

ELECTION OF SENATORS AMENDMENT BILL 2007

Receipt and First Reading

Bill received from the Assembly; and, on motion by **Hon Sue Ellery (Minister for Child Protection)**, read a first time.

Second Reading

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan - Minister for Child Protection) [5.51 pm]: I move -

That the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Election of Senators Act 1903 to bring it into conformity with the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. In June 2006 the commonwealth Parliament passed the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006. The resulting changes to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 have meant a substantial reduction of time for people to enrol to vote in federal elections once the writs are issued. Previously, under section 155 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, the electoral rolls closed seven days after election writs were issued, which gave those people not already enrolled a reasonable time to do so. Now, under the changes to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, the rolls will close on the day on which the writs are issued for new enrolments and re-enrolments. There are three exceptions to this. Those people who are already enrolled but who need to update their details and those who will reach 18 years of age or are eligible to become Australian citizens between the day the writs are issued and polling day will have three days to update their details or enrol.

The Western Australian government was not consulted over this change and is very concerned that it will disadvantage young people, renters, people who frequently change address and, of course, Indigenous Australians in remote communities. It has been estimated that if these laws had applied in 2004, up to 160 000 people would have missed out on voting in the federal election. Currently section 3(1) of the Western Australian Election of Senators Act 1903 establishes the close of rolls for a federal election as seven days after the date of the writ.

Although the Western Australian government does not support the commonwealth's action in reducing the time for people to be enrolled once the election is called, we need to rectify the inconsistency between the Western Australian and the commonwealth acts. If the Western Australian act was not changed, we would have the situation whereby there are two pieces of legislation each specifying a different close-of-roll period for a Senate election. This is not an ideal situation, as it could cause uncertainty and confusion for electors, and the Western Australian government proposes to change the state's act to avoid this. This Election of Senators Amendment Bill 2007 will rectify the inconsistency between the acts. It will amend section 3(1) of the Election of Senators Act 1903 to establish the date for the close of rolls to be the third working day after the date of the writ. I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.