

Release: Progressive parties take aim at Green push to end the GVT

Progressive minor parties are upping the ante in the fight against the removal of the GVT. At a meeting held in Sydney on 8th of October, minor parties from the Alliance for Progress drafted a set of resolutions. The Alliance for Progress ([more details here](#)) was established to collaborate on campaigns around specific issues, share resources, and to negotiate preference agreements on the basis of principles and policy similarities. The resolutions are:

1) The Alliance for Progress calls for an independent enquiry to investigate the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. We believe the current proposal to change the preferencing system will harm democracy. The changes continue an anti-democratic system that already gives advantages to the major parties, including public funding that minor parties cannot access, deposits for running in elections that are only refunded to major parties (which were materially increased at the 2013 election), and red tape that makes it very hard for small organisations to run (which is not applied to the major parties).

We want to make the voting system democratic and we need an independent body, not sitting parliamentarians, to investigate it. The minor parties received 24% of the primary preferences in the 2013 election, yet only make up 10% of the currently elected senators.

2) We will be lobbying the major parties against supporting these changes.

3) We will be taking direct electoral action against parties that support these changes.

4) We endorse [Antony Green's proposal](#) to make below the line voting formally optional after 6 preferences.

The parties that agreed to this statement include:

- Future Party
- Sustainable Population Party
- Online Direct Democracy
- Sex Party
- Australian Equality Party
- Bullet Train Party
- Australian Progressives
- Animal Justice Party
- Renewable Energy Party
- Building Australia Party
- Life Extension, Science and Technology Party
- Transhumanist Party of Australia

Further comments from members of the Alliance for Progress:

Graham Askey, Registered Officer of the Renewable Energy Party, said “The proponents of eliminating Group Voting Tickets are dressing up self interest as principle. The Coalition's and Xenophon's self interests in removing GVT's are well founded - the Greens' are miscalculated.”

James Jansson, Alliance for Progress organiser and leader of the Future Party, said of the proposed changes, “The GVT is not perfect, but that doesn't mean any of the alternatives being proposed by the major parties are any better. The argument is that the system doesn't represent voters' intentions, but the GVT preferences are available online, and they are available at all polling places on request.

“The Green's proposed system will be a disaster. In the current system, all votes are counted, and people who vote for a non-major party occasionally elect a non-major party. If the NSW election is anything to go by optional preferential above the line voting will result in the majority of those votes simply expiring. The voter may as well put their ballot in a rubbish bin instead of the ballot box if they just vote '1'. Lee Rhiannon, who is strongly pushing for this change, is well aware of this as she has been a member of parliament in NSW for many years.

“Nick Xenophon's proposed system sounds a bit better, but there are definitely problems with it. Being forced to preference at least 3 boxes will force the AEC to advertise heavily to encourage voters to fill in 3 boxes. But what will the AEC do when people don't fill out 3 preferences? Will the AEC consider a single '1' vote above the line as valid? If it doesn't, there will be a huge spike in the informal vote, which is unacceptable. The alternative is a saving mechanism, that will still count a single '1' above the line. This is the Greens' proposed system in disguise with all of the vote expiry problems associated with it.

“In a twist of irony, such a system will be subject to laws that make it illegal to tell people how they can vote informally but still have their vote count. This is far from the intention of making the voting system more transparent.

“Additionally, this system requires data entry of all preferences for all ballots, which would be a monumentally difficult task. I would be very interested to hear what the AEC has to say about data entry of so many ballots.

“If we believe it is too hard for individuals to express their preferences, we could take [Antony Green's suggestion of optional below the line preferences](#). This means a voter could vote above the line with a single '1' and have their preferences distributed automatically, or vote below the line in a manner they see fit with ease.

“We are discussing the potential of running in strategic lower house seats. No formal decision has been made about the seats that we should run in, however seats with strong Greens support (such as Melbourne and Grayndler) are being considered. What our how-to-votes say will be informed by each major party's support for removing the GVT and replacing it with the democratically inferior alternatives. If the changes are introduced to

parliament or passed prior to the election by the Greens and the AEC cannot implement it for the next election, the Greens will certainly hear about it in our preference negotiations.

"In the 2010 election, minor parties received 13.8% of the vote, however only one minor party senator was elected (2.5% of all senators elected). In the 2013 election, minor parties received 23.5% of the vote, however only one minor party senator was elected (17.5% of all senators elected). "The minor parties did not receive their fair share of senators in the 2010 election. Now that the minor parties are catching up to what's fair, the big parties are doing all they can to make sure that the minor parties aren't fairly represented"

Vinay Orekondy, Australian Progressives Party president said "It's a massive conflict of interest for our elected parliamentarians to be making decisions affecting their own electability. In a time when Australians are expressing dissatisfaction with politics on an enormous scale, we have significant concerns with any changes which seek to reinforce the status quo"

Anna Hall, Vice President of Animal justice said "The best thing that could emerge from this mess is if the electoral system could be placed under the jurisdiction of an independent arbiter, like the Electoral Commission, because politicians asked to fairly enact reform to their own system is inherently biased."