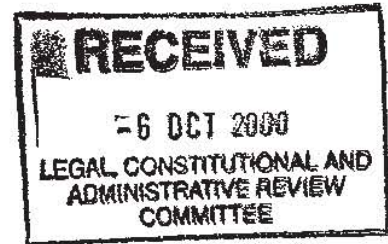


Liberal Party of Australia Queensland Division



5 October 2000



Mr Gary Fenlon MLA
Chair
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Fenlon

Thank you for your correspondence calling for submissions for your inquiry into preventing electoral fraud.

The Liberal Party would like to state from the outset that we question whether a Committee asked to investigate and report back should be chaired by a Labor Party member and have a majority of Labor Party members in its composition.

Our objection is based on the fact that three members of the Labor Party have been convicted on 79 counts of electoral fraud and the CJC are currently investigating the Labor Party over electoral fraud issues.

We note that this inquiry is a bit late to stop systematic electoral fraud. It is a sad day for democracy when Parliament is forced to initiate an inquiry because the governing political party, the ALP, has been found to have abused the system.

Three convictions for electoral fraud by Labor members show that the current electoral system is not adequate to prevent electoral fraud.

The work of the Australian Electoral Commission and Electoral Commission of Queensland is not in question. Our submission will ask for reforms to allow the two electoral entities to ensure the integrity of the electoral roll and the voting system.

The Liberal Party notes the comments from the JSCEM inquiry into the 1996 Federal election:

"It is unacceptable that the most fundamental transaction between a citizen and the government – the act of choosing the government at a democratic election – is subject to a far lower level of security than such lesser transactions as opening a bank account, applying for a passport, applying for a driver's licence or registering for social security benefits, to name but a few"

The Liberal Party is concerned that a systematic method of electoral fraud is being perpetrated within the Labor Party in Queensland.

Mr McMurdo QC, in his report, summarized that reasonable suspicion of official misconduct existed in the Townsville area and in Brisbane (East Brisbane and Morningside).

At the moment, the difficulty we have is that fraud is usually uncovered after the event. Therefore, preventative measures are very important.

The conviction of three Labor members for electoral fraud has severely eroded the confidence of the voting public in the integrity of the electoral system. The public will demand changes to ensure that Labor Party members are not allowed to corrupt the system.

The Liberal Party supports the principle that all Australian citizens eligible to vote should enroll and exercise their vote in a democratic way. Because of the abuse of the system by the ALP members, doubt has risen amongst members of the voting public about the integrity of elections in Queensland.

The only way to ease this doubt is to make changes to the Electoral Act, which will increase public confidence in the voting system and the security of the electoral roll.

No longer can Queenslanders accept the easygoing approach currently taken with regard to electoral enrolments and procedures.

Showing photo identification is a very small imposition when the voter is enrolling to be able to vote to choose governments at Local, State and Federal levels.

We believe that voting is both a right and a privilege.

The Liberal Party believes that it is unacceptable that the process of enrolling is subject to abuse because there are absolutely no checks or balances at present. It is easier to enroll to vote than to rent a video in Queensland. Photo Identification should also be shown when changing enrolment details.

The Liberal Party supports the motion moved by our Liberal Leader, Dr David Watson in Parliament recently when he called for identification to be shown before voting.

Identification is now needed for most transactions in everyday life including opening a bank account, renting a video and collecting airline tickets. While it may increase the time voters spend at the polling booth; this measure would go a long way to ensure that the voting system is not only secure but also seen to be secure.

The Liberal Party agrees that a well-funded CRU will help cleanse the roll.

Extra resources will need to be given to the ECQ by the State Government to ensure that the CRU process is one of the best in Australia.

We also support the use of any extra information that the State Government can supply to ensure that the voter is enrolled at the correct address and also that the address is valid in the first place.

There are some privacy issues that emerge when other State Government information is given to the ECQ to help cleanse the roll but the Liberal Party believes this issue can be overcome.

The Liberal Party supports the use of only one electoral roll run with the AEC. It does not support a separate roll. There is currently an amendment to the Commonwealth Electoral Act that will ensure that identification is required when enrolling and the Labor Party in the Senate should pass this legislation if it is serious about electoral reform.

Having two rolls is untenable because the dual resources of the AEC and ECQ are split though it would be much better to pool their resources to ensure the roll is cleansed regularly.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, in its report on the 1998 Federal election, recommended closing the roll on the day the election is called (Recommendation 2). The Liberal Party supports this recommendation for the reasons given in the JSCEM report.

Also in the JSCEM report is a recommendation from the AEC (page 96) to increase the pecuniary penalties for multiple voting in order to make this offence a higher priority for the Australian Federal Police to investigate. This recommendation also should be adopted by the State Parliament. In fact, penalties for all forms of electoral fraud offences must be increased across the board to deter people in future.

There are many other recommendations in the 1998 Report that the Committee should look at very seriously.

The Liberal Party does not believe that we should hide behind statements made in the past by various committees or entities, which stated that fraudulent voting or enrolments are minimal in our political system.

The recent convictions and inquiries about electoral fraud by the Australian Labor Party show that the evidence is very hard to find unless you know where to look.

Electoral fraud is a problem in Queensland and this Committee should take seriously its responsibility to enact changes to the Electoral Act which would ensure the security of the roll and the integrity of the voting system.

Time will tell how extensive the Labor Party's electoral fraud has been across Queensland. Only after we find out, will we be in a position to look at the level of re-enrolment needed.

Because it is difficult to uncover electoral fraud after the event, the Liberal Party would also like the Committee to look at the information given to candidate's/political parties after the election. Currently, candidate's/political parties have to prove to the Court of Disputed Returns that there is a case to call a new election. It goes without saying that the more information that can be supplied, the easier it will be to uncover fraud.

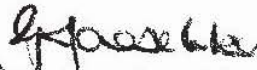
Once again, this submission in no way reflects on the professionalism of our State and Federal Electoral Commissions. Our submission is designed to provide legislative assistance to the Electoral Commission to ensure the integrity of the voting system and the security of the roll.

In summary, the Liberal Party recommends that:

1. Photo identification be required when persons enrol to vote or make any changes to their enrolment;
2. Photo identification to be produced when voting;
3. Extra funding for CRU by the State Electoral Commission;
4. Extra information made available to candidate's/political parties;
5. Increased penalties for electoral fraud and multiple voting; and
6. Closing the electoral roll the day the writs are issued.

The Liberal Party supports changes to the Electoral Act which will make it harder for persons to commit electoral fraud and will also send a message to the people of Queensland that they can have confidence in their electoral system.

Yours sincerely



Graham Jaeschke
State Director
Liberal Party of Australia, Queensland Division