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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
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RE: ALL ASPECTS OF THE 2007 FEDERAL ELECTION AND MATTERS RELATED  
THERE TO

Brief summary of matters raised;

- Change of conditions to early voting for substantial time and cost savings
- Electronic mark off (in real time) as electors vote
- Elimination of multiple voters and the prospect of any election being declared invalid as a result, being virtually eliminated
- Next to no rejected votes that will also ensure full funding is provided to political parties for every vote taken. Worth around \$600,000 to political parties @\$2 per vote
- 96% of votes counted by 4pm the Sunday after polling day
- Delays of a week or more in counting over 80% of all declaration votes being totally eliminated
- Elimination of expensive and time consuming repetitive reconciliation of declaration votes
- Change to Senate ballot paper format reducing informality rates, saving paper, time and costs in handling. (Reducing informality rates increases funding to political parties)
- Notional senate composition made available on Sunday night after polling day, usually accurate to the last projected candidate.

#### EARLY VOTING CONDITIONS

I worked at a Pre Poll (Early Voting) Centre at the 2007 election and was amazed at the large numbers of voters who would be away on polling day, however as they would still be within their home State they are not be entitled to an early vote.

Many became belligerent as they knew they would be away on polling day, did not know where to vote nor could anyone in the Pre Poll Centre tell them as no State wide polling place lists were available.

Advice such as look up a local newspaper for an address or ask the locals was usually given, however many felt that advice was deficient and most asked, "What if I need to hire a car or taxi to get to the polling place". Some also asked if "how to vote" pamphlets for their local

Division would be available, again there is no definite answer. If these pamphlets are not available preferences may be exercised differently to the political parties recommendations.

The solution is simple, let these people vote early and several problems would not only be resolved but would also result in substantial monetary savings for the AEC and an earlier result in the poll for everyone. You should note the only difference between an absent vote and an early vote (pre poll) is the colour of the envelope.

At present, for example, when a family from Sydney is holidaying in Byron Bay NSW, and they vote absentee there; their votes are first reconciled, amalgamated and balanced at the end of the night in the polling place before being sent to the Division of Richmond, at Tweed Heads, to be amalgamated with all other absentee, postal and pre poll votes, again reconciled, balanced and then forwarded by air to Sydney.

They will reach the Sydney exchange centre on either Monday or Tuesday morning where they will again be reconciled and amalgamated this time with all the other declaration votes from around Australia for distribution to the enrolled Division/s. These Divisions will receive those votes on Wednesday afternoon or early Thursday morning, when they will once again have to be reconciled before they can be sorted into alphabetical order, marked off the electoral rolls in preparation to be opened and counted. It would now be Thursday afternoon or Friday morning before the first votes could be opened, counted and added to the tally. All in all a hideously complex, repetitive, expensive and time intensive exercise.

Instead, if the vote was taken earlier in the home Division's early voting (pre poll) centre, the vote would have been returned to the Divisional office and stored until the week prior to polling day where the votes received could be checked against the electoral rolls and if enrolled, marked off, ready to be opened and counted on the Sunday after polling day. Around a full week earlier than if the elector voted as an absentee voter anywhere else in their home State. This anomaly applies even if the declaration vote was taken only one kilometre outside the home Division. Only in co-located Divisions could the local Divisional Returning Officers swap declaration votes between themselves, on the Sunday after polling day, to save this delay.

Perhaps it is time to at least look at an exchange of all early votes taken up to the Friday in the second week prior to polling day. In the case of adjoining Divisions where these votes represent more than 80% of all declaration votes taken, an exchange after the Thursday night prior to polling day is warranted and should occur.

This action alone would result for an average Division, of only 4% (about 3400) of all votes being outstanding after the Sunday following polling day needing to be counted. About 1200 of these outstanding votes would be from overseas and late postal votes still in the mail coming back to the home Division. Little can be done to expedite these votes.

#### ADVERTISING OF POLLING PLACES

In conjunction with this change, advertising of polling places desperately needs to be improved for those voters who find themselves outside their home Division and cannot vote early.

A list of ALL polling places should be available in every early voting centre, advertised in alphabetical suburb order within the home State, not as currently done by Division and then alphabetically by suburb.

For example in the Byron Bay instance, why does a voter when going to a location 803 kilometres from home (Sydney) need to first know the Division they will be in before they can look up the suburb/location they need to find a polling place for? For example, how many of you would know what Division "Cundletown NSW" is in? Is it not easier to look up Cundletown in a NSW alphabetical suburb list?

