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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir/Madam,

Participation by citizens outside Australia

This is a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters “Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election”.

I am one of many thousands of disenfranchised Australian citizens unable to vote in the 2007 election. In 1995 I left Australia to continue higher education in the USA, after voting in the Division of Sturt several times. I remained outside Australia for most of the years following, working first in New Zealand and now in Germany. Like Australia, all three countries have open societies, welcoming migrants and committed to democracy. However Australia differs in one important respect: its overseas citizens are too easily deprived of their voting rights.

I was able to register as an Eligible Overseas Elector in 2001, and voted at the 2001 election (at the Consulate-General in Auckland) and again in 2004 (at the Embassy in Berlin) elections. However there was no feedback as to whether my vote was received, or counted. Last year I did not vote as I was unable to confirm via the AEC online verification tool that I was still on the Electoral Roll, before the sudden close of the Roll. I failed to apply for a yearly extension of my overseas registration. Because of this, presumably I am no longer an eligible overseas elector. I felt it would be difficult to demonstrate my intent to return to Australia, and wonder why the onus is on me to continue to demonstrate this at regular intervals. We don't ask citizens whether they intend to remain citizens before allowing them to vote, and *we shouldn't ask if and*

when they plan to return.

Perhaps in the distant past the eligible overseas elector provisions of Sections 94 and 94A of the Commonwealth Electoral Act made sense. Today, as Australians come from around the world, and travel, work and live around it, *that model is no longer appropriate*. Why should our overseas citizens be penalised by placing such difficulties in the path of their voting?

Citizens, no matter how remote, remain a part of the Australian community. I, like other expatriate Australians, visit home regularly, and between visits remain informed, via family and friends, on-line newspapers and web-logs, about Australian life whether it be the footy or the cricket, or what our politicians are up to. Many of us continue to pay taxes in Australia. While overseas I have paid off my HECS debt and continue to pay nonresident withholding taxes.

Currently it's difficult to find out about the need to register before leaving, it's difficult to find out if one remains on the roll, and with annual applications for an extension, it's difficult to stay on the roll. This situation is needlessly bureaucratic and inconvenient, and anachronistic in world of ever-more mobile Australians. *All Australian citizens should be able to vote in Australian elections as easily as resident citizens can.*

I will return to Australia, which will benefit from the experience and skills I have acquired whilst overseas. I would hope it was to a country that I have helped to shape by participating in electoral life. Sadly, I am currently unable to do so.

Yours sincerely

Peter L. Evans