

Submission concerning the establishment of a scheme which allows 16 and 17 year old ACT residents to vote in elections and referendums for the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Submission and comments

Nothing is more fundamental as a mark of citizenship in Australia than the right and obligation to vote.

History shows a painful acquisition of the franchise: the privilege to vote. People have died in the cause to obtain it.

The importance and necessity of an educated and informed eligible citizenry cannot be exaggerated.

It is argued that even with the voting age, set as it is at 18 across Australia, that the electorate even now, and as a whole, is not objectively informed or able to examine and discern among serious issues. Indeed this **incapacity** is displayed at every election and is **exploited** not only by Federal, State and Territorial politicians but by the media, commentators with agendas, and apart from elections by fashion makers and marketers.

Persons of 16 and 17 are in general more the **target** of such advertising campaigns because they are more easily persuaded and influenced irrationally by peers. Moreover this age group as a whole is just **not interested** in political matters nor are they well-informed nor mature enough to have the privilege of voting on matters that affect other citizens and the community, sometimes in the most serious of ways.

On the simplest of planes, **most parents** of 16 and 17 year old children would **not agree** that their children were mature enough to be given the vote.

With their knowledge of actuarial figures and statistics, **insurance companies** expect persons under 25 to pay higher premiums as that age group is more liable to be involved in road accidents. These companies have thus turned the lack of responsibility within that age group into **reality**.

Persons of 18 or more are eligible to join the **Defence Forces** or be called up in a time of emergency. At the time of its introduction there was controversy about whether persons of 18 were responsible enough to defend their country. The history of this event should be re-visited by the Committee.

The privilege of voting carries **obligations** with it. It is not simply a matter of reaching a certain age. As matters stand in our society fewer obligations are expected of the ordinary 16 or 17 year old person than of all other citizens.

The average 16 and 17 year olds have **no innate and premature claim** to the franchise. They are not seeking it. They have not earned it through any responsible effort nor achievement.

Normal evidence of everyday life shows that just turning 16 or 17 does not of itself endow a person with maturity or independence or grant eligibility and discernment for the privilege and obligation of voting in the same way and with the same effect as adult persons who have to live with the consequences of a democratic election and who have to obey the Law, pay tax lifelong and take responsible roles in society.

Does the Committee want to re-enter the controversy of one-vote-one-value opposed in the past by the ALP, by allowing 16 and 17 year olds a weighted vote or a voluntary vote?

Even under the law as it stands there are privileges such as anonymity, granted to those under-age who are accused of breaking or found guilty of breaking the law. Some thought should be given to the effect on such protection if young law-breakers are eligible to vote.

In summary, my comments are -

- The idea for granting 16 and 17 year old people the franchise in any form is an example of extreme and naïve social engineering which cannot advantage our society;

- Where is the line to be drawn in the future? Will there be a proposal put for the voting age to be lowered even further?

- The question has to be asked what are the grounds and motives for such advocacy and from where is the proposal coming?

- There are so few submissions to this Committee that the whole idea is beneath the radar and priorities of ACT citizens who expect more of their elected representatives than to have them occupied with such a trivial matter.

- Are we going to have via this Committee another sham consultation as was so for that into same sex unions, where a mere count of 'for' and 'against' submissions seems to have been carried out rather than consideration of the weight of the submissions. Many of which were just last minute statements rounded up by a lobby group. Will the Committee publish all the proposals and submissions plus the Hansard of its deliberations especially any public consultations it holds? The Federal Parliament Committees, unlike the ACT Government [which claims to be more transparent !], does all these things and the results are available on the internet.

- There seems also to be a question here of the ACT Government's left hand not knowing what its right hand is doing. Parallel with this ACT proposal on voting age, the Federal Government has tried recently to eliminate compulsory voting as it did in 1998, and the ALP opposed the moves. Does this Committee see itself establishing for the Federal Government a wedge that will allow a scheme of voluntary voting for 16 and 17 year olds?

Submitted by --

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