

SUBMISSION 92

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From: Janet Lyn Magnin [janetmagnin@wanadoo.fr]
Sent: Thursday, 15 May 2008 7:15 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Cc: janetmagnin@wanadoo.fr
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.

What is it that Americans, Austrians, Belgians, British, Bulgarians, Burkina Faso, Croatians, Dominican Republicans, Dutch-persons, Ecuadorians, Finnish, French-persons, Germans, Ghanaians, Indians, Iraqis, Irish, Italians, Japanese, Luxembourghers, Malians, Mexicans, Moroccans, Norwegians, Polish, Portuguese, Romanians, Swedish, Swiss, South Africans, Spanish and probably many other citizens can do even when not living in the country of their citizenship, but Australians can't? They can vote.

Back in the year 1901, Australia led the world by being one of the first countries to give women the right to vote. Now, in 2008, Australia is lagging behind many of the world's nations who recognize the importance of their citizens abroad in the political and economic life of their country. The right to vote is a basic right of citizenship and cannot be taken away lightly.

Instead of finding complicated ways to exclude people from voting, the Australian Government should be finding new ways of helping people to vote (such as internet voting). It is heavily ironic that Australia is one of the few countries with compulsory voting, but strikes its citizens off the electoral roll for "failing" to vote when abroad, even though voting is not compulsory for them!

When I left Australia in 1991, the world was a different place, and daily news from Australia was not available to me. At that time I "took it for granted" that I would not be able to vote. However, since then, I have learned that it is now possible to vote from overseas, but only if one goes through a lot of bureaucratic rigmarole (and even then it sometimes doesn't happen). In any case, it is too late for me. However, I am more in touch with events in Australia than ever, and I am still affected by Australian laws, and should therefore logically have some say in voting for those who make those laws, especially since our Constitution is fairly "thin", and many of our rights depend on clarification by Parliament. I also have two dual citizen children and would like to have my say in the future of an Australia they may well choose to live in one day. And even if they don't, they are still vitally interested in Australia through the connection of their citizenship. They will soon reach voting age.

The present government was elected without our votes so I guess expatriate voting is low on the agenda. The Prime Minister has even said he would like more expatriates to return to Australia, but this is not the point. Surely it is whatever we are doing abroad that is important to Australia. In the world of the 21st century, people do not have to be physically present to be involved. By including expats in the political process, a strong message would be sent out to the world, that ALL Australians are important to the country, that ALL Australian voices are being heard. I would hope very strongly that the elected

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representatives of the people are not afraid of the expatriate vote, that it might somehow make too much of a difference! We are estimated to be some 500,000 potential voters OH (over here) but obviously, while I believe it could be made much easier for us to vote, I do not believe it could or should be made compulsory.

In practical terms, I request the following:

- 1 - that the present time limits on re-enrolling from abroad be removed entirely,
- 2 - that expatriates NOT be removed from the electoral roll for failing to vote,
- 3 - that the feasibility of internet voting be examined as a matter of priority.

Maybe one day, we will be able to sing "Australians ALL let us rejoice" for we have got back our constitutional citizen's right to vote.