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Rob Katter MP
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MR BROOK HASTIE
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**Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013
Submission 180**

Tuesday 28 January 2014

RE: Submission to Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013

Dear Mr Hastie

Please accept this submission made on behalf of the parliamentary members of Katter's Australian Party.

It is patently clear to any thinking person that there is only one purpose to these changes and that is to enforce a two-party system upon the voters of Queensland and as such disenfranchise the more than 500,000 Queenslanders who preferred NOT to vote for either Labor or LNP in the 2012 election.

The proposed changes are entirely to the benefit of the two major parties at the expense of minor parties and independents. The stated justifications relating to concern for taxpayers insult the intelligence of the same constituents whose democratic rights they seek to erode.

The proposed changes diminish the ability for those sectors of society that find themselves underrepresented to achieve any sort of significant representation in parliament.

New political parties are spawned precisely because there has been a failure of political representation on the part of the existing parties.

The hurdles to establish a new party are already high and ensure this will only happen where there is a substantial groundswell of political desperation with the status quo.

These new laws specifically target people in these desperate circumstances and make it as difficult as is constitutionally possible for them to achieve acceptable political representation.

We formed Katter's Australian Party based in recognition that significant parts of the state were not properly represented in government.

We believe this positions us well to provide credible feedback on the impact of these proposed changes on trying to build a new political party.

Our membership, by and large, is composed of people who are not well off; our political contributors are comprised mostly of people who cannot compete with the high end of town; and our candidates are people for whom may find the financial cost of standing for office somewhat prohibitive.

In short, it is highly likely that our party (representing 250,000 passionate, committed Queenslanders last state election) may not have been able to come into existence under the proposed regime.

In the context of this parliament a process of actively legislating to disenfranchise minor parties is already well in evidence.

As demonstrated in the last sitting of Parliament in 2012, when, just hours before the close of parliament for the year, a bill was introduced and passed to deny the Katter's Australian Party (with 3 sitting members) minor party status; even though, this same courtesy had been afforded the Liberal Party in the 50th parliament (also with 3 sitting members) was allocated some of the opposition staff resources.

I would now like to address some individual policy objectives and our associated response:

1. *'removing the caps on donations and expenditure as unnecessarily restricting participation in the political process'*

When in the United States we hear overwhelming cries for an overhaul to the electoral system to prevent big business having too much control of the electoral system, in Queensland it seems we are actively legislating to do the opposite.

The only clear effect the proposed legislation can have to the democracy of Queensland is to ensure corporate interests will be better able to buy influence in our state.

It could be reasonably expected corporate interests seeking greater influence over Government would seek to do this through the auspices of the two major parties, as the two-party system with minimum voter choice provides the greatest opportunity for control.

This control would of course come at the expense of small business and the consumers of Queensland. For all these reasons we strongly oppose this proposal.

2. *'increasing the disclosure threshold to \$12,400 to more closely align with the threshold applying at the Commonwealth level'*

This offers no positive outcomes and will clearly have no other effect than to reduce scrutiny on donors to the two major parties.

This is again to the benefit of larger corporate-type donors who are not as commonly associated with minor parties.

Our experience in growing a minor party is that we appeal less to the affluent sectors of the population and medium to larger size business. We also strongly oppose this proposal.

3. *'returning the basis for electoral public funding to a stated dollar amount per vote and increasing the threshold for entitlement to public funding from 4% to 10% of the primary vote to reduce the cost of funding to the community'*

The transparent purpose of this legislation is to turn Queensland into a state where lower income Australians cannot afford to stand for office unless they are prepared to align themselves with one of the two major parties - both of which have the accumulated resources base as well as an established brand necessary to virtually guarantee a result above 10%.

A change of this nature from our view would be one of the most significant affronts on democracy in recent times and will reflect very poorly on the integrity of all those individuals who support it.

The assertion that this piece of legislation is concerned with the interests of the Queensland public is laughable, firstly because it is so patently political and, secondly, because it is

presented as an integral part of a package of reforms directed squarely at reducing Queenslanders' democratic rights.

It is difficult to interpret this change in any other way than as a strategy to sabotage minor parties' attempts to raise candidates.

This change alone is considered the most offensive in terms of creating an uneven political playing field.

In our experience as a party, we have attracted candidates with great passion but who are not wealthy and have families to support.

The added financial risk this legislation imposes upon them effectively prohibits them from the opportunity to stand for office.

We have strong reservations about the nature of any reforms proposed here by the government, given they are presented with no apparent intent other than to undermine Queenslanders democratic rights.

We trust these views will be treated with the fairness and equity that is expected of our committee system.

Yours sincerely



Rob Katter

Member for Mount Isa

Parliamentary Secretary Katter's Australian Party