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Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters – Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education – Supplementary Submission

If appropriate, I would like to make a few comments following the visit of the Committee to Perth last week. These comments come mainly as the result of some of the questions asked of witnesses and statements made by witnesses.

Senator Murray raised a question re parenting and the role undertaken by the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) in electoral education.

The education process during normal periods is primarily aimed at the schools and this is a joint issue where both the WAEC and the School actively seek such education. Other groups are targeted where the group specifically requests education. This normally forms one session. To broaden into other areas requires the cooperation of those targeted and this is difficult to get. Whilst electoral education may seem extremely important to elected members it plays little part in the lives of the average person.

A number of factors govern the extension of the education process into the general arena. The most important is the funding issue. Whilst funds are made available to conduct elections and redistributions the generosity of Governments does not extend into the daily operations of Electoral Commissions.

If a move was to be made to improve electoral knowledge in the community, then this should, in my view, commence with the Naturalisation process. I have witnessed new citizens in polling places where they have been both confused and angry about having to vote. English people may never have voted before and suddenly they are required to vote or be fined. A number of them do not know the difference between State and Federal Governments. This uncertainty must be encountered in a greater manner by new citizens who have little or no English speaking skills.

Media advertising prior to an election normally targets the specifics at the time, i.e., enrolling before the rolls close, or how to correctly complete a ballot paper. Whether this is the time to extend further is a matter that could be looked at, as funds are easier to obtain at this time. I suspect that the public would not take much notice of the formal electoral advertising given the extent of the Party advertising that occurs as well.

Turning to the points raised by Ms Shelley Archer MLC, Member for the Mining & Pastoral Region.

Purging of the Rolls

Reference was made to the AEC purging the roll whilst electors were still resident in the area, because they have no way of collecting their mail. My experience in Communities indicates that they all have a Community office where payments such as CDEP are made from to the locals. This is also the point where mail is delivered and distributed from. Normally the office staff and the local Community Health staff are aware of movements among the residents.

Accuracy of the Roll.

As I have mentioned before, a number of Community members have more than one name. The second name having been assumed due to cultural requirements. On more than one occasion we could not find a name on the roll only to be told to look at a different name. How many people we found under the first name given but who are on the roll under a previous name as well can only be guessed. I do not believe that the roll is currently a true reflection of the Community population. We assume that there is a low voter turnout based on what we believe to be an accurate record.

I have noticed that even when using a local to identify Community members there are members who would rather tell you personally if they have another name. This is normally done in a very quiet manner. We need to appreciate that Community members should be treated with respect and in a private way.

Postal Voting

Whilst it would not be possible to exclude electors in remote communities from enrolling to vote by post, the lack of understanding of the electoral process could result in a person other than the elector completing the ballot paper. I have witnessed Candidates in a Local Government election bringing in to a Shire for early voting carloads of Community residents who possibly would not normally vote.

Funerals and other Business

To suggest that polling should be conducted at a time convenient to a Community having regard to funerals and Lore is unreasonable. Statutory and practical timeframes do not allow this luxury. After a timetable has been set for remote polling and one or two funerals become apparent, every effort is made to be available at the Community where the funeral is being held. In 2001 there was a funeral at Warburton. Polling was extended to ensure that we obtained as many votes as we could. Of course in many of the other Communities the number of votes was lower as most people were at Warburton.

There was also a funeral at Jigalong and I was instructed by the WAEC Commissioner to send a team to Jigalong. To amend a place of polling requires 48 hours notice being given to all candidates. This was impossible to comply with given the short notice I had received. The polling did take place only after I agreed to take the candidates or their representatives with the

polling team on the charter plane. This was not satisfactory but the desired result was achieved. I believe that Electoral Commissions already make every attempt to meet the conditions of local Communities, where practically possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views. I am of the belief that more people should be given the opportunity to visit Communities and obtain a better understanding of our indigenous neighbours.

Brian Moore