

To the Committee Secretary for the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my view regarding the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018.

As a 16 year old, I often feel left out of the political processes that ultimately decide the direction of the country that I live in. This is a view shared by many of my peers. Therefore, I believe that 16 and 17 year olds who wish to vote should be allowed to.

At 16, individuals are allowed to drive, leave school and pay taxes, providing them with many responsibilities that require a significant degree of maturity. It seems arbitrary at best to say that 16 and 17 year olds are mature enough to do these things, but not mature enough to vote.

Dispelling the myth that teenagers are apathetic and ignorant in regards to politics will always be a significant stumbling block for a proposal like this. However, it is my view that because technology facilitates the sharing of information faster than ever before, certain young people now are more politically aware than many previous generations. Certainly, young people today are no more apathetic than any other generation. Knowledge of the function of government remains low over all generations, with the only key difference relevant here being that most young people still attend an educational institution where they could be taught civics, broadening their knowledge of government. Essentially, many 16 and 17 year olds are smart, responsible and willing to vote, others are certainly no more apathetic than previous generations and there is still scope to improve the education of young people to make them more informed citizens which is not possible for many later in life.

In the manner that this bill provides, non-mandatory voting is the best option for providing young people with a voice, as only those informed and politically active will exercise their rights in a meaningful way.

All in all, young people are locked out of a political system that seems stacked against their interests. Obviously, the decisions being made by our elected representatives will affect the youth of Australia for the longest, so their perspectives should be considered, especially in cases where the parliamentary process could change the face of Australia. I believe that not only would this make our system more democratic and reflective of modern Australia, but could greatly improve our political culture, creating a society where all voices are heard.

Sincerely,
Hamish Lewis