

- (b) It allows allied parties to compete with each other while cooperating through the exchange of second preferences. (Punnett 1986, p.1).
- (c) It can strengthen the middle ground of politics by rewarding parties that can attract a wide range of second preferences from across the ideological spectrum. (Punnett 1986, p.1).

6.18 Other Arguments Against Compulsory Preferential Voting included:

- (a) It is a complicated, cumbersome and potentially protracted process. (Punnett 1986, p.1).
- (b) It can encourage an undesirably large number of candidates to enter the contest. This increases the size of the ballot paper, and at the same time the possibility that a voter will make an error is increased.
- (c) It is capable of producing bizarre outcomes, with a candidate who has few first preference votes leap-frogging to victory on the strength of second, third and fourth preferences. (Punnett 1986, p.2).

Analysis of Evidence and Arguments

- 6.19 First past the post has some advantages as a voting method. The system elects the candidate who receives the largest number of votes. It is a straightforward system, and easy to understand. Electors are not required to choose from a vast list of candidates or to exercise preferences which they do not have. The system produces a speedy outcome, as counting is uncomplicated.
- 6.20 However, first past the post also has major disadvantages. The main disadvantage for parliamentary elections is that it can yield governments which are not necessarily supported by the majority of the electorate at large. It tends to exaggerate the majority of the leading party, and works against minority parties with more dispersed support.
- 6.21 One of the principles of a democratic electoral system identified in Chapter One of this Report is fairness between political parties. The first past the post voting method does not go far enough to ensure such fairness. All other States and the Commonwealth have rejected first past the post.
- 6.22 The Commission considers that a return to first past the post would not be appropriate.
- 6.23 The Commission notes that all major parties support retention of compulsory preferential voting, requiring every elector to record a full set of preferences. It is also aware that of the other States only New South Wales has departed from the norm. Unless the Commonwealth were to adopt optional preferential voting for the House of Representatives (and/or a limited expression of preferences on the lower part of the Senate ballot-paper) there will be a danger of confusion between elections for the two levels of government in the one State.

* 6.24 Nevertheless the Commission is concerned that electors are currently required to record views they may not have, by ranking in order of preference all candidates offering in their electoral district. If they do not have a complete set of preferences they have either to invent preferences, or arbitrarily assign rankings to candidates about whom they know nothing and care less or accept that their ballot-paper will be excluded from the scrutiny. The Commission believes that it is not unreasonable or oppressive to require every adult citizen to play a meaningful part in the choice of their government, and has set out its views on compulsory voting in Chapter Five. But having required that duty be discharged, it is inappropriate for the electoral system to corral votes on behalf of candidates or parties who electors do not wish to support but merely consider less objectionable than the other on the ballot-paper.

* 6.25 The Commission is also conscious that there is emerging evidence in New South Wales that optional preferential voting is resulting in many voters only expressing a first preference. The Commission considers that this phenomenon reinforces the view that under the current compulsory preferential system voters are being required to express views they may not have. Encouraging voters to express preferences is ultimately a matter for candidates and parties, not the electoral system.

Recommendation

* 6.26 **The Commission recommends the introduction of optional preferential voting for Queensland Legislative Assembly elections whereby a vote will be formal if it shows only a single preference, or it shows contingent votes for some or all of the candidates ranked in order of preference.**