

Sent: Monday, 10 June 2002 6:02 PM  
To: 'JSCEM@aph.gov.au'  
Subject: Submission

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 am an Australian citizen disenfranchised by the current laws. When I left Australia in 1984 I had no idea that I would end up living in Germany for the next 18 years. This was a situation which developed over a longer period of time. Even when I married my German husband in 1985, we were still not sure where our future permanent home would be. By the time it became clear that we would remain in Germany, the 2-year period in which I would have perhaps been able to register to vote outside Australia had long expired, but I really had not given any thought to making enquiries before that time. Up to that point I had been quite sure that I would still be able to vote in Australia.

As an Australian citizen with residency status in Germany, I still have very close ties to Australia through family and friends, and I still regard myself very much as an Aussie. My daughter has dual citizenship (German-Australian) and has been brought up to be bilingual. Through visits to Australia she also appreciates the advantages this gives her and is very proud of her Australian heritage. For myself, taking on German citizenship has never been an option as I would have to surrender my Australian citizenship to do so. This means, however, that I also have no voting rights in Germany.

In the past, it may have been the case that non-residents were not sufficiently informed about election issues, but this is certainly not true today. Via the internet I read the Sydney Morning Herald daily, and telephone calls to Australia have also become much cheaper so that one keeps in constant contact with friends and relations and up-to-date on the issues that people are talking about.

In summary, it is my view that this is a matter concerning the fundamental rights of the individual in Australian society. In these days of globalisation, an Australian overseas is still very much part of the Australian community, even though he or she may be physically outside Australia's territorial boundaries. All Australians share the common bond of citizenship and the right to vote is a privilege of citizenship. I do not believe that any Government is justified in removing this privilege simply because a citizen is living overseas for longer than a certain randomly-defined period. An Australian overseas who wants to exercise their democratic right to participate in the election of those that make laws and decisions which affect all Australians should have that right.

Yours sincerely,  
Gaye Rochow

