



Electoral Commissioner

Mr Daryl Melham MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Melham

I am writing to advise you of the discussions between the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and Defence in relation to alternative voting methods for Defence personnel serving overseas for future federal elections.

The electronic voting trial for Defence personnel serving overseas was deemed to be successful, however at the JSCEM public hearing on 17 October 2008, Defence expressed the view that the administration required to support electronic voting imposed an unintended workload on deployed staff. Electronic voting required the supply of dedicated electronic equipment in the designated Areas of Operation as well as each electronic voter received a PIN and a Postal Vote as a contingency for those unable to access electronic voting.

Consequently on 12 November 2008, Defence, AEC and the JSCEM secretariat met to discuss alternatives to electronic voting.

At this meeting the option of the AEC training Defence personnel as Assistant Returning Officers who would then issue pre poll votes in the Areas of Operation was positively discussed.

On 12 December 2008 Defence provided a letter to the AEC confirming the details of discussions with the AEC and described their position in relation to future voting arrangements and requested that it be submitted to JSCEM as part of the AEC's further submission to JSCEM (**Attachment A**). The letter also included as an Annex a description of how an Assistant Returning Officer model might be used in future elections (**Attachment B**).

On 15 December 2008 Defence advised the Minister for Defence that they were cooperating with AEC to facilitate and extend opportunities for overseas Australian Defence Force personnel to vote in future elections. The advice to the Minister also included the details of the Assistant Returning Officer model as outlined in **Attachment B**.

The AEC supports the use of the Assistant Returning Officer model, and notes that this is similar to the model which was used in Timor-Leste in the 2001 federal election.

The AEC also notes that legislation may need to be amended or regulations created to accommodate the unique circumstances and environment in which a "Defence Assistant Returning Officer" may need to operate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Dacey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul Dacey
Acting Electoral Commissioner

18 December 2008



Australian Government
Department of Defence
People Strategies and Policy

Mr Tim Pickering
First Assistant Secretary
Electoral Operations
Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)
West Block Offices
Queen Victoria Terrace
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Mr Pickering

**DEFENCE SUBMISSION ON ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL
DEPLOYED OVERSEAS DURING FUTURE FEDERAL ELECTIONS**

A. Meeting between AEC and Department of Defence Personnel on 4 December 2008

1. The purpose of this letter is to confirm discussion at Reference A, and to convey Defence's position on electoral arrangements for Defence personnel deployed overseas during future Federal elections. Defence requests that this information be incorporated within the AEC submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) for inclusion in their final report on the conduct of the 2007 Federal election.
 - a) Firstly, Defence views the trial of electronic voting at the last federal election as a success for ADF personnel deployed overseas. However, the paper based administration required to support electronic voting (eg PIN mailers and the contingency postal vote), coupled with the use of the General Postal Vote (GPV) to reach those unable to access electronic voting placed an unintended workload on deployed staff. Defence's preference is to reduce the workload on deployed staff during elections by utilising one reliable and responsive voting system. GPV ensures that all deployed personnel, including those on ships, or in more isolated AOs who cannot relocate to areas with access to electronic voting, are still provided with the maximum opportunity to vote. Defence views a GPV only approach – with agreed enhancements, and the utilisation of Assistant Returning Officers (ARO) - offers the optimal solution, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, for the foreseeable future.
 - b) Secondly, Defence agrees to in-principle support for the ARO model suggested by the AEC as used in 2001 with Defence in Timor Leste (see Annex A). Arrangements for the implementation of this model will need to be formally agreed between Defence and the AEC prior to any future election. Defence also requests it be noted that the use of ARO may not be practical in all Areas of Operation (AO) due to their extremely remote nature (eg. ADF operations in support of the United Nations Mission in Sudan/Darfur). Accordingly, an alternative approach may be required for personnel in particularly remote AOs.

- c) Finally, Defence confirms that it will continue to support AEC via a dedicated website for electoral related matters in the lead up, and during future elections. Defence will also endeavour to make opportunities available for AEC staff to conduct information briefings on election related matters to personnel prior to deployment overseas, such as during force preparation.

2. Should you require any further information, please contact Group Captain Geoff Robinson, Director of Personnel at Headquarters Joint Operations Command on 02 9359 4253.

Yours sincerely

TONY NEEDHAM

Air Commodore
Director General Workforce Planning
People Strategies and Policy Group
BP35-4-89
Tel: (02) 61272300
Fax: (02) 61272334

12 Dec 08

Annex:

- A. Assistant Returning Officer Model for Defence -- Voting for Australian Defence Force Personnel Deployed Overseas dated 12 Dec 08

Assistant Returning Officer Model for Defence Overseas Voting

1. Background

- 1.1. Defence, JSCEM Secretariat and the AEC met on 12 November 2008 to discuss a way forward with regard to Overseas Voting for Defence personnel for the next federal election. An action item was to describe the Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) model used in 2001 with Defence in Timor Leste and how it might be applied in future elections.

2. Description

- 2.1. The AEC currently appoints AROs to issue votes in more than 100 Overseas Posts. AROs are not provided by the AEC, but comprise personnel trained using a distance education package in how to conduct Overseas and/or Overseas Mobile Polling.
- 2.2. All non critical polling equipment is dispatched in advance of the election so that only ballot papers are dispatched at election time.
- 2.3. For Defence, ballot papers would also be posted on the Defence intranet for use by AROs prior to the receipt of printed ballot papers. AROs would need to undertake some assembly of downloaded Senate papers given their size.
- 2.4. In consultation with the AEC and Defence, AROs can issue votes from static locations or conduct mobile polling to smaller out posted camps (not always achievable due to force protection requirements).
- 2.5. AROs would typically have 24/7 telephone support from the AEC (although telephone access may not be guaranteed in more remote AO's).
- 2.6. Defence personnel would vote without the need to apply for a Postal Vote, General Postal Vote or Remote Electronic Vote.
- 2.7. Application for registration as a General Postal Voter, and Postal Voting would remain available to all Defence personnel in case they are not in the service area of an ARO.
- 2.8. At the conclusion of polling, ballot boxes would be returned to the AEC via a pre-agreed process with Defence. This may include an ARO escorting ballot papers back to Australia from several issuing areas within that country.
- 2.9. Defence would need to supply dedicated staff to manage each Overseas Post within each AO.

3. Advantages

- 3.1. Defence personnel have more options as to how they cast their vote in an AO.
- 3.2. Dedicated defence personnel appointed as AROs would have responsibility for the project.
- 3.3. Ships could be serviced by mobile polling meeting the ship at port (subject to operational priorities).
- 3.4. DFAT Overseas posts could supplement the voting service in some countries.
- 3.5. AROs could plan their three week polling timetable well in advance of the election so that all transport and accommodation is made available to the Overseas Defence Voting team in order to access the majority of Defence personnel in that AO.
- 3.6. Significantly cheaper than electronic voting.

4. Disadvantages

- 4.1. There may be difficulties with materials/equipment in the pre-election period reaching AOs and being retained in readiness for the election in sometimes adverse conditions.
- 4.2. There may be difficulties involved for AROs in printing sufficient ballot papers from the Defence intranet if the AEC printed ballot papers are delayed arriving in the AOs.
- 4.3. Operational needs may prevent voters from attending to vote or for the AROs conducting mobile polling
- 4.4. Defence would need to provide staff at their own cost as the AEC is unable to supply civilians in AOs.
There may be an additional demand on operational air assets to provide transport to the Overseas Defence Voting Team.