



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF
PARLIAMENT GROUP
(Queensland Chapter)***

ELECTORAL REFORM

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 15 APRIL 2013

Brisbane

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Ms MALONE: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this Australasian Study of Parliament Group forum. It is our first one for this year. For those of you who are new to the ASPG, the Australasian Study of Parliament Group is a federated body. All Australian jurisdictions, plus New Zealand and South Pacific Island parliaments are represented in the ASPG and the charter of the ASPG is to bring together parliamentarians, academics, members of the media and other interested persons to encourage debate, discussion and research for better understanding our Westminster democracy.

The ASPG in Queensland has been in operation for 20 years this year. We run approximately three forums per year on a wide range of topics. Our most recent events have been a weekend forum on the parliamentary committee system last April, which was called 'The parliamentary committee system—alive or dead after the landslide?'. We had a very large attendance for that. There was a very mixed lot of people in the audience. I think the conclusion was 'alive, but on a watching brief'. Our most recent function, in August last year, was to have some new members of parliament share their insights on becoming a new member of parliament and what the surprises were on finding themselves in the role that they were elected to.

Tonight's topic, 'Electoral reform', has been put on the agenda in Queensland by the current government. It was an electoral commitment. It was prominent in the first six-month action plan, which promised a discussion paper on this very topic, electoral reform. The discussion paper was released in January for a short public consultation period, which has now closed. Electoral systems were only one of many topics in that paper, but one that we thought quite worthy of our examination tonight. Different electoral systems already exist across various jurisdictions in Australia and, of course, not to mention the mystical multimember proportional voting system adopted by our New Zealand cousins in 1994. In recent times in Queensland, we have witnessed only one slight but significant change to our longstanding preferential voting system with the introduction of optional preferential voting, I think by the Beattie government in the early 1990s.

If you wanted to know how different electoral processes and rules would affect outcomes, who would you ask? Who would really know? Who better than a mathematician who is also a political junkie? Someone who chose to look into this question by recalculating the results of the 1995 Queensland election for the prehonours component of a political science degree and who subsequently completed a PhD in pure mathematics. Someone who follows Antony Green fairly closely—Antony Green, by the way, has addressed the ASPG in Queensland in the past—Possum Comitatus and the Poll Bludger on Twitter. The perfect embodiment of the qualities that we are looking for to examine this topic, of course, are in our invited speaker, Dr Sacha Blumen.

Sacha's interest in the topic was sparked by an awareness of the longstanding gerrymanders in Queensland, particularly the National Party gerrymander that was still around when he was younger. He has an Arts degree with first-class honours, earned by that particular exercise, the PhD that I mentioned earlier and also an AMus, a music qualification. He does a mean *Rhapsody in Blue* on the piano!

Sacha is closely involved with politics in Sydney, where he now lives. He is a senior consultant with the Allen Consulting Group. He is co-convenor of the Police Powers and Civil Rights Subcommittee of the New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties and was President of the Kings Cross Residents Group in 2007 and 2009. He was, very bravely, ALP candidate for the seat of Sydney in the 2011 state election, standing against Clover Moore, and an ALP candidate for councillor in the 2008 City of Sydney elections. I invite you to join with me in welcoming Sacha to present 'Tweedledee, Tweedledum: All electoral systems were not created equal'.

Dr BLUMEN: First of all, I would like to say thank you to Nonie and to the society for inviting me, very kindly, to give this presentation. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Jagera and Turrbal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and future.

Electoral reform is in the air in Queensland. The Department of Justice and Attorney-General published a discussion paper on it earlier this year which has engendered much discussion. It has been a topic of interest for many Queenslanders and Australians over the last few decades. Across the country, there have been moves towards one vote, one value voting systems, most recently in Brisbane

WA, party registration and placement on ballot papers, and increasing the number of ways that people can vote in elections, for example, the introduction of electronic voting in the last New South Wales election. There have also been reforms to make it easier for people to enrol and for automatic enrolment in New South Wales elections, in addition to electoral funding and disclosure reforms. In my state of New South Wales, the government has just given the redistribution commissioners more flexibility in how they draw state electoral boundaries, which they may exercise in the current state redistribution.

In short, experience tells us that electoral reform is never a done and dusted business, and nor should be it. We should always learn from experience and electoral systems should change in line with societal attitudes. In 1905, laws were changed in Queensland to enfranchise women and in 1974 the voting age was dropped from 21 to 18. Some people are now proposing that the voting age be dropped to 16.

If you were to believe everything in the newspapers, you would think that the prime purpose of electoral reform is to benefit the party that proposes it. The *Australian's* recent coverage of Bronwyn Bishop's floating of optional preferential voting is a case in point. This coverage focused on which party it was thought would benefit, the coalition. There was little discussion beyond partisan impacts.

However, I feel confident in saying that most electoral reforms that are introduced are consistent with the interests of the government that bring them in. One notable example that was not was South Australian Liberal and Country League Premier Steele Hall introducing much more equal electorates for the South Australian House of Assembly for the 1970 election. That reform substantially rebalanced a very weighted electoral system to the clear detriment of his party, which did not win office again until 1979. This example is so notable because it is so rare.

In the zero sum game of politics put forward in the media, a change to the electoral system will likely benefit party A to the detriment of parties B and C. While this approach may be interesting to the media political class, it focuses narrowly on partisan interests and ignores the larger question about whether the changes would have wider systemic impacts.

In this talk, I will focus on the likely electoral impacts of changing to different electoral systems in Queensland elections, and also their potential wider systemic impacts on political culture. These wider impacts may include: the individual accountability of members of parliament to voters and the power of factions within parties; the legitimacy of government and parliament; partisanship; competition and cooperation between parties; campaigning and the resources needed to undertake them; and the stability of public policy. I will be looking at a couple of systems. To get our minds into gear, firstly, let us look at a very familiar one, optional preferential voting.

