

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Melbourne – Thursday 10 August 2023

MEMBERS

Will Fowles – Chair

Evan Mulholland – Deputy Chair

Brad Battin

David Ettershank

Sam Hibbins

Emma Kealy

Nathan Lambert

Lee Tarlamis

Emma Vulin

WITNESSES

Angela Pollard, President (*via videoconference*),

Louise Pfeiffer, Vice-President,

Natalie Kopas, Advocacy Manager,

Bronwyn Currie, Victorian Convener (*via videoconference*), and

Craig Kealy, National Psephology Manager, Animal Justice Party.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I declare open the public hearings for the Electoral Matters Committee's Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands each of us are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders and all community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings.

I am Evan Mulholland, the Deputy Chair of the committee and Member for Northern Metropolitan. The other members of this committee here today are –

Emma VULIN: I am Emma Vulin, Member for Pakenham.

Nathan LAMBERT: Nathan Lambert, Member for Preston.

Lee TARLAMIS: Lee Tarlamis, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sam HIBBINS: Sam Hibbins, Member for Prahran.

Emma KEALY: Emma Kealy, Member for Lowan.

David ETTERS HANK: David Ettershank, Western Metro Region.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I welcome various members of the Animal Justice Party to the committee today: Angela Pollard, Louise Pfeiffer, Natalie Kopas, Bronwyn Currie and Craig Kealy.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same thing, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be given false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of the Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as possible. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

I invite you to proceed with a brief 5-minute opening statement to the committee, which will be followed by questions.

Bronwyn CURRIE: Thank you very much. Thank you, Deputy Chair, and all members of the committee for inviting representatives of the Animal Justice Party to share our views and experience of the Victorian election held in November of 2022. The Animal Justice Party acknowledges the First Nations peoples as the custodians of the land on which we live and work, and we pay respects to their elders past and present. Today we are here in person and online, and we acknowledge that wherever we are, we are on Aboriginal land and that sovereignty was never ceded. The Victorian delegates here today include Angela Pollard, President of the Animal Justice Party, Louise Pfeiffer, Vice-President and director of elections, Craig Kealy, our National Psephology Manager, me, the Victorian Convener, and Natalie Kopas, the Victorian Advocacy Manager.

The inquiry guidelines advise that submissions could discuss any matter related to the 2022 election, including voters' experience, the behaviour of parties, the way the VEC managed the election, candidates' and parties' experiences and possible improvements to the electoral system. All of these issues have been addressed in our submission, which you will have read. What we would add here today is that elections represent significant difficulties for smaller parties. We simply do not have the resources and funds of larger parties, and so we participate in democratic processes as best we can with less.

Group voting tickets were probably the most contentious issue for our party during the course of the last election. Ideally in a democracy voters know where their vote is going, but in Victoria that is not necessarily the case and votes can essentially be sold or brokered between parties. The Animal Justice Party finds it particularly unethical and undemocratic to have this process operating. Even though we ultimately benefited from it, we would see this changed for future elections. Like all parties, we have discussions with other candidates and parties to determine group voting tickets, though there are some that we would never preference. The business model of paying for alliances to achieve better preferences to win an MP would require us to make pragmatic decisions which do not reflect our party values. We believe that voters also find the vote brokering system associated with group voting tickets to be undemocratic. We would like to see the current system of group voting tickets abolished in preference for a system such as the Senate voting system used by the AEC, and at the same time we would also like to see the regional structure of Victoria's Legislative Council be abolished, as has recently been enacted in Western Australia, for example.

