

Lower the Voting Age!

Have you voted for a politician lately? If you answered yes, then you are obviously eighteen or older, because despite being treated as adults in other important areas, sixteen and seventeen year olds in Queensland have no political say.

In a society like ours, voting in elections is the major way most people take part in the political process. There are other methods, of course. You can write letters or emails to the newspapers. You can write or lobby your local Council representative, State MP or Federal member of Parliament. You can push for change in institutions like schools, hospitals, local councils and so on.

You can take grassroots action without waiting for Governments to do anything. Some would say this is a more empowering approach. You could consider setting up community organisations to address a particular issue. You can take part in community activities, volunteer for Red Cross, St. Vinnies, or your local neighbourhood centre. You could organise a protest with other local people.

Still, the right to vote is a very important part of living in a democracy. If politicians didn't have to listen to voters at all, things could be even worse than they already are. Why should young people be denied the opportunity to state their preferences? If young people had the power to vote pollies in and out, maybe they wouldn't be so quick to jump to the youth-bashing "law and order" agenda every time an election loomed.

Young people of sixteen and seventeen already:

- pay taxes on the income they earn, and have NO SAY in how these taxes are spent
- are able to join the armed forces and fight in wars (making life and death decisions)
- at seventeen, are locked up in adult prisons in Queensland if they commit a criminal offence
- may easily be parents or carers of children themselves
- drive cars on public roads (more life and death decisions)

Young people are often portrayed in the media and by older people generally as being unthinking and unable to make important decisions. But sixteen and seventeen year olds are being unreasonably discriminated against in this crucial area of political participation. There is no logical reason to deny sixteen and seventeen year olds the franchise!

It is time to lower the voluntary voting age to 16, with the compulsory voting age remaining at 18.