

**Read, Shane (REPS)**

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**From:** Christine Cunningham [chris\_euroaussie@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, 5 July 2002 7:58 AM  
**To:** js cem@aph.gov.au  
**Subject:** Submission



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(please note it is chris\_euroaussie in the address above)

My submission is an attached Word 97 doc.

Many thanks,

Chris Cunningham

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To: The Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee  
on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. .... 121
Date Received .... 5/7/02
Secretary .... <i>Salvi</i>

Dear Sir,

This submission is in response to the JSCEM's invitation for public comment as part of its Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2001 Federal Election.

We left Australia in April 1995, previously having resided in Wonga Park, Victoria.

My husband works for a multi-national company, and was unable to advance further unless he gained overseas experience. We moved first to the United States and then almost three years later to Belgium.

Our two daughters have since returned to Australia to complete their education, both attending universities in Melbourne. They are both registered voters.

Prior to leaving Australia, we purchased our unit in Doncaster, where our daughters now live and which we use as a base when home for our regular visits. Both my husband's and my family reside in Australia, and we intend to return to Australia permanently, although our return date is as yet unknown.

We keep up with Australian news through our children, other family members, newspapers and online information/internet etc.

We removed ourselves from the Electoral Roll before departing from Australia. There were two reasons for this.

Firstly, we knew that our overseas employment would be extended, and that there was "some kind of time limit." Secondly, I had already experienced the inconvenience of trying to maintain electoral roll eligibility for my sister and her husband. They left Australia in the early 80s, and were employed in a regional town of Japan. Correspondence to and from was both costly and slow, and the Internet was not yet an option. They could not get newspapers or information in a timely fashion to enable them to vote responsibly. Each time there was an election, I had to provide proof that they were still resident overseas.

I believe that the current laws regarding time limitation on Australians living overseas, excludes us unfairly from taking any part in decisions that will ultimately affect us. Not only is this in regard to decisions having a short term impact, but also those that shape our nation's future. We were not able to vote in the November 1999 Referendum on the Republic.

American friends have recently registered as overseas voters (while residing here in Belgium), but no such system exists to encourage continued civic awareness by Australians resident overseas. I would encourage the committee to carefully consider re-engaging "lapsed" voters through a system of registration at their local consulate or embassy.

I would agree that in the past, (particularly based on the experience of my sister and her husband residing overseas) obtaining information to make informed decisions was difficult. Technology now allows us to keep very much up to date with issues, and access appropriate information. One might argue that our situation is no different than the challenges faced by Australians in remote areas of our own country! The increasingly global nature of business should **not** isolate Australians from participating in decisions regarding the future of their country.

In addition, given the increasing mobility of our citizens, and that airports are our chief points of exit/entry, appropriate information should be available and advertised clearly, in International Departure Lounges. For those Australians who choose to continue taking an active role in the future of their country, provision must be made to allow them to maintain their place on the Electoral Roll, irrespective of length of absence.

Christine M. Cunningham