



YOUNG

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To: Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

August 7 2018

Submission to *Lowering the Voting Age and Increasing Participation Bill*

Environment Victoria is one of Australia's leading, independent not-for-profit organisations, which has been campaigning to protect Victoria's environment since 1969. Chief among our concerns is the growing threat of climate change, which will disproportionately affect the lives of young Australians.

Young is a youth-led organisation that exists to build the power of young people to fight for a fairer future.

Environment Victoria and Young are collaborating on the Young Votes campaign to enrol 1000 young people ahead of Victoria's state election in November.

Recommendation: Environment Victoria and Young recommend lowering the voting age to 16 so that young people can have a fair say on critical environmental issues like climate change.

The right to vote for action on climate change

Climate change is here, now. But on its current trajectory the impacts are predicted to be much worse in coming years. Climate change is a matter of intergenerational injustice because decisions made today will impact generations to come. It is therefore critical to ensure young people, whose interests are most affected by climate policies and their consequences, have as much of a say as older people in how our country tackles this existential threat.

Quote from Hayley, a 17-year-old Young Votes volunteer:

"I'm only 17, but I'm already taking action for the environment and in my community. I read the news and care about politics, but I'm shut out from our political system because I'm not old enough to vote."

Young people are most impacted by government decisions because we'll have to deal with the consequences for the longest. Decisions to delay action on climate change put our future at risk, just as economic decisions made today will affect us when we're older. But we have the least say in how our nation is run!"





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Voting young strengthens civil society

The Lowy institute has identified a trend of millennials and younger people withdrawing their support for democratic government.¹

From the perspective of climate policy, which has been turbulent and inadequate for the past ten years, it is easy to see why young people have become disillusioned with political solutions.

Our experience with the Young Votes collaboration has taught us that young people aren't disengaging from politics because they don't care, but rather because they don't see how government is relevant to their lives.

Messages that affirm young people's experiences and emphasise their ability to influence real change through collective action are much better received.

This observation is consistent with the actions of the 60,000 young people who enrolled and voted for the first time during last year's marriage equality postal survey. Young people understand and care deeply about LGBTIQ+ issues, so when the chance to vote for equality arose, it moved young people to action in unprecedented numbers.

Voting at sixteen is consistent with other changes and opportunities available to young people at this age. They can leave school, get a job, drive a car, and pay taxes. They should be able to be involved in political decisions that will directly affect them and their future.

Suggestions that 16-year-olds might not understand the issues at hand is disrespectful to the many highly engaged teenagers we encounter, and probably assumes many adults pay more attention to public policy than they really do.

High school is the place where young people are most likely to be engaged on environmental, social and civic issues. It is in this environment that the most positive voting experience can possibly take place.

The opportunity to vote in elections from the age of 16 will enable young people to have their first experience of voting in an empowering, learning context, making them more likely to continue to vote for the rest of their lives. This makes for a more engaged citizenry, and helps create a healthier democracy.

¹ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/more-young-australians-dismissing-democracy>





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Recommendation:

Environment Victoria recommends lowering the voting age to 16 so that young people can have a fair say on critical issues like climate change.

We call on the Parliament of Australia to:

- Investigate the benefits of lowering the voting age to 16
- Allow non-compulsory voting for 16-18 year olds
- Allow 14 and 15 year olds to enrol to vote
- Relax enrolment requirements that disadvantage young people who move house and need to update their details the most, to allow easier access to democratic participation.

Sincerely,

Cat Nadel
Safe Climate Campaigner and Co-founder

