

Re: Voting rights for expatriate Australians

Dear Madam / Sir,

I wish to address the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters about voting rights for Australian expatriates whilst overseas.

As an Australian who was working overseas in Japan from September 1997 until July 2009, I had the opportunity of voting in state and federal elections, as well as a referendum. I was fortunate to be able to visit Australia about once every eighteen months to see my family. During my absence from Australia, I got engaged and later married [redacted] at Emu Bottom Homestead just to the north of Melbourne. [redacted] is now contributing to Australian industry as a scientist at CSIRO Black Mountain. Whilst in Japan we had a daughter, [redacted] who is now attending school in [redacted] ACT. Actually we decided to return to Australia as we thought that [redacted] would receive a better education in Australia.

I worked as a teacher in Japan and took every opportunity to promote greater understanding of Australia. In conjunction to teaching, I conducted wine seminars where Australian wine was promoted to Japanese nationals. In order to keep abreast with what was happening in Australia, I often went to events organised by the 'Australia Society Tokyo' at the Australian Embassy in Tokyo. To keep up with Australian issues, I accessed the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's webpages on a daily basis and often used their live streaming on the internet to listen to Australian radio. Also, I registered with DFAT through the Australian Embassy in Tokyo in case of emergency and subsequently was kept informed of forthcoming elections.

Being a former serviceman, I strongly support Australian democracy and believe that the system of compulsory voting allows all Australians to have a say in how the country is governed. To vote whilst overseas proved difficult, as I had to request a postal vote application form to be sent to me by the Australian consulate. It was necessary for this form to be witnessed by an Australian citizen, which was difficult in regional Japan. On receiving the voting papers, again a witness was required. The occasions when I voted whilst in Japan were at the 1999 Referendum on the Republic, the 2001, 2004, and 2007 Federal Elections, as well as Victorian State elections during that time.

I believe that time limitations allowed under the Electoral Act for expatriate Australians, of which there is about one million, is unfair. I think that expatriate Australians should not be dropped from the electoral roll, no matter how long they are away from Australia, unless the person has given notice that they are permanently leaving the country. However, I believe that voting should be

compulsory for all Australians, whether they are in the country or overseas. If the person does not vote at an election and cannot be contacted whilst overseas then on return to Australia they should be fined at the point of immigration.

Finally, I believe that the current system of voting in Australian elections is antiquated. At every election there is a large number of 'donkey votes', whether that be accidental or otherwise. Also the amount of paper used must be immense. This is not a good example of being ecologically friendly. Given that almost all Australians of voting age are computer literate and that it is possible to make websites extremely secure using latest technology, it would be better if voting became electronic. That is online voting be made available. This would eliminate donkey votes, whilst allowing all Australians, in country and expatriate, to vote and would probably lead to quicker and easier tallying of election results.

In summary the points that I would like to reiterate are that voting should be compulsory for all Australians, nobody should be removed from the electoral roll unless they have left Australia permanently, and that internet based voting be introduced.

I look forward to seeing improvements in the voting system within the near future.

Yours sincerely,

*Tony Kennedy*

Anthony J. Kennedy