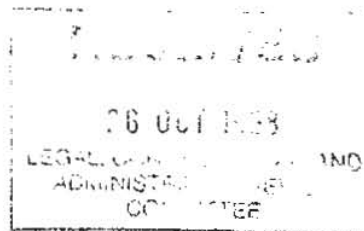


Mr Gary Fenlon MLA  
Chairman, I.C.A.R. Committee.  
Parliament House  
George St.  
BRISBANE Q4000



R.C. Sadler

23/10/98

Submission No 21

Dear Sir,

Thankyou for your letter of 2nd Oct. and the invitation to make a submission to your enquiry into "how to vote" cards.

Although I agree with the judgement of the Hon. Mr Justice Mackenzie, based on the extract included with your letter and my reading of the Electoral Act 1992, I am not qualified to comment further.

Instead I will offer a submission on my observations of the actual use of "how to vote" cards, in the hope that it will be of use to your enquiry.

The essence of my submission is whether "how to vote" cards are useful to the voter or merely a public nuisance at polling stations that are a waste of time, money, and paper resources, and if they should be banned altogether by a change to the electoral act.

My qualification for commenting is ten years of experience as a volunteer handing out "how to vote" cards at Federal, State, and Local Govt. elections in Queensland, both in city and rural electorates, and, often at the same time being a scrutineer, with the advantage of being able to observe inside the polling station during the voting process.

For the two recent elections I was handing out cards and also a scrutineer at the small rural polling station of Bullyard, Kolan Shire, Burnett. (for State) and in both cases I witnessed the sealing of the ballot boxes and was present at the station continuously until ballot counting ended.

Observation at this small rural station was easier because only 231 votes were cast in a steady day-long trickle, and only two "how to vote" cards (National and One Nation) were offered. This was the same for both State and Federal elections

The response to the cards was similar in both elections. Most voters politely accepted a card from both parties. A few did look at them on the path to the polling station door, and on a very few occasions I saw a short discussion of the cards between two partners. The majority just discarded the cards into the bins at the entrance door, with no more than a glance at either card. A few took cards into the booth, but observation during the day as a scrutineer revealed very few cards in booths or the bin near the booths.

The end result for the State election at that station was, 231 votes cast. First preferences were National 97, One Nation 86, ALP 40, Greens 7, and the sole independant 1.

For 2 party preferred count National gained 40, ALP gained 7.

Since there were no cards distributed by ALP, Greens or Independant, it would seem that 48 voters (20%) were able to determine their first preference without card assistance.

Factors that may have influenced voting more than cards were that Doug Slack the sitting National candidate is well known, and his volunteer handing out cards was a local farmer well known to a majority of voters. Another factor may have been a mailbox drop for the relatively unknown One Nation candidate.

These factors were the same for both State and Federal elections, with a similar result, but also similar use of cards by voters.

Based on these observations, which were similar to other election experience, my conclusion is that "how to vote" cards are not a necessary part of the vote determining process, and that banning them would not be a major inconvenience to the majority of voters, and would save considerable time, money etc. as well as annoyance to some voters while 'running the gauntlet' on the way to vote. In addition, no cards might cause voters to study candidate profiles via media, maildrons etc. before arriving to vote, thus eliminating dubious 'last minute' decisions affecting results. If those who rely on 'how to vote' cards cast a blank ballot it would further eliminate the effect of chance.

Candidates, (including yourselves no doubt) would surely prefer to be elected by knowledgeable voter deliberate selection than by uninformed 'last minute' decision based on a glance at a 'how to vote card'??

Based on the above submission, I would ask that the committee consider amending the Electoral Act 1992 as follows.

Section 166. Canvassing etc in or near polling places:

166(2) add:

(e) Distribute any written material intended to influence voting decisions during the hours that polling stations are open for voting.

There may be consequential amendments needed for other sections of the Act.

Thankyou for allowing me to make a submission to the committee.

yours sincerely,

