



4 August 2015

Ms Rebecca Gordon
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gordon,

Submission to the inquiry into campaigning at polling places

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' (JSCEM) inquiry into campaigning activities at polling places.

Voices for Indi is a community organisation based in the Indi electorate in Northeast Victoria. It was established by people seeking to reengage the local community with the political process. V4I is not a political party, instead it is a platform enabling open political dialogue and community engagement. In devising a regional vision statement, V4I's consultation process empowered a course of action resulting in the election of independent Member of Parliament Cathy McGowan AO in 2013.

We note that the committee's terms of reference includes *'Allegations in relation to the conduct of, and material disseminated by, campaigners at state and federal elections in the vicinity of polling places intended or likely to mislead or intimidate electors.'*

On that basis we offer the following suggestions to the JSCEM:

1. There should be a limit on the amount of advertising signage per candidate at polling places.

In Indi there was an excessive display of political signage by the Liberal Party, with that party monopolising the limited space available by installing large swathes of plastic wrap with negative political messaging on it along polling booth main entrances and blanketing whole fence lines.

Even schools that were not polling booths weren't spared. The entire front of Wodonga Middle Years College (Huon Campus) which was not a polling booth, but is adjacent to the Wodonga Primary School which was a polling booth, was covered in plastic wrap.

As indicated by the attached photos it would have been difficult for voters entering Indi polling booths not to be intimidated by the material authorised by the Liberal Party. The swathes of plastic wrap blanketed entire front fences of polling booths. In some instances both sides of the road were covered in wrap and it was plastered along fences of schools nowhere near polling booth entrances.

As supporters of the democratic process it was particularly disappointing to see this type of intimidation at school booths where many parents brought their children along to educate them on the election process and were unimpressed that the Liberal Party chose to behave in this manner.

We allege that the conduct of the Liberal Party by the excessive dissemination of misleading material instructing voters '*with so much chaos don't risk your vote on an independent*' and '*don't risk it*' was intended to or likely to mislead or intimidate electors at these booths in Indi.

We also suggest the placement of such material at primary and secondary schools in Indi was in breach of Education Department and Local Government requirements. Especially given it was installed the day prior to the election and in some cases on schools that were not polling places.

2. The display of election material at and around polling places should be restricted until 5am on polling day.

A building and its grounds becomes a polling place on Election Day, not the day prior. However in Indi political party material was installed on Election eve, in some cases as early as 7pm and security guards were posted at select booths in Wangaratta, Wodonga and Benalla to guard that signage.

That night prior to the 2013 Federal election, the Liberal Party's wrap was affixed to the external brickwork and windows of the Wangaratta TAFE Amenities Building polling booth. As it's political message could be read from inside, AEC staff directed the candidate to remove this on polling morning.

3. The Electoral Act authorises the AEC to control behaviour inside a polling place and within six meters of the entrance of a polling booth only. We suggest this be reconsidered so that there is a clear understanding of who is responsible for behaviour at and around polling places, especially those on school grounds.

A restriction on when supporters may arrive to erect posters and signs at polling booths and clear guidelines as to who is responsible for polling booths would have avoided an ugly dispute at Wodonga Senior Secondary College:¹

At 9.30pm on Election eve when twenty-eight year twelve students returned to the school by bus after a two-day excursion they were greeted by a number of young Liberal Party workers who identified themselves as coming from Melbourne and who had installed two hundred meters of plastic wrap along the school's front fence that they refused to remove when asked by the principal. Some students were shocked to see the extensive signage, words were exchanged and a verbal and physical altercation occurred prior to parents and the principal intervening to diffuse the situation and calling the Police. We understand that there was significant confusion between the Police, the school and the AEC as to who was responsible for this signage.