The behaviour witnessed at polling booths, VEC management and the upper house voting systems were the main issues for our party covered in our submission, and the time constraints associated with election matters, which has been a theme I have noticed through evidence given today. The constraints around election matters especially in arranging documentation and printing, particularly if the VEC rejects a how-to-vote card, make for stress and rushed decisions, particularly within smaller parties. That has been our experience. So we would appreciate a space of time between how-to-vote cards being approved by the VEC and being printed, and potentially that means a shorter prepolling period. Perhaps I will leave that to the committee to determine in their recommendations. But as a small party we cannot attract the number of volunteers to support the current two-week pre-poll period, which puts us, in our view, at a disadvantage compared to some of the larger parties. So thank you for inviting us here, and we appreciate your consideration of these matters.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. I will go first. Just clarifying on group voting tickets, in the model you would support statewide electorates. Do you have any view on also a single metropolitan, single regional electorate model, or any other models that have been canvassed?

Craig KEALY: I guess it is possible to have fewer regions, but ideally we would like to see a statewide model with no regions, which really just reflects South Australia, New South Wales or Western Australia. It is no different to those other states. With regions still in place it just leaves the situation where the three major parties simply dominate the seats in Parliament, whereas if you have got a statewide one with no regions it allows for much more of a democratic upper house with more diverse views across multiple parties and proportional representation.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Animal Justice has in past elections gone in with the Druery wheel, and this election did but famously ratted on that, as has been spoken about, particularly in Dr Kevin Bonham's submission. Particularly in Northern Victoria, on 1.53 per cent, do you acknowledge that without those preferences the Animal Justice Party likely would not have won that seat?

Craig KEALY: We said in our submission that we benefited from the group voting ticket in that way. We had 1.5 per cent, as you mentioned. We have clearly mentioned that we have benefited from it.

Natalie KOPAS: Can I just add that we are, like any political party, here to get in MPs – that is what we are all about – and we can only work within the system which we have. But even prior to this, we have a position statement saying that a single voting ticket and not a group voting ticket is what we would prefer to see happen. That has always been our position on this. But in order to get an MP in there, or to get multiple MPs, we need to work within the system which we have in order to create change, to create a more democratic system. That is the only way we can do it.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: So you acknowledge that – I am just in particular going to focus on Northern Victoria Region because that is where you had an MP elected – the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers and the Victorian Greens had a higher vote share in Northern Victoria and that you were really only able to get an MP elected through preferences, largely from right-of-centre parties?

Craig KEALY: That is the system. As we mentioned in our submission, one of the downfalls of having a group voting ticket is that you have instances of smaller parties – and there have definitely been other smaller parties in other elections – that have got less than 1.5 per cent and have won seats. It is an issue with the system, and it is part of the reason why we want it abolished.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I will move to Mr Tarlamis.

Lee TARLAMIS: Thank you. The previous submitters in their submission argue that you can abolish group ticket voting now and then other structural changes can come later. I note in your submission you talk about:

In order to achieve proportional representation, it is important to note that the recommendation of removing – group voting tickets –

can only be done if removing the regions is also done simultaneously.

Can you just elaborate on that?

Craig KEALY: Sure. So although they could be done separately, our firm recommendation is that it needs to be done at the same time. If, for example, we remove group voting tickets but keep the eight regions, we have a situation where the three major parties completely dominate the entire upper house – with the exception of one, maybe two seats. That is great for you all, but that is not great for democracy in Victoria. The upper house is meant to be a diverse house of review. It should have proportional representation, where if a party receives 4 per cent of the vote, they get 4 per cent of the seats available. Just removing group voting tickets without some further review of the system is not a great scenario either, so we firmly recommend that both need to be done at the same time to allow for an upper house which has proportional representation.

Louise PFEIFFER: Yes, it is comparable to the local government elections and how with councils, when they are divided up into wards, almost invariably it is the major parties' representatives who win the seats where there are wards where there are only two or three seats on offer. So it is comparable to that.

Lee TARLAMIS: Just turning to time lines of elections, there have been proposals around there being a need for there to be more time between the close of nominations and voting, and it has been suggested that there be a week in there. Is that something that you would be supportive of?

