

Read, Shane (REPS)

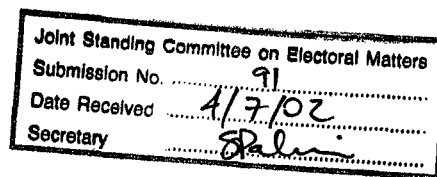
From: Erin Johanson [rinnywee@rinnywee.com]
Sent: Thursday, 4 July 2002 1:33 AM
To: JSCEM@aph.gov.au
Cc: rinnywee@rinnywee.com
Subject: Primary Submission

From: Erin Johanson
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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 have lived in France for the past five years, and am married to a Frenchman, and have a four year old son who holds joint French/Australian citizenship. I originally hail from Melbourne, Victoria, and was last enrolled to vote in the Williamstown District.

My family all live in Australia (Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia), and I have constant contact with them. My husband, son and I endeavour to visit Australia once every two years, with my parents coming to Europe every alternate year.

I am subscribed to the ABC's email news service and constantly visit the websites of Australian newspapers. Keeping up with issues in Australia, and in particular Melbourne, is extremely important to me, and I am often to be found imparting little tidbits of Australian news with my friends and family here in France.

My son is only 4, but as an Australian citizen, I am concerned that if the current situation with overseas voting continues he will be affected in the future.

The last time I voted in an Australian federal election was in 1996 (consequently my first time voting), and I voted from Williamstown in Victoria.

At the time I left Australia I was still on the electoral roll. I now believe this is no longer the case.

I did not attempt to vote in the Referendum on the Republic as I was told by the Australian Embassy in Paris that they were not taking votes for it.

When the time came for the federal elections in 2001 I contacted the Australian Embassy in Paris for information on how to vote overseas.

I was informed that since I had lived more than 2 years out of Australia I was no longer entitled to vote. When I asked if there was anything I could do about this, I was told to contact the town hall of the place I lived in Australia and ask them to assess my claim, but that my ability to vote in any Australian elections would be entirely at the discretion of the person handling the claim.

I believe that more information should be given to people leaving Australia about their rights as a voter, and the consequences of not enrolling from overseas. I would not be surprised to learn that many people are in the same boat as I am.

I am an Australian citizen, holding an Australian passport and proudly calling myself an Australian. Why then, am I unable to perform my duty and rights as an Australian citizen and vote in Australian elections?

It may be true that I have chosen to live out of the country, but not once have I ever considered giving up my nationality or heritage. What a slap in the face it is to be told I have no rights as an Australian to decide who runs the country I still call home.

I have not been penalised for not voting, but to be honest I would not be surprised to receive a fine, were I to move back to Australia.

Yes, I am very proud to be an Australian, and I am very proud to be an Australian overseas. I do not believe it is fair to deny Australians the right to vote, purely because they have chosen to live in another country. Using the argument "well if they really cared about Australia, they wouldn't leave" is ridiculous, because if we didn't care about Australia, you wouldn't be reading these letters.

Sincerely,

Erin Louise Johanson