This system is very familiar in Queensland and New South Wales and can be thought of as a system somewhere in between first past the post and compulsory preferential voting. Optional preferential voting was introduced in Queensland for the 1992 state election, following a review by EARC, the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission. Before this, it had been introduced in New South Wales in 1980 by Neville Wran. In both states, it probably helped the ALP due to splits on the conservative side of politics. Now, it is probably benefitting the coalition, both because of the rise of the Greens and because the coalition has a very high primary vote. The *Australian* recently published stories of Labor members of parliament calling on optional preferential voting to be abandoned in New South Wales and Queensland. The federal coalition has indicated it may introduce optional preferential voting in federal elections.

Antony Green thinks that optional preferential voting would have benefitted the coalition in the last federal election. This is because, compared to compulsory preferential voting, it tends to advantage the candidate with the highest primary vote. As we know, the coalition received many more primary votes than Labor did at the last federal election. In addition to helping candidates with the highest primary vote, optional preferential voting would tend to disadvantage parties who have to compete with other parties from the same ideological pool of voters. This is because some voters will exhaust their first preferences.

In Queensland, the ALP is competing with the Greens and Katter's Australian Party for the same pool of voters. The Coalition is also competing with KAP for a pool of voters. Depending on what happens in the next two years, the LNP might be competing with new parties on the right as well. Personally, I support optional preferential voting as people should only be obliged to give preferences to candidates they want to. It does, however, make things much more complicated for parties and candidates compared to compulsory preferential voting. It might also make election results more volatile, negatively impacting parliamentary government.

Optional preferential voting makes things more complicated for political parties as: first, it makes preference negotiations more difficult because parties do not need to preference each other and, secondly, voters need not exercise preferences. I have personal experience of attempting to negotiate a preference deal with the Greens under optional preferential voting. Then, they chose not to do a deal. Under compulsory preferential voting, they probably would have done a deal.

Clearly, one impact of optional preferential voting is that it encourages like-minded parties to work together or to merge. This is seen most clearly in Queensland. It may also result in more volatile election outcomes, compared to compulsory preferential voting. Election landslides might be even larger under optional preferential voting. This is for the reason outlined by Antony Green: it tends to advantage the leading candidate. Antony Green thinks that the LNP's landslide in the 2012 Queensland election would have been smaller under compulsory preferential voting. I will talk about that later.

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with volatile election outcomes, particularly if they reflect the will of voters. However, they can have some negative consequences for parliamentary democracy. They can make it difficult for oppositions to undertake policy development, hold the government to account and present a credible alternative at the next election. In New South Wales, after the election landslide in 2011, the Opposition has 20 members of parliament in a lower house of 93. In Queensland, the opposition has seven from 89. It is challenging to see how the Queensland Opposition will effectively present an alternative cabinet to voters at the next election. On the other hand, I know that the New South Wales Opposition is using extra parliamentary processes to improve its development of policy. These include a policy forum comprising directly elected party members, members of parliament and union members, which is examining policy areas through discussion papers. So perhaps parties can adapt to election wipe-outs.

It is interesting to note that parties may or may not bounce back quickly after a big loss. In Queensland, they have not over the past few decades. In 2001, the Queensland Nationals and Liberals won a combined 15 seats at the state election, which gradually rose to 34 seats at the 2009 election. By contrast, the South Australian Labor Party came close to winning the '96 election after its '92 wipe-out. Perhaps it is difficult to generalise as each of these cases reflects the particular environment in those states at those times.

So the systemic impacts of optional preferential voting, compared to compulsory preferential voting, may include: more volatile election results; larger majorities for governments and weakened oppositions; and greater pressure on like-minded parties to merge or attempt to run against each other.

Let us turn to first past the post. First-past-the-post voting is somewhat familiar to Australian voters through its use in Westminster elections and in the US, and previously in New Zealand. Queensland used it between 1860 and 1892 and also between 1942 and 1962. It is usually thought that first past the post supports a two-party system. This may be interesting for Queensland, given the rise of Katter's Australian Party more recently. However, the experience in the UK, the US and New Zealand is mixed.

The UK has a vibrant multiparty system with regional variations spanning left, right and unionist-nationalist axes. The Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Labor Party are competitive in large sections of the UK, while Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have competitive regional parties. In addition, there are smaller parties, such as the UK Independence Party and the Greens, that tend to do better in by-elections, local elections or European elections.

While there are many parties in the UK, people often vote strategically, turning large parts of the UK or individual seats into two-party contests, such as the Conservative versus Lib Dem battle in the south-east and south-west of England. Many people will also recall the vote-swapping website for Labor and the Lib Dem supporters in the 1997 and 2001 elections. It was a way for those voters to strategically vote against the Conservatives. This competitive and regional multiparty system is a clear evolution from the stable two-party system that existed in the UK between 1945 and the 1970s.

Why don't we turn to the US. Almost all legislative and executive elections in the US use first-past-the-post voting or a run-off election variant if no candidate receives 50 per cent of the vote. At the national level, the US has only two broad political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats. No other national parties have existed for more than a handful of election cycles.

At the state level, there has sometimes barely been a two-party system with one party being dominant for decades, such as the Democrats were between the Civil War and the 1964 presidential election in the South. While Ross Perot received substantial voter support in the 1992

and 1996 presidential elections—19 per cent in '92 and eight per cent in '96—his Reform Party, created in 1995, only had substantial success with the election of Jesse Ventura as Governor of Minnesota in 1998. The Libertarian Party, formed in 1971 in the US, has received no more than 1.1 per cent of the presidential vote. It currently has 138 elected or appointed officials throughout the US, all or almost all at the local level.

The US Greens Party, founded in 1991, has gained no more than 2.7 per cent of the presidential vote, and that was in the 2000 election. As of October 2012, there were 134 elected Greens. Lastly, when first past the post was used in New Zealand up to the 1993 election, there were two major parties and occasionally smaller parties such as the Social Credit Party or NewLabour.

So what would be the impacts of first past the post voting in Queensland? Firstly, it decisively benefits parties with the most number of votes generally. A famous example is the British 1983 election when the Left vote split between the Labour Party and the SDP-Liberal Alliance. Closer to home, the New Zealand Left was split between the Labour Party and the Alliance in the 1993 New Zealand election. In Australia some Coalition supporters grumbled after the last federal election that they should have won it as the coalition received the most primary votes. Antony Green thinks that, if first past the post had been used in the last Federal election and people voted tactically, as they do in the UK, Labor would have won 70 seats and the coalition 77 seats. Tony Abbott would have been elected Prime Minister in a majority government.

