



Electoral Commissioner

Our Ref: 15/488

Rebecca Gordon
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gordon

Re: Inquiry into Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Bill 2016 (Amendment Bill).

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) notes the Amendment Bill was introduced into Parliament on 22 February 2016.

The AEC is committed to administering the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act), and fulfilling its obligations as a public sector agency. In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the AEC is ready to deliver a federal election in line with the legislation in force at the time the election is called.

As I have stated at Senate Estimates and to this Committee, the level of risk inherent in implementing changes to electoral processes increases significantly with any compression of the timeframe between a Government announcement, subsequent legislative change and the announcement of the federal election. With this in mind, the AEC is reviewing the detail in the Bill, assessing the potential operational and technical impacts of the proposed changes and developing an implementation plan should the Bill be passed by Parliament.

At this time, the AEC has not identified any reason to believe that it could not return the writ within the 100 day period required by the Electoral Act.

The AEC advised the Department of Finance that a minimum three month lead time would allow for the necessary system development and implementation to occur before Senate counting could commence. This would allow for testing and independent certification processes required for stakeholder assurance around the counting methodology.

If the AEC receives insufficient time, funding and resources to update the essential elements of the computerised systems that currently support the Senate count, the only theoretical option available would be to conduct a manual Senate count. The AEC has considered the feasibility of conducting a manual Senate count and the current assessment is that it would carry such complexity and inherent risk of error that it would not be practicable.

Preparation for the next federal election is continuing according to the AEC's election readiness planning framework. As the Committee would be aware, the AEC is currently undergoing a major journey of cultural and operational change, delivering a fundamental and far-reaching overhaul of policies and procedures and implementing the recommendations arising from multiple external reviews (including those by the Australian National Audit Office and Mr Mick Keelty AO APM). The AEC is committed to re-establishing its reputation of delivering trusted, consistently reliable, high quality and high integrity electoral events and services. A key milestone in this process will be the successful delivery of the next federal election.

I welcome your invitation to appear at the hearing on Tuesday 1 March 2016.

Yours sincerely

Tom Rogers

29 February 2016