¹ School demands rules on election signs <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-10/school-demands-rules-on-election-day-signs/4947498>

4. **Election material authorised by political parties should include a reasonable size copy of that party's logo. The authorisation should also include the name of the party of which the person authorising the material is a member of or the name of the candidate on whose behalf it is being distributed.**

The public should be able to identify those candidates and parties who choose to plastic wrap or placard entire streets and primary schools and who select to use negative and intimidating signage and campaign material.

The plastic wrap that blanketed polling places across Indi was authorised by an individual who was at that time the Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division) State Director, however the authorisation failed to mention the words 'Liberal Party' and the wrap lacked the Party's logo.

Additionally, the Liberal Party distributed flyers without the Liberal Party logo authorised by an individual known to be a Liberal Party member, but the words 'Liberal Party' were missing from the fine print, as was the name of the candidate on whose behalf they were being distributed.

These flyers were purposely printed using the same orange shade as the McGowan campaign. A number of voters mistakenly took the cards thinking they were for the McGowan campaign when in fact they weren't. There was nothing written on these flyers to indicate on which candidate's behalf they had been printed.

Voices for Indi welcomes the opportunity to respond to any questions the Committee may have regarding the matters we have raised.

Kind regards,

TAMMY ATKINS
On behalf of Voices for Indi

Attachment 1: Photos of the plastic wrap

Attachment 2: Liberal Party advertising

Attachment 3: Liberal Party wrap

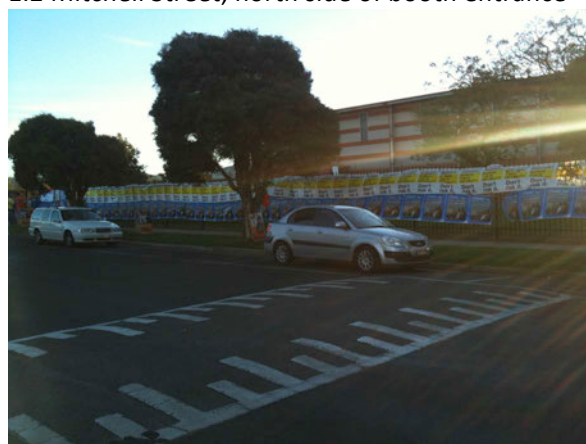
Attachment 1: Photographs of Indi polling booths at the 2013 Federal election.

