

From: Martine MARTINEZ-CASTRO
Sent: Tuesday, 18 February 2014 9:45 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: Sub063 Mette Berntzen



Importance: High

Dear Sir or Madam

I take the courage to send an email as a submission material on electoral matters for Australians who live overseas, passed the six years threshold.

I understand that this request will be now part of the agenda of the 44th Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee, Electoral matters.

As I explained it to AEC when it is not possible to know whether one will be back within six years, it seems 'unfair' that the 'status' and political life of an Australian becomes reduced. .

I will try and explain how we seem to have encountered a diminution of Australian services overseas (no longer the case: actually this point seems to have been addressed and rectified) and a diminution of voting rights when we cannot be in Australia (to vote)..

a- In 2010 we had been able to renew a passport through the advisory services of the Australian Embassy in Copenhagen (Denmark) by writing to Mette S. Berntzen (address below), This Consular representation was not there in 2012/2013 but so was no longer the Australian Embassy in Denmark, and now I find that some Consular services are back (in Norway!).

I mention this parenthesis to encourage their services and thank the Australian Government by the same token. My hope as encouragement for the suggestion also for the Australian Association Norway (AAN) which is a non-profitable entity.

That centre has been 'used' for official visits in 2012 (so it seems) by the Australian Ambassador to Denmark, and the Norwegian Consular office of Mette S. Berntzen had also been used by us, for questions and requests and administrative renewals passport, organised through Mette S.Berntzen and the Consulate . This office is still there or is back, and I am ecstatic about that.

Mette S. Berntzen
Consular Officer/Office manager
The Australian Honorary Consulate

Such local representation is important. because of the change in the Australian representation between 2010-2012 was felt also from the AAN viewpoint! we felt 'cut-off' and hope for that association not be feeling cut-off either.

Please note that other side issues will be addressed in the forum that is relevant, unless stated otherwise by the Joint Parliamentary Committee - Electoral matters. I guess that other matters of concern can be lodged using other Australian Government Agencies or Institutions: DFAT, Consular Strategy (2014-2016) email and contact can be found also on the gov.au pages.

b- On the matter of electoral rights of the Australian living overseas after that six-year period:

Postal voting registration is not available for Australians like us.

Our situation maybe one of a 'singular' case due to the fact that we are both Australian nationals with a dual legal nationality acquired whilst living in Australia (through immigration in 1973 for my husband and by marriage in 1993 and immigration to Australia in 1994). We had been immigrants to Australia. We have a dual nationality with France, which has enabled both of us to expatriate ourselves for work purposes in Europe (France is also a homeland) without applying for a working permit or/and a residence permit.

So, as far as voting rights are concerned, since we can vote using postal votes for French political matters, it is only a mere suggestion that you may consider to keep Australians voting rights, after that six-period has elapsed so that they can continue to vote, and this in an appropriate form for the Australian Security and Polls integrity.

I had suggested some, by explaining only that we were able to vote using the 'electronic vote' (also secured), a distance ballot system, a census of registration which gives the French authorities a way of sending 'sensitive' information of an citizenship and administrative nature, distinctively to the addressee .This is only a suggestion. Proxy ballot in the country of vote is not an option for us, we seem not to be able to get the family (email...also we did not reside in the same localities, cities as them).

Therefore it explains why after immigration to Europe, we have not participated actively in renewing voting rights or using them.

Now in Norway, we are not cumulating these rights.

I explain: though we are permanent residents of Norway since late 2013, we are not able to vote in the Norwegian Parliament or General Elections, and will ever be!

As we do not foresee to becoming Norwegians, we make our utmost duty to fullfil all requirements necessary to be part of the Norwegian Society (acquiring the language skills is one of these duties, prescribed by Norway) but our ties with Australia and France, explained by living family in these countries and our own individual youth and education in Australia (1973 - 2005 for Sergio and 1993 - 2005 for me, with my Higher Education completed at the University of Sydney, Faculty of Economics, Sydney), we strongly feel that we must be represented in an electoral right format also!

We have not yet found the expected recognition of skills and though work (one of us!) do not know what the future may hold any way for us.

