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Mr Mark Roberts
Executive Officer
Electoral Matters Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Roberts

Inquiry into electronic voting

National Seniors welcomes the opportunity to provide input on electronic voting for consideration by the Electoral Matters Committee.

National Seniors is a not-for-profit organisation that gives voice to issues that affect Australians aged 50 years and over. It is the largest membership organisation of its type in Australia. Our interest in this Inquiry is ensuring the voting experiences of older people are adequately considered in assessing the effectiveness of electronic voting and that wider use of electronic voting is based on cost-benefit analysis to ensure security and integrity.

Effectiveness of electronic voting

National Seniors considers universal accessibility, privacy and verification to be fundamental principles in determining the effectiveness of electronic voting. Importantly, development of electronic voting systems must consolidate trust over time, which depends on the socio-political context in which it was introduced as well as the operational, technical and legal foundations.¹

We consider current initiatives in Victoria to be effective, whereby electronic voting is only provided at voting centres and is only accessible by those who require assistance to vote because of vision impairment, motor impairment or insufficient literacy skills.

If expanding the use of electronic voting to the general electorate, National Seniors prefers this occur gradually in designated polling centres to ensure universal accessibility for older people who may not have ready access to the internet. We believe electronic voting at designated polling centres also provides added peace of mind that these votes are private and verifiable because devices are not exposed to the internet and can be supervised in the polling centres.

¹ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2011, *Introducing Electronic Voting: Essential Considerations* at <http://www.eods.eu/library/IDEA.Introducing-Electronic-Voting-Essential-Considerations.pdf>

National Seniors recognises the potential of electronic voting as an alternative to postal voting, with benefits in terms of streamlined counting, reduced risk of informal votes, and improved logistics for those in geographically dispersed areas.

Older people are heavy users of postal voting and there has been a steady increase in postal voting. Changing the traditional postal voting system would need to carefully consider the needs of older voters to avoid risk of disengagement. One option is mobile internet voting where electoral staff visit people in their homes or localities and provide portable devices with internet connections so they can cast their vote.² While this ensures accessibility for older voters, it raises concerns about a lack of independence in voting and potential for undue influence.

The New South Wales Electoral Commission noted that electors who registered for iVote online voting were more likely to have voted than those who registered for postal voting, implying that the iVote system is increasing or at least maintaining voting participation. However, 25 per cent of voters aged over 65 distrust the iVote process and nearly half are unlikely to use iVote in the future.³

National Seniors believes older people would be adaptive to electronic voting provided the technology used guaranteed privacy and verifiable results. Internet based voting outside controlled polling centres does not appear to satisfy these requirements at this point in time.

Security and integrity of electronic voting

Concerns about security and integrity of internet based voting are outstanding issues that undermine confidence in electronic voting for voters of all ages.

National Seniors supports greater use of electronic voting, particularly use of electronic roll for marking attendance and electronic scanning of ballot papers, but considers full replacement of paper voting with internet based voting to be premature. This is consistent with findings of the inquiry by the Federal Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.⁴

The Australian Electoral Commission has highlighted vulnerability with internet based voting and the significant cost of alternatives that involve providing equipment to support electronic voting at each voting centre. This year's federal election is predicated to cost around \$227 million, up from \$194 million in 2013 and \$161 million in 2010.⁵ The cost of developing an electronic voting system for large-scale application is unknown but industry estimates suggest there would be cost savings.⁶

National Seniors believes any move to increase use of electronic voting in Victoria needs to demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the costs.

² Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand 2013, Internet Voting in Australian Election Systems at <http://www.ecanz.gov.au/research/files/internet-voting-australian-election-systems.pdf>

³ NSW Electoral Commission 2015, *Report on the Conduct of the 2015 State General Election*, at <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquirySubmission/Summary/54056/Submission%2020%20-%20NSW%20Electoral%20Commission%20.PDF>

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia 2014, *Second interim report on the inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 federal election: An assessment of electronic voting options*, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Canberra.

⁵ University of Melbourne 2016, *ElectionWatch* and Australian Election Commission data.

⁶ Australian Information Industry Association 2016, *Election cliffhanger prompts e-Voting rethink* at <https://aiia.com.au/news/aiia-news/aiia-news/2016/election-cliffhanger-prompts-e-voting-rethink>

Implementation of any new voting technology, whether internet based or in polling centres, requires additional voter awareness and education. This includes pilot testing with older people to ensure the technology used allows them to independently cast their vote as well as general information about choice of technology to promote social acceptance.

Overall, National Seniors supports greater use of technology to improve the cost-effectiveness of the voting process. The technology focus should be on automating the count and not necessarily replacing the paper ballot. With adequate testing, transparent audit procedures and system design that reflects the needs of vulnerable voters, including older people, there is potential for technologies to provide speedy and accurate election results that maintain electoral integrity.

If you would like to discuss any of these proposals, please contact Mr Arnold Bates, Chair of the National Seniors Victorian Policy Advisory Group via policy@nationalseniors.com.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Saunders', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Saunders
Chief Advocate