

17 July 2018

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

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

I am writing to support the proposed *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018*.

I do so in a personal capacity.

My view is that the voting age should be lowered to 16 years old, with voting being voluntary between 16 and 18 years of age, and remaining compulsory from 18 years old onwards.

Indeed, I would even be keen to see the voting age lowered to 15 years old.

The current voting age being 18 years old results in the exclusion of young people from the electoral process and means that young people are not represented in our parliament.

Given that federal elections only come around every three years, this means that for many young people, the current voting age is effectively 21.

Even though I am now 34 years old, I have been very interested in the parliamentary process and decision making from approximately 15 years old, yet I was nearly 21 before I was able to first cast a vote in a federal election.

Many, usually old, commentators assume that young people have no understanding or knowledge about politics, and claim that young people are disinterested. This could not be further from the truth. Many young people are very interested and knowledgeable about politics.

Just because young people don't always join political parties, does not mean that they are disinterested. Even when I was 15 years old, I had strong views and knowledge, yet I have always been wary of joining or being associated with any particular political party, and indeed am still wary. Could this be interpreted as disinterest? I don't think so, merely a different approach.

Some commentators even claim that young people do not think rationally, and therefore should not be allowed to vote. This is an extremely condescending and erroneous attitude, and ignores the fact that there are plenty of older people who are incapable of rational thought. A "rational thinking" test is not applied to older people, so why should it be applied to young people?

The decisions that parliamentarians make often have long-term effects, whether that be in relation to environmental issues, trade, infrastructure, social policy, or many other things. Young people are the ones that will have to face the consequences of these decisions the longest, and they currently do not have a say.

Young people prioritise issues differently to older people, and whilst younger people remain unrepresented, the issues that affect young people will continue to be ignored by the old politicians.

Numerous other countries have already made the move to reduce the voting age to 16 years old, as highlighted in the submission by George Williams ([Submission 2](#)). These include progressive, and hence well-educated and wealthy, countries such as Norway and Switzerland.

Despite what many commentators claim, young people often have a far greater knowledge and understanding of political issues than older people.

This can partly be attributed to a greater take-up of technology, but is also attributable to the fact that young people have more open minds and are willing to consider alternative approaches to an issue.

In addition, young people have had formal education on civics and the political process through their schooling, something that most of the older generations never had. This means that younger people often have a much greater knowledge and appreciation of issues than older generations.

This is highlighted in the submission by Robert O'Keefe ([Submission 4](#)), who stated that he "*would have to explain civics concepts or political news to adults much older than ourselves. Often this meant a non-voter explaining basic civics concepts to long-time voters.*"

In Senator Stoker's second reading speech ([Hansard, 21/6/2018](#)), the senator cites examples of educational material being provided to younger people as giving them participation. However, it is parliament where decisions are made – participation is not just receiving information about the issues and process.

Senator Stoker also asserts that there would be increased costs to ensuring public knowledge about the changes. Such costs are likely to be either non-existent or negligible, as the information would simply be included in the public information that the AEC already produces for each election.

Australia needs the enthusiasm, energy, and willingness of young people to try different things, to enable Australia to move forward with positive change.

Compare this with the current situation where politics is stuck in a short-term thinking, mud-slinging, resistant to change situation, where politicians have closed their minds to any positive alternative options.

To begin to move towards a fair, just, and inclusive society, we need to lower the voting age to 16 years old as per the bill before parliament.

Yours Sincerely,
Grant Stainer