



Improving the electoral awareness of young, Indigenous and migrant Australians

Federal Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee will examine the adequacy of civics and electoral education in Australia. The inquiry will focus on the quality of education provided to young, Indigenous and migrant Australians.

Australian Electoral Commission reports indicate that young and indigenous Australians are more likely to be under-enrolled, while higher levels of informal voting are often evident among culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Successive surveys of young people have also pointed to low levels of "civic literacy": Australians between the ages of 15 and 35 typically have limited knowledge of Australia's political history and political system, and have little interest in Australian political affairs.

"We need to find better ways of inspiring and engaging these groups", the Chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Peter Lindsay, said today.

"A healthy democracy needs citizens who are informed, and appreciate and participate in our democracy."

The inquiry was referred by the Special Minister of State Gary Nairn.

"It's time we took stock of the way we teach civics and electoral education in this country, and the impact these programs are making on our citizens," Mr Lindsay said.

"The terms of reference for the inquiry are very broad and we hope to hear from a diverse range of Australians, from school children, to teachers, to community leaders, to academics and practitioners."

The Committee is a Joint Committee of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and comprises members of the Government, Opposition and the Australian Democrats.

"While we have very different views on some subjects, we are united in our desire to improve Australia's electoral system and promote every Australian's participation in our political process," Mr Lindsay said.

Members of the public will be able to make submissions in writing to the Committee until 2 June. The terms of reference for the inquiry can be found on the committee's website. During the second half of the year, the committee will undertake a series of public hearings.

Details of the inquiry will be advertised nationally on Wednesday, 5 April 2006.

For media comment: Please contact the Committee Chair, Mr Peter Lindsay MP on (02) 6277 4964 (Canberra) or (07) 4725 2066 (Townsville), or by mobile on 0419 656 234.

Further information: contact the Inquiry Secretary (02) 6277 4453, email jscem@aph.gov.au or visit the Committee's webpage at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/>