

# CORRECTED EVIDENCE

## ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the conduct of the 2014 Victorian state election

Melbourne — 11 August 2015

#### Members

Ms Louise Asher — Chair

Ms Ros Spence — Deputy Chair

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn

Mr Martin Dixon

Mr Russell Northe

Ms Fiona Patten

Mr Adem Somyurek

#### Staff

Executive officer: Mr Mark Roberts

Research officer: Mr Nathaniel Reader

#### Witness

Mr Douglas Leitch, federal director, Australian Sex Party.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Leitch, for coming along to the committee to give your presentation. I remind the gallery that there should be no commentary at all from the gallery, either supportive or heckling. You are covered in your evidence by parliamentary privilege, but again, if I could just let you know that parliamentary privilege does not cover anything that you say outside this particular hearing. If I could ask you to state your full name and business address and also to indicate whether you are attending in a private capacity or whether you are representing an organisation. You may then wish to just perhaps address your submission, and then we can perhaps ask you some questions.

**Mr LEITCH** — My name is Douglas Angus Leitch, our business address is 200 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, and I am representing the Australian Sex Party.

**The CHAIR** — If you would like to perhaps — —

**Mr LEITCH** — It is not as long as the others, you might be pleased to know.

**The CHAIR** — I have noticed it is not as long. I can assure you that we have read them all.

**Mr LEITCH** — I am both the federal director and Victorian party secretary of the Australian Sex Party. I would like to thank the chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, Louise Asher, for inviting me to speak today in regard to our submission about the 2014 Victorian state election. The Australian Sex Party was successful at the 2014 Victorian state election, with Fiona Patten elected to represent the people of Northern Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council. We broadly believe the current preferential voting system in place suitably reflects the voting intentions of electors in both northern metro and across the state generally.

Ms Patten's election represents the progressive voting intentions of the people of Melbourne's northern metro through the alliances made with the Basics Rock 'n' Roll Party, animal justice, the cyclists, the Greens, the Liberal Democrats, the Voluntary Euthanasia Party and other like-minded candidates. The result showed that the current preferential system of voting works. We were not elected on socially conservative votes, for example.

We believe there is a scope for change with the amount of time available for early voting, along with verification as to why a voter is unable to vote on polling day. There is also an expectation that staff working for the VEC at early voting centres confirm with voters why they are not available to vote on polling day, as per the intention of early voting.

The Australian Sex Party believes the time available for early voting should be reduced to a period of seven days. A longer period of time is a drain on the resources of the VEC and smaller parties. In short we think that the current system is in little need of change and has delivered the people of Victoria with an outcome in line with voters' intentions, and that has been reflected across both houses of Parliament.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Victorian Electoral Commission for the efficient, helpful and patient manner in which the 2014 election was conducted. They are standard-bearers for the democratic process in Australia. I commend our submission to you and look forward to any questions you might have.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. Can I just thank you for thanking me, but it is the committee that actually made the decision rather than me personally, so I just want to spread the praise.

**Mr LEITCH** — Thank you, committee.

**Ms SPENCE** — You have suggested the reduction to seven days. Is there any reason why you have chosen a seven-day period? What was that based on?

**Mr LEITCH** — With fixed terms in Victoria we believe there is plenty of time available for people to organise themselves to vote, and seven days is plenty of opportunity to do that. We would suggest a full seven days, though, including a Sunday, to give people the full opportunity to express their vote.

**The CHAIR** — The public love the pre-poll. Perhaps ‘love’ is the wrong word, but the number of people flocking to the pre-poll would indicate to me that the public likes that method of voting in increasing numbers rather than election day. You have mentioned the strain on your volunteers and indeed the VEC, as you have just clarified verbally. What do you think is the more important principle — what the public would like to see as the method for casting their vote or what your party and the VEC can manage?

**Mr LEITCH** — Good question. It sort of goes back to the previous question. It is not like people can be ill prepared, and a party should also be prepared, but to give everyone an equal chance, with small parties with limited resources and limited funding, to reduce it to seven days, I think, for a party and the VEC is ample time. Seven days is more than enough time for a democratic process to work, to organise your life if you are going away et cetera.

**Ms PATTEN** — I am not sure whether you did get a chance to read Malcolm Mackerras’s submission.

**Mr LEITCH** — A little.

**Ms PATTEN** — A little. He was very concerned about the way we did our how-to-vote card. If you have not seen those comments, that is fine, but if you did see those comments —

**Mr LEITCH** — In regard to the wording?

**Ms PATTEN** — Yes, it was in regard to the wording and the way it said, ‘Don’t vote below the line’.

**Mr LEITCH** — I think he was being a little bit picky with his use of words because the Australian Sex Party obliged everything that was required with the Victorian Electoral Commission. Finer words — use of English — I do not think affected the way people voted in following the how-to-vote card.

**The CHAIR** — Do you want to take this opportunity to say anything extra?

**Mr LEITCH** — I do not think so, but thank you for your time.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for being so succinct. It is very clear in terms of your submission and your presentation. I advise you that you will receive a Hansard transcript, a record of this proceeding, in about two weeks, and feel free to amend or change it if you believe there has been an error in the transcript. This is not an opportunity for you to completely change, obviously, the presentation; it is confined to errors.

**Mr LEITCH** — Sure.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for appearing before the committee.

**Mr LEITCH** — Thank you very much.

**Witness withdrew.**