



Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 16 February 2011

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electoral System

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.52 am): I rise to provide the House with an update regarding the government's assessment of Queensland's optional preferential voting system. Before proceeding further, it is worthwhile recapping on the genesis of this review. Soon after the federal election, held on 21 August 2010, a spokesman from the Australian Electoral Commission raised public concerns about the level of unintended informal voting that occurred in Queensland. The concern articulated at the time was that the level of unintended informal voting may be attributed to differences between the voting systems in play at state and federal levels. At the state level, Queensland adopted optional preferential voting in the early 1990s while full preferential voting is used for federal elections.

The Queensland government has now had an opportunity to complete its assessment of a number of issues arising out of the 2010 federal election, including informal voting, and this week's sitting provides the first opportunity to update the House on the government's deliberations. The government's view of the assessment is that the evidence is equivocal and insufficient to support a change to the voting system at this time. The evidence is inconclusive in relation to the issue of concern for the government and others in the community—that voters were potentially being disenfranchised because of the different systems in use at state and federal elections. This issue was of significant concern to the government and prompted our action to conduct this assessment following public comments made by the Australian Electoral Commission. This is because the Australian Labor Party is, as it always has been, committed to ensuring that all citizens can participate in the democratic process to the maximum possible extent.

While the assessment shows that the rate of informal voting in Queensland increased slightly at the 2010 federal election to 5.45 per cent, it is not possible to definitively conclude that the differences in electoral systems were responsible. There may be other factors at play, including an increased number of blank ballot papers. The Australian Electoral Commission is conducting its own review of voting patterns in the 2010 election. However, given that our own assessment shows that the reasons behind the rate of informal voting are inconclusive, the government has decided that certainty is required and that it is unnecessary to delay a decision on this matter.

Obviously, this is an area that will be subject to ongoing analysis, scrutiny and review by the Australian Electoral Commission and others to determine whether voting patterns and trends vary. The government has given a considered and measured response to this issue, rather than rushing out into the public arena with a knee-jerk reaction. The end result is that optional preferential voting will be used at the next Queensland election, which is due in March 2012. The review will be available on the website of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General later today.