

Read, Shane (REPS)

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Sent: Monday, 1 July 2002 6:21 PM
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Subject: Submission

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Message:

To: The Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee
on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. 75
Date Received 2/7/02
Secretary <i>Shane</i>

1 July 2002

Dear Sir,

This submission is in response to the JSCEM's invitation for public comment as part of its Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2001 Federal Election.

I should be grateful if the committee could consider the following submission from my wife and myself. We are both Australian citizens who have lived in the United Kingdom for 5 years now. Our electoral position has been of concern to us for some years. We are presently both on the Federal electoral roll at our last address in Tasmania. Because state legislation uses residence as the basis of eligibility, we have been disenfranchised from voting in state elections, but have voted in every Federal election and the referendum, and sent donations.

I practise as an international lawyer based in London. I have averaged two trips per year back to Australia. We maintain investments and superannuation there (although for some perverse reason we are prevented by Australian law as non-residents from adding to our super., which seems another bit of discrimination)

I understand that there are approximately 645,000 Australian citizens living outside Australia who are of voting age. I know from the extent of my own practice that very many reside in United Kingdom and Europe. Other than short term tourists, the bulk of these people are particularly well qualified and have been recruited to work outside Australia because of their particular skills and talents. Some of these people will be on fixed term contracts, but as a lawyer dealing with many Australian clients I know from the profile of my clients that the great majority are on indefinite terms.

Their influence and talents are a significant benefit to Australia, and obviously when they bring back their investment into Australia it will be of economic benefit to the country.

Apparently only 63,000 votes were issued to Australians overseas at the last election, so 90% of Australians overseas now have no political connection whatever with their home country. This erosion of expatriates ties with Australia can only weaken their attachment to Australia and reduce the chances of them returning and again investing in the Australian community. The six year cut-off rule seems a calculated rejection of wanting us to have a stake in our country's future.

The rules as to registering as an eligible overseas elector are complex. I submit that it is impracticable to expect people to take the specific steps required to register as eligible overseas electors. Indeed the fact that 90% of them have failed to do so is sufficient proof.

Furthermore as is the case with myself and my wife, the anomalies between state and federal laws undoubtedly must confuse and discourage many electors.

I would suggest that creation of a specific electorate for overseas voters might be one way around the problem. Overseas residents have a natural community of interests. It also avoids the very artificial situation where one continues to vote in the electorate one last lived in, whereas, in reality on return to Australia it is just as likely that you will settle elsewhere.

I trust that this is of interest.

Yours faithfully

HENRY & SHEENA BROOKMAN

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