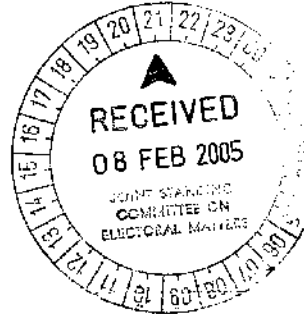SUBMISSION NO. 20

VOLUNTEERS FIGHTING BLINDNESS

RETINA AUSTRALIA (NSW) INC.
PATRON : DON BURKE,

www.retinaAustralia.com.au

5 February, 2005.

The Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Fax 02 62774710

Dear Secretary

Electronically Assisted Voting.

This organisation is the NSW branch of the national body which covers the interests and requirements of persons suffering from inherited retinal diseases. One in every 80 persons worldwide carry the gene for the disease, in its sundry variations, with the result that one in every 3000 persons actively has *Retinitis pigmentosa.*

The disease progressively causes vision impairment and ultimately loss of sight. Many of the sufferers lose their sight at a very early age – teens through to mid 20s.

RA(NSW) accordingly represents a considerable number of persons with the disease in its active state.

RA(NSW) is aware of the difficulties experienced by visual impaired persons when casting their votes at elections (both State and Federal) insofar as many are totally unable to do so without the direct and immediate assistance from a sighted person. RA(NSW) is also aware of the submissions your office will have received from other organisations which represent persons suffering from other sight related difficulties and their call for visually impaired persons to be able to independently verify their vote with such voting being facilitated by providing more than the current pencil/pen on paper method.

It is submitted that there is a need for a recommendation to Federal Parliament that legislative changes be introduced to enable the exploration of alternative electronically assisted voting systems. (It would be hoped that such would ultimately flow through to State/Local elections.).

Yours sincerely

Graeme Banks
President