1. Wodonga Primary

1.1 Mitchell Street, north side of booth entrance



1.2 Mitchell Street, north side of booth entrance

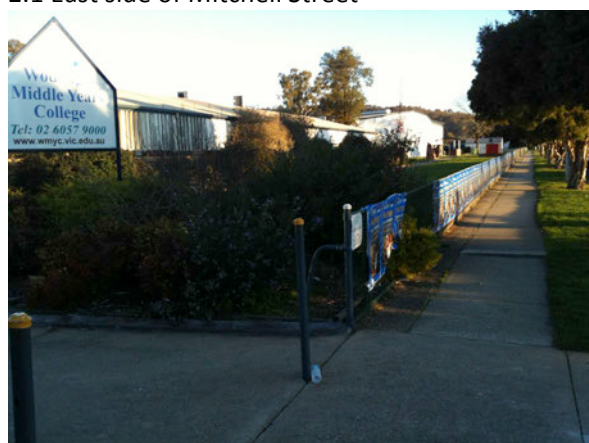


1.3 Mitchell Street, south side of booth entry

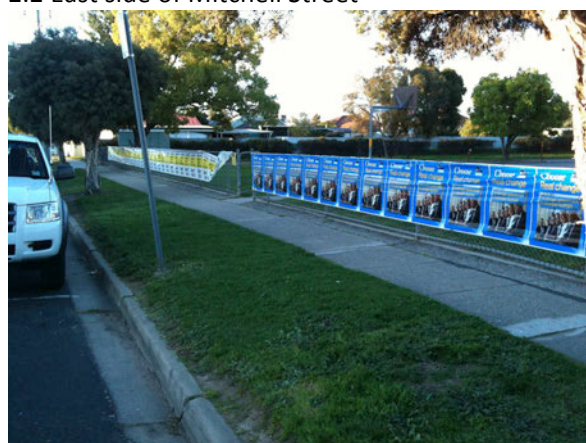


2. Wodonga Middle Years College (Huon Campus) – this was not a polling booth

2.1 East side of Mitchell Street

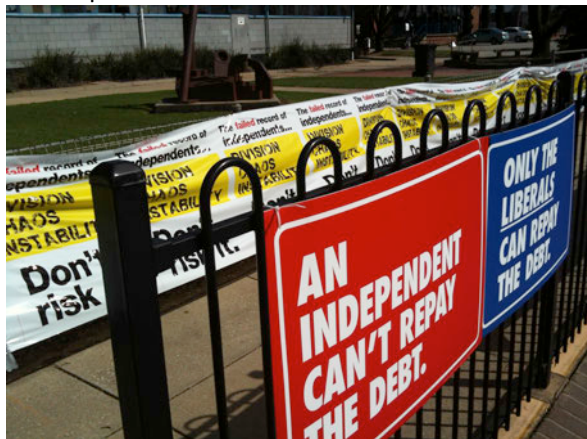


2.2 East side of Mitchell Street



3. Wodonga High School

3.1 Woodland Street east side of booth entrance, bus stop



3.2 Woodland Street, east side of booth entrance



3.3 Woodland Street, west side of booth entrance

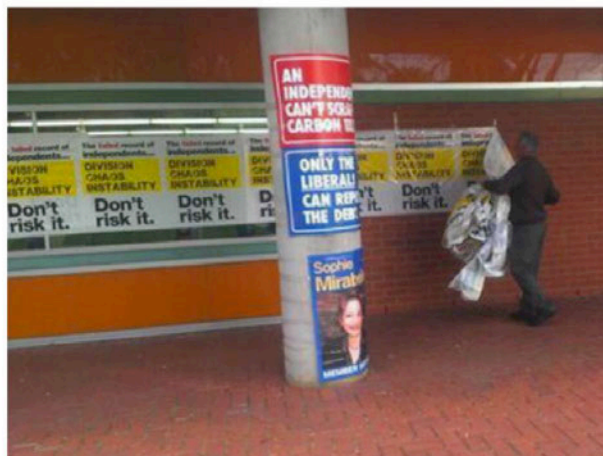


3.4 Woodland Street, west side of booth entrance



5. GOTAFE Docker Street Wangaratta

Signage affixed to the windows of a polling booth on Election eve and removed on polling day



4 Victory Lutheran College, Wodonga

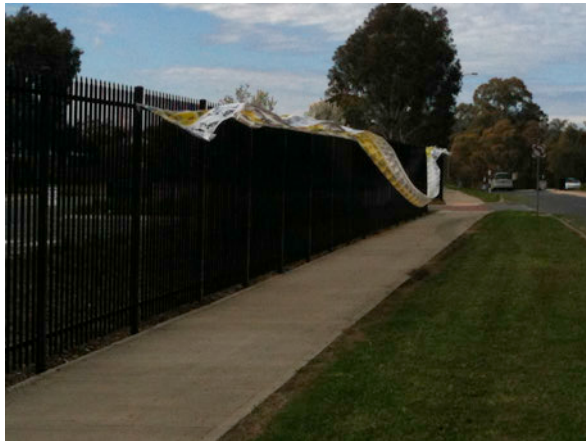
4.1 Drage Road, west side of booth entrance



4.2 Drage Road, east side of booth entrance



4.3 Drage Road, east side of booth entrance (excessive material coming loose and degrading the entrance)



Attachment 2: Liberal Party advertising - no party logo or even a mention of the Liberal Party or candidate on the very small authorisation notice.



Attachment 3: Liberal Party wrap - no party logo or even a mention of the Liberal Party or candidate on the very small authorisation notice.

