

SUBMISSION 176

8 July, 2008.

The Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee in Electoral Matters,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2000.



Dear Secretary,

I have been advised to write directly to you with some issues I have identified following the recent Federal and Local Body elections.

I will relate my recent experience to explain those issues.

1. Prior to the Federal election, there was widespread and frequent publicity given to the need for people to ensure they were on the roll for electoral purposes. I did not complete the enrolment forms as there was no need. I am not currently eligible as I am not an Australian citizen.

2. In the subsequent Local Body election, there was no such publicity or advice given residents as to the criteria for enrolment for that election, despite there being a rates demand notice being issued within the lead up to the election, and various other opportunities available to the authorities.

3. At the time of the Local Body election, I presented myself at the local school polling station in order that I may participate in the democratic processes taking place. I thought I should be eligible to vote in that election as my wife and I own a house, and pay charges upon acquisition (property transfer fees), pay rates, and we pay various other charges during occupancy (eg water charges).

4. I was surprised at being denied the opportunity to vote at that time because my name was not on the 'electoral roll'. There was no capacity for a special vote.

5. The polling station supervisor advised me that the content of the roll was the same as used in the Federal election. He could not explain to me the eligibility rules for either the Federal election, nor for the Local Body election, but he did give me a copy of a brochure for electoral enrolment as prepared by the AEC.

It occurs to me that there are a number of issues here.

- Eligibility for enrolment for a Federal or State election.
- Eligibility for enrolment for a Local Body election.
- information dissemination processes prior to the poll.

As mentioned, we are not currently Australian Citizens, but I am a permanent resident.

My wife and I pay copious amounts of tax to various government agencies upon buying a house, we pay GST on various services obtained, we pay stamp duty on buying a motor vehicle, and we pay fuels excise and so on. We also pay income tax. Even if we were not land owners, but renting property, the principal is the same. We pay our way.

We also receive various state and local body benefits such as medical services, and enjoy the benefits of road networks, and so on.

So for all intents and purposes we participate in the economy and in the affairs of the country in fairly much the same way as any other resident, whether being an Australian citizen or not. But we have no say on who should represent us in making the decisions which affect our lives and well being. Yet this is the essence of democracy.

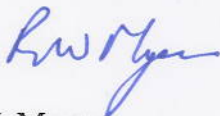
It therefore seems to me that the eligibility rules (and they are just that - an arbitrary set of rules) should be revised so that permanent residents can enrol and vote and so participate in the democratic processes that others enjoy. (Imagine the uproar if I refused to pay income taxes citing non eligibility due to not being an Australian citizen). I consider a residential qualifying period of say 3 months would be appropriate.

I am not asking for an Australian passport (which would flow from being an Australian citizen), but I am asking that these eligibility rules be revised to better reflect the make up of modern society in Australia. I.e. a country with a population expanding as much through immigration as natural growth. There is a significant, but unrepresented constituency within the country.

By and large, my comments in respect of a Federal election also apply to the Local Body scene. However, it seems a little odd that the eligibility rules for enrolling for a Federal election should also be the basis for a local body election. The State of Queensland does not issue passports, if that is a concern as to eligibility. The City of Brisbane has even fewer concerns of a national character. I would therefore seek to lower the key eligibility criterion for a State or Local Body election to simply that of being resident with no qualifications at all.

Incidentally, I would ordinarily take these sorts of matters up with my Federal representative, but of course I do not have any representation at any level within Government. You will understand the need to approach you directly. The resultant information dissemination issues are self evident.

I trust these comments are clear, and would ask that they be given due consideration. In the meantime, I remain,
Yours faithfully,



R. W. Myers