

SUBMISSION NO. 99



Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	99
Date Received	31-3-05
Secretary	<i>[Signature]</i>

CONDUCT OF THE 2004 FEDERAL ELECTION

and

MATTERS RELATED THERETO

INQUIRY

SUBMISSION

From the office of the Hon Bob Katter MP

10 March 2005

P.O. Box 1632, INNISFILL, QLD 4860, Ph: (07) 4061 6060

(1)

Letter from AEC dated 30 July 2004

This advice from the AEC was that the AEC does not approve postal vote applications reproduced by parties or candidates. Further that an allocation of 200 postal vote application forms will be sent to each Senator and Member of Parliament on the announcement of the Federal Election. A quoted sentence in this letter is as follows:-
If you produce postal vote applications, you need to be aware that restrictions apply to the timing of their distribution to electors.

The above sentence may refer to the fact that applications should not be made available to electors until the announcement of the Federal election, however, if we look at what happened in Kennedy, application forms did not arrive at all to some electors and this was a result of what was in place by the AEC.

Email from Peter Dunn to Anne Bright dated 6 October 2004

Further to our telephone conversations this morning I advise that this office is still receiving advice that postal voters have not taken delivery of their postal votes and are very concerned that they will not be able to vote in the election. I appreciate your advice that you have instructed that the balance of Greenvale votes not already reissued will be reissued today, and that special arrangements have been made with Australia Post to accommodate late returns. We understand that a similar situation exists at Burketown and I reiterate the request from Mr Katter that a mobile booth be given urgent consideration. We have complaints that voters are being told, as a solution, to drive to Cairns (over 500km in one case) to vote, or to plead, when the fine arrives, that voting papers didn't arrive in time. We are gaining an impression that the number of postal votes not accounted for is significant, and we understand that an entire batch was misdirected. Mr Katter supports the opinion of the affected voters that they should have the opportunity to vote, no matter what is required to be done to ensure that.

Could you please keep this office informed of steps being taken to address this problem so that we may respond to constituents when they contact us? Thank you for your assistance.

Email to PM from Lynette Moyle – no date

Dear Prime Minister

We petition you to allow the population of North West Queensland to be able to cast their vote in the Australian Election October 9 2004. We have further reliable information that the Burke Shire has had very few postal votes arrive for electors to cast their vote. Maybe there are not enough people in rural and remote Australia to care about but it is their right to vote in this democratic country. We have phoned your office today and the calls on this issue are consuming two thirds of our day.

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What is the AEC going to do to allow the voters who have not received their postal vote ballot papers to cast their vote on Saturday? This needs immediate attention. Please do not disregard this email. We are making representation on behalf of Australians that seem to have had their rights taken from them. How would we be if we had to drive 700km to cast a vote? This is not South Africa.

We know that you Prime Minister believe in the right for all Australians to make their own decisions concerning the Election of the next Government. In the postal vote fiasco it has been removed.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this issue.

Facsimile to Anne Bright from Lynette Moyle dated 6 October 2004

We called this communication to the Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland, Anne Bright, **The Postal Vote Fiasco** because that is exactly what it was. Details are:-

- Burke Shire has received very few postal ballot papers and does not have a polling booth. I have just had information from Octavian (AEC, Mount Isa) that they are driving to Burketown tomorrow (**it would be good to put the kilometres in here**)
- The NT has a mobile van travelling across the electorate, why not Queensland?
- The folk of Gregory Downs have not received their ballot papers either and were told to drive to Cloncurry. It is a 670km round trip of seven hours.
- Seven hours to get the right to vote because they live at Gregory Downs in North West Queensland. This is 2004 and it is Australia.
- The situation in Kennedy is desperate. We have made representation to the Prime Minister's Office by phone and email.
- How is the AEC going to provide the opportunity for all the folk who have missed out to cast their vote, or do they have to wait three years?

Letter to Electoral Commissioner from Peter Dunn dated 22 December 2004

I write in connection with the recent Federal Election, and specifically with the matter of postal votes in the Kennedy electorate.

During the election my offices received a significant number of enquiries and complaints about the late arrival and non arrival of postal votes, and various staff members were in contact with both your Mt Isa and Brisbane offices in relation to these problems.

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At this time my office sought and was given advice that the problems associated with the handling of postal votes would be the subject of an investigation, not necessarily limited to the events in Kennedy.

Could you please advise what steps have been taken regarding the commencement of this investigation, and what opportunities will be available for contribution to it?

Thank you for your assistance.

Letter of reply from AEC dated 7 January 2005, with attachment.

We have to question the appointment of the law firm, Minter Ellison of Melbourne, a company far removed from our vast Electorate of Kennedy, and one with no knowledge of mail deliveries to remote properties and small townships in the western area of Kennedy. Centralisation of the production of Postal Votes has failed. If at this point time frames cannot be met, and we all experience 'tight time frames' in an election campaign, then consideration has to be given for these postal votes to be produced locally in each division. The flow-on effect has been that postal votes were not arriving in time, people were frustrated as they wanted to vote and had a right to vote and so our office was inundated with complaint calls regarding this matter.

We have no complaint with the Management and Staff of the Australian Electoral Office in Mount Isa as they did their best for our office in these difficult circumstances.

The summary attached to this letter indicates operator error by the Melbourne contractor so we question the experience this firm has had in the process of disseminating material during an election campaign.

Recommendation 5 The recommendation that Centrelink be an agency to accept completed Postal Vote applications on behalf of the AEC places another process on an agency which already has a heavy workload.

Recommendation 6 (ii) The modification to the PVA to include a nominated date by which the postal voting material would need to be received at the postal address nominated, would not necessarily come to fruition in the rural and remote areas of Kennedy because the main factor is the **mail delivery service**. Some properties receive mail once a week.

Recommendation 7 The flagging of delivery points in areas where deliveries of mail are only once or twice a week as suggested by Australia Post is a good recommendation however, we feel the application should be dealt with locally and not at a central point far away from our Division of Kennedy.

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Planning for the next election

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We cannot support a centralised, computer-based printing and production system to support the distribution by the AEC of postal voting material when the postal vote administration by Minter Ellison of Melbourne failed to satisfy Postal Voters in the Electorate of Kennedy.

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We support a local computer-based system.

THERE WERE SEVERAL TELEPHONE CALLS BETWEEN PETER DUNN AND ANNE BRIGHT DURING THE LAST 2/3 WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN.

Mine Workers

We are told that mine workers who work quite some distance from their residential addresses work 2 weeks at the mining site and return home for one week. This is the average *on and off period* in most mining sites but a proposal we have been made aware of for the future is *one week on and one week off*. Because of this situation, it is difficult for mine workers to catch up with their mail. One frustrated mine worker contacted our office after the election and said that he never received his postal vote. We are aware of another instance whereby the application was applied for before the miner left for work but he never received it because it went to the wrong address. Although this particular instance was not in the Electorate of Kennedy but just outside Kennedy, it is worthy of note.