First past the post voting may have changed the 1995 Queensland election—the 'koala tollway' election. Labor was re-elected with 45 seats on 43 per cent of the vote while the Nationals and Liberals won a combined 43 seats on 49 per cent of the vote. First past the post may have led to a majority coalition government. This is because the ALP came second on the primary votes in Mundingburra and Whitsunday and the winning margin after preferences in both seats was very small—12 votes and 52 votes. It seems quite possible that the Nationals and Liberals may have won both seats under first past the post voting. Rob Borbidge may have become Premier in a majority Coalition government.

Going back in Queensland history, it is interesting to speculate what would have happened under first past the post when the Nationals and Liberals were not in coalition. It is challenging to estimate how people would have voted because people would have voted tactically. But if we apply first past the post to the observed results in 1986 and 1989, we have the following results. In 1986 the Labor Party would have benefitted significantly because the conservative vote in Brisbane was split. The ALP would have won 44 seats instead of the 30 it actually won. The Nationals would have won 42, down from the 49 it actually did win, and the Liberals would have won three. Sir Joh would have had to form a coalition government. In 1989 there was also no coalition. If we just assume there was no tactical voting on the part of voters, the ALP would have won 68 seats instead of the 54 it actually did win, the Nationals would have won 19 seats instead of 26 and the Liberals would have won two instead of nine. This is just an extreme of the estimate of what would happen under first past the post. More likely is that a couple of extra seats would have fallen to Labor in each election, perhaps requiring the formation of a coalition in 1986. It is interesting to speculate how Queensland history may have been different under that circumstance.

So what are the systemic impacts of first past the post? It advantages larger parties and disadvantages those parties that have to compete with another for the same ideological pool of voters. Parties winning a plurality of votes often win a majority in parliament, although regional factors can complicate matters, as we saw in the UK last election when Labour did well in Scotland. Governments tend to have legitimacy even if they do not win 50 per cent of the vote. In addition, people tend to vote strategically. Many make a judgement about how best to optimise their vote and act accordingly. Election results can be volatile, with the decimation of a ruling party, as we saw in Canada in 1993, or when there is a split, as in Queensland in 1957. Parties can rise and fall quickly. This may lead to less stable public policy.

In Queensland we can speculate that first past the post voting would have dramatically reduced three-cornered contests and possibly a much earlier merger of the National and Liberal parties. Alternatively, increased competition between the Nationals and Liberals may have led to the introduction of compulsory preferential voting, which I now turn to.

Compulsory preferential voting needs no introduction. It means that every valid vote is likely to either end up, after preferences, with a major party candidate or a popular Independent.

What would be the impact of compulsory preferential voting on Queensland elections? It is likely to reduce the volatility of election results. Landslides may be less large. Antony Green has examined the likely impact of compulsory preferential voting on the 2012 Queensland state election. He thinks that it would have benefitted the ALP, Katter's Australian Party and Independents. The LNP would have won 74 seats instead of 78, the ALP would have won nine instead of seven, KAP winning three instead of two and there would be three Independents instead of the two who were elected.

Broadly speaking, it is challenging to forecast how compulsory preferential voting would impact future Queensland elections as you would have to balance out the likely impacts of the Greens and Katter's Australian Party and any new party on the Right that emerges during this parliament. In New South Wales compulsory preferential voting would benefit the ALP, as many Left-leaning voters vote Green and do not give preferences. In the eighties and nineties it would have helped the National and Liberal parties in New South Wales, as they sometimes engaged in three-cornered contests. It is interesting to note that in New South Wales there have been no three-cornered contests since 1999 at the state level.

What are the wider impacts of compulsory preferential voting? It means that major parties do not have to work as hard to earn votes. It tends to benefit parties that are competing for voters from the same ideological pool as they can exchange preferences. It reduces the range of preference deals that parties can do compared to optional preferential voting. This means, for example, that the ALP can treat the Greens worse at the federal level than at the state level, as the Greens will always preference Labor at the federal level but may not at the state level.

Compulsory preferential voting allows new parties to emerge on the Right or the Left without a landslide to the other side. We saw what can happen in a non-preferential system, with numerous parties on one side of the ideological fence in the first round of the 2002 French presidential election. The combined Left vote among Socialists, Greens, Communists and Leftist parties was 36 per cent. However, its split among those parties allowed the National Front's Jean-Marie Le Pen to go through to the second round on 16.9 per cent of the vote, together with Jacques Chirac who won 19.9 per cent. Le Pen would have had no chance under compulsory preferential voting.

Let us now turn to mixed member proportional—the mystical system alluded to by Nonie in her introduction. This will be familiar to many people due to its use in New Zealand since the 1996 election and also in Germany. Wikipedia also tells me that it is used in a number of other countries including Bolivia, Japan, Mexico, Thailand and Venezuela. For those not familiar with MMP, it comprises a proportional representation system overlaid on single-member electorates. Firstly, everyone votes for their MP in a single-member electorate, and in New Zealand it is under first past the post. The number of MPs in parliament for each party depends on the separate party vote. The electorate MPs are then 'topped up' from the list MPs from the separate party vote. Parties are only represented in parliament if they win more than a threshold of votes or electorates. In New Zealand, the threshold is five per cent or one electorate. Party votes are ignored in calculating the overall makeup of parliament if they win less than a threshold. These votes are effectively thrown away.

So what has been the impact of MMP on New Zealand elections? Since 1996 when the first MMP election was held, New Zealand elections have led to coalition governments either led by the National or Labour parties. No single party has ever won a majority of seats in any election. The closest was the Nationals, winning 59 out of 121 seats in 2011. Six parties were elected in 1996 and eight were elected in 2011. The party with the highest primary vote has always ended up leading a government, although that need not happen.