Natalie KOPAS: Yes. The time lines just add to what is an already stressful situation and result in people running around trying to get the logistics of things working. It is just taking away time from people actually getting out there and talking to voters when all they are worried about is printing and registrations and approvals. If there was a little bit more time, then that could be run much more smoothly.

Lee TARLAMIS: You mentioned the issue of registration of how-to-vote cards and that process. We know that there are a number of instances or a number of procedures that occur in Victoria that do not occur at the Commonwealth, like actually the need to register how-to-vote cards. So do you think there should be a better alignment of what happens through the AEC and the VEC? Also, just specifically on the issue of registration of how-to-vote cards, do you see why there is a need to actually register how-to-vote cards?

Craig KEALY: Upon the need, I believe there is a need, because we have also had instances where fake Animal Justice Party how-to-vote cards have been handed out at an election – not to my knowledge at a Victorian election. So there is a need for registering how-to-vote cards. I do agree with that.

As far as the timing goes, I think that it would be great – well, I am not sure about the alignment with the AEC, and maybe others can comment on that. But included in our recommendations is just the ability to liaise with the VEC about what a how-to-vote card should look like so that were not submitting it and then waiting days to receive a response, which is sometimes three or four or five days into the pre-poll early voting period. What would be great is just the ability to put together a proforma how-to-vote card with the authorised by and all the details that are required well in advance before early voting and to get that ticked off beforehand, which just

means in the last part, when nominations are completed and we know who the candidates are, you are just putting in the numbers of the candidates.

Lee TARLAMIS: All good.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Hibbins.

Sam HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. So you have indicated that you would like to see the abolition of group voting tickets in conjunction with upper house reform. Do you have views in terms of the time line of those changes – any preference whether that should occur by the next election?

Louise PFEIFFER: Yes, 100 per cent – the sooner the better. It was really great to see Western Australia take swift action after their last state election. It would be great to see Victoria do the same. Just on that topic, to your point about the Animal Justice Party benefiting from the last election, if you consider that where there are GVTs in regions there is going to be a greater number of candidates, because people know that they can potentially get a deal put in place and win on a small vote. But in the other states where there are no GVTs, the Animal Justice Party consistently gets between 1.5 and up to 2.2 per cent, in the SA state election, in terms of primary vote, which clearly puts us in a category of winning one seat kind of outright based on a proportional system. I just wanted to make that point to go back to what you said before. But to go back to your question, yes, as soon as possible.

Sam HIBBINS: Okay, thank you.

Bronwyn CURRIE: Sorry, if I may, I just wanted to circle back to comments by Mr Mulholland. I just want to make it very clear that the Animal Justice Party in this Victorian election was not a client of Mr Druery's, and to my knowledge we never have been. Obviously, in an election we talk to many parties and candidates. It is just a reality of the system that we operate under. We do not like it; we did not create it. Yes, there were conversations had, but I just wanted to make it very clear to the committee that we were not a client of Mr Druery's.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is eating into your time, so we will keep going.

Sam HIBBINS: Thank you, that is all right. Now, I just want to go into behaviour around the polling booths and whether you can provide any examples of just what sort of negative behaviour was experienced by any candidates or your volunteers, and what you would like to see specifically in terms of code of conduct or enforcing standards of behaviour?

Natalie KOPAS: There were certainly a lot of reports back from our members who were at polling booths that they were having some fairly negative experiences, although often these were not directly directed at our volunteers, but they were observing things. I myself saw parties who were yelling at other parties, taking affront at their policies, denigrating them – how can they agree with these policies. So there was a lot of this sort of behaviour which was making voters quite uncomfortable. It also led to other safety issues, because voters were then walking on the street trying to avoid being on the path near this sort of behaviour. Perhaps the issue that this comes down to is one of process, because the majority of the time the VEC officials were inside, which is obviously necessary for them to be doing their jobs, but perhaps there needs to be a review of the staffing levels, because by the time a voter got inside – and this is direct feedback from voters – and called attention to something, if the VEC official came outside, everything was already over. They sort of just stayed at the entrance for 5 minutes and then went back inside, so there was not really anything deterring the behaviour from happening again, and this was leading to some issues where some of our people handing out how-to-vote cards felt uncomfortable. But it was certainly something that we received feedback from voters on, that they also felt uncomfortable.

