

**Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013  
Submission 007**

15 January 2014

Research Director  
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
George St  
BRISBANE Q 4000

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013**

I refer to correspondence dated 28 November 2013 from the Mr Ian Berry MP, Chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee inviting submissions in respect of the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013.

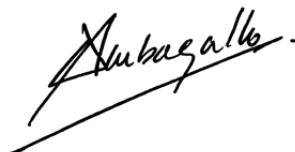
On behalf of the Board, members and clients of Endeavour Foundation I am pleased to provide a submission on the draft Bill. Comment on the Bill will be limited to matters of importance to Endeavour Foundation stakeholders, specifically matters pertaining to the proposed legislative changes to enhance the participation of people with a disability in the electoral system.

While it is pleasing to see a particular focus on supporting the participation of people with a disability through facilitating electronically assisted voting, I would encourage members of the committee to also consider other strategies to support the participation of people with a disability in the voting process. Some examples are outlined in the attached submission.

It is Endeavour Foundations experience that people with a disability, particularly a cognitive disability, are under represented both on the electoral roll and in the voting process. Considering and implementing strategies used in other jurisdictions may greatly improve the participation rates of people with a disability in the electoral process, supporting the reform policy objective of ensuring the opportunity for full participation in Queensland's electoral process.

Endeavour Foundation would be happy to assist in the development of regulations in respect of the above, as well as any trial of the proposed electronic assisted voting.

Yours sincerely



David Barbagallo  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Submission to the  
Legal Affairs and Community Safety  
Committee  
  
Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013

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Chief Executive Officer  
Endeavour Foundation

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Endeavour Foundation is a non-government, not for profit organisation founded in Queensland in 1951. It provides services and employment for people with a disability from more than 230 locations across Queensland. Endeavour Foundation has grown to be the largest disability service provider in Australia with an extensive network of specialist disability and business services across the country. Endeavour Foundation currently provides services to more than 4,000 people with a disability. Services include accommodation support, respite, day services, post school services, vacation care, and education and training services.

Endeavour Foundation also provides supported employment for more than 2,000 people with a disability as well as support to secure employment in the open employment market.

While our primary target group is people with an intellectual disability, we also provide services to people with a broad range of disabilities including cognitive, neurological, physical, sensory and psychiatric disabilities

Our goal is to support people with a disability to have the opportunities and choices of an ordinary life.

## **PREAMBLE**

Endeavour Foundation welcomes the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013 with its policy objective of ensuring the opportunity for full participation in Queensland's electoral process.

It is Endeavour Foundations experience that people with a disability, particularly an intellectual or cognitive disability, are significantly under represented both on the electoral roll and in the voting process.

This submission's comment on the Bill will be limited to matters of importance to Endeavour Foundation stakeholders, specifically matters pertaining to the proposed legislative changes to enhance the participation of people with a disability in the electoral system.

While it is pleasing to see a particular focus on supporting the participation of people with a disability through facilitating electronically assisted voting, Endeavour Foundation would encourage members of the committee to also consider other strategies to support the participation of people with a disability in the voting process.

It is also pleasing to note that the above objective is consistent with the intent of the Queensland *Disability Services Act 2006*. The Queensland *Disability Services Act 2006* supports the principle that people with a disability have the same human rights as other members of society and should be empowered to exercise those rights.<sup>1</sup> This includes their active participation in society and in decisions affecting their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland *Disability Services Act 2006* (Part 2 Disability Rights)

## **DISABILITY PREVALENCE IN QUEENSLAND**

People with a disability comprise a significant proportion of the Queensland population.

The Productivity Commission reports that the number of people with intellectual, physical, sensory or psychiatric disabilities who have significantly reduced functioning is estimated to total 410,000 across Australia.<sup>2</sup> National Disability Services Queensland in their 2011 analysis of Productivity Commission and Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009 show current estimates of disability in Queensland for the 0-64 group to be approximately 268,814 with profound/severe core-activity limitation.

