

Bid for the kids' vote

Shorten's radical plan to drop ballot age

STEVEN SCOTT

NATIONAL POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

PEOPLE as young as 16 could be allowed to vote in federal elections under a plan from Opposition Leader Bill Shorten.

Warning it is unfair that 16 and 17-year-olds pay taxes but are not allowed to have a say in choosing politicians, Mr Shorten will unveil a plan to lower the voting age if he wins the next election.

In a speech to the NSW Young Labor Conference in Sydney today, Mr Shorten will say people under 18 are treated like adults in many other areas of the law and should be allowed to vote.

"If Australia trusts our 16 and 17-year-old citizens to pay tax and work, to join the military, to drive on our roads, to fly a plane, to make independent decisions about their medical care, then we – the Parliament of Australia –

should extend that trust to include a direct, empowered say in our democracy," Mr Shorten said in notes for his speech.

"I believe young people want to be involved in decision-making processes and should be offered the opportunity to do so, within our existing political structure."

More than 17,000 16 and 17-year-olds paid tax totalling \$41 million in 2012-13, Mr Shorten said as he made the case that young people were being unfairly denied a role in Australia's political life.

Under the plan, Labor's parliamentary secretary for youth Sam Dastyari would consult with community leaders to work out how to lower the voting age.

It is not clear whether the plan could see 16 and 17-year-olds forced to vote or whether voting would be optional until people turn 18.

The move would be likely to advantage Labor because

young people typically have higher rates of support for parties on the Left such as the ALP and the Australian Greens.

Mr Shorten said it would encourage young people to become more involved in public life.

The former Rudd government toyed with the idea of lowering the voting age as part of an electoral reform package in 2009 but did not implement it.

A voting age of 16 has also been canvassed by the Victorian electoral commission and a parliamentary committee in the ACT.

Mr Shorten said many other countries had already reduced voting ages or were looking at doing so.

Brazil, Austria, Argentina, Malta, Indonesia and East Timor allow 16-year-olds to vote in national elections.

Scotland dropped its voting age to 16 for its independence referendum last year.



Gold Coast finalists Neil Cadigan, Deb Mooney, Lyn Glover and Casey Lyons at The Pride of Australia Award ceremony at GOMA in Brisbane. Picture: MARK CRANITCH

These fine citizens do Coast proud

LUCY KINBACHER

BETWEEN them they have raised thousands for charity, established renowned clothing lines and assisted others through tough times, but for these Gold Coasters it's all just in a day's work.

Neil Cadigan, Casey Lyons, Lyn Glover and Dr Deb Mooney were among 30 finalists recognised for their courage, compassion and community spirit at The Pride of Australia Award

ceremony in Brisbane last night.

Casey Lyons was the big winner on the night, taking the People's Choice award for his charity LIVIN, which targets the stigma of mental illness.

Neil Cadigan was nominated for the Courage Medal after he continued to carry his son Andrew's legacy when he tragically died in a motorcycle accident.

Mr Cadigan kept his promise to complete his son's book, and raises funds

for cancer foundations.

"What we have tried to do with Andrew's situation was continually fundraise which was one way to make a positive out of a catastrophic event," he said.

Dr Deb Mooney was a finalist in the Care and Compassion category for her Gold Coast Specialist Bereavement Service.

Lyn Glover was a finalist in the Community Spirit Medal for her leadership in forming the Gold Coast Post Polio Network.

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