One feature of MMP elections has been strategic voting. Many parties have used this. The aim has been to win one electorate MP to ensure that their party list MPs also appear in parliament, even if the party vote is less than five per cent. Major party voters have voted for minor party electorate MPs such as the free-market Association of Consumers and Taxpayers, or the ACT party, to obtain additional MPs who would likely support their side of politics. The clearest example of this has been in the seat of Epsom in Auckland—a blue-ribbon conservative seat. In Epsom, conservative voters have returned an ACT MP in the last three New Zealand elections—2005, 2008 and 2011—while still voting for the Nationals in the party vote. In the last New Zealand election the Nationals won 65 per cent and the ACT party won three per cent in the party vote in Epsom, but in the electorate vote ACT won 44 per cent, the Nationals won 38 per cent and Labour and the Greens won a combined 16 per cent. John Key, the National Party Prime Minister, encouraged a vote for

the ACT candidate. Some Labour and Greens supporters undoubtedly voted for the Nationals candidate to attempt to stop the ACT candidate being elected. While the ACT candidate was elected, this actually did not help his party in the last New Zealand election, as it won no additional list MPs. However, it did help ACT in previous elections. At one election they won an additional five MPs and at another election they won an additional one MP.

New Zealand probably provides the closest parallel to what would happen in Queensland if a proportional electoral system was introduced, but what happened in New Zealand depends dramatically on its history. It had traditionally used first past the post voting before introducing MMP. National Party governments had been elected in 1974 and 1981 on less than 40 per cent of the vote despite winning fewer votes than Labour. The Social Credit Party had obtained 21 per cent of the vote in 1981 and two seats. The Lange Labour government, elected in 1984, was a reformist government that dramatically liberalised the New Zealand economy. This economic liberalisation was greatly unpopular with the party's more left-wing supporters and caused political stress, with the Labour Party fracturing in the late eighties. The Roger Douglas faction, which we may remember as being associated with 'Rogerism' I understand, wanted ongoing economic liberalisation while Jim Anderton formed the New Labour Party to represent traditional Labour values.

In the 1990 election the National Party won 67 seats out of 97 on 48 per cent of the vote. Labour won 29 seats on 35 per cent of the vote, the Greens won seven per cent with no seats and NewLabour just won one seat on five per cent. The new National Party PM had promised to hold a referendum on a new electoral system. Referenda were held in 1992 and 1993, leading to the introduction of MMP for the 1996 election. There are parallels between New Zealand and Australia and Queensland in that there were reforming governments, particularly in the eighties and nineties, that alienated their traditional supporters. In Australia the Democrats, One Nation, Greens and Katter's Australian Party gained some of this alienated support.

What would be the impact of adopting MMP in Queensland? While it could be easily introduced, there has been little clamouring for it except from the Greens. It could be adopted in Queensland with slight variants. You could adopt optional preferential voting for the electorate seats and probably for the party vote as well.

While forecasting the results of a Queensland election under MMP is sheer speculation, it is fun to try. We can guess what election results would have looked like by applying actual results through the MMP algorithm. If we do that, we get the following. In 1995—the aforementioned 'koala tollway' election—there would be a likely majority Coalition government. In 1998 there would have been a hung parliament, with One Nation holding the balance of power. I think that it probably would have been a minority Coalition government. In 2009 it would be a minority Labor government supported by the Greens. In 2012 there would have been a majority LNP government on 46 seats, Labor on 25 seats, Katter's Australian Party on 11, the Greens on seven and two Independents for a total of 91 seats.

But it is difficult to know what would have actually happened, as MMP makes it easier for small parties to form and survive. This might have happened in the latter days of the Goss government. There was some disquiet from left and small-l liberal supporters about its policies. It is entirely possible that a splinter Labor Party could have been established and contested the 1995 election, together with the Greens and Democrats. I know, because I was at a meeting at which the potential establishment of such a splinter party was discussed. In addition, it is entirely possible that major party MPs or Independents would have formed their own parties and won a few seats, as occurred in New Zealand. A few major party MPs have split from the party they were originally elected under in the last few Queensland parliaments. As an interstate observer, this might happen if MMP was enforced in the current Queensland parliament. I would speculate then that MMP in Queensland would broadly lead to similar results as seen in New Zealand.

What are the systemic impacts of MMP? They are fairly obvious. It supports there being a collection of parties. Parties will differentiate themselves. Large parties can still exist and win a near majority of the vote, as the Nationals have in NZ, particularly recently. Politics is more fluid. But governments may have less legitimacy if the governing party is not supported by most voters.

A key element of MMP is having single member electorates. This helps improve the accountability of individual MPs, as they are directly responsible to their voters and not to a central party committee. In addition, this can help decentralise power geographically by putting candidate selection in the hands, at least in part, of local party members. Voters can sack an electorate MP by

voting for an opponent while still voting for their party and single member electorates also help improve information flows from voters to government as each resident has an identifiable person and office to approach if they need to.

Why don't we now turn to Hare Clark which I notice was the subject of a story in the *Brisbane Times* in the last few hours. Hare Clark is familiar to Australians through its use in ACT and Tasmanian elections. It is also used in the Republic of Ireland, Malta, some UK elections and some local elections in New Zealand and the US. It is a form of proportional representation using multimember electorates in which people vote for individual candidates instead of parties. Hare Clark elections have two dimensions: firstly a contest between parties to win seats in parliament—and hopefully government—and secondly a contest between candidates within each party. Candidates in a single party compete vigorously against each other to be elected. It is common for some MPs to be replaced by other candidates from the same party in Hare Clark elections.

Hare Clark has been used in Tasmania since 1909. According to Antony Green, it has worked well there due to the highly stable population, the clear regional divisions reflected in federal electoral boundaries and long experience of using Hare Clark. Successful candidates are often well known within their communities through local government, union or business activity. The compact electorates may support this. Majority governments in Tasmania have usually been elected since the 1959 election, which was the first election at which seven MPs were returned from each electorate. Only in four elections since 1959 have minority governments been elected: 1969, 1989, 1996 and 2010. Since 1998, five state MPs have been elected from each federal electorate. The reduction from seven MPs to five was an attempt to reduce the chances of a minority government being elected with the Greens holding the balance of power. This succeeded until the 2010 election.

