

13 July, 2012

Parliament of New South Wales,
Committee on Electoral Matters
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Attention: Jonathan Elliott, Inquiry Manager

Dear Sirs,

Re: Your reference: D12/16204
Administration of the 2011 NSW election; and Review of the Parliamentary
Electoralates and Elections Act 1912 and the Election Funding, Expenditure and
Disclosures Act 1981

Thank you for your letter dated 28 June 2012 requesting a response to a question taken on notice as a result of the appearance of Susan Thompson before the committee on 15 June 2012.

I am responding to the question on behalf of Vision Australia as Susan Thompson is currently overseas and I am her Manager.

1. Was any explanation given to your organisation, if it was asked, as to why phone voting was not available during the Clarence by-election (transcript p39)?

In the lead up to the Clarence by election Vision Australia was provided with information regarding the deployment of iVote so that we could promote it to people who are blind or have low vision in the electorate.

The notice attached as appendix A is information provided by the NSW electoral commission tailored to Vision Australia clients. As a consequence of learning from this information that the computerised phone component of i-Vote would not be deployed Vision Australia made enquiries to the NSW electoral commission and we were informed that the cost of deploying the phone component for a by election would not be viable.

On learning of this we wrote directly to the Premier of NSW (see Attachment B) regarding this and the issue of iVote potentially not being deployed for local government elections. The letter was copied to the Local Government Minister, Don Page, and Disability Minister Andrew Constance.

I trust that this answers the question on notice.

Kind regards

Michael Simpson
General Manager Advocacy

Attachment: NSW Electoral Office information on iVote
Vision Australia letter to the Premier of NSW

Important information for Vision Australia clients in the NSW Government seat of Clarence.

As the consequence of the recent resignation of the elected member for Clarence, a bi-election will be held for the seat of Clarence on 19 November 2011.

Vision Australia is keen to ensure that everyone is aware that the internet element of the iVote system that was used for the NSW election in March earlier this year is also available for the Clarence bi-election. The phone element of the iVote system that was used for the March election is not available for this bi-election.

iVote is a Remote Electronic Voting System that enables eligible electors to vote using the internet.

iVote eligibility

You can vote before Polling Day using iVote if:

- your vision is so impaired, or you are otherwise so physically incapacitated or so illiterate, that you are unable to vote without assistance, or
- you have a [disability](#) (within the meaning of the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977](#)) and because of that [disability](#) you will have difficulty voting at a polling place or are unable to vote without assistance, or
- your real place of living is not within 20 kilometres, by the nearest practicable route, of a polling place, or
- you will not throughout the hours of polling (8am to 6pm) on polling day (19 November 2011) be within New South Wales.

Key dates for iVote

iVote applications will be accepted until 6:00pm EDST on 16 November 2011 by completing the online application on this website. Please click on the "[Apply to use iVote](#)" button to the left.

People who have difficulty completing the online application can also call the iVote call centre to apply; 1300 2 iVote or 1300 24 86 83 (from outside Australia call +612 9290 5287)

iVote opens for voting at 8:00am EDST on 7 November 2011 and closes at 6:00pm EDST on 18 November 2011. (iVote is not available on election day) You will be able to cast your vote on this website or if you are blind or with low vision and want to use our call centre to cast your iVote over the telephone, you will be able to call 1300 2 iVote or 1300 24 86 83 (from outside Australia call +612 9290 5287).

You must register before you can use iVote.

If you want to practise voting then please click on the link "[Try the iVote practice system](#)" button to the left.

The links to the right provide you with information for using iVote.

If you need to speak to the iVote help desk, please call 1300 2 iVote or 1300 24 86 83 (from outside Australia call +612 9290 5287)



[Apply to use iVote](#)



Cast Your Vote



[Try the iVote Practice System](#)



Check Your iVote Receipt



The Hon Barry O'Farrell MP
Premier of New South Wales
NSW Parliament
Via email: office@premier.nsw.gov.au

October 26 2011

Regarding Accessible Voting in NSW

Dear Premier

You will no doubt be aware that for the March 2011 election the NSW Electoral Commission deployed iVote, a system for casting votes via the internet or phone, in addition to traditional voting methods. Vision Australia welcomed this initiative as it afforded people who are blind or have low vision the opportunity, for the first time in an NSW State election, the opportunity to cast a fully independent and secret vote.

We note with appreciation that iVote is again being deployed for the upcoming by-election in the seat of Clarence for 19 November. While we appreciate that many of our clients will be able to use the internet web based component of iVote to cast a vote in this by-election, we are extremely disappointed that the phone component of iVote will not be available for this by-election. We are of the view that by only deploying the web based component, that many people who are blind or have low vision, and who don't have computer access or competency with internet access, will be disadvantaged.

People who are blind or have low vision, and who cannot use the web based iVote will either have to rely on friends, relatives, or polling officials to cast their vote, or phone an Electoral Commission call centre where a call centre operator will complete their ballot. In our view, this is not only disempowering for people who are blind but also quite demeaning. It reverses the positive democratic impact of having the technology available.

Our greater concern however, is that we understand that a decision has been taken that iVote will not be deployed for the upcoming local government elections in 2012. If this is the case many thousands of voters who are blind or have low vision and who cannot use a printed ballot paper will again have no choice but to rely on the support of others to cast their ballots.

Vision Australia is seeking your intervention to ensure that voters who are blind or have low vision are afforded their right to a secret and independent vote in the Local Government elections. Australia is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) which clearly sets out in Article 29 that people with a disability should be afforded equal access to the democratic process as other citizens. NSW residents who are not blind are able to exercise their right to a secret and independent vote but, without deploying iVote, citizens who are blind will not be afforded equal access.

Vision Australia is building positive working relationships with your Government and we are pleased to note that we have had several positive meetings with Minister Andrew Constance about disability services.

We ask that you give positive consideration to our request that iVote, both the web based and phone components, be fully deployed for the 2012 local government elections.

Yours sincerely,

MICHAEL SIMPSON
General Manager
Policy and Advocacy
VISION AUSTRALIA

CC:

The Hon Don Page MP, Minister for Local Government

The Hon Andrew Constance MP, Minister for Ageing and Minister for Disability Services