Participating in free and fair elections

OUR RIGHTS	OUR RESPONSIBILITIES
To vote in elections Australian citizens, 18 years of age or over and enrolled have the right to vote. In Australia enrolment and voting is compulsory. No person can be prevented from voting because of their appearance, religion, wealth, disability, racial background, or where they live.	**Enrol as voters** Australia has compulsory enrolment. Only people who have enrolled to vote may vote in an election. People can enrol to vote when they are 16 years old so that they are on the electoral roll ready to vote at the next election after they turn 18. Voters are required to keep their details (address) up to date.
Equal vote All voters have one vote in each election. This is the same for everyone. Votes cannot be bought or sold, nor can extra votes be given to people. Every vote has the same value. For example, an 18-year-old's vote is worth the same as the vote of someone twice their age.	**Vote in elections** Australia has compulsory voting, so it is against the law not to vote in an election.
Secret ballot Citizens vote in secret. A screen is provided to prevent others from seeing how they voted. The secret ballot allows people to vote without fear of intimidation from others and reduces the risk of bribery.	**Know how to fill out a ballot paper correctly** Voters should understand how the voting system works, from filling out a ballot paper correctly to how it is counted when all the votes are collected. If a ballot paper is not filled out correctly, an elector's vote cannot be counted.
Participate in regular elections Elections must be held regularly. This is outlined in the Australian Constitution. Each Member of Parliament must go before the people in an election to be re-elected to Parliament. New candidates can also stand for election.	**Be 'active citizens'** This means having your say in choosing representatives who make decisions that affect your life. Citizens need to be aware of the issues that affect their lives and choose representatives who will take action on those issues.
Participate in elections that are free and fair The Australian Electoral Commission conducts federal parliamentary elections according to the provisions of the Australian Constitution and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.	**Make informed decisions** This means that electors know who the candidates are in an election, and understand their viewpoint and opinions on issues, because if elected they will be making decisions on behalf of the people of Australia.

© Australian Electoral Commission 2010

Participating in free and fair elections

Australia is a representative democracy where voters elect people to represent them in parliaments. It is important that its citizens are able to participate in free and fair elections. It is also important that we take our right to vote and participate in elections seriously as we are electing representatives to parliaments to make the policies and laws that govern us.

How are our rights protected?

Federal elections are organised by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The AEC is an independent statutory body. This means that it organises and conducts elections without interference from government, political parties, businesses or other groups. It is against the law for anyone to interfere with the organising and running of elections.

The AEC protects the rights of the voter by:

> ensuring candidates follow nomination rules
> planning, setting up and controlling polling places on election day
> training staff to run polling places
> producing the ballot papers used and keeping them secure
> counting votes and announcing election results
> maintaining the electoral roll
> educating the public on Australian voting systems, enrolling to vote and how to vote correctly.

The Australian Electoral Commission ensures that everyone has an opportunity to vote in elections

© Australian Electoral Commission 2010