Some impacts of Hare Clark in Tasmania and the ACT have been small government majorities in the Assembly, which potentially makes governments less stable—although this does not appear to have been borne out in practice; party leaders can have high personal votes—this was used strategically by the Liberals in the last ACT election to elect another MP on their leader's coat-tails; personal votes for individual MPs and regular turnover in MPs from the same party; smaller parties can be represented, but micro-parties tend not to be elected; and regional factors can be reflected in parliament.

One challenge with introducing Hare Clark in a mainland state, particularly Queensland, would be the size of the electorates, potentially reducing the familiarity of voters with individual candidates. In Queensland you would probably have between 11 and 17 electorates. Seventeen electorates might each return five members for a total of 85 members or 11 electorates may each return nine members for a total of 99. Each electorate would be about the size of five to eight current Queensland state seats. If you had 17 electorates then each of them would be small enough for individual candidates to probably be known.

So what would be the impact of Hare Clark on Queensland elections? Firstly, candidate selection would probably be different. Each party would nominate a handful of candidates who would have to campaign against each other. This might reduce the ability of factions within major parties to choose candidates in winnable seats or factions may simply fund and promote their preferred candidates at the general election. I know that this would cause a major change in how the ALP operates. Secondly, election results are more likely to be closer and there are likely to be a wider range of parties in parliament.

I modelled the 2012 Queensland election under Hare Clark using 17 electorates. With 17 electorates, five MPs are returned from each electorate. The LNP would have still won a majority with 46 MPs; Labor would have won 27 MPs; Katter's Australian Party would have won eight; the Greens three; and there would have been one Independent. I also modelled that election with 11 electorates with each electorate returning nine MPs. There is a similar result. The LNP wins a majority with 52 seats; Labor wins 29; Katter's Australian Party wins 10; the Greens win six; and there are two Independents. In the modelling the quota effectively acts as a threshold preventing microparties being elected. It also helps to produce small majorities for parties receiving close to 50 per cent of the vote.

So what are the wider impacts of Hare Clark? Much less volatile election outcomes; smaller government majorities in parliament; potentially increased cohesion in the parliamentary party as you don't tend to have a very large backbench; and greater emphasis on individual candidates and their own mini-campaigns—there may be both central and candidate campaigns.

For completeness let's also mention list proportional representation. This involves candidates being elected from party lists. An open list system allows voters to preference individual candidates. A closed list only allows people to vote for a party. Something to note about Queensland history is that in the last 30 years the winning party or parties have usually come close to 50 per cent of the primary vote, but only once did they receive more than 50 per cent—in 1989. Independents and third parties have obtained between three per cent in 1989 and a combined 31 per cent in 1998—that includes the One Nation vote. With similar voting patterns, proportional representation would usually have resulted in third parties or Independents holding the balance of power or a government with a small majority. However, in practice, proportional representation may well have encouraged the formation of new parties. Smaller parties could have been elected, depending on whether there would be a threshold—say five per cent.

So what are some of the wider impacts of list proportional representation? It refocuses campaigning. There are no marginal geographic seats any more, but there may be marginal demographics or other sections of the electorate. It would reduce the accountability of individual MPs to voters as they might only be able to be sacked by a party committee or by voters if the party's support reduces significantly. It may result in local party members being less likely to have input into the selection of any one candidate and increase factional influence inside parties. It may create incentives for MPs to split from the party they were elected under, especially if they would then have the balance of power, as they might get elected under a new party that they create at the next election. It would also reduce information flows from residents to government as there is no one identifiable office for residents in an area to approach.

Some of these things are familiar to us through Senate elections and New South Wales Upper House elections. In addition, City of Sydney elections have some characteristics of list proportional representation. It is difficult to argue that Senate or New South Wales Upper House members can be sacked by voters, except if they are at the end of their party ticket and their party is unpopular. In that case they're unlikely to be well known. Instead, New South Wales Upper House members are responsible to those who preselected them—the Labor state conference or Liberal party members in notional geographic electorates. This is not good for political accountability.

It's interesting to also look at the City of Sydney election as it may have parallels with list proportional representation. The City of Sydney comprises the CBD plus surrounding suburbs. It has only 180,000 residents and produces about eight per cent of Australia's GDP. There are 41 local councils in the Sydney metropolitan region.

In the City of Sydney we directly elect a Lord Mayor using optional preferential voting and also elect nine councillors using a Senate style list system. There are no wards. The lord mayoral candidates are all obliged to also stand as candidates for council. This has led to the following impacts: elections are campaigns between mayoral candidates with councillors effectively providing a supporting role; people vote for teams rather than individual councillors and there is no scope for councillor candidates to run their own campaigns—to do so they would have to run for mayor; the mayor is the dominant political personality on council and is likely to hold a majority or plurality on council; the accountability of councillors is reduced—councillors on the mayoral ticket are effectively responsible to the mayor—the current mayor sacked one of her councillors before the last election; the lack of wards may make information flow from residents to council more challenging—no specific councillor is 'responsible' for knowing about the issues in any particular part of the LGA.

This system and perhaps the list proportional system in state elections emphasises the legitimacy and profile of the mayor and de-emphasises the role of councillors. I should note that Brisbane City Council, which I am very familiar with having lived here until 2000, with its 26 wards and its Lord Mayor is quite different to Sydney. In Brisbane, councillors are generally well known in their local area and can be more or less popular than the mayoral candidate from the same party.

Lastly I am going to touch on voluntary voting. The Queensland government discussion paper touches on this. The Rudd government asked a similar question in 2009 in a green paper on electoral reform. As we know, compulsory voting was introduced in Queensland in 1915 and 1924 at the federal level. The evidence suggests that Australians generally support compulsory voting. In the 2010 Australian Election Study, 72 per cent of respondents supported compulsory voting and 28 per cent supported voluntary voting. 8.4 per cent said they probably or definitely wouldn't have voted if voting had not been compulsory. The question for us is what would be its impact if it was introduced. Traditionally, it was thought that voluntary voting benefitted the conservatives. Professor Ian McAllister from the ANU said that voluntary voting might have given the conservative parties a

two per cent benefit some decades ago but that the gap is much tighter now. Professor Clive Bean of QUT said that voluntary voting would benefit the conservatives in the short term based on the 2010 election study. In that study, nearly 90 per cent of Liberal voters said that they would definitely or probably vote if voting was voluntary, while 85 per cent of Labor voters said the same. It's unclear what the margin of error was. A uniform one per cent benefit to the conservatives would be enough to change some election results—the 1995 Queensland election and the 1990 and 2010 federal elections. But we need to do more to understand the likely election impacts. What matters is which party would receive a net benefit in the marginal seats, which we don't know the answer to. The net impact might even help Labor in marginal seats.

