

Read, Shane (REPS)

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Sent: Wednesday, 26 June 2002 7:27 PM
To: JSCEM@aph.gov.au
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Subject: Submission

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Message:

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	76
Date Received	2/7/02
Secretary	

To: The Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee
on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir,

This submission is in response to the JSCEM's invitation for public comment as part of its Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2001 Federal Election.

I am an Australian citizen whom is both eligible to vote and currently living abroad.

Before I departed Australia to reside overseas (Aug 1997), I completed and submitted the necessary paperwork to be eligible to vote overseas. Since that time, I have updated my voting enrolment on two occasions (change of name & change of Australian address).

I am now in the 5th year of my 6 year eligibility period, so I will probably not be eligible to vote in the next federal election even though I am an Australian citizen whom has followed the law, exercised her democratic right to vote in elections, & fulfilled expected duties of a responsible Australian citizen.

Unfortunately, I feel that I have not been afforded my full voting rights as an Australian citizen since I have been overseas, even though I have made all attempts to exercise those rights.

Since I left Australia in 1997, there have been two federal elections & one referendum, and I have only successful in voting once, in the 2001 federal election. Even then, I know my vote wasn't even counted because the election was not close enough to require counting of postal votes!

Regarding the 1998 Federal Election, I applied for a postal vote through the Australian Embassy in Washington DC, USA. Unfortunately, due to what I told was "problems with the post from Australia" at the Embassy, I did not receive my postal vote until the day after it was due to be submitted!! Thus, my voting rights were forfeited due administrative errors beyond my control.

When the 1999 Referendum on the Republic was called, I did not know about the vote until after the postal vote application deadline had passed, but still before the election was held.

My attempt to vote in the 2001 Federal election was successful, but barely. The application for an overseas postal vote requires a signature from another Australian overseas (which are hard to find where I live in Florida) and the timeframe between getting the application & the deadline for

submission does not allow for sending it elsewhere for someone else to sign it. So, just to complete my paperwork required me to submit a statutory declaration, and after all that trouble I know my vote wasn't even counted!!!

Also during the 2001 Federal Election, I utilised the AEC website heavily to find out information about changing my enrolment address (in Australia), to check my enrolment, to clarify the overseas voting process, & to find information about the nominees. The last is an area the AEC website seriously lacked : information on the nominees in the election, or at least links to the nominees websites or contact information for them. All I could find was a page with a name for the nominee for the district, & if there was contact information it was only a mailing address. When I searched for information on nominees I could only find the websites of the major parties. I was also trying to find out information about the different parts of the vote itself & what they meant, to no avail. I think the AEC could improve access to the nominees, or at least publish their official statements so that web users can find them.

So, certainly, I am disenfranchised by the system for overseas voters as it currently is. I do not believe that just because I have lived outside of Australia for 6 years or more that I should have to forfeit my democratic right to vote. I also believe that the many steps the AEC makes overseas voters go through (endless submission of applications & enrolments) serve to further disenfranchise those Australian citizens whom would like to participate in their country's democratic processes.

I strongly support better official education and notification (from the Australian Government) of expatriates, which in the age of email should be a relatively easy undertaking (it would just require persons to register for email). Australian Embassies and Consulates do not provide any notification service of events such as elections, which I think is a major shortcoming considering that more than 4% of the population lives abroad.

I thank you for your time and I hope you will allow me to continue to exercise my democratic rights as an Australian citizen without regard or limitations to my "overseas" status.

Sincerely,
Michelle Kelleher
Pembroke Pines, FL, USA