

**Submission
No 15**

INQUIRY INTO STATE SENATE BILL 2015

Name: Mr Bernie Finn MP
Organisation: Parliament of Victoria
Date received: 11 May 2018

The Director
Select Committee on the State Senate Bill 2015.

I strongly support the adoption of the State Senate Bill 2015.

Democracy is best served by the people having a proper understanding of the role played by those they elect to govern. At this point in time, the term 'Legislative Council' means little if anything to the overwhelming majority of the population. After 150+ years, it is clear that is unlikely to change anytime soon. By referring to the upper house as the 'State Senate', the cloak of mystery is lifted and a far greater understanding is afforded the community of what it is and what its Members do.

I refer members of the committee to the the Parliament of Victoria's Electoral Matters Committee report 'Inquiry into the future of Victoria's Electoral Administration', published in March 2014.

In Chapter 8 of that report, the committee made the following Recommendation 8.1:

"The Committee recommends the Victorian Government amend relevant Victorian legislation to introduce the terms 'State Senate' as a reference to the Legislative Council, and 'State Senator' as a reference to a member of the Legislative Council".

ABC Election Analyst Antony Green made the following observation in evidence to the inquiry:

"I think more and more people know what the Senate is; I think fewer and fewer people know what the Legislative Council is. If it helps people know that there is a state upper house, it would help raise understanding". (Page 118)

Mr Green went on to say:

"People have a better understanding of what the Senate is than they do of the Legislative Council". (Page 119)

The report also commented on the level of confusion between the Legislative Council and local councils:

"The term 'council' can thus mean two things in relation to Victorian governance. According to Bernie Finn MLC, Chair, constituents often attempt to correct MLCs when they say they are Members of Parliament instead suggest you are a local councillor". (Page 119)

The report makes the following finding, in part:

"8.40 ...the committee is not calling for constitutional reform; the recommendation will simply allow MLCs to use the term 'Senate' and 'State Senator' in the same way that members of the Legislative Assembly use 'MP'. Such a change will assist members of the Legislative Council to advertise and promote their work to constituents, and improve overall understanding of Parliament in the community". (Page 119)

I believe this is identical to the intent of the State Senate Bill 2015.

The move to change to the 'State Senate' will remove further confusion among the community, most of whom more often equate the term 'MLC' with an insurance company or possibly a private girls' school than Members of Parliament.

This proposal is entirely about opening up the Parliament to the community. Despite the usual cynicism of sections of the media, it is in no way about MLCs seeking grand titles. If the public does

not understand what a chamber of parliament is, there is no chance it will take the slightest interest in its proceedings. That can only be to the detriment of both the community and the Parliament.

I invite members of this committee to stroll down George Street and ask the first 100 people they encounter: "What is an MLC?" If more than five of that hundred answer correctly in the parliamentary context, I will be most surprised. The results of such a survey will amplify the need for the reform proposed by this Bill.

This is a long overdue change. Regrettably, it is New South Wales that is leading the way on this matter and not my home State of Victoria. I am, however, confident that once a jurisdiction makes the inevitable move, all other States will follow.

The State Senate Bill 2015 is worthy of your support. At a time when the standing of elected representatives is, at best, under a cloud, this Bill if passed will enhance the status of the NSW Parliament.

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