

# THE VOTING AGE



## Lower the Voting Age: MP

MEMBER for Ipswich Rachel Nolan has reignited the youth democracy debate by calling for the voting age to be dropped from 18 to 17.

In a speech to Parliament this week, Ms Nolan said lowering the voting age and introducing compulsory civic education in schools would empower young people.

"Young people care about the future and no single thing will impact on that future more than politics," Ms Nolan said.

But University of Queensland political science lecturer Ian Ward said 17 year-olds would not necessarily be interested in voting.

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By BRIGID SIMEONI

Dr Ward said the fact that many young eligible voters were not even enrolling indicated that convincing 17 year-olds would also prove difficult.

"A significant proportion of people aged between 18 and 30 who are supposed to be enrolled just never get around to it," Dr Ward said. "Young people don't necessarily see a real point in the voting process."

According to Dr Ward, lowering the voting age is unlikely to work to a particular political party's advantage. "There was

evidence of young people being sympathetic towards the Labor Party during the 1980's and 1990's but the trend has evaporated," he said. "I don't think there is a significant party bias built into lowering the voting age."

An Australian Electoral Commission spokesman said voting trends showed the younger a person was, the less likely they were to be correctly enrolled to vote.

The spokesman said around 60% of 18 year olds in Australia were on the electoral roll.

The qualifying age for enrolling and voting in federal elections was last reduced by Parliament in 1973 from 21 to 18 years.

Although people under the age of 18 cannot vote in Australia, people who are 17 years old can provisionally enrol so that they can vote at elections when they reach 18 years of age. The following points show other legal rights and obligations on young people in Victoria as a result of the elected government of the day making legislation:

- A person may obtain a learning driver's permit at the age of 16 years.
- A person may obtain a probationary driver's licence at the age of 18 years.
- A person on a probationary licence must drive with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.00%.

- A full driving licence is obtained three years after receiving a probationary driver's licence.
- A person on a full driver's licence must not have a BAC exceeding 0.05% whilst driving.
- It is illegal to sell alcohol to a person under the age of 18 years.
- It is illegal to sell cigarettes to a person under the age of 18.
- A person must attend school until they reach 15 years of age.
- Marriageable age is 18.
- It is illegal to admit anyone under the age of 18 years to a R-rated movie.



1. How do the laws governing these rights and obligations benefit people under the age of 18?
2. Do you think that there are any ways in which these laws disadvantage young people? Why?
3. Is it fair that a parliament without any youth representation can make laws that impact significantly on your everyday life?
4. How can youth have a voice in matters that affect them politically?



### Debate

That the voting age be lowered for voting at Federal and Victorian State elections.

