



Changes to postal voting, nominations and the 'unsound mind' exemption

Federal Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee has released its advisory report today on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Procedure) Bill 2012.

The committee unanimously recommended that Parliament pass the Bill, subject to changes to Schedule 3 in relation to the 'unsound mind' exemption from enrolment and voting.

The committee was not satisfied that there is any pressing need to remove or substitute the phrase 'unsound mind' in section 93(8) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*. The phrase has an established meaning and its removal risks broadening the exemption and disenfranchising some electors.

The committee did not support the amendment to expand the types of professionals who can make a determination under section 93(8).

Medical practitioners should remain the only profession to make determinations about a person's capacity to understand the nature and significance of enrolment and voting.

The Bill implements the Government's response to recommendations in the committee's report entitled *The 2010 Federal Election: Report on the conduct of the election and related matters*.

Recommendation 12 was to allow the automated issuing of postal votes, and recommendations 31 and 32 were to increase nomination fees for Senate and House of Representatives candidates to \$2 000 and \$1 000, respectively).

Other significant amendments included in the Bill will increase the number of nominators required by unendorsed candidates from 50 to 100 electors, and require unendorsed candidates for the Senate who request to be grouped to each have 100 unique nominators.

Appropriate nomination requirements help ensure that prospective candidates appreciate the seriousness of their participation in the electoral process, and that they can demonstrate some community support for their candidacies.

The **report** and a **fact sheet** outlining the key differences between the current arrangements and proposed changes are also available on the committee's website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/em>.

For media comment: Please contact the Committee Chair, Daryl Melham MP on 02 6277 2054 (Parliament House office) or 02 9774 2111 (Electoral office).

For general information: Contact the secretariat on 02 6277 2374 or jscem@aph.gov.au.