

From: Paul Kent [pkent@freesurf.ch]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 May 2008 5:31 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: Voting Rights of Australians living Abroad
To the Committee Secretary, JSCEM

Dear Sir,

Please accept this submission for the JSCEM's inquiry into the 2007 Federal election

I am an Australian citizen living abroad with my Australian wife and 3 Australian children. My wife and I are displeased that we have lost our right to vote in Australia and were not given a chance to have our say at the last 2 Federal elections. We should have the right to register our say and hope this inquiry will produce a result that will enable us to vote at the next Federal election.

We moved to Switzerland in 2001. My wife and I and then 2 young children were busy for the first 3 years finding accommodation, setting up a home, learning a new language, finding a job for my wife, starting a business for me and starting school for the children just to mention a few hurdles. We had little time to learn the fine print about the rules about voting rights back in Australia. We had little time for the politics back in Australia. The necessity of life meant that we did not vote in the first Australian Federal election that took place while we lived in Switzerland. We did not at the time realise that by not voting once we would disqualify ourselves from voting in Australian elections for the remainder of our time spent in Switzerland. We always did intend to vote in future Australian election once things had settled down. We unintentionally lost our right to vote.

Australian expatriates are a valuable part of Australia. There are many of us. Yet the majority are in the same boat as my wife and I and are disenfranchised voters.

Australian expatriates are natural ambassadors for Australia. Their experiences are broad. They live within the advantages and disadvantages of different world cultures and governments. They have an idea. It is a waist not to draw on Australian expatriates ideas to help build a future Australia. Expatriates should be encouraged to be involve in the making of Australia.

My wife and I are probably very typical expiates. We have strong family ties in Australia. We own a house in Australia. We visit Australia yearly. We listen to Australian radio and read Australian News daily on the internet. We intend to return to Australia to live. We go for Australia in the cricket. We are Australian. We are not criminals, yet we are treated so when we are disqualified from voting.

Expatriates would be good voters, making informed decisions and deserve the right to vote.

I hope the JCEM take my submission seriously enough to suggest changes to the electoral law to enable disenfranchised Australians living abroad to re register as voters while still living overseas. Expatriates should be able to vote in the seat where they own a property or where they intend to return to live in Australia or perhaps where they were last registered to vote in Australia. A separate seat for expiates may also be a consideration. The important thing is that we have a chance to have our say.

Regards,

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