

## **Analysis of Liberal-National Draft Constitution**

Details of the proposed merger between the Liberal and National parties have only just become available to party members on Tuesday of this week. The proposal which has been floated by State President Gary Spence was the product of secret negotiations with the National Party over the past week or two. Up until that time no one except the President, State Director and a select few allies of Mr Spence had been privy to any details of proposal or the negotiations with The Queensland Nationals. Even the Vice Presidents of the party, who were elected to represent members were excluded from the discussions and kept in the dark.

Now that people have had a chance to examine the draft Constitution of the amalgamated entity, we have some idea of what Mr Spence's proposal entails. There are a few key points that can be taken out of this document that members ought to be aware of before they cast their vote in the plebiscite.

### **The devil in the detail – power centralized in hands of a few**

Unlike the existing LP structure, the power and control of the party will be centralized in the power of an elite few like never before. Members are effectively left out in the cold.

The proposal sees the creation of an all-powerful State Executive that will be made up of just two directly elected positions from Convention: President and Vice President.

Other members of the proposed executive will be the 10 Regional Chairmen (see below), the Young Liberal-National President, the Women's Council President and 6 presidential-apointees.

This greatly diminishes the role of State Convention which currently elects the full executive with the President, 5 Vice Presidents and 6 State Council members. This provides good representation where the rank and file membership of the party has ultimate control about the make-up of the executive. Under the new proposal, members will only elect 2 people and the President will be given ultimate control with the ability to appoint 6 people to the State Executive. It is really a winner-takes-all approach.

The proposed new Executive will have ultimate power. It will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the party, will have the power to invalidate preselections (that is to quash/reverse the decision of local members) and will be empowered to expel members or not accept new members without providing reasons.

### **A State Council with no power**

The proposed new Executive will be complemented by a State Council that will have no real power.

It will have an unworkable 250+ members.

The proposed new State Council will be composed of the State Executive, all elected representatives (Federal & State MPs and Councillors), all Honorary Life Members and all FEC/SEC Chairmen and will **only meet twice a year**.

It really only has a complimentary role given that all power will lie with the proposed new State Executive and the fact that it will only meet twice a year. Currently, the State Council (which has a great deal more power) currently meets every month and Management Committee meets every second week.

The composition of the proposed State Council is also concerning. The inclusion of Honorary Life Members will strongly favour the National Party that has hundreds (possibly thousands) of Honorary Life Members compared with just a small handful of Liberals. The National Party has been in the practice of giving out a huge number of life memberships, whereas the Liberal Party has only given out a few life memberships and only to those who have provided years of dedicated service to the party.

The proposal also gives an unhealthy amount of power to elected representatives, without any extra representation for ordinary members of the party.

### **One Vote, One Value goes out the window**

The proposal will also see the creation of Ten Regions that will have representation on the proposed State Executive. They are as follows: Gold Coast, Brisbane South, Brisbane Central, Brisbane North, Sunshine Coast, Wide Bay, Central Queensland, South-West Queensland, Far-North Queensland, North Queensland.

In something reminiscent of the pre-Fitzgerald, pre-EARC Joh days, these regions will be unrepresentative, with the 5 Regions outside the South East corner having roughly half the number of members than those regions in SEQ, but the same representation of State Executive and State Council. (77% of Queenslanders live in SEQ)

Essentially, the vote of someone in Northern or Western Queensland will have twice the value of someone living in the South East corner. The democratic process and the notion of one vote, one value are key tenets of Liberal philosophy.

These areas are National Party strongholds. This aspect of the proposal is another example of how it will favour the current National Party and its members and its interests at the expense of the Liberal Party.

### **An unrepresentative State Convention**

The proposal will also see an unrepresentative allocation of delegates to the annual State Convention. Unlike the current structure which provides for a delegate for every 10 members, the proposed structure will provide for 5 delegates for every State Electorate irrespective of the number of people in that electorate.

It will be branch stackers heaven.

That means that a traditionally Liberal electorate with hundreds of members, such as Moggill, Clayfield or Surfers Paradise will have the same representation at the Convention as an traditional ALP electorate with few Liberal members like Inala or Woodridge and little chance we will ever win.

It will effectively disenfranchise local branch members in areas where there are many Liberal Party members and totally diminish the role of the branch (as a party unit) in having a say in direction of the party.

It will also allow for rampant branch stacking, whereby power of the party could be assumed with as little as 10% of the party membership. It is worth noting that a similar system in NSW, where branches have a capped delegate entitlement has just seen years of instability and the recent resignation of the State President, Vice President and other executive members.

## **Conclusions**

There is no doubt that the structure of the new party greatly reduces the role of ordinary, rank and file members of the Party. Power will be centralized in the power of a few and so-called 'representative' bodies of the party will simply not be representative.

The proposal favours the National Party at the expense of Liberal Party members and their right to have a say. The National Party will have control of a merged entity, even without a Constitution like this one that entrenches their power. **The National Party has twice the membership of the Liberal Party and twice the representation in the State Parliament.**

**It is an extremely right wing and agrarian based organization that is quite different from the broadchurch of the modern Liberal Party.**

It is also worth noting that it may, in fact, torpedo an imminent Federal amalgamation, because once control is handed over to the National Party in Queensland they will be likely to resist a move Federally to incorporate the National Party within a democratically-framed Liberal Party Constitution.

All members need to be well-informed and know the real effect of this proposal before casting their vote in the plebiscite.

They have refused to tell members what percentage of the party will need to vote in favour of the proposal for it to succeed. One would expect that for a vote of this kind they would need at least 75% rather than a mere 50% + 1.