Sam HIBBINS: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Excellent. Mr Lambert.

Nathan LAMBERT: Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for coming in. I was just interested – your submission touched on the short time lines that you faced with respect to the Narracan by-election, which of course occurred in the sad circumstance of the death of a candidate. I was just wondering, you did not go into a

great deal of detail for that and I am not sure if it is something that other parties have experienced, but could you elaborate on which time lines you felt were too short there and the impact of it?

Craig KEALY: I cannot speak about the Narracan by-election –

Natalie KOPAS: I was not specifically involved in that, I am sorry. Our election person who was working on that was not able to be here to today. But just in a very general sense the feedback was that it seemed to be quite short in terms of having to – because the Narracan by-election occurred a while after the election, we were sort of starting from scratch; even though it is only one area, it is essentially a new election. So we have to go through the same process as we would, and normally for us, you know, like in a state election we are preparing a year or more in advance, only we were preparing a couple of weeks in advance. There is the same type of work to be done, just on a smaller scale. So I believe that that was what we were referring to, that it was still a lot of work in a short space of time.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, sure. And look, if anyone wants to provide further detail on notice, feel free. Something we have chatted to other parties about, but I will just be straight, there is a somewhat emerging pattern that we all agree that there are issues with candidate safety and issues with behaviour on polling booths. However, most of us also seem to agree that we are not aware within our own parties of a lot of complaints about our own candidates and volunteers. But did you have any difficult situations where you had to manage the poor behaviour of an Animal Justice candidate or volunteer?

Natalie KOPAS: Not that I am aware of.

Nathan LAMBERT: If that did come up, you have recommended I think in your submission a code of conduct process to be run by the VEC. There is sort of always in these things a choice about whether we make parties do something or the VEC does it for all of us; pros and cons. Do you internally have a code of conduct or an internal process that you would use to manage those situations?

Louise PFEIFFER: Yes, absolutely we do. We have got quite a comprehensive program for our volunteers and candidates alike, including what is expected in terms of their conduct. Bronwyn, did you want to talk a little bit more about the candidates in Victoria? We have an online training program and then we have workshops and we have a range of different, I guess – what would you call them – benchmarks or just like course material that candidates have to go through and participate in and sign off on as well in terms of their conduct, whether they are a candidate or a volunteer. I do not know. Bronwyn, do you want to add anything more to that, because I am aware of what we offer at a national level but I was not sure if you have got things that were rolled out in Victoria?

Bronwyn CURRIE: No, just to reiterate what you said, Louise: we train our volunteers as best as we possibly can. Yes, they have to sign off on our code of conduct and our volunteer behaviour, and all of our volunteers are provided with a handbook on all of the expectations around being a volunteer for our party, so they are well trained. The handbook is supported also by actual training, which they can do through our online modules, so they are as best prepared as they can be.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes. We have heard from the same from the Greens and the same is true for Labor and probably for all the parties. Why then would we ask the VEC to run a parallel process, as your submission has done today?

Natalie KOPAS: So that everyone is on the same page.

Bronwyn CURRIE: Yes, I think that was certainly the experience I had from feedback I personally received during the election from some of our volunteers – that volunteers associated with other parties obviously did not have the same ideas around behaviour as our party does.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes. If I have got time, Chair, one more?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Nathan LAMBERT: I will preface this a little longer because the Member for Prahran sort of jumped in earlier when I asked this question in a different form of a different party. We have a system at the moment in this state where the government provides very significant public funding – much more public funding now of

course than we did in the past – to political parties. It is tens of millions of dollars, but there is not a great deal of transparency on how that money actually gets spent once it gets to parties. I am interested, for a non-major party – what are the big buckets of expenditure for you in terms of things that you have to spend that money on?

