

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2015-16

Finance Portfolio
27-28 May 2015

Department/Agency: Australian Electoral Commission

Outcome/Program: General

Topic: Australian Electoral Commission – Portfolio efficiencies

Senator: Ludwig

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Type of question: Written

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Number of pages: 3

Question:

1. Why is administered revenue projected to fall by \$5 million in the budget estimate for 2015-16?
2. Why is administered revenue in an election year (2016-17) only just above expected non-election years?
3. In the preparation of the Budget 2014-15, what factors went into the calculation of revenue projections for the forward estimates?
4. Was the Commission advised of any planned legislative changes that would affect the Commission's administered revenue? If yes, please detail. Include the date the Commission was advised and a summary of the advice.
5. Is the Commission expected to make savings in the next financial year? If yes, where have savings been found and how much do they total?
6. Is the Commission expected to spend less in the federal election expected in 2016-17 than previous elections? If yes, please detail. Include where the savings will be made and what they will total.
7. Why do the forward estimates for 2016-17 have \$21 less in government revenue for what is the expected election year than the budgeted actuals for 2013-14 (when the Commission administered the 2013 federal election)?
8. Does the Commission commence planning for the public awareness campaign upon the announcement of the election or prior to the announcement of the election by the Prime Minister? If prior, how is the timing decided?

9. Given the reduction in government and administered revenue, how will it affect the Commission's delivery communication, education and public awareness activities to inform Australians of electoral and Parliamentary matters?
10. What is the current level of enrolment participation at this time?
11. Last federal election, the AEC spent \$20.2 m on Government advertising during the federal election campaign to increase voter awareness. What were the outcomes of that program?
12. Your Annual Report for 2013-14 indicates that increase to overall enrolment from 91.2 to 92.3 per cent – with the biggest increase in voter participation with younger voters – who of course are disproportionately disengaged from the electoral process. Given the reduction in funding in the forward estimates, does the Commission expect this to affect the delivery of the Commissions' successful outcomes in these areas seen in the last federal election? If yes, please detail the expected impact on outcomes.
13. How will reductions in funding affect the Indigenous Voter Participation program?
14. Why are employee benefits going fall from \$78.6 m in the 2014-15 actuals to \$74.7 m in the 2015-16 budget estimates?
15. Is this due to a loss of own source revenue or government source revenue?
16. How many Commission employees have been made redundant or were retrenched in the last financial year?
17. How many Commission employees will be made redundant in the 2015-16 financial year?
18. Will this affect the number of staff that the Commission can employ if an election is called? If yes, please detail the effects on election staffing.
19. Is the Commission reducing staff to get back to surplus as soon as possible?

Answer:

1. Administered Revenue relates predominately to non-voter fines issued for the election events in 2013 and 2014 and will reduce over time.
2. Administered Fees and Fines are budgeted at \$2 million in 2016-17 (election year) and \$0.033 million in non-election year (2015-16) on the assumption that we will issue non-voter fines post the expected election in 2016-17.
3. Budget revenue estimates, excluding Appropriations, are based on expected revenue, considering past trends, adjusted for changes in circumstances. Appropriation estimates are as per advice from the Department of Finance.
4. No.
5. The Commission will manage its resources in line with the budget estimate.
6. No.
7. The 2013-14 actuals include the cost of the Western Australia Senate election and Griffith by-election in 2013-14.

8. The Commission commences planning for the public awareness campaign in advance of the announcement of the election. Key elements are prepared following the conclusion and implementation of evaluation of the previous event to ensure basic elements of the campaign are election ready in case of an early election.
9. The AEC is intending to maintain its communication, public awareness and education program.
10. The national enrolment rate as at 31 March 2015 was 92.8 per cent.
11. The AEC undertakes formal benchmarking and tracking research to assess the effectiveness of its election time advertising campaign. Research conducted in relation to the 2013 federal election advertising found the following against the benchmark conducted prior to the campaign:
 - 34 per cent increase in the awareness for the deadline for enrolling
 - 3 per cent increase in the understanding of how to enrol
 - 6 per cent increase of how to update enrolment details
 - 3 per cent reduction in understanding of the range of voting services for those unable to vote on election day
 - 3 per cent reduction in awareness of how to get more information on those options
 - 6 per cent increase in understanding of how to vote correctly in House of Representatives
 - 17 per cent increase in understanding of how to vote correctly in the Senate.
12. No.
13. No funding changes have been proposed for the AEC's Indigenous Electoral Participation Program for 2015-16.
14. – 15. Reduction relates to our expected decrease in Average Staffing Level from 801 in 2014-15 to 788 in 2016-17.
16. In the last financial year, being 2013-14, four Commission employees were made redundant.
17. There are no planned redundancies for 2015-16.
18. No.
19. The AEC reported a deficit because we are not funded for non-cash amounts. Excluding non-cash amounts we have achieved a surplus for the last 2 financial years.