

## INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION

### Submission from Guides Australia

The Mission of Guides Australia is: *Helping girls and young women grow into confident, self-respecting responsible community members.*

The Program of Guides Australia gives girls the opportunity to work in teams, develop leadership skills and to be involved in activities which promote a sense of responsibility to the wider community. To this end, they take part in a wide range of service activities including involvement in ANZAC Day ceremonies, Australia Day ceremonies, 'Clean Up Australia' as well as fund-raising and activities to support local charities and communities.

Guide Leaders in Australia have access to a document entitled "Our Rights, Our Responsibilities", produced by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. This program is suitable for a wide age range of girls and encourages awareness of an individual's rights but also her responsibility to others. Girls use voting procedures throughout their time in Guides as part of their decision-making process. They vote on the choice of activities and programs in their own Unit, and vote to select leaders from their peer group as part of the focus on team work.

Throughout the award challenges in the Guide Program, progressing through Junior BP Award, BP Award and Queen's Guide Award, there is an increasing emphasis on good citizenship and service, but this does not include any particular reference to the Australian political system at Federal or State level.

While Guides Australia is an apolitical organisation, we are very conscious of the need for young women to be informed in order to make sensible decisions about their future. We would welcome the opportunity to consult, in order to add to our existing programs, a program which would cover the electoral system and highlight the need for young women to be informed about the responsibility which comes with voting.

But understanding the process is not enough by itself. Information about the process needs to be supported by information about the major issues that face the elected government and the whole community. Citizens in Australia will face many challenges ahead in relation to global warming, water conservation, the use of nuclear power, immigration and management of an aging population, to name but a few.

Guides Australia members believe that good citizenship is essential for the 'health' of a nation. No changes in society are likely to be actively supported unless people understand the need to put aside personal desires to work towards the common good.

We believe that the programs we offer girls promote this understanding. However, we suggest that programs such as ours should be offered in primary schools to increase social awareness and encourage responsible citizenship. We look forward to the opportunity for further consultation on this matter.

Lynne Price  
Chief Commissioner

1 May 2006