



people with disability

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People with Disability Australia Incorporated

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31 January 2005

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Attn Stephanie Hesford

Inquiry into administration of the 2003 NSW Election

People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a national disability rights and advocacy organisation. Our primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations mainly constituted by people with disability. PWD also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement. PWD has a cross-disability focus – we represent the interests of people with all types of disability.

We welcome the opportunity to provide into the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into the administration of the 2003 NSW Election. We confine our comments to terms of reference 1 (a) the role of the State Electoral Office.

For a number of years PWD has communicated with the NSW State Electoral Office (SEO) and other electoral authorities regarding the lack of access for people with disability to the electoral system. PWD is extremely concerned that electoral authorities, including the NSW SEO, are denying the civil rights of people with disability through their failure to act on specific access needs.

In particular, the SEO has failed to act on the following:

- the provision of information about electoral processes and arrangements in easy read, pictorial or similar formats to assist people with cognitive disability to understand the election process;
- the provision of adjustments to voting instructions and ballot papers to assist people with cognitive disability;
- the provision of Auslan interpreters to assist people who are deaf to communicate with electoral staff at the voting booth;

- arrangements for hearing augmentation at the voting booth to assist people who are hearing impaired communicate with electoral staff;
- arrangements to allow people who are blind or with a physical disability which limits hand function to exercise a confidential (secret) and independently verifiable vote by electronic or other means. We are aware of some of our members being forced to disclose their vote to family members or polling officials;
- physical accessibility for polling booths that complies with Australian Standard 1428 Part 2. We are aware of some of our members visiting polling booths that are advertised as fully accessible and finding their requirements unmet. Similarly we are aware of inaccessible polling booths being used when nearby accessible facilities are unused;
- the provision of disability awareness and flexible service delivery training electoral staff working on booths receive to assist them to be knowledgeable and responsive to disability related issues and concerns.

PWD believes that the response of the SEO to the right of people with disability to cast their vote in an equal manner to the rest of the population has been inadequate. Further, we believe that the failure of the SEO to act in this matter may be in breach of both federal and state anti-discrimination legislation.

We have called on the SEO to develop and implement a disability action plan that ensures the right of people with disability to a secret ballot. We welcome an opportunity to work collaboratively with the SEO to overcome these difficulties to ensure that all voters in NSW are able to cast their vote free from discrimination.

For further information please contact Digby Hughes, Senior Policy Officer, on 9319 6622 or digbyh@pwd.org.au

Yours sincerely



ALANNA CLOHESY
Deputy Director, Advocacy