

From: Steve Leo  
Sent: Wednesday, 29 May 2002 7:55 AM  
To: JSCEM@aph.gov.au  
Cc:  
Subject: Submission

From: Steve Leo  
E-mail:

Message:

To: The Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee  
on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Sir,

This submission is in response to the JSCEM's invitation for public comment as part of its Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2001 Federal Election.

I would like to comment on the fact that I have lost the right to vote in Australian federal elections. I understand that I lost this right because I have resided outside of Australia for more than two years and did not file a necessary piece of paperwork.

I am a natural born Australian citizen who has now lived in the US for just over 3 years. I moved here to marry an American citizen in May 1999. While I now reside permanently overseas, I still retain many close ties with Australia. My whole family lives in Australia along with many of my friends, I maintain a rental property in Australia, keep in touch with what is going on at home through speaking with family and friends, read Australian news online and since leaving Australia I have returned home twice for holidays. I fully intend to continue this close association with my country.

While my wife and I do not currently have any plans to return to Australia on a permanent basis, I would certainly like to think that we may one day be able to do so. Because of this I consider it important to keep in touch with what is going on in Australia and further would like to have a say in how the country is run by being able to vote.

I was unaware that Australians living overseas for more than two years lost the right to vote unless a particular form was filed. I discovered that I had lost my right to vote after the AEC confirmed that my name had been removed from the electoral role. I only became aware of the rules and regulations regarding this two year limit after reading about this issue on the Southern Cross Group's web site. I missed the two year limit by less than a month.

As a citizen I believe that I should have the right to vote and that this should not be taken away just because I no longer live in Australia. I retain my citizenship, my interest in domestic issues and my love for Australia and have a clear desire to remain involved in how my county is run.

As an absolute minimum I would encourage the Government to make an extra effort to let citizens know at the time they permanently leave Australia of their rights and responsibilities with respect to voting and specifically that they will lose that right if certain steps are not followed. I would think that this could be quite easily accomplished by checking the customs cards that are filed upon leaving the country. I remember having to state that I did not intend to return. This could be used as a flag to target those citizens that would benefit from such information.

While this would be a good interim measure, I would ask that the Government seriously consider permanently removing the residency restrictions that currently restrict otherwise eligible Australians from voting in Australian elections while living overseas for extended periods of time, and further allow those Australians who have lost the right to vote because of these restrictions to regain this right.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely

Steve Leo