

15 May 2008

The Secretariat
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

2007 Federal Election

I wish to offer the following comments on behalf of clients of the Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia (RSB), who are blind or vision impaired.

The Royal Society for the Blind of S.A. (RSB) is the primary provider of services to people who are blind or vision impaired in South Australia, currently delivering a full range of vision rehabilitation services to over 10,500 South Australians.

As our clients cover both those who are totally blind and those who have residual vision it is important that any changes to the existing system cater for both categories of our clients. The RSB would be happy to present to the committee the impact and the types of vision loss that our clients incur so that you may fully appreciate the problems that exist.

In order to reduce the inconvenience and allow independent voting by our clients we would like to offer the following comments:

- **2007 Trial of Electronic Voting for the Blind:** Whilst a number of our clients participated in this system and I am aware that the Electoral Commission is preparing a separate Report, my main comment on this topic is that unfortunately it had to be (a special solution), I believe that the system utilized by the Australian Defence Forces in the Pacific through a secured intranet was more feasible (normal approach) to Electronic Voting. It is important that any changes in technology should be available to the whole community and designed and developed in line with inclusive design or universal design concepts.
- **Braille – Voting Forms in Braille:** Technology is available that allows Ballot Papers to be prepared in Braille. It should be everyone's right to be able to vote in their reading and writing format.
- **Magnification:** For those who have some residual vision, the majority of who are elderly and would not easily use another electronic or Braille format, however do require electronic magnifiers to independently vote. This can be easily overcome by providing electronic magnifiers at polling booths.

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- **Printed Material:** Whilst a number of changes have been made over a period to time, to improve the readability of Ballot Papers, I believe there is still an opportunity to increase the size of the font, which I believe will help the whole community and that the size of the Ballot Paper for the House of Representatives could be increased to accommodate this. I acknowledge the Senate Ballot Paper presents some challenges, however larger and bolder boxes above the line could be improved

I trust that these suggestions are helpful to the committee. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.



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