



## **SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS**

# Inquiry into and report on all aspects of the conduct of the 2013 Federal Election and matters related thereto.

Below is my submission to the Joint Standing Committee. I am a former NSW State Returning Officer (1986 – 1997) having managed 3 General Elections and 1 By-Election. I have also managed polling places as Officer In Charge (OIC) for Federal, State and Local Government elections since 1986, including the 2013 Federal Election (OIC at Goulburn High School – Hume electorate).

I make the following recommendations and suggestions which I feel will improve election management:

### **RECRUITMENT**

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) requires persons seeking employment at elections to submit a detailed Expression of Interest about themselves and their abilities to carry out electoral work. This is required at every new election.

Why is this needed at every election?

Surely an experienced person who has previously been employed on elections and delivered satisfactory work performance can be just automatically considered for employment again. Can't they? This would save a lot of bureaucratic time if it could.

As it currently stands, most Divisional Office Managers (Returning Officers) contact their previous OICs and 2ICs in advance of election announcements to secure their availability for election day. This further illustrates the superfluous need for the person to lodge a detailed Expression of Interest. The same could apply to the recruitment of other polling staff.

### **DECLARATION VOTING**

#### **1 Iroles:**

In the last NSW State Election (2011) and Local Government Elections (2012), small hand sized electronic electoral roles called Iroles were used for the first time.

These Iroles were excellent in quickly tracking the electorate of an absent voter or silent voter and also as a double check if someone was actually on the Electoral Role. For reasons unknown they were not used in the 2013 Federal Election.

I recommend these Iroles be used in all future Federal Elections. They save time and help improve accuracy.

## **2. Cross Border voters (NSW – ACT)**

Declaration voting at a polling place can only be delivered in the same State as the voter is enrolled. ACT voters cannot Absent vote in NSW and vice versa. **Can this change?**

There are only 2 electorates in the ACT which could simply be added to the 48 electorates we need to manage and sort in NSW. I get a few cross-border voters from the ACT wanting to Absent vote on election day but I need to refer them to the Interstate voting centre.

Allowing ACT voters to Absent vote in NSW and vice versa would help these voters on Election Day.

I do concede that allowing this would result in a different Senate ballot paper needed for ACT voters in NSW polling places and vice versa.

## **3. Silent Voting**

The procedures for processing Silent Voting are excessive and cumbersome in polling places.

If it is so important to protect the Silent Voter from physical harm then why do we have to process details of the Silent Voter in a polling place?

I am not aware of any case where a Silent Voter was subjected to physical harm or traced as a result of doing a silent Vote but the potential exists – given the amount of details recorded about the person (name, where they voted, what electorate they are enrolled in). In NSW State elections it is worse because the person's address must be recorded on an inner envelope!

I recommend Silent Voters be automatically placed on the Registered Postal Voters list to receive their ballot papers by mail and remove the need for them to attend a polling place altogether. This will improve their personal security.

## **ELECTORAL MATERIALS**

### **1 Posters**

There are too many large posters in the electoral materials that we must display in polling places. Hardly anybody reads them and we are only supplied with one small strip of blutack to use on several posters which usually fall down before 6:00pm on election day. The use of adhesive tape often causes paint removal when the poster is pulled down – which doesn't make the school staff happy.

These posters explain to people how to vote which 99% of people already know. Those who don't can simply ask us for help – which they do.

I recommend a revue of posters and removal of unnecessary ones.

### **2 Cardboard signage**

Freestanding cardboard signage is only useful indoors. Externally it simply falls over or blows over in a slight breeze so trying to reserve a disabled parking place outside the polling premises is useless. I also doubt we have any authority to reserve disabled parking places in public streets.

## **SENATE VOTING**

### **1. Group Voting Preferences**

There is much debate currently about Senate voting and allocation of Group preferences. The voting public are not aware how minor parties and candidates can be elected with few votes.

I favour allowing voters the option to determine Group preferences – i.e. allow voters to number 1,2,3,4, etc above the line if they wish or simply put a 1 above the line as is current practice if they don't want to.

I believe the majority of people favour this from what I hear and Parliament would be seen more favourably if this was amended as such.

### **2. Political Party Names**

In many instances the Liberal Democrats were clearly confused as being the Liberal Party in the 2013 General Election. Being the first Group (A) on the ballot paper probably exacerbated this.

In my polling place (Goulburn High School) the most common reason voters returned their Senate ballot paper for mistakes was for selecting the Liberal Democrats instead of the Liberal Party.

I suggest some revision of allowable names for political parties is needed – especially if they have near similar names to already established political parties.

## **POLLING PLACE OFFICER IN CHARGE RETURN**

The Return a polling place Officer In Charge must complete is becoming excessive.

A review is needed to reduce unnecessary reporting. NSW did this for the 2011 State Election and 2012 Local Government elections. A similar reduction in the reporting needed could be done for Federal elections.

## **GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES**

The Australian Electoral Commission deserves credit where it is due. In the 2013 Federal Election it is worth noting:

### **1 Pre Poll Voting**

Allowing pre poll voting for 2 weeks before the election date to all electors was clearly very popular with the voting public. It should be continued. Some 20% (approx) of Hume Electorate Pre Poll voted which was higher than expected.

This resulted in less votes taken at polling places on Election Day 7 September and will most likely result in fewer staff needed on Election Day in future. I have no issue with this. There were less than expected absent votes as well which indicates people pre poll voted (more than in previous elections) before travelling outside their enrolled electorate.

## **2 Additional Evening Staff**

Allowing extra (in my case 2 extra) staff from 5:00pm on Election Day was a great help in preparing for the evening count of ballot papers and completion of work. It enabled the counting to be completed and packed faster and all furniture to be put away much earlier thus restoring the venue to its normal use condition.

This directly enabled completed results to be phoned thru to the Returning Officer sooner on the evening. Hopefully this practice of allowing additional staff from 5:00pm will be continued in future elections.

## **TO CONCLUDE**

I thank the Committee for considering my submission.

I am happy to clarify any points or appear before the Committee if you wish.