

**Submission to
Inquiry Into Civics and Electoral Education
The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

**From
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Summary: Despite the work already undertaken by the Australian Electoral Commission to provide adequate voting information to people from non-English speaking backgrounds, it is clear that in many cases the message is not getting through. Because our democracy depends on informed participation it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that all Australian citizens are enfranchised.

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCoT) notes that the main culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) group in need of electoral education is that which is comprised of our newest citizens. We welcome the initiatives of the AEC in this regard but note that translated information as listed on the AEC website does not include many of the languages of the most recent citizens.

MCoT has received information from a member of a new community in Hobart (also a member of TACMA) who says that his people receive very little information when it counts - just before an election. His point, which is relevant to the broader community of new citizens, is that most people don't take in the information when it is first presented to them.

MCoT would also like to add that:

- People who come from places which are very different to Australia are not immediately concerned with the nuts and bolts of the electoral system - there is too much other, more urgent information to occupy them. It is at this early stage, during their introduction to Australian citizenship and culture, that they are given some electoral education. They need this information reinforced before an election.
- Many of these new citizens come from countries that are in conflict and where the populace is disenfranchised and voting is very important to them.

The following are ways in which to assist these people exercise their democratic rights:

- **Election information should be also distributed through service providers such as Migrant Resource Centres and volunteer groups who work with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and grassroots organisations like MCoT and the Ethnic Communities' Councils.** This information should include the date of the election, location and hours of polling booths, ID requirements, instructions on how to vote, including how to cast a vote and general information on voting rights, including instructions on how to contact the appropriate officials if these rights have been violated. It is not enough to rely on ethnic media and in many cases there is no newspaper or radio/television programme for newer citizen groups.
- **Targeted Information Sessions should be provided in the pre-Election period.** During an election campaign these communities should be targeted for information sessions through grassroots organisations - churches with identified congregations of new communities; Migrant Resource Centres; Ethnic Communities Councils and Multicultural Councils; Local Government Community groups and initiatives; clubs and sporting organisations with identified membership of new communities. Demonstrations of the voting system rather than only literature would make a great difference.
- **Voters from CALD communities should be educated on voting method options:** It is important to provide education and outreach to voters on the various options they have for voting (e.g., early voting, voting by absentee ballot, Election Day voting) as part of the information package.
- **Voters from CALD communities should be provided with adequate assistance:** Every effort should be made to recruit poll workers who are able to speak the community languages and have voting materials in those languages to provide appropriate language assistance at any voting site that serves a sizeable number of voters from non-English speaking communities.
- **Multilingual voting materials must be provided:** Non-English speaking voters should have access to voting materials in their language, including the newer, small but growing communities. Where possible, practical how to vote information should be displayed in English and the languages of all people in the local community at polling booths on polling day.