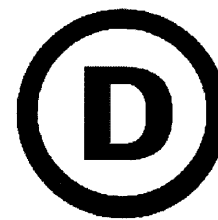




Preparing the  
Youth Affairs Network of Queensland's  
Submission to...

**Voices and Votes**  
**An inquiry into young peoples'**  
**engagement in democracy in Queensland**



Democracy  
for a safer world

### ***About the Inquiry***

#### **Who is running this inquiry?**

The *Voices and Votes* inquiry has been initiated by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee (LCARC) of the Queensland Parliament. You can get more information about this committee from its website at <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/LCARC>.

#### **What is the goal of the inquiry?**

According to the LCARC's discussion paper, the committee "aims to recommend practical ways to increase young people's interest and meaningful engagement in democracy in Queensland".

#### **Where can I get more information about the inquiry?**

The LCARC has a [page on its website](#) devoted to this inquiry. From this page you can download a discussion paper that provides more background information. The *Voices and Votes* page can also be accessed from a link on LCARC's main website.

#### **How can I make a submission to the inquiry?**

There are a few ways you can have your say on this topic.

- Use the the inquiry's response form. You can [download it](#) from their website or [fill it out online](#).
- Fill out the quick (4 questions) survey on the inquiry's website.
- Write a letter to the inquiry giving your ideas on the topic. You can send your letter to:

The Research Director  
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee  
Parliament House  
George St  
BRISBANE QLD 4000  
or via fax: 3406 7070  
or e-mail: [lcarc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:lcarc@parliament.qld.gov.au)



## About YANQ's Submission

### Who will be preparing YANQ's submission?

YANQ's Network Development Officer, David Powell, will be preparing YANQ's submission during October and November. David can be contacted via:

Phone: 3844 7713 / 1800 177 899 (from regional areas)

E-mail: [ndo@yanq.org.au](mailto:ndo@yanq.org.au)

### Can I make suggestions to YANQ for their submission?

**Yes!** You can do this by contacting David on the details above. YANQ will make sure that advice from members is included in our submission. If you are not a [member of YANQ](#), David is still interested to hear your suggestions, and may incorporate them into YANQ's submission. Suggestions for reading, comments on the ideas raised by the LCARC, or your own suggestions for how we can assist young people to participate in our democracy are all welcome. You will need to contact YANQ by **November the 16<sup>th</sup>**.

### What are YANQ's first reactions to the Inquiry's discussion paper?

While it is too early to say what YANQ's final submission will include, here are some initial reactions to the topic. These are included here with the hope of kickstarting some debate within the Youth Sector. If you'd like to take YANQ up on these points, please do so. David's contact details are above.

#### Lowering the voting age

One of the main barriers to young people is the restriction on the voting age. Sixteen and seventeen years olds can pay taxes, but have no say in how those taxes are spent. YANQ has [argued in the past](#) that the voting age should be lowered to 16, and we will continue to do so.

#### Does civics education have a role?

Understanding how our democracy works is crucial if you want to take part. Previous inquiries have suggested that civics education should be introduced in schools. YANQ tends to agree with the general principle that to take part in our democracy, we all need a basic understanding of it. Civics or citizenship classes in schools may be one way of improving young people's understanding, but there may be others.

#### It's not just young people who are 'disengaging' from our democracy

Much has been written about a [malaise in Western Democracies](#), pointing to indicators such as falling voter registrations, low voter turnouts, decline in party memberships etc. This suggests that many of the problems young people have in exercising their democratic rights and duties are not restricted to young people, but to all of us. Therefore any efforts to improve our democracy generally, may flow through to young people also.

#### If you're not an expert, don't bother

[John Ralston Saul](#) [argues](#) that Western societies are increasingly being corporatised. What he means is that public policy is debated and decided more by interest groups than by citizens collectively. Interest groups, or 'stakeholders', are defined by their interest in the policy area, or expertise. The problem with this is that each group uses language or jargon as a barrier (whether purposeful or not, the effect is the same). Saul would argue the (overly) complex use of language by various interest groups, makes it difficult for a lay person to comprehend many public policy documents, and therefore to have any real input. Don Watson makes a related argument in his book 'Death Sentence: the decay of public language' ([reviewed here by Julian Burnside](#)). So if you're not an expert or a 'stakeholder', participating in policy debates can be a difficult and frustrating exercise.

This problem is not something that can be overcome by governments alone, but may require action from citizens, politicians, advocacy groups and the media, to name a few.