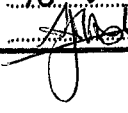


Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No. ....	146
Date Received .....	16-3-05
Secretary .....	

16<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Senator G Barnett,  
33 George Street,  
Launceston 7250

Dear Senator,

**Reference – Cairns Polling Day**

I refer to your request for a submission for the review of the 2004 Federal Election.

I confirm that I am happy for you to use my original letter to you regarding the inadequacies for absentee voters in Cairns on the proviso that you also use the response from Senator Abetz's Office and this letter in your submission.

My comments on the response from Senator Abetz are as follows:

1. The tone of his letter is patronizing (not surprising coming from Senator Abetz) and basically blames voters for the problem. The letter goes on to reassure me (but I guess primarily to reassure themselves) that the AEC had done everything right in the lead up to voting day. Quoting Electoral Acts and suggesting I should read the *Gazette* as well as take along my laptop to check out their websites or even ring the AEC Call Centre does not take away the fact that the facilities were **grossly inadequate**.
2. The second part of the letter again highlights attention that it was the voters who were the problem by "*overwhelming*" the PPVCs. The AEC, or rather I suspect the Returning Officer in defending him/herself gets desperate when part of the blame is affixed to the wicked airlines with their fare discounting. To put the slipper deeper into the voter the letter points out that they should have pre-pollled in their own division before leaving for Leichhardt. Obviously and reasonably this is to make the planning job easier for respective Returning Officers. I would point out that it is not always convenient for people to pre-poll. In my case I had to travel to Cairns at very short notice and time did not allow for this to take place. It seems not to occur to the author that many people might have already left their electorate prior to the poll being announced (extended holiday or work travels).

3. The excuses build up in the final paragraph when the AEC places on record the difficulties and inconveniencies that confront them with their challenging job of providing suitable premises on Election Day. I suspect that the organizational skills of this exercise would be little more demanding than for the proverbial "chook raffle".
4. The one admission is that the Returning Officer for Leichhardt failed in his/her duty to research and identify the population profile of Cairns. For goodness sake Blind Freddy knows that half the population of Cairns and other recognized tourist destinations in the area come from somewhere else.

In summary it is reassuring that the AEC will remember the 2004 Cairns fiasco and take the experience into account for the next election. Perhaps a review of the particular Returning Officer's role might be in order.

For my part I am upset that inefficiency by the AEC denied me a vote. Perhaps a fine would be in order.

Yours sincerely,



Jim Dannock  
31 Mayne Street,  
Invermay  
LAUNCESTON 7248

13<sup>th</sup> October 2004

Senator G Barnett,  
33 George Street,  
LAUNCESTON

Dear Senator,

I wish to place on record my concern regarding the disgraceful voting arrangements for absentee voters in the City of Cairns during polling day on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2004.

It is obvious to most that the city of Cairns is a very popular tourist destination and as such a large percentage of the population at any given time can be visitors from outside that City. Obvious that is to most except the Australian Electoral Commission.

As a visitor to that city on business during that weekend I was dismayed to find, when attempting to vote, that the only location available was a very small office located in the centre of the city. On my many attempts to vote I found queues of people extending back out of the building and down the street and as a consequence the frustration of the voters was at a peak.

I made a number of attempts to vote at other booths but each time was directed back to this **one and only** booth to accommodate what seemed like half the population of Cairns.

Being on business the short time available to me was extremely important and did not allow for standing in lines for an indeterminate time at the expense of the success of my mission. My business partner also was less than impressed that we were effectively denied the opportunity to vote.

I cannot comprehend what must have been in the minds of those who were responsible for this debacle. I can only assume the decision was made in Canberra where many civil servants are sheltered from life in the real Australia.

I hope for the sake of absentee voters in Cairns that you can do something to prevent a re-occurrence at the time of next Federal election.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Dannock', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right and a small upward tick at the end.

Jim Dannock,  
31 Mayne Street,  
Invermay 7248

20 October 2004

Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz  
Special Minister of State  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Minister,

**Re: absentee voters in Cairns October 9, 2004**

Enclosed is a copy of correspondence dated 13 October 2004 from Mr Jim Dannock of 31 Mayne St, Invermay. Mr Dannock expresses his concern regarding the polling arrangements for constituents that voted in absentia in Cairns in the Federal Election on October 9.

Your advice on the matter at your earliest convenience would be appreciated  
thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Barnett  
**LIBERAL SENATOR for TASMANIA**

Enc:



14/12/04.  
- JD rang office  
- MD contacted Chris  
at Eric's office  
- is sending letter to JD.

SENATOR THE HONERIC ABETZ  
Special Minister of State  
Liberal Senator for Tasmania

ATTACHMENT C

Senator Guy Barnett  
33 George Street  
LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

15 NOV 2004

Dear Senator Barnett

Thank you for your letter of 20 October 2004 regarding representations you received from Mr Jim Dannock of Invermay in Tasmania relating to polling arrangements in Cairns for absentee voters.

As you are aware, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is responsible for the conduct of federal elections, including the appointment of polling places, in accordance with the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act).

The AEC advises that, under Part XVA of the Electoral Act, an ordinary polling place cannot issue votes to interstate electors. Interstate electors can only vote by 'pre-poll' vote at a Pre Poll Voting Centre (PPVC). Pre Poll Voting Centre locations were published in the *Gazette* well in advance of polling day, widely advertised in newspapers and were also available on the AEC's website, through the AEC's Call Centre or from divisional offices.

In addition, the AEC's advertising campaign reminded voters to apply for postal votes, to cast pre poll votes or to check locations for absentee voting if they would be interstate or away from their home division on election day. It was open to electors to pre-poll vote in their own division before leaving.

For the 2004 federal election, three PPVCs were provided in the Division of Leichhardt. They were situated in Cairns, Trinity Beach and Port Douglas. I am advised that the pre poll voting needs for Leichhardt, including staffing of polling centres, were estimated on the basis of the voting figures for the 2001 federal election.


However, I am informed that all three PPVCs in Leichhardt were overwhelmed on polling day, with the number of interstate voters almost double that for the 2001 election. Given the significant transient population and workforce in Leichhardt and the increasing tourism resulting from discount airfares, the AEC advises that Leichhardt's Divisional Returning Officer has endeavoured without success to identify the demographic profile of interstate electors who may wish to vote during an election at a particular time of the year.

Nevertheless, I am assured that the AEC will take the 2004 election experience into account in its planning for the next federal election.

Regarding the premises for polling places, unfortunately the AEC is limited to local sites, which are conveniently positioned, suitable for polling and which are available for use during the week before and on polling day. Because elections are not held on fixed dates, the AEC is not able to negotiate ongoing arrangements for polling places, and less than ideal premises may need to be used due to lack of alternative venues.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Abetz', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

ERIC ABETZ