

Senate F&PA Committee

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AEC OPENING STATEMENT

Witness Name: Mr. Tom Rogers **SENATE ESTIMATES 29 MAY 2014**

Organisation: AEC

The AEC is now focussed on rebuilding the community and Parliament's faith in the AEC and our capacity to deliver an accurate and reliable election result. Given the damage caused to the AEC's reputation by the WA incident, rebuilding our stakeholders' trust in this Agency will be our primary focus for some time to come, and I thought it appropriate that I briefly update the Committee on what we will be doing and why.

The most important part of this process will be the successful delivery of electoral events. To be successful in that delivery, there can be no room for doubt about the integrity of the process. Integrity has always been implicit in our approach, but I think it is now time to demonstrate this in a more explicit way.

The AEC has already begun refreshing its focus on integrity and two related elements - quality and compliance. I have been reinforcing these concepts with staff, and this message is also being disseminated by the AEC's leadership group.

The loss of ballot papers has reinforced my view that any lapse can have a significant impact on our electoral system. I want to be in a position to assure Parliament that there will not be a repeat of what happened in WA. The implementation of ANAO and Keelty recommendations is only one part in doing this; I also need to satisfy myself and others of the robustness and integrity of all aspects of our processes.

Major areas of our current focus include improving the way we train temporary employees and confirm their political neutrality (given the numbers involved, this remains a significant challenge for us) and alleged instances of multiple voting (which I will expand on in a moment) and non-voting. We are also reviewing the way we update the roll to ensure its

integrity and completeness; the ANAO will be contributing to this with a review of the electoral roll later this year.

Multiple voting has been a consistent area of discussion for this committee. It is also the subject of discussion for electoral management bodies across the world. This is understandable – a voter's faith in, and engagement with, the electoral system rests on an assurance that each person in a polling place has the same opportunity, but only the same opportunity, to vote. AEC analysis indicates that levels of multiple voting have not had an impact on declared outcomes. But in some ways this misses the point: multi-voting contravenes the universally accepted standard of 'one person, one vote'.

Ahead of the 2013 election I instigated a review of our approach. I formed the view that, previously, the AEC may have been exercising a discretion that was at the outer edge of our authority. We have since been working closely with the AFP and have also met with the staff from the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP), about this matter.

We have implemented a new way of working with the AFP, and have begun a process whereby we will provide them with all cases from the 2013 federal election where an elector admitted multiple voting (currently 2,013) and all cases where the elector has not responded or not provided adequate evidence in response to our enquiries (currently 6,086). We have our next scheduled meeting with the AFP about this matter next week. I note that Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters is considering a number of possible remedies to this issue.

I would like to close by reiterating that the AEC acknowledges that its past mistakes have damaged the electorate's confidence in us. We have begun the long journey to restore Australia's faith in the integrity of our practices, people and behaviours, and in doing so, rebuild the community's confidence in Australia's electoral process.