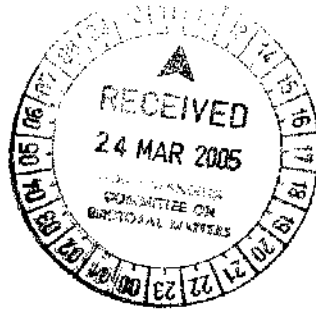




people with disability
ABN 98 879 981 198



SUBMISSION NO. 50

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	50
Date Received	24-3-05
Secretary	<i>[Signature]</i>

7 March 2005
 The Secretary,
 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters,
 Suite R2.105 Telelift 10.3,
 Parliament House,
 CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Inquiry into aspects of the conduct of the 2004 Federal Election and matters related thereto

People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a leading national disability rights and advocacy organisation. Our primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations mainly constituted by people with disability. PWD also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement. PWD has a cross-disability focus – we represent the interests of people with all types of disability.

We welcome the opportunity to provide into the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into the conduct of the 2004 Federal Election.

For a number of years PWD has communicated with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and other electoral authorities regarding the lack of access for people with disability to the electoral system. PWD is extremely concerned that electoral authorities, including the AEC, are denying the civil rights of people with disability through their failure to act on specific access needs.

In particular, we draw your attention to the following:

- the lack provision of information about electoral processes and arrangements in easy read, pictorial or similar formats to assist people with cognitive disability to understand the election process;
- the lack of provision of adjustments to voting instructions and ballot papers to assist people with cognitive disability;
- the lack of provision of Auslan interpreters to assist people who are deaf to communicate with electoral staff at the voting booth;
- inadequate arrangements for hearing augmentation at the voting booth to assist people who are hearing impaired communicate with electoral staff;

Our vision is of a socially just, accessible and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution and potential of people with disability are respected and celebrated.

- inadequate arrangements to allow people who are blind or with a physical disability which limits hand function to exercise a confidential (secret) and independently verifiable vote by electronic or other means. We are aware of some of our members being forced to disclose their vote to family members or polling officials;
- the lack of physical accessibility for polling booths that complies with Australian Standard 1428 Part 2. We are aware of some of our members visiting polling booths that are advertised as fully accessible and finding their requirements unmet. Similarly we are aware of inaccessible polling booths being used when nearby accessible facilities are unused;
- the lack of provision of disability awareness and flexible service delivery training electoral staff working on booths receive to assist them to be knowledgeable and responsive to disability related issues and concerns.

PWD believes that the response of the AEC to the right of people with disability to cast their vote in an equal manner to the rest of the population has been inadequate.

We applaud the proposed trial of electronic voting as a means of ensuring all voters in Australia are able to vote free of discrimination and would welcome any opportunity available to pursue this proposal with the AEC and other relevant authorities.

For further information please contact Digby Hughes, Senior Policy Officer, on (02) 9319 6622.

Yours sincerely

ALANNA CLOHESY
Deputy Director, Advocacy