



Statement by the Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon Joseph
Ludwig

Amendments to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls
and Other Measures) Bill 2010 – voting for electors who are blind or have
low vision

9 March 2010

I would like to take this opportunity to announce the Government's intention to move amendments to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 (the Bill) to provide a mechanism for voters who are blind or have low vision to cast a secret and independent vote.

Electronically assisted voting for electors who are blind or have low vision was trialled at the 2007 federal election. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (the Committee) report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election recommended that electronically assisted voting not be continued at future federal elections, due to the high average cost per vote. The Committee further recommended that the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) continue to work with organisations

representing electors who are blind or have low vision to investigate viable and sustainable options for secret and independent voting.

The Government responded to the JSCEM report in September 2009 accepting the Committee recommendation to discontinue the trial and noting that the AEC was consulting with peak bodies to investigate other viable and sustainable options for secret and independent voting arrangements.

The AEC convened a reference group which included key stakeholders such as the Disability Discrimination Commissioner and representatives from Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, the Australian Blindness Forum and the Royal Society for the Blind. The reference group has proposed a number of options for consideration, noting that timing and cost considerations mean that there will need to be a short term solution with longer term options to be developed.

The amendments to the Bill will provide a legislative framework to allow electors who are blind or have low vision to cast a secret and independent vote at future federal electoral events.

These amendments will ensure that suitable and agreed short term arrangements can be in place in time for the next federal election while longer term solutions are developed.

As an interim measure, at the next federal election, electors who are blind or who have low vision will have the option of attending an AEC Divisional Office to cast a secret vote. It is intended that eligible voters will be provided with a private environment and be connected to a call centre where two trained call centre operators will complete the ballot papers according to the voter's verbal instructions.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring people with disabilities are able to participate fully in our national life, and these measures will assist the blind and vision impaired community to exercise their right to vote by secret ballot.