

## Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

### Civics and Electoral Education

Name: Robyn Stephenson

I have been residing in the United States as an Official Resident since July of 2003, and had arrived here on December 28 2001. My previous address in Australia was [...]

Firstly I would like to address, **the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under the Australian Electoral System;**

Prior to moving to the USA I visited here for six weeks from October to November of 2001. Knowing I was going to miss an election I visited the Electoral Office on Burelli Street in Wollongong. I was handed a list of missions where I could vote where I was here, but the officer I spoke with explained that she seriously doubted that the voting papers were going to arrive at USA missions on time. (A matter I have since learned is more common than one would think.) At that stage I had no idea how far I was from Chicago, so I had requested to be excused from voting.

Of note for this particular Inquiry is that I would have never known that I needed to notify the AEC had I not been a member of the RAN or that the local Enrolment Officer was a neighbour of my parents'. Had I not had these opportunities I would have known of my need to notify the AEC and would have become disenfranchised.

Since residing in the USA I have had a strong involvement with the Southern Cross Group. And in that time I have received many queries about voting from overseas from all ages of people. It seems that there is an educational gap about the Electoral system that is not restricted to an age bias. Confusion and frustration abounds among many who could be and are Eligible Overseas Electors.

Secondly I would like to address; **opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education;**

Every overseas mission is required to collect as many contact details of Australians in their area. It would not be a costly exercise for emails to be sent to all of those Australians explaining their Rights and Responsibilities in the Electoral System. It is one thing to simply post the information on the AEC website, but if people are not even aware of their need to contact the AEC, why would they be checking the AEC website? Email is a cheap, innovative approach to education that can be used both within and outside of Australia.

I would strongly recommend that a more aggressive approach be made to education. The law is quite cut and dry but most people only become aware of it after they are disenfranchised. I do not understand why there are not posters in the airports? A one-time expense that would save a lot of frustration and time for AEC employees.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information.

Regards  
Robyn Stephenson