

Read, Shane (REPS)

From: Aaron Gray-Block [aaron.gray-block@expatica.com]
Sent: Friday, 5 July 2002 2:45 AM
To: JSCEM@aph.gov.au
Cc: aaron.gray-block@expatica.com
Subject: Submission

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	115
Date Received	5/7/02
Secretary	SPalm

Address:

Gaastlaan 45
8304 JE
Emmeloord
The Netherlands

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.

As an Australian citizen, I believe it my right, privilege and responsibility to vote in the Australian elections.

Unfortunately, due to the fact I have been living in the Netherlands for more than two years, the AEC informed me in May 2002 that my name was removed from the electoral role.

But when the warning letter from the AEC arrived, my parents contacted the commission and stated that I lived in the Netherlands and would in future return to Australia. An AEC officer informed them at that time that my name would not be removed from the electoral role as soon as what was stated in the letter (20 days). But I was then sent a letter stating that because I had not contacted the AEC within 20 days of the previous letter, my name was removed from the Farrer electoral role (and I assume the state electoral roll as well). When my parents contact the AEC again, they were informed that the previous advice given to them was either false or overturned.

The second AEC letter stated:

"Recently, I wrote to inform you that I may be required to remove your name from the electoral role because it appeared that you were no longer living at your enrolled address and that you may not have lived in the electoral subdivision for at least the last month.

"You were advised that, if you believed that you were entitled to remain enrolled, you should contact me within 20 days from the date of my letter and that if you did not do so I would be required by law to consider removing your name from the electoral roll.

"I did not receive a response to the letter within the specified time.

"As a consequence your name has now been removed from the electoral role".

This situation is unacceptable. As a journalist, I take a deep interest in Australian affairs and wish, more than ever now that I am an expat, to be involved in the Australian democratic process.

Furthermore, having been provided with no information about electoral repercussions of my move to the Netherlands and in light of the unspecified length of time I would be away, I did not expect to become disenfranchised from the electoral system. I was also under the impression that if I voted within two years of my departure (I voted at the 2001 federal election) that I would be kept on the electoral role. This has not happened.

I believe greater knowledge should be made aware to expat Australians about the electoral repercussions of their move overseas and that I should not be required to spend at least one month in Australia before being eligible to be placed back on the electoral role. I was unaware of the need to apply to become a Registered Overseas Voter and assumed my voting rights would remain intact for a longer period of time.

As my Dutch partner and I are expecting our first child in October, I am not planning in the near future to spend the

required one month in Australia for voter eligibility. Maintaining links with Australia while overseas is difficult enough, but being removed from the electoral role is akin to a stab in the back. I am still an Australian citizen, am I not?

Australian expats are an educated community and their voice should not be ignored.

I am requesting my reinstatement on the electoral role, a change to current regulations requiring expats to apply to become a Registered Overseas Voter within two years of their departure, removal of the one Australian residence eligibility clause, greater awareness made of the electoral repercussions of living abroad and simplification in the expat voting right.

In closing this letter, I would like to congratulate the Australian Embassy in The Hague, the Netherlands, for the swift and easy access to the 2001 national election voting cards mailed to me at my Dutch home address. I fully support the submission of the Southern Cross Group in lobbying to remove legislation disenfranchising Australian expat voters.

Sincerely,
Aaron Gray-Block
Journalist and Dutch Translator
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8304 JE
Emmeloord
The Netherlands

PS: My Australian home address is 482 Hume St, Albury, NSW, 2640.