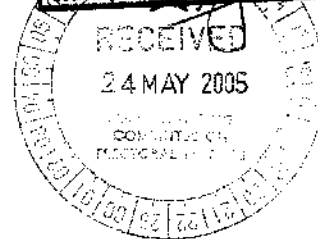


27 April, 2005.

20 Wrennet Street
Woorim. Qld. 4507

Tony Smith, MP. SUBMISSION NO. 158
Convener, Parliamentary
Joint Standing Commission
on Electoral Matters
Parliament House,
Canberra. ACT. 2600.

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	158
Date Received	24-5-05
Secretary	[Signature]



Dear Mr Smith,

I have read the column in the Sunday Herald-Sun (24/4/05) entitled - "BUNGLES PUSH VOTING ONLINE".

While I agree that changes are necessary to overcome the debacle during the last election, to ensure that every elector's ballot counts - I urge you not to go along the track of doing away with paper postal voting entirely. Keep the existing system, while adding to it all the electronic whizz-bang technology.

My reason for this is that your rush to "go electronic" might disenfranchise the older generation - Seniors over 60 whose prior work experience and education happened before the electronic age of 1980 plus. I belong to this generational grouping and, along with many others, we are not computer-savvy, nor do we find it easy to unlearn our methods to take


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on board new means of communicating.

Even before I became an Aged Pensioner, I was already mobility-challenged from the permanent disablement from a serious accident 22 years ago. I have therefore always applied for a postal ballot and returned it.

I have to say that it irks me that the AEC does not trust us Seniors enough to allow us to send in our ballot with only our own signature. The AEC insists that we have to traipse around - bothering neighbours or shop-keepers to WITNESS our forms! If a person applies for a postal ballot because they cannot walk to a polling booth, nor drive, nor have anyone able to drive them, then simply being able to post the ballot envelope is all that is required. (The taxi driver who takes me shopping on pension day will usually stop at a post box and post any mail I have).

As regards the AEC demand for a witness signature and declaration, I have no family who can vouch for my identity details. As for asking neighbours, all in my immediate area are a floating group of tenants, and all

much younger than ³ I am. I therefore have not developed a close bonding friendship with them — to the extent that they know my personal details and circumstances. So, therefore, were I to prevail upon any to witness my postal ballot, they would have the right to refuse. Most probably would not, as it is the Aussie tradition (as was in my earlier days) always to help a neighbour to the best of one's ability.  →

You government people just do not understand the culture of elderly Australians, do you?

On one occasion I had to ask the local pharmacist to witness my ballot, as he was the only one who had my details on file. But, he was loathe to put his private address — the one for which he is registered as a voter — on my card. He was a younger man, indoctrinated to the belief that, if he imparted his private address, it was tantamount to giving it to a potential terrorist / drug dealer / burglar, etc.!!

He witnessed my form on the proviso that I would not read HIS details (as a witness) — and that he himself insert my ballot paper envelope into the outer envelope. I am not used to anyone, especially professionals, acting in such a suspicious manner towards me!

The point I am making is that - paper postal votes must be retained, and they must eliminate the ludicrous demand that they be witnessed. The AEC has all my details on file, and all of these can be cross-checked with other agencies. If the AEC needs a cross-referencing detail, why not ask for a Pension Card number, or Medicare number, or Tax File number - all of which would readily verify my declaration that I am who I claim to be.

The Government needs to bring the voting process into the 21st century, but not only by electronic means. You just need to streamline it more. Instead of having the voter write or phone in for a postal ballot form, and then the AEC have the huge task of mailing them - why not have bundles of the damn things on every post office counter? People who satisfy the conditions for a postal vote can simply pick up a postal ballot form when next buying stamps or paying bills. Too much aggravation all this witnessing of a ballot form!

And, compare that onerous burden with the simplified task of going personally to a polling booth. A voter steps up to the table, gives

one's name and address - and is quickly and automatically tanded the ballot papers. The only question asked is - "is this the first time you have voted for this election" (or similar words). No proof of identity or date of birth is required - so why all that rigmarole for postal votes?

As regards the Pauline Hanson fiasco - no doubt she is laughing all the way to the bank with the huge profit she made by standing, but not being elected. She will see that as justifying the false imprisonment. But, as the media writer indicates, that is side-stepping the spirit of the law. There should be no reimbursements, no rewards, no profit-making by those who fail to be elected. Being endorsed to stand for an electorate is a gamble for most of the candidates. Only one will win, and like with everything else in life, there are no prizes for second or third - not for losing an election that's for sure!

I wish you well in your examination of the electoral system - but remember to keep it FAIR FOR ALL VOTERS!

Yours faithfully

(1975) H.B. Watkins Butterworth