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To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: submission JSCEM
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Dear Sirs,

I would like to add my voice to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. I am one of the thousands of Australian expatriates who is frustrated and disillusioned by our government's treatment of its very own Diaspora. In comparison to many other nation's treatment of their citizens overseas, unfortunately Australia falls short in some concerns and this is one of them. Australians abroad have difficulty in being able to vote for their own Government which I believe is not a good situation for a democratic government to be in.

I have been living overseas on and off since 1990 and have returned many times for holidays or to reside. I returned to Australia in 2003 to live however due to the lack of acceptance of the skills I learnt in China and Japan as well as my language abilities (I speak Chinese and Japanese) I could not find work for 2 years and was forced to return back to China to find employment. Even though I was forced to live and work overseas, I am constantly involved in Australia with all my family and friends living in Melbourne. I read the The Age online religiously every morning and evening to keep up to date with events at home.

Following the rise of the "Mandarin speaking" internationally minded Kevin Rudd I was very excited about adding my vote to last year's election. I was however totally frustrated in my efforts to find out how to vote when it came close to do so and was devastated to find out there was a deadline that had passed and I was not able to register to vote from overseas. I know of many fellow Australians who were also mortified and not being able to vote at this very unique and special election.

Firstly, information was not readily available to us in the Australian media despite thousands of overseas Australian readership. Secondly, I voted in Australia in the last elections so my name should still be on the register. Efforts to find out this lead nowhere. Lastly, the deadline to re-register was way too early for most people as by the time they found out by themselves that they were not eligible to vote, it was too late.

The AEC website is totally confusing and I would advise a separate clear site for overseas Australians. There were forms that I thought were relevant to me that turned out not be so.

I believe that the deadline of 3 years should be extended as the vast majority of Australians are now living overseas for longer periods yet still very connected with their nation. We represent our nation with great pride, celebrate all our national holidays such as Australia Day, Anzac Day (we even play "two up" in Shanghai) Melbourne Cup and in Shanghai, we have the best know Australian Charity Ball that beats all our fellow expatriate's events insofar as being innovative, original and spectacular.

I believe the 3 year period was suitable when most overseas postings were for that period and it was difficult to keep in touch and connected with our home land. However, in current times we are highly connected to Australia and amongst ourselves. Disenfranchising citizens from voting freely and easily I believe is a very damaging for a nation's spirit. In this globalised world we are embracing many migrants and encouraging them to become Australian citizens yet at the same time alienating Australians abroad. Many of the Australian Diaspora have a deep connection to their homeland and it can be quite heartbreaking when we are shunned from our motherland.

I urge the current Government to review the process of voting for it's Australian citizen's abroad and ensure ease of access in obtaining clear and legible instructions on registration for overseas voting as well as details in this in the media much earlier than has been in the past. I would urge the Government to extend to eight years the deadline for all overseas Australians to stay on the electoral role as this would guarantee two elections to be involved in.

I believe that for Australia to truly be considered global it needs to embrace it's global citizens in its election process and would like to support changes to the current system.

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read my submission and for your consideration in this matter.

Kind regards
 Adrienne Farrelly
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