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From: Eric Brown [cadzow1907@live.com]
Sent: Saturday, 17 May 2008 8:21 PM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
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Subject: Submission

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Message:

To: The Committee Secretary, JSCEM

Dear Sir,

JSCEM's Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election.

First, I apologise for missing the deadline for this submission. If you would nevertheless be kind enough to accept my belated effort below, I should be most grateful.

Voting in Australia is not only a right, but also a duty. This means that everyone eligible to vote does so. The result therefore represents the views of the whole electorate. This contrasts with here in the UK, where voting is not obligatory and where turnouts can be abysmally low at national and local level. Some potential voters do not believe that voting will make any difference, so the ruling party wins with the largest minority of the 60% of all votes cast thanks to voter apathy.

However, what is so rigorously enforced within Australia is not enforced in the case of Australians who go and work overseas. At present the Australian diaspora amounts to over one million and most of these Australian citizens are eligible to vote. However, if they forget to register before they leave home, it is very difficult for them to do so retrospectively. This rigid ruling should be relaxed. Many who have forgotten to register regret their decision once they have arrived overseas and find that it is not so easy to get back onto their home register.

A month ago, I attended a talk given in the Phoenix Theatre of the London School of Economics by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Mr Rudd commented that he was aware that the largest Australian polling station on the planet was located a few minutes' walk away, namely at Australia House. From the statistics I have seen, some 80,000 votes were cast by Australians in the UK in the November general election, yet over 200,000 Australians live over here, mainly in London. May I therefore encourage the committee to make a strong case for making it possible for those Australians who have left home before registering to vote to be able to do so retrospectively?

By casting their votes overseas, these Australians will be making a concrete demonstration that are keeping in touch with their homeland and that they still regard Australia as home.

It will also reinforce the message that every vote counts and that just by leaving Australia, one does not automatically sever one's links and responsibilities to one's native land.

Yours faithfully,

Eric Brown
Southern Cross Group volunteer

London, UK

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