



The Hon Mr Tony Smith MP
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
PARLIAMENT HOUSE ACT 2600

6 March 2014

Dear Mr Smith

Re: Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 Federal Election

I have received correspondence from constituents in relation to the conduct of Returning Officers from the Australian Electoral Commission, particularly as it related to the storage of material on-site at pre-poll locations. I am making this submission in the light of that correspondence.

Constituents have explained to me their experiences of the different ways by which AEC Returning Officers responded to requests by volunteers distributing how-to-vote cards at pre-poll booths to leave their material, principally boxes of how-to-vote cards as well as corflutes, when the booth was closed.

In the light of the matters related to me, I would encourage the Committee to consider developing of a policy by the AEC for Returning Officers in relation to the storing of material on site at pre-poll locations.

While Returning Officers at many pre-poll locations in the past have made provision for such material to be secured stored overnight in a room, cupboard, or ante-room, this practice is not universal and I am advised that some Returning Officers refused to discuss such a practice. Consequently, many volunteers were required to transport the material away from the pre-poll location each evening and bring it back again the following morning.

This is of special concern for elderly volunteers, as this material can be heavy and cumbersome to transport. The concern is broader, however, as it also affects significantly those without a motor vehicle or those attending polling booths in in areas where parking is difficult. Significant booths such as Sydney Town Hall require a larger volume of material as the location caters for all electorates in the state of New South Wales. It is not an easy booth to access by car due to the need to pay for already scarce on-street parking, and the lack of safe drop-off point nearby where material can be brought and deposited safely.

A policy which allows for political parties to store a box of material as well as a reasonable number of posters, space permitting, would avoid the need for volunteers to transport this material to and from the polling booth on a daily basis. Such a policy would be appreciated by volunteers from the various political parties, and is a common-sense response to the matter.

I know that the volunteers appreciate the actions of many Returning Officers at pre-poll who consistently make space and allowance for the storage of material, and that this plays an important role in ensuring equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

I request that the committee consider this submission.

Yours sincerely,

The Hon Don Harwin MLC
President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales