

## SUBMISSION 76

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The Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Dear Secretary

I wish to make an individual submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election. Please find the submission attached for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely

Sean Tyrell

## **Submission to the Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election.**

### Key points

- As an elector with severe vision-impairment I would like the Committee to recommend that the Australian Electoral Commission retain electronically assisted voting for future elections to provide electors with a print disability with the means to exercise our right to a secret and independent vote.
- I would also like the Committee to recommend amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to remove the requirement for electors with a print disability to obtain a certificate from a registered medical practitioner in order to be added to the electoral roll.
- Finally, I would like the Committee to note in its report the need for political parties to make how to vote cards and on-line policy information available in formats accessible to people with a print disability.

### Electronically assisted voting

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) trialled electronically assisted voting in a relatively small number of polling places at the November 2007 election. This measure provided me with my first opportunity to exercise my right to an independent and secret vote. At previous elections I had been obliged to ask an AEC officer to mark a print ballot paper on my behalf because I am vision-impaired to the extent that I cannot read print or write by hand.

I commend the AEC for implementing this initiative. While I had been looking forward to casting a vote for myself for many months leading up to the election, I was nonetheless overwhelmed by the positive and empowering experience of voting. I found the technology used by the AEC for the electronically assisted voting trial very easy to use. Instructions were available in Braille and the technology was situated in a quiet part of the polling place.

My only reservation about the trial was the relatively small number of polling places involved. I am aware of many other blind electors who would have liked to take the opportunity to cast a secret and independent vote, but who were unable to do so at the 2007 election because electronically assisted voting was not available in their electorate.

### Restrictions on people with disability joining the electoral roll

I almost missed the opportunity to vote at the 2007 election because as an elector with a print disability I am required to obtain a certificate from a registered medical practitioner in order to have my name added to the electoral roll.

Shortly before the 2007 election I learned that my name had been deleted from the electoral roll. When I tried to re-enrol to vote at the Fraser electorate AEC office I was advised that I would first need to make an appointment with a registered medical practitioner and have them fill out a certificate on my behalf. I found this requirement difficult to comply with because at that time all the medical practitioners I contacted seeking an appointment had waiting lists of at least a fortnight. After several letters of complaint to AEC head office I was advised that the requirement had been waived in my case and my name could be returned to the electoral roll.

The Committee would be aware that in decades past Australians with a disability were confined to asylums and that we had many aspects of our lives regulated by medical experts. The Committee would also be aware that in contemporary Australia people

with a disability are free to live and work as we please, and are no longer required to obtain permission to do so from members of the medical profession. The time has come to update the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 and remove the badly antiquated provisions that require people with a disability to obtain a certificate from a registered medical practitioner in order to be added to the electoral roll.

*Political party information in accessible formats*

The Committee could help make future elections more inclusive by noting in its report that at the 2007 election both the Australian Labour Party and the Liberal Party of Australia failed to make important information available in alternative formats to print, such as Braille, large text or accessible electronic text. This applies both to “how to vote” information distributed at polling places (available only in print) and on-line policy information (available predominantly in PDF, a relatively inaccessible format with the adaptive technology people who are blind or vision-impaired use on our PCs, rather than the accessible MS Word or HTML).