

29 July 2018

**Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600**

Dear Secretary

Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018

I would like to thank this joint committee for the opportunity to make a submission on this matter.

To accompany the affirmative arguments and opinions of the submissions made public so far:

Prior to the voting age being lowered to eighteen, there were widespread concerns held by the community as to the maturity and social practicality of young people aged 18-21 and their level of democratic inclusion. Society now views this as having been unnecessary and prohibitive; which could possibly be how future generations of Australians see the current laws about franchise.

The definition of what constitutes as being an adult is not being challenged – instead what is being considered, and eventually decided on, is whether sixteen and seventeen year olds are capable of the responsibility to participate in this definitive display of democracy. Public submissions 1-4 (Miller, Williams, Heesh and O'Keefe) provide clear examples or anecdotes where sixteen and seventeen year olds are demonstrating the maturity and responsibilities required by the society of today to validate their inclusion in the modern electoral process.

At the ages of sixteen and seventeen most young people are in the process of transitioning to adult environments and taking on adult responsibilities. Teenagers as young as 14 have started paid or voluntary work where expectations of maturity and responsible attitudes are required. Regardless of what each young person is doing and planning, society has already demanded that contribution be made. This expectation is not new – in some era's it was not uncommon for teenagers to drop out of school to help with work on the farm (boys) or household duties (girls). Yet society (both then and now) does not provide this age group in question with the voice to match its responsibilities, something that would be rectified through the opportunity to vote.

Our society has changed over the years; in many ways for the better. The way that sixteen and seventeen year olds have engaged with mainstream society has also changed, especially as recent generations have become more interconnected through technology. Yet despite these technological changes and its ability to unite and educate people, there appears to be a noticeable disenchantment with politics and the electoral landscape. This dissatisfaction appears present across many demographics and has a negative influence on upcoming voters. While the reasons and solutions to this issue are complex, providing sixteen and seventeen year olds with the opportunity to vote and increasing their education about local, state and federal government processes.

I believe that lowering the age limit could encourage the community at large to facilitate a greater level of healthy discussion and education about the electoral system. It will probably take some, if not a considerable amount time to undo the entrenched hostility that is so prevalent among some groups of voters. However, I hope that we will see more willing engagement of the community in electoral matters as future generations of young people become accustomed to having a greater voice for their futures.

Kind regards

Michael McKelvie