Louise PFEIFFER: For each election?

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, for the election just gone – the 2022 election.

Louise PFEIFFER: Bronwyn, you can jump in and correct me, but my understanding is a lot of the money gets spent on obviously election materials: how-to-vote cards, corflutes, that kind of thing. There is also significant expense in digital creative content creation and digital advertising and placement. They are probably the two primary categories of expenditure outside of candidate fees and the like.

Nathan LAMBERT: Do you do opinion polling and research? Is that a big –

Louise PFEIFFER: Not opinion polling. We have at a national level not opinion polling but focus groups. You mentioned focus groups in the previous hearing. We have spent a small amount in total over the last two or three years on focus groups – about \$30,000 in total. But the bulk of it is marketing expenditure for each and every election.

Bronwyn CURRIE: That is correct. The cost of printing how-to-votes especially is huge, and for a small party, that is a very big factor for us. My understanding is some of the bigger parties, for example, given the short time lines and the tight turnaround, will print their HTVs assuming that they are going to be approved by the VEC, and of course they have the funds to reprint if anything around that changes. Whereas for smaller parties like us, we have to wait however long it takes for the VEC to approve our how-to-votes before we can go to print, which often means that voting – certainly pre-poll – has already commenced before our how-to-votes are approved, let alone printed. That is just another issue that we have to factor in. But, yes, the majority of our expenditure is on printing and digital campaigning.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I am just conscious of time. I will go to Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Chair. Can I just clarify one minor point firstly: in the context of the group voting, you sort of talk favourably about New South Wales, or you mentioned New South Wales, where obviously only half of their upper house is built at a time. Are you advocating for that as well, or is that a separate question?

Natalie KOPAS: That is a separate question. We did not address that in this. We were more just focused on abolishing the group voting tickets and on abolishing the regions for a whole-of-state electorate.

David ETTERS HANK: Do you have a view on it?

Craig KEALY: We have not suggested anything about the term of an upper house member, whether it is four years or eight years.

David ETTERS HANK: All right. Thank you. Your recommendation 28 talks about prohibiting political advertising which is false or misleading. Have you got any thoughts on how that would actually be interpreted or applied?

Natalie KOPAS: I believe there needs to be legislation that prohibits this. I could not tell you what exactly that legislation looks like at this point in time, but I think that is the only thing that would ensure that that truth in advertising is happening.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. In terms of, I suppose, both the GVT and also the question of false and misleading, is it your thoughts that that would be done possibly by separate reviews into those questions, or do you have other thoughts as to how this would be progressed?

Natalie KOPAS: Sorry, I am not sure if I quite understand, because the group voting tickets – is that not a major topic that we are here discussing today? Is that not part of this inquiry?

David ETTERSHANK: Oh, yes, it is. I guess it is a question of whether there would be recommendations from this committee or whether there should be a separate process to explore and tease out more broadly the question of group voting tickets.

Natalie KOPAS: I would be hoping it is a recommendation of this inquiry.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It is certainly in the terms of reference.

Lee TARLAMIS: Can I just say that we did make that recommendation in our social media report, that there should be truth in political advertising, so the committee is on the record from its previous review calling for that.

David ETTERSHANK: Okay. Thank you, Chair. That is enough.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Great. Ms Kealy.

Emma KEALY: Thank you very much. And thank you very much for appearing before our committee today. I am interested in your comments around Glenn Druery. In particular I refer to the *Guardian* article which quotes Druery as saying it was the ‘most elaborate sting in minor party history’. Given there were clearly extensive discussions between the Animal Justice Party and Glenn Druery in the lead-up to the 2022 election, what financial arrangements had been discussed or agreed to?

Bronwyn CURRIE: I would not consider that there had been extensive conversations. I do not know what you would base that on.

