



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

Continuous Roll Update (CRU) is the primary methodology used by Australian electoral authorities to maintain electoral rolls and was implemented mainly to address shortcomings of the full habitation review, or doorknocking, method. With CRU, data on the roll is reviewed and/or matched with other Commonwealth and state/territory data to identify specific addresses from which, or into which, people are moving, and to identify any anomalies in roll data, such as more people being enrolled at an address than the expected number for the type of dwelling. The advantage of CRU is that it is more targeted than traditional methods of maintaining electoral rolls, such as doorknocking, as it focuses efforts on areas where evidence suggests current roll information is incorrect or the roll is incomplete.

Since its national introduction in 1999, CRU has developed incrementally as resources and data sets became available, and as ideas for enhancements and upgrades were formed. While there has been regular reporting and evaluation of CRU, it has not been the subject of a comprehensive review to determine whether it is undertaken in the most efficient and effective manner or whether it meets Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and state and territory electoral authorities' (SEAs) requirements.

Further, evidence is showing that relative to the eligible population, the number of electors on the roll is declining and in some cases the actual number has declined. From 30 June 2005 to 30 June 2006, the number of electors on the roll declined nationally from 13,114,475 to 13,081,539, with declines evident in all jurisdictions except South Australia and Tasmania, states in which there were state elections during the year.

Therefore, it was timely to review the operations of the CRU program.

### Findings and conclusions

There are several key findings and conclusions that can be drawn from the way that CRU currently operates:

- A more universally understood definition of what is meant by 'roll review', what activities this entails and what is meant by the term 'CRU', is needed;
- The main challenge in ensuring the quality of a continuously maintained roll is the constant change brought about as young people come of voting age or migrants obtain Australian citizenship, as people die or leave Australia permanently, and as people change their name or address;
- A more universal understanding of the definition of roll integrity<sup>1</sup> and its elements is required;
- A need for clear links between high level objectives such as those contained in the corporate plan various business plans, and frame works such as the elements that comprise the definition of 'roll integrity', and specific operational functions;

<sup>1</sup> That is, entitlement, accuracy, completeness, processing correctness and security.

- That the tension between the 'roll integrity' elements of accuracy and completeness may have contributed to the current decline in total enrolment numbers;
- The legislative change in 2004 from divisional-based enrolment to address based enrolment appears to have resulted in more people being removed from the electoral roll based on non-residence;
- As a result, an imbalance now exists because people must complete a new enrolment application to enrol or update their enrolment, but to be removed from the roll an elector need do nothing, and that action to remove them from the roll can be taken even if the elector is living in the same division;
- There is an imbalance between the acceptance of obligation of the elector and the AEC responsibility to encourage the elector to enrol or change their details on the roll;
- It appears that many people do not see the urgency (or need) to update their enrolments when prompted by letters from the AEC. Updating enrolment details, or enrolling at all, generally appears to have a low priority for many people;
- It appears community knowledge of the need to update enrolment information every time a person changes address is poor; people seem not to understand the basic legislative requirement surrounding enrolment;
- Focus groups have identified that electors believe that nothing needs to be done by the elector, as the AEC will either doorknock the area or will send a form. Further, these focus groups have identified that some electors believe that enrolment is automatically updated when other government agencies;
- To date there has not been an active campaign to tell people that they can be removed from the roll if they don't re-enrol;
- The incidence of data from external agencies that is of poor quality or is out-of-date that has caused difficulties for matching and ultimately for mail not being delivered. A similar issue arises in areas of Australia that have no, or limited, mail delivery services to individual residential addresses;
- The roll and the strategies that are used to maintain the rolls and encourage enrolment require continuous monitoring and analysis at all levels of the organization to ensure the ongoing appropriateness and effectiveness of activities and to identify emerging trends and potential problems. This requires the relevant tools. This includes keeping across and watching for emerging trends and changes in the environment;
- The current roll review program employs a standard suite of enrolment stimulation activities that are expected to effectively address the needs of the whole population whereas there are several target groups for which this program, for various reasons, appears to be inadequate;
- There are benefits in taking a more considered approach, segmenting the eligible population into specific characteristics and tailoring activities to better service different groups, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of enrolment

stimulation activities. Such an approach can be styled as *plan for the majority, engage the minorities*<sup>2</sup>;

