

# YOUNG LIBERALS

Federal President

26 July 2018

Senator Linda Reynolds CSC  
Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Reynolds,

I am pleased to provide this submission to the Committee as a part of its inquiry into the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018* indicating the Young Liberal Movement of Australia (the Movement)'s opposition to the Bill.

The Young Liberal Movement of Australia is the youth wing of the Liberal Party of Australia, welcoming members between the ages of 16 and 30 from across the nation. We are an active and activist movement that was founded on the Liberal values espoused by Sir Robert Menzies in his *We Believe* statement, for the purpose of being an effective campaigning, policy and personal development organisation.

To that end, Young Liberals champion and applaud the political involvement of young people as being crucial to the functioning of our democratic system. However, we submit that this Bill is an ill-designed and poorly masked attempt by the Australian Greens to increase their vote share in Australia following a continuing failure to resonate with the wider Australian community. The Greens Senator who introduced this Bill, Senator Steele-John, belled the cat in relation to this in an interview on Sky News on 19 June 2018:

*Tom Connell: ...it would help the Greens wouldn't it?*

*Senator Steele-John: Well that is something which is often said but if look at the research, of people that have actually spoken to young people, 16, 17 year olds about how they would vote, they split pretty evenly amongst the three parties. I think what's...*

*Tom Connell: You say split evenly? So a third each?*

*Senator Steele-John: Yeah, a third each.*

*Tom Connell: That'd be a huge help for the Greens compared to your normal vote.*

Contrary to the broad statements and anecdotes included in the short Second Reading speech tabled by Senator Steele-John, the overwhelming evidence demonstrates that a change in the voting age would not increase political participation. A paper produced by Professor Ian McAllister from the Australian National University in 2012 found that "there is no evidence that lowering the voting age would increase political participation; indeed, the evidence points in the opposite direction." We strongly agree with this assessment.

Seemingly, the only argument put forward in support of this proposed reform contends that people under the age of 18 can participate in society and that government makes decisions that affect them. This is, at best, a flimsy argument. In Australia, the universally accepted age of adulthood is 18, while people between 16 and 18 are afforded some additional rights. If the argument advanced by many of this proposal's proponents were taken through to its fullest extent, it would permit toddlers who are the beneficiary of the Government's childcare reforms a vote – a ludicrous proposition. While 16 and 17 year-olds are naturally more politically engaged than toddlers, this itself invites questions about the subjectivity of political capacity as a whole.

In regards to youth political participation, it is noted that while our membership stretches from the age of 16 through to the age of 30, less than 10 per cent of our membership are under the age of 18. This level of civic participation accords with anecdotal accounts of teenage participation in programmes like Youth Parliament, where the overall number of applicants and participants constitute a very small proportion of the teenage population.

More broadly, we firmly reject the notion that young Australians are not given a voice in the Parliament. On the Liberal side of politics, the Young Liberal Movement has proven itself to be a strong and effective body that both advocates on behalf of Young Australians and helps them to be strong contributors to public policy. Indeed, it is noted that many current and former members of the Young Liberal Movement have gone on to serve in the Commonwealth, State and Territory Parliaments. In fact, half of the Federal Cabinet are former Young Liberals and Parliamentarians including Senator James Paterson, the Hon. Taylor Martin MLC (NSW), Candice Burch MLA (ACT) and Sam O'Connor (QLD) are presently serving Parliamentarians and Young Liberals.

Every day, Young Liberals are making the case, leading the charge and delivering positive policy results for their communities and for our nation in the political space, and we are very pleased to enjoy a strong working relationship with the Parliamentary Liberal Party, which is always eager to engage with our Movement.

Leaving aside our opposition to the notion of lowering the voting age, one element of this Bill that is worthy of support is that of voluntary voting. Our Movement has long supported voluntary voting following an address to our Movement by then Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Hon. Nick Minchin in 2005. We strongly believe that voluntary voting should be progressed in Australia across the board.

We respectfully submit that this Bill is a poorly designed attempt by the Australian Greens to expand their voter base and should be rejected. We respectfully encourage young Australians of a centre-right disposition that want to be more involved in politics to join our Movement at [youngliberal.org.au/join](http://youngliberal.org.au/join).

Yours sincerely

JOSH MANUATU