

Media Release



Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee

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A Queensland parliamentary committee has tabled in the Parliament a report on an inquiry into young people engaging in democracy. The committee report made recommendations for active learning for democratic engagement to be mandatory in Queensland schools, for electoral reform, and for reforms to the way in which representative government engages with young people.

Through its *Voices & Votes* inquiry, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee aimed to recommend practical ways to increase young people's interest and meaningful engagement in representative democracy in Queensland.

When tabling the report in the Parliament, the Chair of the Legal and Constitutional Committee, Dr Lesley Clark MP, said:

'I consider this to be one of the most important reports of this committee because I hope it will lead to the strengthening of representative democracy in Queensland to the benefit of not just young people but all Queenslanders.'

Dr Clark thanked the young people who had participated in the committee inquiry and assured them that their voices had been heard:

'I thank the many young people who gave their time to meet with the committee for their openness in sharing their thoughts and ideas which are represented in this report. It was clear to us that young people are passionate about a wide range of issues and that they want their voices to be heard and acted on by government. But it was equally clear that they do not feel well equipped to achieve this or have confidence that the government will listen and respond to them.'

'The committee believes that our recommendations to Parliament reflect young people's voices, and the Ministerial responses to the recommendations, required within three months, will be a powerful demonstration that young people's voices are important to our system of representative democracy.'

Dr Clark called for the committee's recommendations to be adopted:

'I urge the Government, Parliament and Electoral Commission to consider and act upon the views of young people contained in this *Voices & Votes* report, and to implement its recommendations. For the Government and Parliament, it will provide an opportunity to demonstrate respect for the role of young people in our democratic processes. Implementation of the recommendations will also demonstrate that young people's voices were heard and that they can make a difference which is the key to fostering the formal engagement of young people in our representative democracy.'

The recommendations fall into three broad areas:

- active learning for democratic engagement;
- electoral reform; and
- engagement of representative government with young people.

Key recommendations within these broad areas include:

- that all Queensland students be entitled to learn about and experience democracy by way of an Active Democracy program which is proposed to be mandatory for the middle and senior phases of learning;
- the creation of a Democracy Centre and the launch of a Democracy Bus to tour communities in rural, regional and remote Queensland to support school based education programs;
- the introduction of 'mock elections' to be conducted in schools for senior students at the same time as the general state election due in 2010;
- that the voting age remain at 18;
- introduction of direct, or automatic, enrolment;
- that unconditional pre-poll voting be available to all voters;

- use of innovative engagement methods by Queensland parliamentary committees;
- strengthening the observance of the Queensland Youth Charter and ensuring that young people have resources and opportunities to take action in their communities;
- an annual assessment of democratic engagement in Queensland, and a longitudinal study of the effect of the introduction of the Active Democracy program.

Dr Clark advised the Parliament that the committee had itself resolved to inquire further into two issues that were considered important by young people:

- proportional representation and/or mixed member electorates for state and local government elections;
- electronic voting, with regard to improving access to democracy for rural and regional Queenslanders and Queenslanders with disabilities.

Editor's notes:

- The Legal and Constitutional Committee is a permanent statutory committee of the Queensland Parliament with a broad range of law reform responsibilities including administrative review reform, constitutional reform, electoral reform, and legal reform.
- Further information, including a copy of the report, is available from: www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC.
- Dr Clark may be available for interview - please call the committee secretariat on 07 3406 7307.
- Youth Jurors, Casandra Boyle (0419 710 084) and Paul Spearim (0432 656 823) are available for interview.
- For further information about the committee's inquiry please contact Julie Copley at the committee secretariat on 07 3406 7244.
- An electronic version of the picture below is available on request – please call 07 3406 7307.

