

# **SUBMISSION**

**Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Department of House of Representatives**

**Date of Submission:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2006  
**Name:** Robert Tuppini

## **Re: Expatriate Voting & Enrolment**

I left Australia in November 1999 and have since been returning to Australia 1 to 3 times per year for periods usually not exceeding 6 weeks (except for a period of 29 weeks in 2001).

Upon my initial departure from Australia in 1999 and up to 2 months ago in March 2006, I had no knowledge of Expatriate Voting and Enrolment. Neither, what it was or that it existed. I was never informed of the procedure when in Australia or each time I departed.

It was, until recently, my (mis) understanding that if I went overseas that I could automatically vote at an Australian mission overseas. This (now unfounded) understanding was based mainly on the pre-supposition that:

- voting is compulsory and a democratic right as an Australian citizen – always (except for prisoners).
- voting would remain compulsory and/or a democratic right when overseas because I am an Australian citizen.
- departments such as the AEC, DIMA and Centrelink track Australian citizens upon entry and departure from Australia and therefore Australian missions can cross check eligibility to vote from overseas for any Australian abroad

It has only been since reading the Southern Cross Group web that I have learnt that I have lost my voting rights, that they were lost on the day of my departure from Australia in 1999 because I did not enrol as an expatriate, and that I have now become disenfranchised and disempowered as a citizen.

I strongly feel that there has been a profound lack of information dissemination and community awareness, on the part of the AEC, as to the rights and responsibilities regarding voting in Australian elections for Australians travelling abroad.

By not informing the public of the possibility of losing a democratic right, Australians like myself, who have travelled overseas without being made aware that they needed to enrol for voting overseas (as well as the ongoing procedures to retain voting rights whilst overseas), have become disenfranchised from the political and democratic process in

Australia and have been made to feel like 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens, disempowering them in the process.

It should be incumbent on the AEC to clearly, transparently, but more importantly “pro-actively”, inform all Australians on overseas voting procedures as a matter of “duty of care”. This is especially a priority considering that currently there are approximately 1 million Australians abroad.

This “duty to inform” should be done on a regular basis and in an easily understandable format. It should be done as a general campaign within Australia and as an information dissemination requirement upon purchasing a ticket for overseas travel. There should also be a campaign to actively educate Australians currently overseas who have lost their voting rights or who may lose them in the future.

At present there is no comprehensive or ongoing awareness program, neither within Australia or overseas. Consequently if a University graduate such as myself had no knowledge of his responsibilities to inform the AEC, I fear that it would be rendered impossible for people of other socio-economic groups to have such awareness- groups that may have difficulty in retrieving information such as NESB citizens/residents, the elderly, the infirmed, the disabled or simply people without internet access.

Without a comprehensive awareness program the statement that ***If I don't know what question to ask then how can I ask the question?*** rings true for Australians travelling overseas with the consequent loss of voting rights.

In order to achieve an ongoing awareness campaign the Federal Government should approve specific funding for the AEC that targets Australians travelling overseas as well as those currently living abroad. Also, due to the current lack of information given to Australians overseas on their expatriate voting and enrolment responsibilities, there should be an amnesty on the current requirement that those that have lost their voting rights need to return to Australia to regain them, until such date that an awareness program is put in place.

**Robert Tuppini**  
**Rome, Italy**