

## SUBMISSION 63

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**From:** Andrew Ambrosius

**Sent:** Saturday, 3 June 2006 9:08 AM

**To:** Committee, EM (REPS)

**Subject:** Submission to Inquiry into civics and electoral education

Submission to the:

Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

From:

Mr. Andrew Ambrosius

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this matter, one that I feel is important, particularly for those abroad. I would like to make several points in relation to overseas voting for Australian citizens.

Firstly I think it is important to acknowledge that large numbers of Australia's youth leave Australia every year to study and work abroad, this in itself is an enriching experience. I have first hand experience and believe I am a better person as a result of my experiences abroad. Also I believe that this is of benefit to the country as a whole as Australian's abroad can bring back experience as well as business opportunities and contacts. This is the joy of living in a free and open society that allows me to leave but always accepts me home with open arms.

What is often the case is that people initially leave for a set amount of time, only to end up staying abroad for various reasons. Often it will be the realisation of a fulfilling job opportunity or a love for differing cultural experiences or love itself. The point is that people, especially youth, may be unaware of their voting rights or obligations in order to remain on the electoral roll and may only find out that they have been disenfranchised after the fact.

When living and working/studying abroad it is easy to become caught up in your new life, new friends, culture, experience, languages etc. People can become temporarily disconnected from Australia, this however does not mean that they are any less Australian or that they are not concerned or interested in the affairs affecting our wonderful nation. Often people are more passionate and very patriotic. Voting is the right of every Australian and to take that away from people without properly informing them is greatly unfair and un-Australian.

Voting abroad is actually not that difficult, but you need to register as an overseas voter, why not include this form with passport documentation, or visa applications for foreign countries, it could be offered to passengers at the same time as landing tickets are handed out for any flights departing Australia.

I was lucky enough to be in Rome last election, by pure chance, so I was able to vote (It felt GREAT to vote abroad). I had also taken the time to register as an overseas voter. I had to find this information out through such groups as the Southern Cross Group, if I had not been informed early on I would have missed my chance to vote, I would have been very hurt at the prospect of not being able to vote. This is one of the key problems, people only become aware of these issues at the last minute, this information should be posted on all major government websites that have anything to do with State or Federal Government politics in and around the time an election is called.

If we as a nation seek to spread free and Democratic ideals around the world why don't we start to practice these with our own citizens and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to vote no matter where it is they happen to reside.

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Ambrosius