

## **Submission on 2022 General Elections**

**To:** Special Parliamentary Committee on 2022 General Elections

**From:** Cathryn Buis, Ordinary Citizen of Papua New Guinea

**Date:** 15 February 2023

This submission relates to point 2 of the Terms of Reference, and focusses on two elements covering the process involved in updating of the common roll and voting. This submission contains observations from the perspective of would-be voters denied the right to vote on Polling Day; it is not academic, but the lived experience of a citizen. I hope this submission joins with views from other Papua New Guineans who would like to see changes made to how we go about voting.

In Ward 9 of Lelemadih-Bupi Chupeu, landowners who had resided outside of Manus Province since the Common Roll was last updated, were not allowed to vote. I understand that the letter of the law was followed by polling officials in preventing these sons of the soil from voting; however, an injustice was done to these citizens, who were denied their right to vote in their home ward where they are principal landowners. The fact that they will eventually return to this ward at any point in their lives, was not taken into consideration when denying them the right to vote. For a small ward where everybody can identify each other, and even each other's ancestors going back six or more generations, there was no doubt as to their identity; it was simply that their name was not on the common roll for Ward 9, Lelemadih-Bupi Chupeu. On 6 July 2022, I witnessed a husband and wife who had voted in 2017, going up to vote in this same Ward 9. The wife's name was on the common roll, while the husband's name was not. Despite the husband being a native of Ward 9, easily identifiable by all at the polling station, he was denied his democratic right to vote. The explanation provided by the EC official was that it was an IT glitch done in Port Moresby, which could not be fixed on polling day in Manus.

There must be a mechanism put in place to ensure that all indigenous people are not denied the right to vote in their home province, regardless of whether or not they have lived in the province since the last Common Roll update. Polling officials need to be clearly educated and empowered to enable an identified member of the community to exercise their democratic right to vote, regardless of whether the EC has included that person's name on the Common Roll for that Ward. If a Ward Councilor, or any other official such as a Village Magistrate, can confirm the identity of a citizen to the polling official, then the polling official should allow such persons whose names do not appear on the common roll to vote; by exercising their discretion as a polling official near to the end of the polling day. The rule that states that one has to have lived in a province for a certain period of time in order to vote there, is perhaps a transplant imported from other democracies, and not suited to the Papua New Guinean context. There should be a documented process to follow and steps put in place, for instances when community members who reside outside of their home province, choose to return to their home province to exercise their democratic right to elect a leader for their home province. Sooner or later they will still return home to receive services in their home district and province. My family members and I hope to be able to vote in our home province in the next general election, even though we currently live outside of our home province.

Respectfully submitted by Cathryn Buis

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cathryn Buis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and 'B'.

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