

REVIEWING THE VICTORIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM



This Parliamentary Committee role-play involves students taking the parts of:

- Parliamentary Committee members;
- members of lobby groups presenting their views to the Committee; and
- the media.

The purpose of the Committee hearing is to draw out the many views and opinions on the key issues in an informal and cooperative manner. Questions formed by the Committee should assist lobby groups to accurately present their viewpoints, so that everyone may understand them.

It is important to stress that this is a role-play, and that students put their own views aside to take on their respective roles.

1. Preparation

Parliamentary committees investigate particular issues in order to recommend to Parliament what may be the best law to pass on a particular area.

Parliamentary committees are composed of members of parliament, but they may also comprise members from the general public, particularly those who have special expertise.

The function of such a committee is to assist parliament in the performance of its duties. The committee does this by investigating, advising and reporting to the government.

The following preparation is recommended:

- It is useful to cover the following topics from Your Opinion Counts to provide background understanding for the role-plays:
 - Democracy, Parliament and Representatives;
 - Active Citizenship; and
 - Voting Rights and Responsibilities.
- Time should be spent as a class examining the attached Notice of Committee, ensuring that all students understand the four issues to be examined by the Committee.



Notice of Committee

Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

ELECTORAL REFORM

Hearing into matters concerning the effectiveness of the current electoral framework of Victoria.

The Standing Committee on Electoral Matters was established to monitor the issues surrounding electoral matters in the State of Victoria.

One of the Committee's duties is, from time to time, to inquire into and report to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly on the effectiveness on Victoria's electoral system.

The Committee now invites persons and organisations to express views on any of the following four aspects of voting in Victoria:

- the voting age at Victorian elections;
- the voting system used at elections for both houses of the Victorian Parliament;
- the issue of compulsory voting at Victorian elections; and
- any matter that affects any aspect of the franchise at Victorian elections.

The Committee Secretary will provide notes to assist in the preparation of written submissions. Upon acceptance, the Committee will make submissions public. Persons lodging submissions must not make those submissions public without the approval of the Committee. The closing date for written submissions is 15 September 2006.

Provision will also be made for oral presentations to be made to the Committee at a public forum. Applications need to be made in writing, and permission will depend on the nature of the written submission. Those groups appearing before the Committee will be notified in due time.

The address for submissions is:

1 Mill Street
Parkwood Victoria 3004

Committee Secretary

- c. Divide the class, according to numbers, into lobby groups, Committee members and the media. In a class of 28, there should be approximately:
- four members of the Parliamentary Committee;
 - three members of each of the six lobby groups (see attached listing and what each group represents); and
 - six members of the media, two from each of television (using video), two from radio, and two press reporters.
- d. Each lobby group should prepare a five minute presentation to the Parliamentary Committee.
- e. Committee members and the media need to be fully aware of the range of issues beforehand in order to be effective. They should study the information and identify what they believe will be the major issues to be considered in each of the four areas for consideration.
- f. Committee members should identify the major issues and some basic questions to guide the lobby groups on how they are to present their views on each of the four issues.

The views of lobby groups

Voters in a mature Victoria

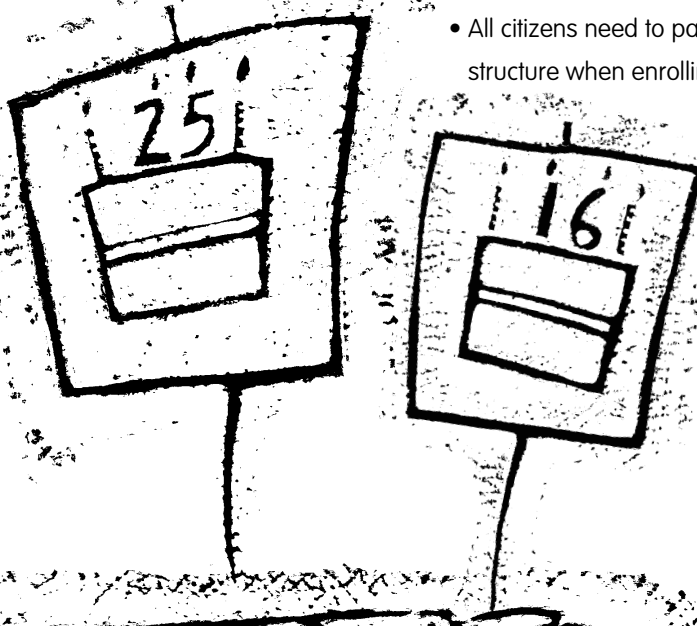
We hold that:

- The voting age in Victoria should be lifted to 25, because that is the age of maturity in this modern world.
- The preferential voting system is the preferred system for the Lower House of the Victorian Parliament, and proportional representation is preferred for the Upper House.
- Voting should be compulsory.
- All citizens need to pass a test on government structure when enrolling to vote.

Youth for Victoria

We hold that:

- The voting age in Victoria should be lowered to 16, because that is the age of maturity in this modern world.
- The first-past-the-post system is the preferred system for the Lower House of the Victorian Parliament, and single member electorates with the preferential voting system is preferred for the Upper House.
- Voting should not be compulsory.
- All citizens need to pass a test on government structure when enrolling to vote.



Protect Australia Lobby

We hold that:

- The voting age in Victoria should be lifted to 21, because that is the age of maturity in this modern world.
- The preferential voting system is the preferred system for the Lower House and proportional representation is the correct system for the Upper House.
- Voting should be compulsory.
- All citizens need to pass a test on government structure when enrolling to vote, combined with an English test.
- Further, new citizens must wait five years after citizenship before they may vote, so they may understand the issues.

