



Statement by the Special Minister of State,
Senator the Hon Joseph Ludwig

Government response to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral
Matters: *Report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election and
matters related thereto*

18 March 2010

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) and its Chair, Mr Daryl Melham MP for the Committee's comprehensive inquiry and detailed analysis of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto.

Many of the Committee's recommendations were designed to reinforce, restore and protect the ability of eligible Australians to exercise their right to vote. The Committee also made recommendations to modernise the way in which electors can interact with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to keep their enrolment details up to date.

The report made 53 recommendations. Forty-five were unanimously supported by JSCEM.

The Government wholly supports 37 recommendations, five in part, five in principle, notes six, including those contained in supplementary remarks by the JSCEM Chair, and notes the two dissenting reports from the Opposition and the Greens.

The AEC estimates that around 1.4 million eligible Australians are not currently enrolled. The number of Australians who did not fully exercise their right to vote at the 2007 federal election exceeded 2.3 million, taking into account enrolled electors who did not vote, and electors who did not cast a formal vote.

The Government response to the JSCEM report that I table today will remove barriers to electoral participation imposed by legislative amendments enacted by the previous government, modernise enrolment and electoral processes, encourage and foster greater electoral participation and respond to the increased demand for early voting services.

The Government has already moved to implement some of the Committee's recommendations, having already provided \$13 million to the AEC over four years to close the gap in areas of Indigenous disadvantage by improving the electoral participation of Indigenous Australians.

The Government also recently introduced the Electoral Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010, fulfilling an election commitment to restore the close of rolls period to seven days after the issuing of the writs and repeal the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity before their vote is counted.

The Bill makes a range of amendments to modernise the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, including, among other things, a legislative framework that will allow electors who are blind or who have low vision the legal option to cast a secret vote at the next election. The Bill will also provide for a pre-poll vote, cast in an elector's home division, to be cast and counted as an ordinary vote, which will allow a significant number of additional votes to be counted on election night. To partly address the decline in enrolment rates, the Bill will simplify the way in which enrolled electors can update their details with the AEC, through an on-line update facility. In addition, the Bill limits to one the number of candidates a party can nominate. This responds to an issue at the recent Bradfield by-election, where one political party nominated nine candidates causing a very high rate of informal voting. The Government is drafting legislation to implement recommendations which are supported in the response and require legislative change, with a view to introducing that legislation in the Winter sittings of Parliament.

The Government's second green paper on electoral reform, *Strengthening Australia's Democracy*, also identified a need for reforms that modernise electoral laws and processes and enable more eligible Australians to exercise their right to vote. The Government is pursuing as a matter of priority those matters identified by the JSCEM and is giving longer term consideration to the broad range of options for reform raised for discussion in the second green paper.

