

From: Leigh Dwyer
Sent: Saturday, 22 June 2002 2:01 AM
To: JSCEM@aph.gov.au
Cc:
Subject: Submission

From: Leigh Dwyer
E-mail: [_____](#)
Phone:

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 left Australia in November 1986 intending to spend a year or two in Europe. While in England I met my wife and moved to Germany at the end of 1988 and have lived in Germany since then. Although I have lived continuously overseas, I have tried to maintain close links to Australia. I am currently working as Investment Development Director for Invest Australia, the national investment agency of the Federal Government. I keep up-to-date on Australian affairs through the web. My trips to Australia with my family have been on average every third year and more regularly with my current job.

After leaving Australia I was able to vote in an election (or a referendum?) at Australia House in London. Thereafter, on moving to Germany, it was extremely difficult to vote. I do remember enquiring at the Embassy and the answer was that I would need to be registered and have to have my ID legitimised etc at the Embassy (which was many miles away from where I was living - most probably 4 hrs drive then) or at the British Consulate in Stuttgart (I was living in Stuttgart/Germany at the time). I thought it was most peculiar that legitimisation was acceptable by a British Consulate in a foreign land; clearly the old colonial ties were still strong. Given Germany's status, I could not see why authentication could not have been done through one of the German authorities or via a notary. (If I remember rightly, the forms for passports, elections etc permitted British professionals to verify signatures who I was but no German lawyer could).

Given that I have maintained my Australian citizenship and my children are also registered as Australians by descent, I believe people such as myself should be able to vote and take part in elections and referendums. I, like many other Australians overseas, are proud to be Australian and still believe they will return to Australia. We want a say in Australia's future for ourselves and our children.

When I first went overseas, I found the information even at Australia House was poor, actually non-existent, as to how one can stay on the electoral role while overseas. I am unaware of any brochures, general information that was given to people who took the effort to vote then, telling them how to stay registered if they stayed longer. I do not believe the situation has improved in the meantime. I have since been told that one needs to register within two years of leaving Australia. By the time I found that out, the period for registration had long elapsed and no possibility exists to be reregistered. It is quite frustrating. I felt most frustrated when it came to the recent referendums, as the republic issue was of great interest to all Australians of all political persuasions. Given the size of the Australian community in London, it is easier to find out about elections and where one should register than elsewhere in Europe. I found out about this submission through Austral!

ian Business in Europe (Frankfurt) and not through an Embassy or Consulate.

Australian embassies and consulates often keep records on Australians living in a country. I believe that if Australians are registered with a consulate or embassy then it should be possible for them to vote electronically. It would be quicker, cheaper and easier than postal votes.

One issue that you may wish to address if you allow Australian expatriates to reenroll is the choice of seat for which they may vote. I was registered in the seat of Phillip in Sydney which no longer exists as such. Should I be registered only for the seat at my last address in Australia? Or could I nominate another seat. In my case, if I return it is not clear that I would even live in Sydney, let alone the same suburb as before. It would depend on the jobs available to me at the time of my return and where my family live. Systems would need to be set up so that overseas officials can cope with electoral boundary changes that have taken place since a person has moved overseas.

I have tried to set out as briefly as possible my opinions. Should you wish me to elaborate on any point, feel free to contact me,

yours sincerely
Leigh Dwyer