Rural Victoria Electoral Lobby

We hold that:

- The voting age in Victoria should remain at 18, because that is the age of maturity in this modern world.
- The preferential voting system is the preferred system for the Lower House of the Victorian Parliament, and the proportional system is preferred for the Upper House.
- Voting should be compulsory.
- That the number of rural members in the Parliament be increased in both houses.

Victorian Women Voters

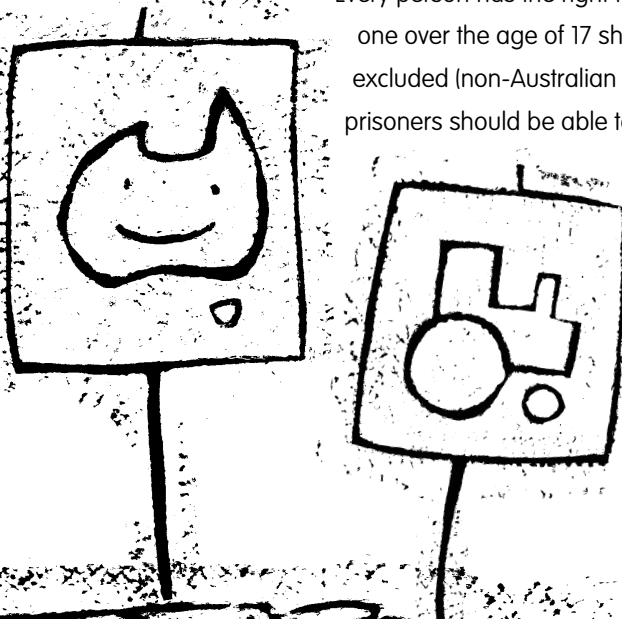
We hold that:

- The voting age in Victoria should remain at 18, because that is the age of maturity in this modern world.
- The preferential voting system is the preferred system for the Lower House of the Victorian Parliament, with half the Upper House elected from female candidates and half from male candidates using the proportional representation voting system.
- Voting should not be compulsory.
- The system of voting needs to allow a greater number of women in the Parliament.

Victorians for Voter Reform

We hold that:

- The voting age in Victoria should be lowered to 17, because that is the age of maturity in this modern world.
- That the first-past-the-post voting system is the preferred system for the Lower House of the Victorian Parliament, and the Upper House be abolished as it is unnecessary.
- Voting should not be compulsory.
 - Every person has the right to a vote and no one over the age of 17 should be excluded (non-Australian citizens and prisoners should be able to vote).



2. Lobby groups prepare written and oral submissions

Distribute the following guidelines to enable students to make intelligent, clear and responsible submissions to the Parliamentary Committee.

The Committee hearings are based on a question and answer format, so each lobby group will need to have a solid understanding of each of the issues. Members of each group may choose to specialise in particular issues and handle any questions on these by the Committee.

Use the information in Your Opinion Counts to produce clear statements that support the views of your lobby group. That is, use one of the 'facts' as a reason to support your point of view. For example, 'No other western democracy has compulsory voting, so we stand alone in forcing our citizens to elect leaders that do not represent them', or 'The proportion of women in parliament compared to the proportion of women in society clearly indicates that the parliament and voting system needs serious attention in order to be equitable'.

Further develop these clear statements by giving practical examples of how your group's suggestions would improve the voting system. Tell stories of how your ideas will help ordinary people or special groups in the community.

Develop your statements and stories one by one, and try to anticipate the questions that the Committee will ask.

3. Conduct the Committee hearing

Set up a room with tables at the front for the Committee, a table facing the Committee at which lobby groups will present their submissions, and seats at the back for non-presenting groups and the media.

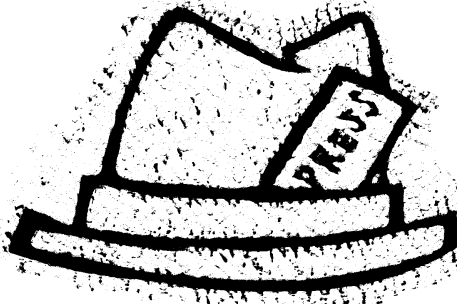
The Committee calls on each group to present their submission. Questions should be friendly. The aim is to assist in discovering all there is to know about electoral issues.

The Committee is trying to get the full story from the lobby groups. They will ask questions such as: 'What do you mean exactly by that?' 'Could you make your views a bit clearer please'. In short, all the 'who, what, when, why and how' questions that are left unsaid by the lobby groups. However, the Committee members should fully explore any issue, providing that it is done in the spirit of the Committee.

The Committee needs to take careful notes on the matters presented by each lobby group. The following pro-forma could be used to make a record of what was said at the hearing.

Pro-forma for Committee members (and media)

Lobby group	Strengths	Weaknesses	Summary



4. Media report

The TV, radio and press reporters should present their reports to all of the students involved in the role-play following the Committee hearings. They should cover the main points made and report on any major differences in the positions of each lobby group.

The media may present their findings as a TV news report, a radio report and a newspaper article.

The class should assess the media reports according to the following:

- Have they accurately recorded the events?
- Is the news report interesting and attention getting?
- Is there media bias?

5. Revision and Committee conclusions

The Committee should have time to prepare and report their findings.

This should include a written report summarising the major submissions, as well as a verbal presentation of its findings regarding each of the four main issues:

- the voting age at Victorian elections;

- the voting system used at elections for both houses of the Victorian Parliament;
- the issue of compulsory voting at Victorian elections; and
- any matter that affects any aspect of the franchise at Victorian elections.

The media will then prepare and present their final reports for the public on the Committee's findings. They will do this using TV (video), radio (tape) and a newspaper article. These reports should be presented to the class.

Finally, there should be a class discussion on the following:

- What do students now think of the main issues?
- Which group most accurately represented their views?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system?
- What improvements can they see in the Victorian electoral system?