

Democrats  
vote down

thegreens

## Bellarine support strongest

THE Democrats' only candidate in the Geelong region — Upper House contender Erica Menheere-Thompson — had 2.16 per cent of the vote at close of counting.

The Victorian election was the first the party had contested since it went through a leadership implosion earlier this year.

The Democrats had been a non-entity during the past four weeks, with the Australian Greens replacing them as the alternative party.

"The vote at two to four per cent is a lot lower than our 6.8 per cent at the last state election," Democrats Victorian president Diaz Couper said.

GEELONG Greens are jubilant after winning more than 10 per cent of the vote in Bellarine — its strongest seat in the region.

At the close of counting on Saturday, the Greens had also performed strongly in South Barwon (8.9 per cent), Polwarth (8.18 per cent) and the Upper House seat of Geelong Province (8.02 per cent).

Statewide the Greens polled 9.19 per cent at the close of counting.

Greens Geelong branch secretary and Geelong Province candidate Bruce Murray said the party did

best in coastal polling booths Torquay, Queenscliff, Collendina and Ocean Grove.

The Greens vote in Geelong was 6.9 per cent and 6.1 per cent in Lara.

"It's heartening that people are looking to the Greens — our vote has increased 100 per cent on the last time," Mr Murray said.

Greens preferences in most seats flowed strongly to Labor but Mr Murray said he doubted the Greens were being used to funnel protest votes to Labor.

"I think they see the Greens as a genuine alternative," he said.

Greens South Barwon candidate Iain Lygo said he was delighted with the support in Geelong's southern suburbs and ocean-front towns.

He said the Greens vote suffered because of the Otway Ranges Environment Network's overt support for Labor's policy to end logging Otways native forests.

"I think that cost us two per cent," Mr Lygo said.

"But I'm very happy, obviously. It shows continued Greens' strength and we were really happy that the high Green vote obviously forced the Government to move on the

Otways — we're really happy and proud about that.

"We firmly believe that if it wasn't for the Greens polling pressure, it would have been business as usual in the Otways, so we're really happy that we made a difference."

Greens Senator Bob Brown said the level of support for the party would translate into two Senate seats at the next Federal election.

Senator Brown said the party was not prepared to concede defeat in Melbourne — its strongest for a win — until all votes were counted.