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Australia Post Plan for Blockchain Voting by 2017

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The Australian government-owned Australia Post has unveiled plans that it will conduct tests through digital voting via the blockchain technology in a bid to reduce costs and improve efficiency. The plans have been met with criticism from a prominent privacy consultant.

Recently a submission was presented to the Victorian Electoral Matters Committee (<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/emc/article/2823>) by the Australia Post who intend to operate electronic elections utilizing the blockchain technology.

According to ZDNet (<http://www.zdnet.com/article/australia-post-details-plan-to-use-blockchain-for-voting/>), the postal service thinks that with the use of digital voting it will improve on convenience, better counting, reduced costs, transparency, and efficiency.

In the submission, Tim Adamson, Australia Post state director of Victoria Government and Tasmania said that the emergence of cryptocurrencies via blockchain technology highlighted opportunities to repurpose the technology to capture various digital transactions in immutable, distributed, and secure ways.

He said:

In many ways voting is an ideal use case for blockchain technology application beyond crypto currency. With demand for digitisation high and technology shifts opening up new approaches we believe that now is the time to solve the digital voting challenge.

Tamper-Proof System?

According to Adamson, the use of blockchain would provide the ideal solution for a tamper-proof system that would eliminate manipulation, provide traceability, but still deliver anonymity.

However, critics of the idea have come out to view their thoughts.

One such critic is Steve Wilson of security outfit Lockstep. Speaking to The Register (http://www.theregister.co.uk/2016/08/22/australia_postblockchain_for_voting_proposal/) he gave his thoughts on the use of blockchain as a basis for voting. As blockchains don't require third parties, management or administrators to function, no one needs to know who or what the account holders, nodes, or miners are to trust them.

He added that while it's useful, it doesn't go well with voting:

Blockchain is not necessary, and more importantly, neither is it sufficient.

Trust is a Necessary Component

Wilson went on to state that with bitcoin trust is not a necessary factor because users can operate the system without needing to trust each other. On the other hand, when it comes to an election, trust is a vital element.

He stated that an electronic voting system is the complete opposite of a decentralized blockchain because the voting system has a trusted third party involved, such as the Electoral Commission.

The Register references Satoshi's Bitcoin paper, where he says that 'the main benefits are lost if a trusted third party is still required to prevent double-spending.'

Australia Post as Trusted Third Party

It would seem, though, that the Australia Post is seeking to become a trusted third party by detailing how it would handle Australia's voting in elections.

Adamson said the postal service foresees a digital transaction where voting credits can be used by the voter.

He stated:

Permission to vote would be secured through the use of secure digital access keys sent securely to each voter. A ballot would be cryptographically represented within the blockchain, with each vote linked to the voter through their preference choice stored within the blockchain in a way that anonymises and protects that information from being publicly accessible.

If the go-ahead is given, then it is believed that a partnership with the NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) would commence with investment in the iVote product with western Australia aiming to use it in the March 2017 election. However, the iVote is reported to be vulnerable to the FREAK flaw.

Of course, this is not the first instance where the use of blockchain technology has been discussed with voting in Australia.

Earlier this year, [CCN \(https://www.cryptocoinsnews.com/australian-political-party-blockchain-ideals/\)](https://www.cryptocoinsnews.com/australian-political-party-blockchain-ideals/) reported that a new Australian political party, the Flux Party, was intending to ‘upgrade democracy’ and change the way Australians vote by using the Flux app, which had been built entirely on the blockchain platform.

The aim of the party was to restore the power back to the people as well as solving online voting problems such as ballot secrecy, incorruptibility, and verification.

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