In addition, we'd have to know who would benefit in inner-city, suburban, outer-metropolitan, regional and rural seats. How would it differ across demographics? How would it vary between major parties, the Greens and Katter's Australian Party? We don't know because the 2010 Australian Election Study is a bit too broad and didn't go into those questions. In addition, the results of that survey are hypothetical. Behaviour may differ from what people say they may do. What we can be certain of is that parties would immediately attempt to work out how voluntary voting affected them. We can also say that political campaigning and activities would be likely to change. Parties would have to put a lot of effort into convincing people to vote. There was a 47 per cent national response for the 1998 voluntary postal ballot for the Constitutional Convention. Presumably a state election would have a larger turnout than 47 per cent. Evidence from low turnouts at some council elections across Australia, even with fines for not voting, suggest that people may not vote if they think it isn't important enough. The turnout for the last Queensland local government elections was 80 per cent while it was 91 per cent for the last state election. In some Melbourne councils turnout was 50 per cent.

Political parties would have a much bigger job getting people out to vote, particularly in marginal seats. They would make much more effort to contact and target voters in the lead up to an election. On polling day, parties might even attempt to track people who hadn't voted and attempted to get them to a polling booth. They are already starting to target individual voters much more than previously, and this would receive greater emphasis under voluntary voting. Getting out the vote would be very difficult for political parties given their small membership. The Queensland ALP seems to have about 6,000 members, while the Queensland LNP had 13,000 in 2008.

Under voluntary voting election results would depend to a large extent on which side could get their supporters out to vote. Election results would likely be more volatile as people may stay home if they were unenthused about their options. Some people have wondered how many seats Labor would have won in the last Queensland and New South Wales elections if voting had been voluntary.

Senator Barnaby Joyce has argued that introducing voluntary voting would pave the way for radical political movements to push racist and extreme green agendas. His point is that voluntary voting may lead to election results that don't reflect most people's views. This is possible, but unlikely. We don't tend to see it in New Zealand or UK general elections. While some US candidates have had some fringe views, for example abortion, they were generally defeated in the last Senate elections even in conservative states. The primary election process was at fault in selecting of those candidates.

Many people express concern that voluntary voting might lead to the hyper-partisanship we see in the US. It must be pointed out that the UK and NZ also have voluntary voting, and they don't display the hyper-partisanship we see in the US. Other factors particular to the US must come into play. These other factors could include, the gerrymandering of districts, meaning that many candidates effectively just need to win their primary to be sure of being elected; the multi-step decision making process, meaning more points at which decisions can be thwarted; and the very high stakes involved.

Would partisanship increase in Australia under voluntary voting? Possibly, if parties sought to campaign to their base supporters, or other opposing groups, such as anti-abortion groups and pro-choice groups, tried to get their supporters out. Campaigning would almost certainly change. Currently it targets the marginal voter, but under voluntary voting, parties would have to energise both their base as well as marginal voters. This increases the incentives for greater spending.

Energising the base is key in voluntary voting. We saw how Gordon Brown targeted Scottish Labour voters in the 2010 UK election and Labour actually improved its vote in Scotland. We also saw over the last decade how the Republicans and Democrats in the US targeted their core voters in general elections by concurrently running ballots on gay marriage or the minimum wage. These techniques worked. No doubt similar techniques would be used in Queensland to get the vote up.

But voluntary voting may also allow voter intimidation. It is much easier to try to prevent people from voting if it is not compulsory. There are numerous examples of alleged voter intimidation in the US.

Let's look at some of the arguments around voluntary voting.

Firstly, the obvious one. Why should people be forced to vote if they do not want to? As blogger Paula Matthewson, also known as DragOnista, wrote on *The Drum*, 'What's the point of forcing voters begrudgingly to the polls if we engage them in the political process but do so voluntarily?' Paula makes the point that people would vote voluntarily if we engaged them moreso.

My civil libertarian instincts support voluntary voting. Why should people be forced to do something they do not want to? How does not voting harm others?

New Zealand and the UK seem to survive quite well with voluntary voting. There is not necessarily a spiral of election expenditure. The UK has expenditure limits of £30,000 per constituency contested while marginal state seat campaigns in Australia can easily cost \$150,000 per seat. NZ also has expenditure limits of about \$1 million plus \$25,000 per seat contested. Expenditure caps in Australia may restrict any spending spiral.

An argument in favour of voluntary voting is that election results should reflect the opinions of the adult citizenry who are interested enough to vote. A low turnout may reflect dissatisfaction with the political process. Any other impacts from people not voting must just be borne and addressed. Another argument is that voluntary voting could also mean that parties would have to engage with voters much more than currently. One benefit of compulsory voting may be a philosophical point in that it ensures election results reflect the opinions of most adult citizens.

How about arguments against compulsory voting? One argument is that it is an imposition on liberty. It is an imposition, as is jury service, seatbelts and road rules. Compulsory voting is a trivial imposition. Filling out a tax return usually takes longer.

Another argument opposes compulsory voting on the basis that it requires people who are uninterested or know very little or are badly motivated to vote. This is true but with the mass franchise the only qualification to vote is being an adult citizen, not some level of property, income or education. This argument against compulsory voting falls over.

In addition, this argument would support people who are very interested or particularly knowledgeable about politics to have a larger say in elections. Maybe they should each receive two, three or 10 votes or perhaps graduated according to a scale of worthiness determined by notable elders. I have heard some Australian right wing economists suggest, maybe tongue in cheek, that people with economics degrees should get two votes as they better understand how the world works. Some right wing commentators have recently said that you should only be able to vote if you pay tax. Apart from the fact that we all pay GST, this type of argument falls over as it is inconsistent with the mass franchise.

