

# **Antony Green - Toying with the Senate: the Western Australian Senate Election Re-run and Proposals for Reform**

**By Melissa Ferreira**

I was recently lucky enough to be selected to attend the Samuel Griffith Society Conference in Melbourne on a scholarship from the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation.

The first session of the conference was focused on the 'Institutions of Federation', which included a presentation by the ABC's Antony Green, well known for his work in election analysis. His topic: 'Toying with the Senate: the Western Australian Senate Election Re-run and Proposals for Reform'. Antony's experience and background in statistical analysis meant he was able to provide a number of very interesting observations about the way in which our Senate elections are run, have been run in the past and should be run in the future.

The issue of gaming the vote in Senate elections is a serious one, particularly when the balance of power becomes the plaything of previously unheard-of micro-parties. While there are arguments to be made that this will result in more scrutiny of the government and elevate the Senate from its status as a 'rubber-stamp', the concern is that there is currently a real lack of transparency in the way voting preference deals are being done and who our votes end up actually electing. A prime example of preference flows resulting in questionable outcomes is that of Senator Ricky Muir achieving a six-year term with only 0.51% of the vote.

The reality of the current system of voting is that parties engage in preference harvesting, instead of attempting to support the next most similar party in terms of ideology or policy. This trend means that rather than supporting a 'competitor' parties currently send their preferences to all sorts of unexpected candidates and parties. The problem is that the average voter has no idea where their preference will end up (although the preference flows are available on-line), nor the inclination to stand in the booth and number some 77 boxes.

Mr Green had a number of proposals to rectify the current situation including shifting towards an above-the-line preferential voting system, tightening up the rules surrounding the registration of parties for the Senate ballot and changing the focus of the rules that define invalid votes to more readily enabling validity.

Antony Green's presentation was immediately followed by presentations from Senator David Leyonhjelm and Senator Bob Day who certainly did not agree with the allegations of 'gaming' the system and provided an interesting counterinterview.

The Samuel Griffith Conference was an excellent opportunity to hear from some of Australia's finest legal minds and foremost constitutional scholars. The range of topics presented on, combined with the calibre of delegates at the conference meant that there was always a spirited debate to be had around the dinner table and there were many interesting conversations to be had in the breaks.