

SUBMISSION

Electoral Reform Green Paper – Strengthening Australia’s Democracy

4(c) To what extent should Australian citizens living overseas be permitted to vote in Australian elections?

I am considering residing overseas after retirement from the Australian workforce in a few years time. I note with considerable dissatisfaction that I may be denied the right to vote in Australian elections after the expiration of six years as a ‘non-resident’ – noting the possibility of continued electoral enrolment on the basis of annual applications and statements of intention to reside in Australia. I find such provisions quite unfair and unrealistic. In my own case, my expected tenure as a non-resident is indeterminate. However, I have no intention to surrender my Australian citizenship and will retain a fundamental interest in and concern for the way Australia is governed. Further, I expect to continue to be an Australian taxpayer, regardless of my place of domicile. I believe that these factors should count just as strongly as an expressed intention to reside in Australia at some future time.

I have no complaint that the onus for ensuring that an expatriate Australian’s continuity of electoral enrolment should be the responsibility of that individual. Ideally, the process of re-enrolment should be simplified (and in the light of current and future communications technology, this should not be a problem). However, the test for continuity of enrolment should be simply the demonstration of the expatriate Australian’s continued interest in the Australian electoral process. The fact that an expatriate *applies* to enrol should satisfy that test. To impose an additional requirement that a future date for domicile in Australia should be nominated seems to me very unfair.

I have noted that there also appears to be considerable variance amongst the respective states and territories in regard to the rules for continued enfranchisement on non-residents. Requirements for the enrolment (and continued enrolment) of expatriates on Local, State/Territory and Commonwealth electoral rolls should be harmonised.

Expatriate Australians should retain the right to vote in any and all Australian elections as long as they wish to do so. The place of enrolment in Australia should be accepted as the location that the overseas elector nominates as having a continuing interest in or connection with.

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