

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA
By e-mail: em@aph.gov.au

Submission 126
Date Received: 19 March 2014

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7 March 2014

Dear Sirs

Inquiry into and report on all aspects of the conduct of the 2013 Federal Election and matters related thereto

This submission to the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the conduct of the 2013 Federal Election is being made by the Australian Chamber of Commerce, Singapore ("AustCham Singapore").

About AustCham Singapore

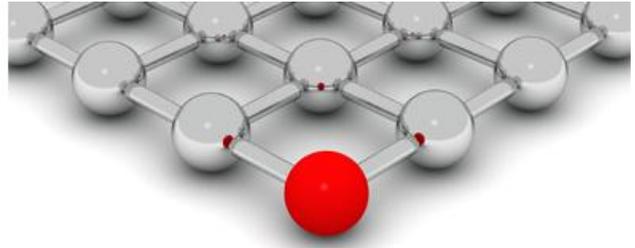
Established in 1983, AustCham Singapore has more than 700 corporate, individual and associate members based in Singapore. Our members cover the broad cross section of the Australian business community in Singapore:

- Australian companies in Singapore;
- Australians working for Australian and non-Australian companies in Singapore; and
- Singaporeans and other nationalities who have a connection to Australian business (whether in Australia or the region).

The one common theme is a connection to Australian business. Our mission statement reads as follows:

"We are the Australian business community in Singapore. We are committed to assisting our members achieve business success through:

- *Connecting members to business, government, each other and our culture by hosting, facilitating and providing events and services for members;*
 - *Keeping members informed and up to date with the latest issues and opportunities in Singapore and the region; and*
 - *Offering members access to regional Australian chambers, the Australian High Commission, Australian and Singapore government agencies and business.*
- We are your Australian business connection in Singapore."*



This reflects our premier position in leading the Australian business community in Singapore. In 2010, AustCham Singapore was a founding member of Australian Business Asia (“ABA”), the name given to a grouping of 16 Australian chambers of commerce and business councils throughout Asia. ABA’s mission is to provide a collective voice for Australian business operating throughout the region.

Voting Entitlements of Expatriate Australian Citizens

AustCham Singapore’s submission is focused on the voting entitlements of Australian citizens who are not ordinarily resident in Australia a matter that is more specific to our members relative to other matters involving the electoral process. The views expressed in this submission are consistent with views expressed in the submissions by AustCham Singapore to the Senate Inquiry on Australian Expatriates (Feb 2004) and on the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper (March 2012). Those two submissions are appended to the current submission. Our submission has two main points for consideration by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

1. The rights of Australian citizens to vote

There is a view that the right of overseas Australians to vote is unfairly restricted. [Section 94A\(2\)\(c\)](#) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* says that an application for enrolment from outside Australia "must be made within 3 years of the day on which the applicant ceased to reside in Australia". It is appreciated that you can register as an Overseas Elector with the Australian Electoral Commission before you leave Australia, however any restriction on Australians enrolling to vote is regarded as unfair.

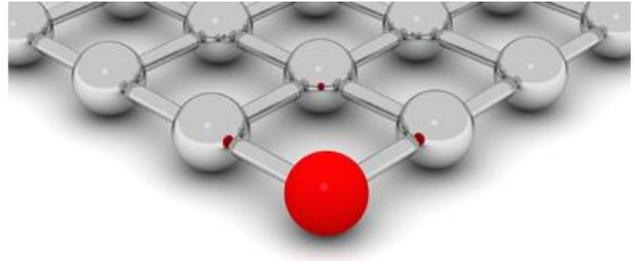
It should also be noted that the Australian Taxation Office regards whether a person remains enrolled to vote, as one of the tests of residency for taxation purposes. Australians should not have to make a choice to disenfranchise themselves, in order to prove non residency for tax purposes.

Voting is a fundamental right of all Australians regardless of resident status.

2. Providing for overseas electorates

There are believed to be approximately 1,000,000 Australians working overseas many of whom have lived outside of Australia for long periods. While this does not necessarily diminish their connection to Australia and does not, in our view, diminish their entitlement to have representation in the Australian Parliament, it is recognized that the connection to a specific electorate within Australia may be of less relevance than to a citizen resident within that electorate. Similarly the concerns of Australians living overseas may be different from those in Australia by virtue of both the fact of living outside of Australia and specifically where they are resident overseas.

We believe consideration should be given to providing for electorates for offshore Australians. Doing so would allow for representation that is more directed to the needs of these Australian citizens. Similar systems exist for both French and Italian citizens and we invite the Joint Standing Committee to examine those systems.



The Australian Chamber of Commerce, Singapore welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. Should the Committee wish to seek further comment on the matters raised please contact:

Annette Tilbrook
Executive Director

Yours faithfully

Guy Scott
President of AustCham