

**Wilson, Frances (REPS)**

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**From:** Alison Hogg [ahogg@noos.fr]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 27 May 2008 4:43 AM  
**To:** Committee, EM (REPS); Committee, EM (REPS)  
**Subject:** JSCEM's Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election

To: The Committee Secretary, JSCEM

Dear Sir,

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

My personal details are as follows:

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I have been away from Australia since August, 1996. Prior to leaving I was registered in the sub-division of Cremorne NSW.

I have strong links to Australia as all my family and friends live there. I am at least 6th generation Australian. Although I do not have property or pay taxes in Australia I have strong personal ties. I would expect hopefully to return to Australia some day.

I visit Australia as much as I possibly can. In each country I have lived in I have always kept abreast with Australian issues and news through internet, magazines (subscriptions from Australia to Paris), correspondence with friends and relatives. As I do not live in Australia it is even more so important to me to be kept well informed on what is happening at home.

I voted during the Australian Federal Election in 2007 and my vote was submitted at the Australian Embassy in London (as I was visiting there at the time).

I voted at the Australian Embassy Bangkok in the November 1999 Referendum on the Republic. Since then, I have voted in all Federal Elections 2001, 2004 and 2007. For the 2004 Federal Election after voting I received on 7 December, 2004 a letter at my Paris address from the Australian Electoral Commission (Division of North Sydney) informing me that my vote was not counted on this election as they could not find evidence in the enrollment records to indicate that my name was, or should have been, on the electoral roll for this division. At this time, I did not know that I had in fact been disenfranchised, I presumed that an incorrect ballot paper was issued at the Australian Embassy in Paris.

At no time had I been informed from the Australian Electoral Office that I had been "disenfranchised". It was only through correspondence I received from the Southern Cross Group in Brussels who prompted me to look into this and provided me with the rules about voting from overseas. With this information I sent an email to the AEC who subsequently informed me by email dated 24 March 2006 that as my enrollment had lapsed I had been deleted from the electoral roll.

On leaving Australia in 1996 my tax accountant advised me to forward to the Australian Electoral Commission an application to be registered as an eligible overseas elector. Unfortunately I was unaware that my registration would only be for a period of 3 years (at that time) and since it was extended to 6 years and again I was not aware.

Due to a long stay in Australia I have now managed to be re-instated on the Electoral Roll - registered as an Overseas Electoral Voter - I am currently registered at 21 Golden Grove Red Hill, Canberra (being my parents address).

During each of my overseas postings (since 1996 to the present) Singapore, Bangkok and now Paris I have registered my details with the Australian Embassy providing my address and contact details. It is extremely disappointing that I was not made aware in the last 10 years of what I needed to know as an Australian living overseas concerning Electoral Matters.

The time limitations for overseas enrolling is absurd - there shouldn't be any, considering if one is casting their vote in each Federal Election! I believe that it is necessary to inform the AEC when leaving Australia but to disenfranchise me with no warning from them is quite wrong considering we are living in the 21st century and most importantly I thought Australia was a democratic nation. Especially considering that I have registered at the appropriate Australian Embassy in each country I have resided. I cannot understand why the AEC or the embassy have not provided a simple message or reminder at each election of the rules and regulations on overseas voting. However, thankfully for the organisation Southern Cross I have been kept well informed. I will always be an Australian and will one day return home - why is it that my rights as a citizen is taken away from me for the simple fact that one forgot to re-register? On each and every Federal Election I have voted on whilst overseas I have been able to make an informed decision on each vote due to the fact that I am kept up to date on Australian issues. I do not believe that one should ever be disenfranchised - being disenfranchised to me was extremely emotional and saddening. I do not hold another nationality - I am an Australian and why should the rights of an Australian be taken away just because I live in another country - a true Australian can still live outside Australia and be a wonderful representative and example of who an Australian is.

Time limitations allowed under the Electoral Act is unnecessary. I do not feel it necessary to remind the Electoral Commission (every 3 or 6 years) that I am still an Australian and would like to continue to have the right to vote, especially considering that I vote in each and all elections.

What is most surprising is that I have learnt all about my voting rights and issues from a non profit organisation called the Southern Cross Group. Without their valuable assistance, newsletters etc I would not have my rights today as a citizen. It should be noted and taken seriously as to why an organisation like the Southern Cross Group was formed in the first place - they are offering a great service and providing much information and assistance to the Australian Diaspora (and they are a non-profit organisation!). I am kept up to date on Australian issues through all means as already mentioned - but never have I come across information that should be readily available to the public that I have received from the Southern Cross Group.

It would be great to see the following changes in the Australian Electoral System:

Require Australian Embassies to inform Australian citizens by way of a brochure etc made available at the embassy or at time of voting of their voting rights.

Tax accountants to be given detailed information so they can pass on to their clients who are leaving Australia

The AEC could easily obtain details from the Australian Embassies overseas of Australian citizens registered in each embassy so that information can be forwarded directly on to them.

Australian Embassies to provide information readily available at the embassy or by way of newsletter of voting procedures for each Federal Election.

The Australian Government recommends its citizens to register at the Embassy of the country they are residing in . I am not sure what the Embassies do with this information or why it is recommended in the first place. I have never been sent newsletters, updates, information on events by any of the Embassies I have registered at. In fact the only way to obtain information is by paying for a membership associated with the Embassy. Would it not be too difficult for all Australian Embassies to extend information by form of a regular or yearly newsletter to each person registered at the Embassy (like other nations do)?

I am a lucky one - I have regained my voting rights - but I should never have been disenfranchised in the first place. The fundamental right and privilege of an Australian Citizen is to have the **Right to Vote**. With this right, under the Electoral Act there should be **no time limitations or requirements to re-register as an Overseas Electorate**. I and other Australians should be allowed freely to exercise our democratic right to participate in elections.

Yours faithfully,

Alison Hogg