



JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

Committee set to begin hearings on the 2013 federal election

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters will hold the first public hearings of its inquiry into the 2013 federal election tomorrow and on Friday. The immediate focus will be on the two major issues raised by the 2013 election: lost ballot papers and Senate voting practices.

Thursday will focus on the lost ballot papers from the Western Australia Senate election. “The loss of 1370 ballots in the WA Senate election is the biggest known failure by the AEC in living memory,” said the Chair, Hon Tony Smith MP.

“As a result, the Committee has made it a priority to examine this issue at its first public hearing for the inquiry into the 2013 federal election.”

“That a situation could arise where 1370 ballot papers could go missing and the subsequent AEC initiated inquiry then identifies a smorgasbord of flaws has understandably left the voting public dumbfounded and their confidence in the AEC dramatically diminished.”

“The Committee will rightly be focussing on how such a situation could have arisen, whether other similar failures occurred in other parts of Australia and what needs to be done to prevent a repeat of this, or, the occurrence of other failures.”

In the first of a series of hearings into the issue, the Committee will hear from Acting Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers, who is leading the taskforce responding to the Keelty report on lost ballots, and the Australian National Audit Office. At future hearings the Committee will receive evidence on this issue from Mr Mick Keelty AO and the Electoral Commissioner.

Day two will focus on Senate voting practices more generally.

“There has been considerable public concern expressed about whether the result of the Senate vote is representative of the wishes of the electorate,” said the Chair, Hon Tony Smith MP.

“That our above-the-line Senate voting system can pole vault – almost randomly - a micro party candidate with a primary vote no larger than a typical suburb into the Senate as a result of tactical preference swapping, is I think for most Australians baffling.”

“The Special Minister of State has highlighted this as one of the priority issues for the Committee’s consideration. The Committee will investigate this issue very closely, as well as proposals for reform, with experts in the field.”

The Committee will receive evidence from elections experts Antony Green and Malcolm Mackerras, as well as the New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties and Family Voice Australia.

Details of the hearings are as follows:

Thursday 6 February, 1.15pm – 4.30pm and Friday 7 February, 9.00am – 12.15pm

Committee Room 2R1

Parliament House, Canberra

Other subjects that will be examined by the Committee in future hearings include automatic enrolment, electronic voting, and voter identification. Submissions are welcome on these and any other issue regarding the 2013 election, and can be made to em@aph.gov.au.

A detailed program is available at the Committee website. Proceedings will be broadcast at http://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Parliament.

For information on the inquiry: contact the Secretariat on (02) 6277 2374, email em@aph.gov.au or visit the Committee website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/em>