In Queensland just 23,107 people received a disability service in 2009-10.<sup>3</sup> Of these 14,713 had funded community support and 8,833 community access.

Many Queenslanders with a disability live with little support other than that provided by their families.

People with an intellectual disability represent 40% of those receiving a disability service in Queensland (4,956). Some 31,089 people with an intellectual disability do not receive a disability service.<sup>4</sup>

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Anecdotal evidence suggests that people with a disability are poorly represented in the electoral process.

While there is a cohort of people who fail to meet the cognitive threshold allowing them to vote, it is believed that there is a significant eligible cohort who have not registered to vote, or who having registered, do not receive the necessary support to allow them to fully participate in the electoral process.

For many adults with a disability, the current rights based legislation was not in place at the time that they were eligible to register to vote. Community attitudes at the time did not encourage their full inclusion in community life.

For others, poor literacy or lack of access to support has meant that they have not registered and or participated in the electoral process.

Endeavour Foundation believes that while electronic assisted voting will be a positive step forward, there is still much to do to ensure the full participation of people with a disability in Queensland's electoral process.

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<sup>2</sup> Disability Care & Support, Productivity Commission Inquiry, 2011

<sup>3</sup> National Disability Services Qld, Report on Characteristics of the Population with Disability for Queensland, December 2011

<sup>4</sup> National Disability Services Qld, Report on Characteristics of the Population with Disability for Queensland, December 2011

## PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

There are three amendments which Endeavour Foundation wishes to provide comment:

1. Electronic Assisted Voting – Proposal is supported. It is understood that the detail of this will be covered by regulation. ***It is recommended that consideration be given to using technology that people with a disability are familiar with.*** Tablet devices are now being used extensively by people with a disability to facilitate their communication. It is expected that the use of familiar technology will assist in the success of this initiative.

It is noted that the Commonwealth Government trialled the use of electronic voting for people with a vision impairment in the 2007 election. It is understood that the trial was seen as successful. Development of a Queensland system should build on the experience of this trial.

2. Postal Voting – Proposal is supported. A simplification of the postal voting process will assist people with a disability who experience access difficulties in registering their vote.
3. Proof of Identity – Should this amendment be implemented, care will need to be exercised to ensure that any identification requirements are easily available to a person with a disability.

As indicated earlier in this submission, Endeavour Foundation holds concerns that the proposed amendments do not go far enough to support the full participation of many people with a disability in the electoral process.

There are many barriers to full participation. These include physical access restrictions, communication difficulties, lack of understanding of the impact of disability by polling booth staff and lack of awareness of the electoral process by people with a disability, to name but a few.

Acknowledging that such matters are difficult to include in legislation, ***Endeavour Foundation recommends that the legislation include a provision requiring the Electoral Commission Queensland (ECQ) to prepare a Disability Action Plan (DAP) outlining objectives and strategies to address the barriers that impact on the participation of people with a disability in the electoral system.*** Similar plans have been in operation in Victoria<sup>5</sup> for some time and have led to improvement in the participation by people with a disability.

Specifically, a DAP should address the following:

- Improving access at polling places
- Staff training in disability awareness
- Removing barriers to voting
- Improving the electoral awareness of people with a disability

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/files/DisabilityPlan.pdf>

## **SUMMARY**

Endeavour Foundation welcomes the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013 with its policy objective of ensuring the opportunity for full participation in Queensland's electoral process. While acknowledging positive steps to improve the participation of people with a disability in the electoral process, it is believed that the amendments do not go far enough.

It is recommended that in addition to introducing electronic assisted voting, the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee should include a provision requiring the development of a Disability Action Plan outlining objectives and strategies to address the barriers that impact on the participation of people with a disability in the electoral system.

Endeavour Foundation would be happy to provide input into the development of regulations in respect of the above, as well as participate in the development and trial of the proposed electronic assisted voting.