Cases like ours: Australians who live overseas for a period longer than three, six or ten years..all their life, maybe beyond retirement age is possible a 'hard case' but not too hard, we trust the Australian Government to find a solution for Australians that 'wander or not' over the working conditions, so as to settle down..

I understand that they maybe a reason (valid) for the Australian Government, not to give the opportunity beyond a reasonable doubt or reasonable means of integrity for poll time but the technological advancements exists Proxy ballot or email 'secured password' are available,

Therefore I may add to my submission to the 44th Joint Parliamentary Committee- Electoral matters, for re-instating or keeping rights, voting rights, for Australians who go beyond the threshold of years before heading back to homeland, to consider

- 1- not limiting but expanding Australians' voting rights to their actively participating in Australian Politics
- 2- for manageable reasons, point the following resource:

- It could be essential to have an idea of the true representation of Australians (overseas): use of the Consular services or AAN memberships, and also a non-mandatory registration for Australians as nationals at the Embassy in Brussels (if this is newly European Diplomatic Australian corps).

- It could be useful for Australians who seek help with 'reinstatement' into full economic life in Australia to have services for endorsing the applications, and so on. (Your newly Consular Services Charter gathers contribution toward suggestions currently and will send some feedback..)

- It could be useful to strengthen Australian language, education and culture in certain countries, like Norway. My campus BI-Oslo entered the EQUIS member base and is following assiduously what I have studied at uni in Australia since I lodged my application for recognition of my high Australian education (and that is since 2010! and has not yet be pronounced, without having to study a full degree all over again). That needs to be mentioned here also..because it is one of the reason why I have not been able to work and other Australians ought to be warned, assisted, etc...Only in July 2014 has the three-year degree to the Bachelor of Administration and Economics-mention Accounting, recouping such cursus as offered in the Business School of Sydney, University of Sydney Undergrad and Postgraduate programmes. I mean Norway goes to a long extent to get information And I feel therefore that many manageable reasons for electoral matters, ought to consider any 'underlying issues' for Australians wanting to keep their Australian status current or revive it That is our case!.

- It could be very important to keep police records, citizenship issues (passport renewal, citizenship evidence, and so on...), financial, tax and pension schemes, economic agreements, traveling issues for Australians, etc.. only by Australia and Australians agencies, for privacy and democratic reasons and reasons above mentioned..

I would like to conclude by giving an example from the French International Policy and Diplomatic representations: a free of charge and voluntary procedure (not a census), by the 'registration' of 'ex-patriés' within embassies, within the framework of the Privacy Act. It may serve the purpose of catering only for those who are seriously interested. .

I must say though that the postal vote (currently) in Australia is very good as a centralised system and stands very different on its international scene compared to other countries. I would not like to comprise that. If it can be enlarged, then by a shortlist of 'electors', then that is my hope.

In any event my proposal is interesting please note the following:

1- a way, postal vote based on last enrollment address (for us it is as far back as 2001 in the electoral division of Brand')

2- a way of increasing services to Australians living overseas, who have a need to 'register' and have services through Australian Embassies, and through Australian Consulates when appropriate (the Australian Honorary Consulate in Norway and the AAN abovementioned should be working offices in these areas, may be together).

My proposal sends a message to be passed for Australian living oversea not to cut-themselves off from the cradle of diversity and liberty that Australian political life represents (to me, that is what it always has done!)...I could be wrong and idealist. But I wanted to encourage and further, by this 'emotional' proposal, the Australian Democracy and Growth in the right democratic ways..

All the best to the new Commissions at Parliament on Electoral matters. Hope you will find the subject interested and some example of an addition to the existing secured poll (for proxy vote) for Australians correctly registered in their Embassies or Consulates (if more appropriate) a readily usable solution . Because I feel I write too much and

the answer does not need a long-winded explanation. But it is a Parliamentary Commission and all reasonable aspects must be inquired and reviewed in a consistent and sound manner.

I sincerely hope I have reached that goal.

Yours faithfully

Martine

Martine and Sergio Martinez-Castro
(formerly Martine Blondy-Martinez, on my Australian passport and Sergio Martinez on his)