

From: Ed Smith - BCG [EdSmith@BJConsultingGroup.com]

Sent: Thursday, 15 May 2008 2:37 PM

To: Committee, EM (REPS)

Subject: Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) - from China

Dear Committee Members,

As a member of numerous Australian community bodies in China I write to advise that I am deeply concerned about the number of Expatriate Australians, both in China and elsewhere, who are currently disenfranchised and unable to vote in Australian Federal and State elections.

I believe that this is a significant problem that needs urgent attention. For instance, at the recent AustCham dinner for Kevin Rudd in Beijing in April (attended by 350 people) as many as half the people I spoke to admitted they were disenfranchised ! We are talking here about high caliber professionals - lawyers, bankers, real estate professionals, accountants, heads of manufacturing firms, etc. who regularly visit Australia, read Australian newspaper online on a daily basis, represent Australian (and multinational firms) in China, own real estate in Australia, but who have chosen to live offshore for between 2-20 years. These people are highly educated, high earning, passionate Australians who the Australian Government has turned its back on by disenfranchising them.

I believe we need to consider urgent reform to the much outdated Electoral Act to consider allowing:

- 1) A vote for all Australian passport holders (as a basic right).
- 2) Overseas electorates (as adopted by some other countries now) so that Australian Expats can be represented by someone in their region who understands their issues, knows them and can relate to them, and who is accessible to them. Ideally we would start by establishing a small number of overseas electorates e.g. one for the UK, one for Europe, one for the US and one for Asia. The numbers of Expats located in each of these regions would of course be the final factor determining the electoral region.
- 3) Online voting. Currently Expats can buy books, movies, plane tickets, cars, houses, manage their finances, buy shares (globally), read and watch the news and current affairs programs, listen to the radio, etc. all online. The only reason we can't vote online is that the internet didn't exist when the Electoral Act was written. Online voting is definitely technically feasible and should be a priority addition to the outdated postal voting (which is hopelessly too slow and cumbersome).
- 4) In order to properly implement Overseas Electorates, I believe we would need to first extend the Australian Census to also include a survey of Australian expatriates located offshore, and I highly commend the Southern Cross Group and Advance for their groundbreaking joint efforts to commence this process privately at the time of the last Australian Census.

If we expect to tax Australians living abroad, which in my view we should, we must accordingly also ensure they have the ability to vote and be represented, otherwise we face a return to taxation without representation.

I look forward to the Committee giving serious consideration to these ideas and suggestions and to making some concrete changes in the near future.

I look forward to acknowledgement of receipt of this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Smith

- 1) Managing Director, **Beijing Consulting Group**
- 2) Steering Committee Member, **Australia China Alumni Association**
- 3) Board Member, **Australian Chamber of Commerce, Beijing**
- 4) Member, **Australian Chamber of Commerce, Shanghai**
- 5) Board Director, **Lai Te (Beijing) Electrical and Electronic Equipment Co. Ltd.** (a Sino-Australian Joint Venture Manufacturer of Power-Saving Lighting Equipment)
- 6) Treasurer, **Beijing Australian Rules Football Club of Beijing**
- 7) Asia Coordinator, **Southern Cross Group**

Suite 1705, 17/F, Zhubang Office Centre, Chaoyang Road,
No. 98 Bali Zhuang Xili, Chaoyang District
Beijing 100025 PR China

Tel: (86-10) 8586 6220 ext. 612 and
(86-10) 8586 6386/87

Fax: (86-10) 8586 6221

Mob: (86) 1390 1333 747

Email: EdSmith@BJConsultingGroup.com

and EdSmith@BCG.sina.net

Web: www.BJConsultingGroup.com

Beijing - Hong Kong - Melbourne - Shanghai - Tianjin