Weighing up these points does not lead to an obvious answer. Perhaps the most substantial points are that, while voluntary voting would enhance the freedom to vote or to not vote, it may also allow for intimidation to attempt to discourage people from voting. In practice, it is likely that parliamentary support or opposition to voluntary voting will not depend on principled notions of liberty or impacts on political culture but pragmatism: whether it is likely to benefit the party and government and whether it would make campaigning by political parties more difficult. This is no doubt on the minds of MPs.

Electoral systems are, to quote Paul Reynolds from a 1992 lecture, the calculus for turning votes into seats. Different systems will lead to different party compositions in parliament. While parties will think of the impacts of different systems on themselves, it is at least as interesting to consider their wider systemic impacts. Do they promote greater volatility in election results and reduce the ability of the opposition to do its job? Do they ensure that political views of sufficient support are represented in parliament? Do they promote party splits and minority governments? Do they emphasise the role of the leader? Do they promote the power of factions within parties? Are MPs directly accountable to voters or to a central party committee? I trust and hope that these systemic issues are touched on in the current focus on electoral reform in Queensland.

Ms MALONE: It is now open for questions. We have time for four or five questions, depending on how long the answers are. Is anybody prepared to start questions? I should say the whole session is being recorded by Hansard. John Pyke will take the Hansard recording device close to the questioner. When you ask a question would you please identify yourself and whatever association you might represent.

Mr MURPHY: Peter Murphy, I represent no organisation. When I was watching the last Tasmanian elections, I noticed with Hare-Clark that a lot of dead wood was being eliminated, that there would be two or three people from one party but the voters would think, 'Okay, this person is a waste of space. Let's vote them out and let's get someone more competent in.' Is Hare-Clark the best election system for that, or are there ones that are better at getting out the hacks, the time servers—you know what I am talking about.

Dr BLUMEN: Hare-Clark is very effective in allowing that because people can still vote for the same government and completely change the MPs or change half the MPs that you see in that government. Because in Tasmania in particular—first of all, there are five MPs or there used to be seven MPs for each electorate. Therefore, with an electorate of about 75,000 voters you only need about 10,000 voters to support you, which is pretty small compared to a normal state electorate in any other state. You can effectively campaign. I know from personal experience that it takes a long time to doorknock—and I am sure many MPs would agree—10,000 people or to talk to 10,000 people. It is much easier than talking to, say, 20,000, 30,000 or 40,000. Because the size of the electorates is fairly small in Tasmania and people generally know the candidates, people can make a very informed case. So it works well in that regard.

INAUDIBLE QUESTIONER: Other systems?

Dr BLUMEN: Of the ones I mentioned tonight it is probably the best system for that. If you look at MMP you can vote in or out an electorate MP quite readily while still voting for a party for government, but then you get the opposite number—you only have a choice of two, in effect. In single member optional preferential, first past the post or compulsory preferential, it is much harder because you effectively are voting for a government. I would say yes.

Ms MALONE: Any further questions?

Mr GIBSON: I am the member for Gympie and a member of the ASPGQ. You have alluded to different systems but one of the things we have seen in Queensland is that the same system has been in place for a while but our population has grown. We have not increased the number of MPs for some time. I would be interested if there has been any analysis on how that may or may not change if we saw the parliament grow from 89 electorates to 93 or 95.

Dr BLUMEN: I am not aware of any analysis but what we imagine is that, in general, the larger the electorate, the greater the amount of variation in electoral support amongst different towns there will be in the electorate. So if you make them smaller, if you cut an electorate in half and then in half again, you are likely to get many more marginal seats. Mary Crawford attested to this because in the 1984 federal election the parliament was expanded from about 120 or 125 seats to 148 and there were many more, if I remember correctly, marginal seats created. In fact, the seat of Forde was won by a Liberal candidate in 1984 and then won by Mary in 1987. In general, you probably would get many more marginal seats, which is good for keeping governments on their toes.

Mr PYKE: I suppose I have two questions, if that is not being greedy, since nobody else seems to be in a hurry. One is an observation. It seems fairly clearly proven that systems of proportional representation increase the proportion of women members of a House. I know I have heard Mary say that there is evidence against it, but I have seen several publications through the Proportional Representation Society which seem to indicate that it does. Have you seen any figures that will resolve the fight that is going on across the chamber here?

Dr BLUMEN: No. I will say that, regardless of anything else, quota systems for female candidates do result in more female MPs, but I am not making any observations on the merits or otherwise of the party system.

Mr PYKE: My other question—part observation—was that when you were talking about either form of PR—Hare-Clark or a list system—you commented that one of the problems can be that you have no local representation at all because you have nobody out there in the electorate. It seems to me that New South Wales and Tasmania have both made bad mistakes in not providing any facilities for electorate officers—I will partly correct that. New South Wales provides no facilities for upper house members for electorate offices outside of the parliament building itself. In Tasmania I do not know what facilities are provided, but I know that at least half of the members have their offices in parliament or within a couple of blocks of parliament and it is only some of the members from the northern end of the island who actually have got away from the electorate of Denison. So if either system is brought in I think the members of parliament—and I do not know if that is terribly

likely to happen here in Queensland—should be very conscious of the fact that they should demand electorate offices near where they live where they can represent the people of that area, even though they are not elected specifically by the people of that area.

Dr BLUMEN: That is probably quite true. Of course, if you were to suggest that upper house MPs in New South Wales should have an electorate office, it will be a case of, 'Where? Where should they go? Why there? Why not where it is cheap?' 'Because they represent the whole state.' Yes, I think not having a local electorate is actually a major problem not in terms of any kind of passing impacts but if you are not responsible to any particular set of voters then you are not responsible to anyone because, as I mentioned, you were responsible to the party committee or the Labor state conference comprised or controlled by various trade unions.