Therefore, for New South Wales, Byron Bay should be found in suburb alphabetical order and every polling place in that town should be shown slightly offset, again in alphabetical order, showing the Division that ordinary votes are taken for. If it is a dual booth (on or near a divisional border) both Divisions should be shown.

This is a recommendation I have put forward in 3 of the last 4 post election conferences, each time accepted, but one that has never been implemented by the AEC.

#### ELECTRONIC MARK OFF AS ELECTORS VOTE IN REAL TIME AND ITS BENEFITS

I would also like to reintroduce a recommendation I first put forward in 1999 that was to trigger an evaluation in my office, but once again, one that never eventuated.

All electors have to be matched to a name and address on an electoral (certified) roll before their vote may be placed in a ballot box ready to be counted. Ordinary voters go straight into the ballot box whilst, declaration votes (absent, postal, pre poll and provisional) are all contained in an envelope, which first needs to be matched and marked off the same electoral (certified) roll prior to the ballot papers being removed from the envelope and placed in a ballot box ready for counting.

I suggest that once the rolls close CD's or DVD's of each States enrolment be produced, one for each Division, another State wide, both showing in black enrolled electors and in red electors who have had their names removed from the roll and have not re-enrolled. (Example, removed as no longer at that address).

If enrolled and the vote is formal, as the vast majority will be, every elector's vote will count, as no one could be given a vote, particularly a declaration vote for an incorrect Division. For political parties this will ensure public funding is provided for every vote cast and will not be reduced by votes cast for an incorrect division, thereby rendering the vote/s either partially accepted or totally invalid. (A minimum \$600,000 bonus to political parties)

For electors that have been deleted from the roll, when they present at the polling place the "Red" will trigger a check of their ID against the last enrolled address and if different the elector should be asked to explain the reasons for the variation.

Thus the polling official should quickly recognise from the voters ID if the address has changed that will also alert him/her for the need to obtain a new enrolment form and if necessary assist in the process of issuing a “section” vote for the Divisional Returning Officer/s to investigate later and then either admit or reject the vote.

I would suggest all section votes be called provisional votes because that is now what they actually are. If there is an error, or the voter has only recently changed address the vote will be allowed.

If implemented then if the provisional vote is contained in a separate and distinctively coloured envelope then all of the votes could easily be sorted into two groups, the vast majority who are on the roll and a small percentage that were not on the roll.

The next obvious step would then be, can the elector be marked off at the time of recording their vote or does the vote have to go back to the Divisional office to be sorted, amalgamated and reconciled many times before being marked back to the certified electoral rolls.

If the elector can be marked off at the time of their vote (in real time) then if they have already voted an alarm could also be programmed to sound before any other votes could be lodged.

Any attempt to multiple vote would be immediately identified, the elector’s ID confirmed and he/her questioned and their response documented for further follow up action.

I believe this can be done and it will save substantial administrative costs, as well as preventing multiple votes being lodged, rendering any election (such as McEwan in 2007) invalid.

From the close of the roll it is another week to the close of nominations and receipt of the first ballot papers in the Divisions to start early (pre poll and postal) voting. As these votes are only taken in the Divisional office up to two weeks prior to polling day, for the first few weeks each voter can be put to the roll and issued a vote that in the case of a pre poll can be marked off the roll immediately and in the case of a postal vote on its completion and receipt in the Divisional office.

Any elector not enrolled could be issued a provisional vote in a distinctively coloured envelope. These provisional envelopes could ask many more pertinent questions than on the ordinary vote envelope, in order to determine the validity of the vote.

#### FORMAT OF AN ELECTRONIC ROLL

The format for AEC electronic rolls, uses the numbering system N1234-5678, the N being for NSW and the 8-digit number to identify the elector, the Division is not identified.

The format currently used on Divisional (certified) electoral and printed rolls is an A-Z list, with the number 1 allocated to the first elector counting upwards to the last elector on the roll.

I would suggest for the next election a new numbering sequence be adopted, starting with an Alpha letter for the State or Territory, then the Division number shown as two numbers (02) or say (45) then the roll number, a maximum of 3 numbers followed by the electors surname, given names, Date of Birth (DOB), and then the address and DIVISION (in capitals) or if not enrolled the whole entry shown in RED with ‘Deleted Division’ in place of the DIVISION. Example:

N....44....017..SMITH Anne 03/08/43 6 Hector Rd MAYO WERRIWA  
 N....13....215..SMITH Anne Betty 22/11/02 4 Bie St PITT TOWN GREENWAY  
 N....31....211..SMITH Anne Rose 12/02/54 12 Parliament St MAYO REID  
 N....31....212..SMITH Anthony 24/02/75 66/3 Rose Cres RUSE REID  
 N....14.....078..SMOOTH John Andrew 07/05/87 34 Pine St MAYO MITCHELL  
 N....14.....SMOOTH Anne June 21/12/88 34 Pine St MAYO deleted Mitchell

I have suggested this change, as the roll number now becomes a maximum of 3 numbers to reduce the number of keystrokes used to record electors as having voted.

