

From the Chief Executive Officer

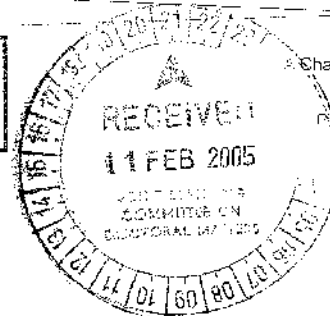
**Guide Dogs Victoria**

A Guide Dogs Australia Organisation



9 February 2005

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. 16
Date Received 11-2-05
Secretary [Signature]



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Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Department of House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**Equal Rights for People with a Vision Impairment**

On behalf of the staff and clients of Guide Dogs Victoria, I would like to express our concern over current voting methods for people with a vision impairment. Our organization is dedicated to enhancing the independence and freedom of people who are vision impaired so they can enjoy equal rights and responsibilities in our community. We believe the failure to provide the opportunity for secret voting infringes on this sector of the population's rights and ability to fulfil their responsibilities.

It should be considered an issue of discrimination that people with a vision impairment cannot cast their vote privately or independently verify their vote. The solution of electronically assisted voting seems entirely feasible and should be achievable in time for the next Federal election in 2007.

As the Hon. John Murphy MP stated in his submission to the Special Minister of State, it is every person's democratic right to cast a vote independently. People who are vision impaired now tend to be very astute in their use of technology and electronic communication has become integral in their lives. It appears an unjustifiable anomaly that they can arrange personal, banking and other business matters through electronic communications but they must still rely on another person's assistance to vote.

Electronically assisted voting can address the needs of all those who are disadvantaged by the current pencil/pen-on-paper method of voting including all those living with a vision impairment and the thousands of people with English as a second language. Previous concerns about the security of electronic voting can be assuaged as people can cast their votes using computers in polling booths. Printed ballot papers can still be generated, deposited in the ballot box and counted in the traditional way or scanned and counted electronically.

We look forward to receiving the Committee's support on this matter and call for the necessary legislative changes to the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* so electronically assisted voting can be established. I look forward to receiving your response and may be contacted on (03) 9854 4486, by mail or by email on [brian.r@guidedogs.asn.au](mailto:brian.r@guidedogs.asn.au)

Yours sincerely

  
Brian Ritter  
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Mr M Simpson, General Manager, Policy & Advocacy, RBS.RVIB.VAF Limited  
Mr F Nowlan, Executive Officer, Blind Citizens Australia  
Mr J Finucane, President, Australian Blindness Forum

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