Emma KEALY: Well, Druery said it was a sting. He says that it was a sting, there was an agreement in place and that Ben Schultz, who was a former election manager, put forward a phone call that pretended he had to leave urgently to go home because he was actually lodging an alternate group voting ticket to what was agreed with the Animal Justice Party. So it sounds like discussions were much more progressed. I am interested to know what financial arrangement was agreed to or what discussions had taken place to that point.

Bronwyn CURRIE: There had been discussions with Glenn Druery by the Victorian election manager. There was no agreement in place and no money had changed hands, and there was no ‘elaborate sting’ from our perspective. When it came time to lodge the group voting tickets, we went with what was best for our party.

Emma KEALY: In the interests of this committee understanding how Druery operates, what discussions would take place if you had gone ahead with the group voting ticket, which involved the other minor parties, the ones that Glenn Druery was speaking to? What financial exchange would take place? Did he talk, or did Animal Justice Party speak, to the amount of money that would be required to be exchanged and how that would be delivered?

Bronwyn CURRIE: I understand what you are asking, and I reflect also on what the Greens had to say about this matter. We are coming here today to say very clearly that we consider what Mr Druery does to be unethical, though not illegal. If you are a minor party within Victoria, obviously we want to get the best outcomes for our party, and that involves talking with many other parties. Unfortunately, that also means having conversations potentially with Mr Druery, which we did. We did not sign any agreement with him. We did not give him any money. My understanding of the way he operates is that there is a \$5000 ‘deal-in fee’, and that if your party successfully has a member of Parliament elected through his system, there is then a fee of \$50,000 payable. I understand that there are different ways that that can be paid, and that that may include providing him with a period of employment.

Emma KEALY: In the 2018 election it was widely reported that the CFMEU funded the agreement with Glenn Druery to have Andy Meddick elected as the Animal Justice Party candidate in Western Victoria. How close was the Animal Justice Party in those deliberations and agreements in this triangle between the CFMEU and Glenn Druery in order to elect Andy Meddick, given you have said that those discussions, those agreements, would be quite unethical?

Louise PFEIFFER: I can speak to that if you like, Bronwyn, because I was on the board of directors then as well and the matter had come up to the board about making an arrangement with Glenn Druery. The board

voted it down and said, 'No, we are not going to deal with him.' So we were removed from – if there was any arrangement between the CFMEU and Glenn Druery, it was not endorsed by the Animal Justice Party.

Emma KEALY: You accepted, though, the votes and the agreement, because obviously Meddick was elected and you had an Animal Justice Party representative in the upper house during the last term of Parliament.

Louise PFEIFFER: We were not privy to any agreement between Glenn Druery and the union. That was not anything that we had any visibility over, and it was not anything that we endorsed either. Of course we were grateful to see Andy elected, but if there was an arrangement, it was not something the Animal Justice Party saw or endorsed.

Emma KEALY: Do you agree it is a bad look to be associated so closely with Druery and getting members elected as an outcome of the group voting ticket system and the vote whispering at the past two elections in a row?

Louise PFEIFFER: Absolutely. I think that any association with Glenn Druery is not a positive brand or party association. I agree with that.

Emma KEALY: If there are not changes supported – because we could put forward recommendations as this committee. We will deliberate the evidence, we will put forward recommendations and it will be up to the government to make any changes to the Act if they choose to do so. If there are not changes to the Act and Druery is able to continue in his vote whispering, will be Animal Justice Party rule out any negotiations or agreement with Druery whether directly or via a third party such as the CFMEU?

Angela POLLARD: It is Angela Pollard here, President of the party. I would just like to say that that is just not something that we have ever done in terms of ever having a deal with Glenn Druery. We have had discussions, but it has never been any further than that, and I do not see that happening in the future, that we will engage in any arrangements with Mr Druery in the future.