The Liberal Party in New South Wales have attempted to somewhat address that by—and I will mention this very briefly. To select upper house Liberal candidates—I am not sure about the Nationals—they divided the state up into notional regions. They select maybe 75 per cent or 80 per cent of the Liberal Party upper house candidates. Each one of those regions will elect a candidate. So it is a bit like a normal preselection for a lower house seat. Then there is a central body which comprises delegates from Liberal Party branches or Liberal Party state electorates which then meets to select, in the case of the last election, the three remaining upper house Liberal Party MPs. So that is how we do it.

Mr PYKE: Having been selected in those areas, do they then have any special responsibility to answer for voters in those areas?

Dr BLUMEN: No, no. They would, no doubt, try to pay attention to the Liberal Party members for the next election coming up, but they have no specific responsibility. Just on something similar to that, in New South Wales—I am not sure about Queensland—for Labor Party MPs, for those seats where the Labor Party does not have an MP, the 73 of them, there are only 20 Labor MPs in the lower house. If an upper house ALP member is nominated, they call it a duty a member to look after the interests of certainly party members in that electorate—not the interests of voters in that electorate, but certainly party members, because previously there was nothing and people felt pretty left out. That seems to work well inside the party context.

Ms MALONE: I have noticed in New Zealand that list members likewise have that kind of responsibility allocated.

Mr MURPHY: A special thing about Queensland is that it is very, very sparse in the west. Would it be a danger with Hare-Clark of just getting one big seat for about five members that goes all the way from Cunnamulla to Cooktown? Would it be necessary to have legislation to prevent that happening?

Dr BLUMEN: I suspect in practice there probably would be legislation to allow very large seats to have lower numbers of voters, like there is currently. It is just interesting to note that similar legislation was introduced for WA when they brought in one vote, one value electoral systems there—only very recently, only before not this recent WA state election but the previous one. But in practice, if you can think about it, think about what happens for federal electorates. You have three electorates covering the vast bulk. Kennedy is very large and in the state scene Mount Isa is enormous. I am sure Gregory and Warrego are both enormous. Cook is enormous. In WA, the federal electorates of Durack and O'Connor, I think it is, are enormous. So these things are quite doable, but what would happen probably in practice is that the Electoral Commission would be quite aware of this and would try to attach, say, Cape York to a Cairns electorate. So if you had 17 electorates, then you can construct them so that they are not absolutely phenomenally huge. You might have Cape York and Cairns. You might have Townsville and going out to Mount Isa along the Flinders Highway. You might have Warrego and the Darling Downs in mind. You might have Gregory, Callide, Gladstone—that kind of area—all joined up together. So I think in practice you would not have one seat for all of western Queensland, but there is nothing preventing that. Maybe you would have to reintroduce a zoning system. I am not advocating it.

Mr PYKE: Can I make the suggestion that it would be partly up to the parties if you did have a seat that was, say, Darling Downs and Warrego. It would be a stupid party that preselected all of its candidates from Toowoomba. They would have to have a couple of candidates from Toowoomba, one from Charleville, one from Dalby, say, and they would be able to choose to have electorate offices there.

Dr BLUMEN: Absolutely, yes.

Ms MALONE: Mary, we would like to offer you a right of reply, if the evidence you have contests that.

Ms CRAWFORD: In the Australian context, yes, we do have more women in the Senate than in the House of Representatives and they are Labor women. That is partially due to the changes that were made in 1994 to preselections and so on. So that is, in effect, the de facto sort of quota there. But if we look at the states, Tasmania is a very good example, where you have more women in the single-member electorates than you do in the proportional represented seats and so on. Of all the figures, certainly in Victoria and so on, there is no evidence and one would argue that Queensland had the highest percentage of women in a state parliament with over 50 per cent in the Bligh government in single-member electorates. So in the Australian context, certainly, proportional representation does not give us more women. We are back to the same old story about preselections.

Internationally, there have been some arguments, particularly in places like Scandinavia and other places. They say the advantage is somewhere between two and three per cent, but when closely examined, there are also some quotas at play in that, too.

Ms MALONE: Thank you very much, I would now like to call on the member for Gympie and the government's nominee to the executive of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, David Gibson, to give a vote of thanks.

Mr GIBSON: Thank you very much. I cannot think of anything better than to have a mathematician crunching the numbers on politics. Too often we have all of these political science people who do not really get the numbers side of it right—looking at it and hypothesising as to what might or might not have been. But coming from it from a mathematical perspective I think gives it the rigour that we clearly need. One of the great strengths of our Westminster system is that we have so many variations within that system. Within it we can see different models that will produce different outcomes. I think all who are involved in the political process look on with some interest whenever any government of any persuasion indicates that they are making some changes. Self-preservation is a great motivator, as an MP, but I think also it is appropriate that parliaments review themselves. Too often we sit back and we are quite happy to force other branches of government and other areas of society to review their operations, but we are very reluctant to do it within ourselves. I think, as has been referred to often in Queensland, our unicameral system results in an elected dictatorship where, regardless of the politics, the government of the day that wins does so and is very happy to keep the arrangement that got them into power in that place. Any government that engages openly and looks at opportunities for change, I think, should be commended for that. On listening to the various options that may have occurred based on some historical analysis, I think that shows that wherever options are there should be assessed clearly and openly. That is not to say that any of those outcomes necessarily would have been better than what we have. Clearly, we would have had differences and that impacts greatly on the state of the Queensland. So thank you very much, Sasha, for coming up and for sharing and for taking the time to put that effort in for all of us. Thank you.

Ms MALONE: There definitely were a lot of numbers in that presentation. So I would like to assure you that if you want the opportunity to revisit those numbers that the transcript from the recording tonight should be on the ASPG website in two to three weeks time and it will be available to the public generally to anybody who want to see it. I would also belatedly like to acknowledge all of the members of parliament present tonight. There are quite a few, and assure you that you are most welcome. We are very grateful that you are here. I would also like to belatedly acknowledge Madam Speaker's earlier presence here tonight. Also, Sasha referred to the *Australian Election Study* in his speech and David Gow, who is one of the producers and authors of that, is here tonight as well. So anybody who would like to catch up with David about those kinds of matters might have the opportunity to do so. I would now like to draw proceedings to a close and invite everybody to join us for refreshments. Food is provided and there will be a cash bar in the Strangers bar. Thank you everybody for attending.