, changeable requirements for political disclosure at both the Federal and State level.

Policies of the Citizens Electoral Council of Australia on matters relating to electoral reform

Firstly, all public funding for elections should be eliminated.

It is a recent phenomenon, which the existing parties use to cover up the stark reality: that their party memberships have collapsed, and with them, their contributions. Such dwindling membership clearly indicates that the parties no longer represent the electorate, in the way they once might have. Moreover, why should the public pay for election campaigns of parties they do not wish to join?

The only funding that should be made available for candidates and political parties is for the reimbursement of expenses of engaging properly credentialed independent auditors to audit their financial records so that accurate electoral disclosures can be made, both after elections and annually in the case of registered political parties. (See below.)

Secondly, preferential voting should be abolished. It is a scam designed to entrench the two-party system. It was established in the first place in 1918 in order to stop the pro-national banking, pro-sovereignty Australian Labor Party of that era by allowing the two conservative parties to swap votes and therefore to effectively vote as one, and worked to the same effect during the Menzies era, when the DLP's preferences were always anti-ALP.

The CEC calls for a simple plurality, first past the post or winner-takes-all voting system as in Canada, India, the UK and the USA. A single winner should be chosen in a given constituency by having more votes than any other individual representative.

Whilst the preferential system is supposed to take into consideration the other preferences of the voter, the reality is different, in that the system of preference sharing is simply not known to the voter. Also, in some cases, the preferential system has become so complicated today, requiring so much sophisticated computer automation, that the average voter no longer has any clear idea of where his or her vote will end up. Within large voting ballots, it is nearly impossible to determine who will win the seat, hence in the end the choice comes down to: Which of the two main parties do you wish to vote for?

It is also susceptible to phantom-candidates running who direct their preferences to other candidates in deals of which the voting public is not aware.

Thirdly, fixed terms should be established federally and in all states, to ensure the orderly management of the electoral process, and associated planning for elections.

Fourthly, the same registration requirements that are currently required of non-parliamentary parties, should be applied to all current Parliamentary Parties; namely that every party must demonstrate that it has a membership base.

Finally, the CEC does not support the current system of compulsory voting as it forces disinterested voters to cast votes only to avoid penalties. Whilst the compulsory voting system forces voter turnouts of 95% plus, the reality is that real participation levels in elections would be substantially lower, if people were given a choice. With non-compulsory voting, lower turnouts would mean that the quality of votes cast in an election would be far more representative of the intentions of the voters, than the current system of forcing people to make their choice. The choice of not to vote in an election, is itself, a statement by the voter that either the parties offering candidates, or the entire system are not worth supporting.

Elaboration:

1. **Bans and Limits on Contributions, Donations and Loans**

Only individual citizens of Australia, who are registered voters should be permitted to make contributions, loans or donations to a candidate for election or to a political party. Corporations, unincorporated associations and unions should be banned from making such contributions, donations and loans.

Severe penalties would be provided for any violations and it would be illegal for any individual to receive funds from a third party with the intention of passing that contribution on to a party or candidate.

The total amount of contributions, donations or loans to a candidate for election or a political party from an individual should not exceed a cumulative total of \$20,000 per year.

In relation to loans, an exception would be provided to registered political parties to be able to enter into commercial financial agreements, to obtain finance, for the purpose of funding non-election campaign expenses. Examples of these expenses would be the purchases of office building and essential office equipment required for the running of the party administration and offices.

2. **Disclosure of Contribution, Donations and Loans to Political Parties**

The CEC supports the annual public disclosure of all political contributions, donations, loans above \$5,000, cumulatively, from any individual. For example, a contribution of \$1,000 for literature subscriptions; a loan of \$3,000 and a donation of \$1500, would take that individual above the disclosure threshold of \$5,000, and therefore that individual would be disclosed.

The CEC also supports public disclosure of all expenditure made in running electoral campaigns.

When taken with all the provisions contained within this submission we do not think that more regular disclosure is necessary.

All disclosures would be supported by audited financial records, audited by third party auditors not associated with the party or candidate.

3. **Limits on Electoral Campaign Expenditure**

There is no need to place limits on campaign expenditure if the source of the donations is capped, and there is no public funding.

A well organised candidate or party that demonstrates the ability to raise the required funds to run their electoral campaigns does not require a limit on their expenditure. They are in fact capturing the support of the electorate to raise the required funds, and therefore, will be in a position to expend more on their campaign increasing the potential for election.

4. **Advertising by Governments**

All public notices or information bulletins required by government for the benefit of informing the public, at any time, shall be carried by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and all government advertising on commercial television stations should be banned at all times.

Government advertising, particularly just before an election is called, has become a de facto source of funds for electoral campaigning, and an enormous source of revenue for television and radio stations.

5. **Electoral Comment by the Media**

Commercial media are private organisations. Therefore, their boards, editors and directors are responsible ultimately, under corporations laws, only to their shareholders. It is expected therefore without oversight and regulation, media outlets of all forms will use their commercial resources to shape public opinion to the benefit of themselves and their shareholders.

This is a direct conflict of the public interest, especially under the current arrangement where the commercial media organisations receive tens of millions of dollars for advertising from the major parties, and hundreds of millions for advertising from the federal and state governments.

Therefore, the Electoral Commissions of each state, who are ultimately servants of the public, should establish a Media Directorate, which would monitor the activities of all media outlets to require, under provision for criminal sanctions, that all media, printed or electronic, operate within their state to give equal and fair coverage to all candidates and registered political parties both at elections, and between elections.

The Directorate would also monitor advertising, such that no advertising, which could be construed as a de facto contribution to a candidate or political party, would be permitted to be published.
