

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Finance and Administration Portfolio**

**Australian Electoral Commission**

Budget Estimates Hearing – May 2006

**Question: F21**

**Outcome: 2; Output 2.1.9**

**Topic: Overseas voters**

**Hansard Page: F&PA 110**

**Senator Carr asked:**

Regarding the report “*They still call Australia home*” and the recommendation to allow overseas Australians to register and vote in certain circumstances, are you able to advise the Committee of the Commission’s view as to the feasibility of such a recommendation. I want to know what the Commission’s experience is of this particular provision.

**Answer:**

The AEC notes that the intent of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* 1918 (the Electoral Act) has always been that Australians living within an electoral division enrol and vote for that electoral division. While some amendments to the Electoral Act have been made to cater for citizens temporarily overseas, the main intent of the Electoral Act has not been widened to permit general expatriate voting. However, the AEC points out that in the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Access to Electoral Roll and Other Measures) Act* 2004, the period of time in which an elector may apply to become an eligible overseas elector after leaving Australia was increased from two years to three years, going some way towards meeting this recommendation.

Under the current provisions, for the 2004 federal election –

- (i) 16,194 Australians were registered with the AEC as eligible overseas electors;
- (ii) 68,544 electors voted at overseas missions.

At the time of an election or at any other given point in time, the AEC is unable to obtain information regarding the number of Australians entitled to vote who are overseas.