

20080507sub049.txt

From: Stephen McDonald [stephen.mcdonald@southwark.gov.uk]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 May 2008 4:05 AM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
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Subject: Submission

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Message:

To: The Committee Secretary, JSCEM

Dear Sir,

Please accept this submission for the JSCEM's Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election.

I have now lived overseas for 10 years, and was formerly resident in the seat of Sydney, where I still own my home.

Like many Australians, I ventured overseas for a 'couple of years', but end up remaining longer. I return home regularly and plan to return home permanently in due course.

I retain a keen interest in Australian current affairs and take voting seriously. It was a shock to discover at the last federal election, despite regularly attending at Australia House in London to vote at every state and federal election to date, that my vote has not been valid for the past four years at least.

I only discovered I had been disenfranchised through a chance conversation with an Australian official in London. They told of stories of Australians turning up election after election for, in some cases, more than 20 years not realising they could not vote.

I'm sure they too would share my deep sense of being disowned by my own country on discovering this fact for myself.

I'm proud to be Australian - and would hope my country was proud of me. Finding out that I don't "count" literally, is a slap in the face.

Other countries, such as Italy, actively encourage expatriate involvement in local politics. An open, inclusive society like Australia should do likewise.

It seems to me that the defining feature of whether you can vote or not is not how long you have been living overseas, but whether you continue to identify with being Australian and willing to exercise your democratic responsibilities.

If this means needing to re-enrol periodically (but certainly not in the currently delimiting way it is currently) and was publicised so people understood that this was the requirement, then so be it.

One of the many things I am proud of about Australia is its compulsory voting system. I have seen in the UK what not having one means in terms of electoral apathy and election results. The requirement to vote is instilled into Australians as a right and a responsibility that has been keenly upheld - indeed we have gone to war in the name of democracy - yet we cavalierly disenfranchise tens of thousands of our own countrymen.

I would prevail on the Inquiry to consider the case for re-enrolling expatriate

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Australians as an integral part, albeit distant, from an inclusive country.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McDonald