Dear Electoral Matters Committee,

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018.

I am a 15-year-old Australian-born citizen that lives in Fitzroy Crossing, a small town in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. I currently hold two jobs, including one at my local community radio station where I engage with young people in media making along with hosting and producing a weekly news and current affairs program where I delve into topics that affect my local community including local, state, commonwealth and international politics.

I consider myself an informed citizen and I am thankful for the opportunity to submit to this important inquiry that could define democracy within this nation.

I have been disappointed by some of the arguments put forward by individuals and organisations against this Bill to lower the voting age to 16. It appears there is an ideological block whereby arguments made against the bill often paint a totally perfect picture as to why the voting age should be lowered, but then deny it because “16-year-olds are not old enough”. 16-year-olds can drive a car, give consent, get married, control their own health care and pay taxes, it makes no logical argument to deny these citizens the right to vote simply on the basis of their age when we as a society gauge them as responsible enough to do so much.

I am currently employed, because of this as with any other Australian I am subject to Australian taxation laws, it is part of my civic responsibility to pay taxes so that the government can provide essential services to other citizens and I am happy to do my part. My taxes help bankroll this government yet I am not entitled to help decide how a government spends my money.

I, as with many of my peers, am an informed citizen, I am a keen learner and I am engaged with policy decisions and how governments function. I am currently working towards a portfolio entry into University studying Journalism and Law.

The argument put forward during the second reading debate of this bill by Senator Amanda Stoker that young people are not interested in voting, therefore, should not be allowed to is simply wrong. The report by the ACT’s legislative assembly that the Senator refers to was written back in 2007. I would like to remind the committee that this was over 10 years ago, it was a time where Fergie's “Big Girls Don't Cry” was topping the charts, John Howard was still Prime Minister and Barack Obama was just launching his first campaign for president. Most importantly, I was just 4 years old. My point is that societies change and evolve, a 16-year-old 10 years ago does not speak for a 16-year-old today and if you lodged a study conducted over a decade ago for any other policy matter you would be laughed out of the room.

Other arguments put forward as to why we should not lower the voting age include the grossly ill-informed statement that young people should not be included in the vote because they are financially reliant upon their parents and can be manipulated by them and the education system. Australia has a large and, so long as you are over 18, an inclusive voting system. We allow welfare recipients to vote even though they are financially reliant upon the Government, we also

allow people with mental or physical disabilities that could put them in a position for their vote to be biased towards their carers political ideology along with allowing students at university to vote. I believe this makes Australia a stronger country by enabling everyone to have their voice, therefore it still makes no logical sense to deny 16 and 17-year-olds the vote.

Looking in a large range of the submissions ,so far, to this inquiry I have found a broad trend towards logical argument being used by individuals and organisations for the bill while people and organisations against this Bill appear to have as I put earlier in this submission “an ideological block” towards this discussion. I refer now to Submission 21 to this inquiry by the Young Liberals Movement of Australia, in this submission Federal President Josh Manuatu implies that this Bill would only benefit the Australian Greens. He uses an excerpt from an interview on Sky News conducted on 19 June 2018, during the debate, Senator Jordan Steele-John states that the vote of 16 and 17-year-olds would be fairly evenly split among Liberals, Labor & The Greens. The submission then goes to state that “this Bill is a poorly designed attempt by the Australian Greens to expand their voter base”. It is correct that if the voting age was lowered The Greens voting base would expand but so would Labors and the Liberals.

Once you take this into consideration it is highly erroneous to assume that The Greens will benefit any more than the other parties. The main difference between lowering and not lowering the voting age is the engagement that young people will receive by having their voices heard at the ballot box, it will encourage more people to be involved in our democratic processes and foster a sense of trust in our political systems along with possibly national pride in the fact that Australia take the opinions of our young people, our young citizens seriously.

Australia is well behind the curve when it comes to how we treat our young citizens, I believe that young people should have more autonomy over their lives than current laws allow. Australia treats our young citizens as children, apart from in some circumstances, right up to the age of 18. When you compare this to nations like Denmark where considerable trust is placed in young people to develop individualistically, to make more decisions in regards to their life and to develop as an adult rather than being held back as a child. A system that instill trust in young people rather than marginalising them is a system that raises respectful and responsible citizens.

Young people are always classed as being out of touch, not knowing how to live in the real world and forever being stuck on our phones or social media. Yet when we ask to be heard and when we say we do not want to be judged by our stereotypes but by the ideas we create we are always and repeatedly shut down and told our opinions do not matter. I have a message for this committee today, young people are our future, young people are the next generation and if we don’t as a country say that we trust you, we risk marginalising our future generations and that is not a good thing for any nation including Australia. I thank the committee for the opportunity to place my submission.

Sincerely,
Dylan Storer