

Stephanie Hesford - Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters - Submission

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Subject: Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters - Submission

I would like to make the following comments as a Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters further to a SMH advertisement calling for same.

I stood as an Independent Candidate for the Legislative Council in the 2003 NSW Elections. Whilst understanding some of the reasons for group voting squares, I feel quite strongly that there is discrimination and bias in the way this is carried out.

From my understanding, some independents did group and therefore were able to be put above the line, but those without any grouping or alliance were grouped under Independents and placed at the end of the voting paper.

Why should someone on a party ticket or group ticket be included in the ballot for positioning on the voting paper, but as an Independent, you are placed at the end.

The question does need to be asked as to why there is a need to have voting for the Upper House done by political parties. This continues to cause delays in counting of preference votes and, of course, the advertising and promotion of major parties for the Lower House candidates, carries over to the Upper House. The Upper House is supposed to be a House of Review yet the way the voting is currently structured, it makes it almost impossible for an Independent to be elected. Belonging to a Party does not carry any qualifications, so why should there be this bias.

If candidates for the Upper House were all named individually, with the party affiliation identified where appropriate, then the voters would have to decide who they wanted in the Upper House by personal selection. There would be no need for preferences as the voting would be by total number of votes received by each candidate. Even if there were a tie, i.e. two persons had the same number of votes, they would be elected until all vacancies were filled. The only issue would be if there were two person who tied for the lowest number of votes. This would need some way of deciding the final slot, even if it had to be by the toss of a coin. This would be no different to pulling a number out of a barrel to decide where you are on the ballot paper.

An Upper House selected in this manner would certainly be very democratic and would ensure that the Upper House was a House of Review by the People's choice.

I know that there are many reasons why what I have proposed may not be considered, but there are just as many reasons why it should be considered. Individuals should have a voice and the right to be fairly judged as a candidate. An Independent candidate does not have that right today.

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