

## Hon Gary Gray AO MP

Federal Member for Brand

Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia

The Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

### **Re: Submission to the Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee's Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election.

I would like to bring to the committee's attention the difficulties candidates experience in relation to accessing privately-owned public open space for the purposes of campaigning during the election as the Labor Candidate for Brand.

Our democratic system is predicated on the assumption that citizens have the right to access their local candidates and the policies they stand for. Local candidates provide local people with access to their ideas and policies by meeting them in person in their local community.

Traditionally, this would have occurred in public open spaces or common meeting areas such as town squares and town meeting halls. However, time has changed the nature of social activity and social interaction.

In 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia, the most appropriate venue to meet and greet voters is at local shopping centres that are dotted throughout metropolitan and regional areas. The privately-owned public open spaces located within shopping centres are now the meeting place of choice.

My concern is that shopping centre owners have the ability to pick and choose which candidates they allow into their shopping centres. This ability creates an unfair situation where shopping centre owners play a significant and influential role in the campaign process.

A related concern is the increase in pre-poll votes in all electorates, especially in Western Australia and the limited ability of election volunteers to hand out how-to-vote cards outside AEC where they are located in privately owned shopping centres or other institutions such as defence force facilities.

I believe that the Australian Electoral Commission should investigate, in collaboration with major shopping centre owners and other interested parties, a voluntary set of guidelines which ensure access for appropriate electoral activity.

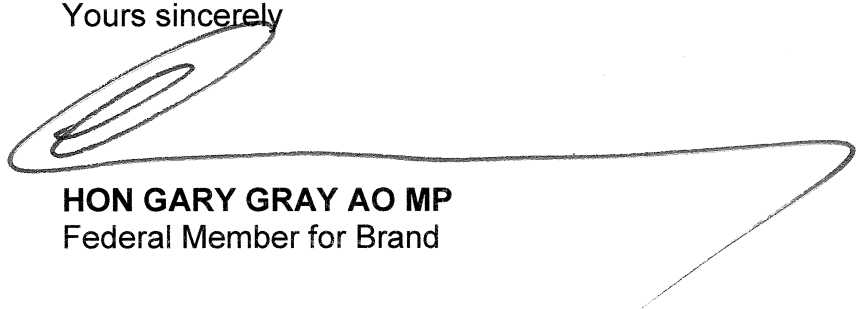
It should also be a condition for AEC offices that the lease agreement allows campaign volunteers to distribute how-to-vote cards to pre-poll voters.

Apart from this concern, I believe that the conduct of the 2007 Federal Election was professional, transparent and accountable.

Given the professional conduct of elections in Australia, I strongly suggest that the Australian Electoral Commission give consideration to inviting visitors from Pacific and Asian neighbours to observe the conduct of our elections.

If you require any further information on the issue that I have raised please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a long horizontal stroke that tapers to a point on the right.

**HON GARY GRAY AO MP**  
Federal Member for Brand

**22 MAY 2008**