The roll number can be allocated from the first three letters of the elector’s surname. This means that for every change in these three letters the numbering sequence starts again. This will ensure a **unique identifier** Australia wide for each elector, with the prefix alpha letter and two-digit number identifying the State and Division.

This should ensure that where there are the average 90,000 voters on the roll in each Division, everyone whose surname starts with the most common prefix SMI i.e. Smith, Smithers, Smiths, Smithson, Smits etc) would be allocated a three digit identifying number starting from 001.

Roll.....GIVEN  
 Number SURNAME.NAMES..... DOB.....ADDRESS.....DIVISION

001.....SMITH.....Anne Rose...12/02/54.....12 Parliament St MAYO....REID  
 002.....SMITH ..... Anthony.....24/02/75....66/3 Rose Cres RUSE.....REID

If the next surname were SMOOTH John Andrew then the numbering sequence would start again and would be

001.....SMOOTH... John Andrew.. 07/05/87... 34 Pine St MAYO.....REID

In the 2007 election, the spread of electors in the roll for Mitchell, that is surnames that started with the letters SMI, ranged from Roll number 72900 (Smidt) to 73620 (Smits) a spread of 720.

NOW ARE ELECTORS ELECTRONICALLY MARKED OFF AS HAVING VOTED?

Following on from the Divisional office mark back (in the first 3-4 Weeks), for early voting in the final two weeks prior to polling day, declaration vote issuing officials need one CD or DVD for each State.

On polling day absent vote issuing officers need only the home States CD/DVD, Ordinary issuing points the Divisional CD/DVD or a printed roll, if a computer or laptop is not available.

There are two options for ordinary voters, the first a printed roll held at each issuing point and once the voter is found on the roll, the code input into a keypad linked wirelessly to one internet connection going back to the Divisional office or a national roll centre.

The second option for ordinary voters and a must for Declaration (absentee) voters, is a lap top or base computer running the CD or DVD that once an elector is identified and selected, the polling official either inputs the data, or simply selects the voter, via internet and relays this information back to the Divisional office or national roll centre.

If the voter is enrolled, by simply selecting or inputting the **unique** ID code, i.e. State Prefix and Division number, Roll number, then the first three letters of the voter's surname and the first letter of their given name, the elector could be marked off as having voted in real time.

The IT to make this work is relatively simple, a list held on a mainframe computer with an individual ID code identifying each elector. The polling official inputs and sends the ID data in real time, via Internet, for the system to mark off the elector as having voted at the polling place where the data originated. I can provide the details of a North Sydney IT company that can provide this technology, now.

For ordinary votes the terminal, computer or laptop, only takes votes from the home division, so the State and Division number need not be entered each time, the connection should be set up so the polling official need only enter the 3 digit roll number, the first 3 letters of the voter's surname and then the first letter of the voters given names. Enough characters to ensure a unique match is struck with only one elector.

If there is a match the elector is marked off as having voted and the voter moves on to pick up their ballot papers. If the elector has already been marked as having voted he/she is referred to the OIC for further questioning and the possible issue of a provisional vote if the elector insists an error has occurred.

If the elector is not found on the ordinary roll he/she may be referred to the absentee area for investigation. They could be enrolled in a neighbouring Division, or if not enrolled and deleted from a previous address, their enrolment and entitlement to a provisional vote could be sorted out immediately and with absolute accuracy.

In the case of a declaration vote the issuing officer should prior to electronic input also add the State and Division number, along with the roll number to the declaration envelope to signal the voter has been identified and marked off the certified lists as having voted.

This action will make it much easier to reconcile these envelopes (votes) that are sorted in the polling place and/or sent from the early voting centre to the home Division at the end of the day/night. A sort by State prefix and Division number is always much easier than by alphabetical Division names.