Emma KEALY: But those discussions were more than just gathering information. You have actually got discussions which lead up to the minute, to the point where you submit the group voting ticket. I think this has been kind of swept under the carpet a little bit. Serious discussions have been taking place over many years, and we have already just heard evidence that that included discussions around financial arrangements.

Angela POLLARD: Well, it is my understanding that every political party has discussions with Mr Druery. I think that is quite normal. We have never given Mr Druery any money, therefore we have never been in any situation where we are obligated to enter into an agreement with him. If we did not even give \$5000 to be dealt in, you could hardly say that we went down to the wire. You are relying on reports in the newspapers.

Emma KEALY: But you have also just had the party representatives go on the record to say that they have been beneficiaries of Druery's deliberations and vote whispering. People would not know who the Animal Justice Party was if it was not for the discussions that have taken place and the votes that you have harvested through agreements with Glenn Druery. There have been financial discussions. How can you say that you have never had any part of that? Because the Animal Justice Party has had serious benefit out of discussions and agreements with Glenn Druery.

Angela POLLARD: We have not had any agreements with Glenn Druery. I will put that on the record.

Natalie KOPAS: Can I also say, we have not said that we have had financial discussions. Bronwyn said that that was her belief from what she knew from whatever sources. We have not gone on record saying that we have had financial discussions with him. I believe that is a misquote.

Emma KEALY: We will review the Hansard. Thank you very much, Chair.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any other questions?

Emma VULIN: Yes, thank you, Deputy Chair, and thank you for coming today. I have got two quick ones. In your submission you refer to a VEC official telling campaigners that they were required to pay \$75 to display their materials. I have never heard that before, so can you elaborate a little bit on what that was about?

Natalie KOPAS: Yes, we were a little bit stunned too – it was just to do with putting out their corflutes. One of our members who was there handing out how-to-vote cards had – I cannot remember how many corflutes they had with them, but it was the allowed amount. And when they put them up, they were told by the VEC official that they needed to pay \$75 to put one up. They obviously queried it; we had various chats and things where they could try and get information from us to clarify because they were like that was not what they believed to be the case. We of course directed them to the relevant section explaining that that was not the case, and they discussed it with the official there and they were allowed to put one up. But it was just an interesting example that highlighted that obviously different VEC officials had a different understanding or levels of knowledge of the regulations.

Emma VULIN: And my other one, just quickly: in your submission you identified concerns surrounding immunocompromised people and the late announcement from the VEC about telephone voting. I was just wondering: can you tell the committee about what demand you saw for this service?

Natalie KOPAS: Again, this was something that was sort of anecdotally raised, particularly with a few people in my area in west metro where we were lucky enough to have the drive-through area there, but people just being very concerned that they did not know how to plan ahead because they did not know and we made some inquiries about that. Obviously COVID was a factor, but there are other easily transmissible illnesses that people are trying to avoid. I can tell you of multiple people who still are hesitant about entering buildings for long periods of time even when they are masked, when they know that others around them are not. Having that late information just caused a little bit of stress for some people, to the point where it was reported more than once.

Emma VULIN: Thank you for raising those things that I had not actually heard about before. I am done, Deputy.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Vulin. I am just conscious we need to get to lunch, but I will just ask one quick question. You said you had no discussion of financials, but you also have said that a proposal was put to your board in the past. Did that not include – it just sort of beggars belief a bit – any discussion or broad sentiment about financial arrangements?

Louise PFEIFFER: So this is going back ahead of the 2018 election, I guess. There were no numbers mentioned, it was just a philosophical discussion: should we enter into conversations with Glenn Druery with a view to having a formal arrangement in place? And the answer was a categorical no, we were not going to deal with him for the 2018 election – like, at all. If there were any discussions that took place independent of the Animal Justice Party and the board, then, you know, we were not privy to those.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, no worries. I would like to close the meeting. Thank you for appearing before the committee.

Witnesses withdrew.