

24 May 2006

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;

**Re: Submission To The Inquiry Into Civic And Electoral Education From
The Auburn Migrant Resource Centre Inc.**

Introduction

The **Auburn Migrant Resource Centre** is a community based organisation working with people from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds living in the Auburn LGA, particularly, recently arrived migrants and refugees.

The AMRC believes that it is essential for all citizens of this country to be able to influence decision making process in the issues that affecting their life. We have many projects to build the capacity of our target group to integrate into the society. We believe there should be more resources to undertake extensive community education campaigns in rights and obligations of Citizens in culturally and linguistically appropriate way.

There are a number of barriers to CALD communities' participation in Australia' s political process, such as:

- Lack of information and knowledge about the governmental system;
- illiteracy and /or lack of fluency in the English language;
- fear of authorities and Bureaucracy;
- Lack of trust in the effectiveness of their votes.

Refugees and migrants come from different political systems as well as different cultures. They even most of the times may not have knowledge of a federation itself. Due to traumatic past experience in their countries they may not have interest in political affairs of Australia.

In cases such as these, the assistance of a community advocate or public interest group could encourage people to participate in democracy.

Recommendations:

It is important that a range of strategies are developed to encourage people, particularly from non-English speaking backgrounds, to be part of electoral awareness program.

- Employ bilingual community educators to work in partnership with NGOs, MRCs/MSAs;
- Use female educators where culturally appropriate;
- Provide funding to above mentioned organizations to conduct appropriate education programs/ workshops about living in democracy, including their rights and responsibilities;
- Advertise more in the ethnic media;
- Provide information in audio/visual form.

We support the efforts to improve the electoral awareness of migrant Australians.

Yours sincerely

Semra Guler

Community Project Officer