## EXCEPTIONS

With the electronic input proposal, there will always be exceptions and one may be where very few votes are taken; (Special hospitals) in these cases each vote could be telephoned back (mobile or land line) to the Divisional office for confirmation of enrolment and input there. Another exception may be in remote communities where ID codes for each vote could be manually recorded and input on return to the Divisional office at the end of the day or return later in the week. A more expensive option may be to use a palm pilot to record the vote and download it on return to the office.

In the home Divisional office is all that is required to make this work, are sufficient staff to take the calls and mark the voters back to the rolls after confirming their enrolment.

## RECONCILIATION OF DECLARATION VOTES AND MONETARY SAVINGS FROM ELECTRONIC MARKBACK

Electronic mark-back will also eliminate the need for printing Division finders for polling officials to look up the electors Division. Presently one is required for each Declaration vote-issuing officer at a cost of about \$22 per list, with an average 120 per Division. There would also be no need to print special and expensive "scannable" certified lists for each issuing point and huge savings on the costs for distribution, sorting, return, security and scanning of these lists after polling day.

I noted at the 2007 election the NSW Division finder had numerous amendments that took between 20 and 30 minutes to correct. If not corrected thousands of voters would have been disenfranchised. In many cases this did happen due to the polling official not updating the finder. The average error rate in issuing declaration votes from past elections has been around 2 votes per 100. This could be totally eliminated.

In an earlier paragraph I outlined how absentee votes from Byron Bay are returned to the home Division. If an electronic system is used to record electors as they vote, then this data could be sent back to each Division in real time and at the end of each day that Division could look up how many declaration votes have been taken outside its boundaries and can be expected to be forwarded to them at some later time.

In fact the home Division could print off a list of declaration votes, in alphabetical order, taken by all Divisions and overseas posts and cross them off as they are received. A better option may be to electronically accept or tag each vote as it is received by using the ID code. This would eliminate a lot of the triple and quadruple reconciliation and checking currently involved in the exchange of vote process between Divisions.

This process would also mean on election night each Division would know exactly how many declaration votes they expect to receive in the following days. The only exception being Postal votes that have been completed by voters and are still in the post.

However by taking the number of postal votes issued, and subtracting the number already received, the balance outstanding is readily available. Political parties could be advised with great accuracy how many votes are outstanding almost immediately after polling closes.

Another advantage, and possibly the most significant, is that the absentee, postal and pre poll votes, returned to the Divisional office, are now ready to be opened and counted without any further scrutiny. A result available a week earlier combined with an enormous monetary saving for the AEC.

A real significant change would be that provisional votes could now be taken at any polling location and forwarded back to the home (claimed enrolled) Division for scrutiny. In the past an absentee vote would have been issued instead with the voter taking "pot luck" that he/she sent the vote back to the correct Division.

Again this would ensure no vote is wasted and the attached public funding to the political parties would not be lost.

## SENATE BALLOT PAPERS

This idea is not original and has been discussed within the AEC for many years.

At present 96% of Senate voters, vote for a group, where only one mark is required, rather than for an individual candidate where they are required to complete every square below the line.

It therefore makes sense to have two ballot papers, one for groups and the second for individual grouped candidates and ungrouped candidates. The voter to decide which ballot paper he/she would like.

The group ballot paper would be the same size as the House of Representatives, whilst the individual candidate's ballot paper would remain the size of the current senate ballot paper.

The paper saved would be staggering along with the obvious benefits to polling officials in not having to handle such a large quantities and weights, much easier to issue votes, easier sorting and subsequent quicker counting with the added benefit of increased accuracy.

The only disadvantages are all with Postal voters and General Postal Voters.

For postal votes the application form would need another tick box section.

The elector would tick if they require a (small size) senate ballot paper for a group vote or one for an individual and ungrouped candidate (full size)

If neither box is ticked the default must go to a full size ballot paper where both voting options are available.

For registered General Postal Voters, where ballot papers are automatically posted out, the solution is to write to each voter as soon as the election is announced advising them all ballot papers will be issued after the close of nominations and given a date of for dispatch of the first ballot papers (usually two weeks later).

At this point they could be asked if they would like a group (small) or individual candidate (full size) ballot paper.

Again, if no reply the default must again go to the full size ballot paper.

Previous surveys show a smaller ballot paper also has the effect of reducing the likelihood of an informal vote. This will then also have the benefit of increasing the funding provided to political parties by decreasing the number of informal senate votes.

For the political parties, another advantage would be that a notional distribution of preferences could be run on Sunday night, after polling day, (or very soon afterwards) and a likely senate composition provided. It would usually be accurate to the last projected candidate to be elected.

Ivan Freys