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## Submission to the Inquiry on the future conduct of elections operating during times of emergency situations

There are many obstacles society faces when it comes to emergency situations, but the ability to participate in democracy should not be one. We must ensure that there is never a barrier to fair and democratic elections, people's ability to participate in such elections, and the adequate operation and logistics of elections during emergency situations.

One of the concerns that arise out of the conduct of elections during emergency situations is the availability and access to information about candidates and engagement with citizens. The current global pandemic has shown how important political engagement is and how much it can directly shape and impact people's everyday lives, particularly in emergency situations. However, when faced with the overwhelming issues of emergency situations there is increased difficulty and barriers to both the logistics of voting, but also the comprehension and awareness of the importance of the process of elections and voting. That is why consideration needs to be given to the effectiveness of communication during an election, the channels used for this communication, and how it is to reach people during emergency situations. To ensure elections remain fair, democratic, and representative of people's interests during emergency situations, voters must remain informed so they can adequately engage with election material such as candidate statements and the like (something that may prove problematic if natural disasters prevent adequate internet or postal access). Additionally, the local council elections in Victoria have shown how important the accessibility to a well-funded, publicly owned postal service is. I believe continued attention and investment into Australia Post is extremely important for the future of elections during emergency situations.

With the increasing ramifications of climate change bringing new challenges for the democratic process, it is more important now than ever to make sure elections during emergency situations provide a platform for the voices of those most affected by the climate emergency. It would surely be a terrible irony if the people most affected by the natural disasters that are exacerbated by climate change inaction (such as bushfires, floods, and drought) were unable to participate in electing representatives who will represent their interests and push for better climate policy. Special consideration must be taken into account for the voters who will be impeded the most from participating in elections due to the worsening effects of climate disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Kind regards,

Daisy Norfolk.