



DAVID MORRIS MP

**Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government
Member for Mornington**

Participating in Our Democracy Legislative Assembly, 2 September 2009

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — This afternoon I want to address the recent report of the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into voter participation and informal voting. The coalition of course is represented on the committee by the member for Malvern as Deputy Chair, the member for Sandringham and Mr Philip Davis, a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the other place.

It is somewhat ironic that the subject of this report is perhaps arcane except to those of us who are participants in the electoral process and our associates, our party members and some academics, but the opportunity to participate in the selection of our parliamentary representatives, to participate in the selection of law-makers and indirectly in the selection of the government is one of the most important and precious privileges that any civilised society has. Yet we all know that in Australia there is what could at best be called widespread disengagement. Many people vote only because they believe they are forced to. They do not want to pay the fine for not voting.

I suspect that far more actually claim that that is why they vote than is the case, but still a significant number simply attend and mark their ballot paper because they feel compelled to do so. Perhaps that is because the rights enjoyed by Australians today have not been won through insurrection or armed revolt — with the exception of Eureka — but had it been necessary for Australians to go through that process, I do not believe we would have shirked the challenge. We value our freedoms and democracy, but we are fortunately the inheritors and the beneficiaries of the democratic traditions established by our forebears. They have of course evolved from that point and taken on a particularly Australian tinge in their application to the way we operate today, but they are in large part the democratic traditions that we inherited.

If history proves anything, though, it is that we must be vigilant. Today is the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II with the German invasion of Poland, an invasion by a formerly democratic nation, and it probably marked the final overtaking of that democracy by the fascist state. We need to retain our vigilance; we need to ensure that we retain the integrity of our electoral system.

Mr Tully, the Victorian electoral commissioner, reminded us in his evidence before the committee that we all have a role to play, whether it is as members of Parliament, of political parties or educational institutions, the media or the electoral commission. To that list I would certainly add the citizens of Victoria, particularly those who are engaged — and we all need to ensure that those who are not engaged are encouraged

to become engaged and to participate, because in doing so we get a better result for all.

Without going into too much detail, it is interesting to note that the turnout for elections in the Victorian Parliament does not seem to have changed much between the 1970s, when there was a turnout of 93.3 per cent, and 2006, when there was a turnout of 92.73 per cent. Similarly, the turnout results for the House of Representatives in the federal Parliament was 95.4 per cent in 1974 and 94.8 per cent in 2007.

I want to touch on two points that were made in the minority report — that is, the opposition expressed to direct or automatic involvement of a citizen by their being enrolled without their knowledge. That is fundamentally undemocratic. Similarly, on the proposal to consider the so-called ticket voting, by which a voter puts a figure 1 in a box and then preferences flow from there automatically, it is presumptive of the Parliament or the government to consider that they can guess what a citizen intended when marking their ballot paper. I reject both those concepts.

I commend the Electoral Matters Committee, particularly the coalition members on their minority report, and I look forward to the government's response.
