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Restraining Electoral Dictatorship - The Upper House Solution? Edited by Nicholas Aroney, Scott Prasser and J R Nethercote, University of Western Australia Press, 2008

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Abstract

This book has its geneses in the papers presented at the 2006 conference “Improving Government Accountability in Queensland: The Upper House Solution”. It is based, not unwisely, on the premise that the current unicameral system of government in Queensland is less than desirable; arguing that it promotes the power of executive government over that of the elected parliament. That certainly is the view of both the editors and former Federal Opposition Leader and Governor General Bill Hayden in his foreword.

KEYWORDS: Queensland Parliament, Upper House?

RESTRAINING ELECTORAL DICTATORSHIP – THE UPPER HOUSE SOLUTION? EDITED BY NICHOLAS ARONEY, SCOTT PRASSER AND J R NETHERCOTE, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA PRESS, 2008

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This book has its geneses in the papers presented at the 2006 conference ‘Improving Government Accountability in Queensland: The Upper House Solution’. It is based, not unwisely, on the premise that the current unicameral system of government in Queensland is less than desirable; arguing that it promotes the power of executive government over that of the elected parliament. That certainly is the view of both the editors and former Federal Opposition Leader and Governor General Bill Hayden in his foreword.

In pursuing that premise the editors have brought together an eclectic mix of authors drawn from academia, politics, executive government and the judiciary. Further they have cast their contributors net outside Australia to provide an international view from other Westminster System based jurisdictions.

It is a well structured contribution to the debate albeit, in the main, unapologetically favouring one side. The editors open with a number of authors, including Associate Professor Aroney, outlining the doctrine of bicameralism, its pros and cons.

This is followed with a logical partitioning of discussion into the Australian Senate, the International Scene before moving into the Australian States and specifically the Queensland model.

The final part provides the argument for the reintroduction of an upper house to the Queensland parliament so as to *restrain the electoral dictatorship*. This is well argued commencing with an enlightening history provided by Justice McPherson followed by a discussion on the reforms proposed by the Fitzgerald Report and their progress. Here Janet Ransley explores the use of Committees and Commissions by successive Queensland governments to scrutinise the executive arm. She finds it wanting.

Professor Gerard Carney then walks the reader through the constitutional niceties required to reintroduce a Legislative Council in Queensland and notes the irony of the need for a referendum when the only other time the Queensland electorate were

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given an opportunity to decide on the existence of the Council they did so in the affirmative.

So as to add the finishing touches Professor Colin Hughes provides a commentary on the models available to the Queensland electorate.

As Bill Hayden in his foreword comments there is a need for a reinvigoration of the momentum toward the re-establishment of an upper house in Queensland. This contribution to that reinvigoration makes no apology for its stance in supporting such a move. Nor should it.

If there is an ember of momentum then this book will certainly fan that flame. It is a well structured argument drawing from a diverse range of backgrounds and political viewpoints to mount the argument.

As an academic resource it is overflowing with well structured argument. As a commentary on the Queensland political landscape it is eminently readable.