

SUBMISSION 5

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Committee Secretary,

My Italian husband and I left Australia in March 2004 to live in Italy and I have since lived in Florence, Italy.

When I left Australia I barely knew anything about expatriate voting and enrolment, apart from the fact that I was able to continue voting (which I indeed intended to and subsequently unfortunately wasn't able to get to Rome to do so at the last election). I had no idea that I could become disenfranchised if I a) did not vote from overseas within a period of 3 years or b) if I did not return to Australia and live at a fixed residence for a month to enable me to re-enrol. Currently I do not believe that I have been disenfranchised (having been here just over 2 years but would like to double check this) but I was extremely concerned to recently learn that this could happen to me AND that the Australian Government does not make this legislation blatantly clear to departing Australians before they move overseas to live (e.g., at the travel agent, at the airport, at passport renewal offices at DIMIA). I was lucky to learn this information from the Southern Cross Group via the Australian group in Florence. This was the first I had heard of these electoral consequences of living overseas.

I think it is absolutely imperative that the Australian Government departments such as the AEC, DFAT, and DIMIA do an ongoing publicity campaign on this issue so that expat Australians do not become unknowingly and unwillingly disenfranchised. There is currently simply not enough information available about these very important issues for Australians as they leave to live in another country. I would have appreciated information from the travel agent with my air ticket, posters in the travel agent and at the airport, information on the plane to read, information at the passport renewal offices and other such relevant places so that I could not miss this important information as I prepared to leave to live overseas. I may live overseas, but I am no less Australian or passionate about Australia for doing so (in fact in many ways I feel even more passionate about our country living here), and my voting rights are important to me. I ask that the Australian government does everything in its power to INFORM AND EDUCATE Australians who are leaving for overseas about exactly how this influences their voting rights and to change the legislation so that expat Australians can vote regardless of how long they have lived overseas and when the last time they voted was so that they do not risk becoming disenfranchised.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sarah L. Barker

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