



people with disability

ABN 98 879 981 198

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. <i>12</i>
Date Received <i>21/5/07</i>
Secretary

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

*21/5/07*

17 May 2007

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

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### **Inquiry into certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission**

People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a national disability rights and advocacy organisation. Its primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWD also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement. PWD was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own. PWD has a cross-disability focus – we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability.

PWD has advocated for the rights of people with disability to participate in electoral processes for many years. We are currently on the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) Disability Advisory Committee and the Electoral Commission of NSW Advisory Committee on the Equal Access to Democracy Plan. Despite the work of many electoral authorities many people with a disability are still unable to cast a secret and verifiable vote. This is especially relevant for people with a vision impairment and people with limited hand function. We are aware of some of our members being forced to disclose their vote to family members or polling officials.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee.

PWD has previously requested that the AEC invest more resources into disability awareness training for staff. In particular we would call for disability awareness and flexible service delivery training for all electoral staff to assist them to be knowledgeable and responsive to disability related issues and concerns. This training should be ongoing and people with disability should be included in the provision of this training.

PWD has also previously commented on the lack of access of polling places. We understand that all divisional offices are polling places, especially in regard to pre-polling. Accordingly we believe that it is imperative that all divisional offices be fully compliant with Australian Standard 1428 Part 2.

PWD would support divisional offices being in accessible locations. For our members this would mean being close to accessible transport nodes. We would have some difficulties with the co-location of divisional offices if this meant that people had large distances to travel. Many people with disability are still unable to use much of the public transport system and are forced to spend large amounts on specialist travel, such as wheelchair accessible taxis.

Similarly many people with disability find the additional cost of disability debilitating and as such are unable to afford a comparable level of access to technology. This is a further reason why the collocation of divisional offices may be to the detriment of people with disability.

For further information please contact Digby Hughes, Senior Advocate, on (02) 9370 3100.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Bowden', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**MATTHEW BOWDEN**  
Deputy Director, Advocacy