

672/1081

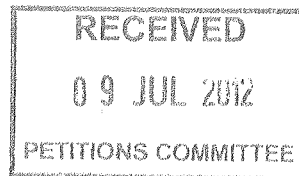


HON GARY GRAY AO MP

Special Minister of State
Minister for the Public Service and Integrity

REF:C12/1657

The Hon. John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 28 May 2012 (your reference 672/1081) regarding a petition submitted to the Committee seeking to lower the voting age from 18 years of age to 16. I note the petition proposes that voting for eligible 16 and 17 year olds be optional before it becomes compulsory at 18.

The Government is committed to improving Australia's electoral system and to examining options for modernisation and reform.

As you may be aware, the rules governing enrolment and voting at federal elections are set out in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act), which is administered by the Australian Electoral Commission. Any changes to the rules set out in the Electoral Act are matters for Parliament to consider and agree to.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) considers a range of electoral and administrative matters, including the issue you have written about. Further information about the JSCEM, its activities and processes can be found at:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary Business/Committees/House of Representatives Committees?url=em/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=em/index.htm)

In its inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 federal election the JSCEM discussed, among other things, the appropriate minimum age for provisional enrolment. The JSCEM recommended lowering the minimum age for voluntary provisional enrolment from 17 to 16 years old, but did not recommend lowering the voting age.

The petitioners may be interested to know that optional enrolment and voting for 16 year olds was mentioned in the report on the 2008 Australia 2020 Youth Summit, which discussed the future of Australian governance (including renewed democracy). Lowering the voting age was also considered in paragraphs 4.42 to 4.45 of the Australian Government's *Electoral Reform Green Paper – Strengthening Australia's Democracy*, released in 2009. This Green Paper, the second of two on electoral reform, invited comment on a wide range of possible changes to Australia's electoral architecture and processes. This Green Paper is available from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website at:

http://www.dpmc.gov.au/consultation/elect_reform/.

In early June 2010, the Government introduced legislation into the Parliament to lower the minimum age for provisional enrolment from 17 to 16 years old. The necessary legislative changes were passed by Parliament later that month, and made into law by the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Act 2010*.

Significant changes to the electoral system are not usually introduced to the Parliament without first being considered by the JSCEM. This is an open process and the JSCEM welcomes submissions from any interested Australians. The Government considers and responds to the JSCEM's recommendations once the inquiry is complete. Accordingly, persons who may wish to pursue legislative change, such as lowering the voting age to 16 years, should lodge a submission with the next appropriate inquiry of the JSCEM.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Committee and its petitioners.

Yours sincerely

GARY GRAY

28 JUN 2012