



Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. 183
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Secretary SD

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31 Alfred St.,
Joooon Bay NSW 2261
1st Aug, 2005

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

I recently wrote to Sen. the Hon Eric Abetz concerning casual remark made by the Prime Minister on the possibility of the Commonwealth Electoral Act being amended to permit non-compulsory voting.

Senator Abetz, however, advises that consideration to such an amendment is not currently being considered by the Govt which I personally am disappointed to hear.

The Senator points out that without compulsory voting the voter turnout would slump & that confirms my experience as a Returning Officer for 4/6 elections in NSW which depending on the complexion of the Govt at the time enact either compulsory or non-compulsory ballots. Non compulsory voting has resulted in turnouts as low as 19%.

But surely that is democracy at work - Free Choice. The USA, Germany, Britain, France to name a few of the larger democracies all have non-compulsory voting relying on the

of local & policies of the Parties to "attract" electors to the Bill. Again, this is democracy at work & can lead to a more informed elector making his or her choice on polling day. One does not have to look too far back to see the weakness of the present Act & indeed its unjust application relative to its monetary penalties.

Mark Latham resigned his seat of Werribee South West of Sydney recently resulting in an election held for the vacancy. The Liberal Party declined to contest the election leaving the Labor Party as the main contestant.

The present legislation therefore resulted in election being a \$20 penalty if they did not vote for the Labor candidate.

Obviously I have over amplified the matter as the Act cannot force an elector to mark his or her ballot paper but I'm sure you'll understand the point I'm making.

The present Act relative to penalties & avoidance thereof seems overly legislative & even draconian just to force electors to the Polling Place. Just reading it, leaves one wondering where an elector's democratic right fit in.

I will write to the Chief Electoral Commissioner to ascertain (1) How many electors have been fined for non voting (2) How many electors have received a Penalty Note for non voting (3) How many electors have had their reasons

for not voting accepted.

My experience at the local Govt level is that the answers to the foregoing questions are - None. Surely a law that is not enforced is bad law & I would urge the C'ntree to give consideration to amend the present Act along the lines of the comments of the Prime Minister.

Of course there are shortcomings in such a proposal to the major parties but good policy & strong campaigning will overcome these resulting in a stronger democratic Australia.

Yours faithfully
Bill Howell