- Opportunities have been identified for SOs and DOs to tailor the national CRU program to local demographic characteristics, requirements and target groups. Relevant performance-related measures to monitor achievements would be needed;
- The building of the address base in RMANS, whilst important to business processes, appears to have diverted our focus to those processes and away from pursuing the enrolment of the eligible elector; and
- As a result of RMANS being an address-based system, it is difficult to access information on electors contacted through the CRU program, or who have responded to that contact;<sup>3</sup>

The overall conclusion from the review is that electoral rolls are in a better shape under a continuous roll review process than if a more passive approach was undertaken or no enrolment-stimulation occurred at all. Of the 2 million enrolment forms processed by the AEC in 2005-06, it is estimated 1.3 million (66 per cent) came from CRU-related activities.

CRU also appears to be more cost effective than would be the case if habitation review occurred and the enrolment workloads generally are much more evenly spread over the year.

Notwithstanding the deficiencies identified in the report, it is considered that in the short to medium term the current CRU program, with those deficiencies addressed, should remain.

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<sup>2</sup> Minorities is referred to in the electoral context.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible to identify that a person returned an enrolment form, and whether that form was CRU generated, but other response types are not identified to individuals, only to addresses.

## Recommendations

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### Recommendation 1

A program of activities be identified that is consistent with an appropriate apportionment of responsibility for maintaining enrolment between electors and electoral authorities.

### Recommendation 2

A roll review approach be developed that differentiates between the mainstream population and specific minorities and develops appropriate strategies for both.

### Recommendation 3

Improve the ability of managers and staff to obtain roll review performance information by electors (in addition to that available on addresses); at the very least information on which individuals are sent correspondence and what response, if any, resulted.

### Recommendation 4

Specific response codes be employed to the Mail Review System to record the outcomes from mail review activities, with the following being a minimum requirement:

- enrolment form received (if this fact is not captured automatically when enrolment forms are processed);
- resident ineligible;
- correctly enrolled;
- no further action/action completed; and
- return to sender mail.

### Recommendation 5

The Sample Audit Fieldwork be subject to a full evaluation.

### Recommendation 6

The feasibility of extending the Sample Audit Fieldwork to include rural and remote localities be investigated. If inclusion of rural and remote localities proves not to be feasible, that alternative roll measurement be developed and implemented for these localities.

### Recommendation 7

Divisional demographic and socio-economic profiling be developed and state management and Divisional Returning Officers use this information proactively in their management of the rolls.

### Recommendation 8

Further research and analysis of the rolls be undertaken. Evaluation could take the form of an annual work program of research and analysis, which would be reviewed and agreed by senior management and be based on an accountability model.

### Recommendation 9

State management teams and Divisional Returning Officers actively seek and use intelligence opportunities that might exist locally that can provide useful information for stimulating enrolment and managing the rolls.

### Recommendation 10

Ensure that State Offices and Divisions have the flexibility to supplement the national enrolment stimulation program with activities tailored to identified local demographic characteristics, requirements and target groups and allow some controlled experimentation and trial as necessary, in developing local enrolment stimulation strategies.

### Recommendation 11

A formal process of identifying, evaluating and disseminating innovation in regards to roll management and enrolment stimulation be introduced, with State Managers and management teams actively facilitating this process at relevant state and national fora.

### Recommendation 12

While encouraging local innovation, ensure, wherever possible, that performance monitoring occurs.

### Recommendation 13

Implement the following modifications to existing CRU practices:

- objection batches to be matched to external data sets to attempt to identify current addresses for electors facing removal from the rolls;

- the suspension of:
  - reminder letters in most circumstances;
  - the review of addresses under the 'two-year rule';
  - mailings to 'from' addresses;
- activities to be undertaken more frequently (even by manual methods, if this is necessary) for people identified as potential electors;
- not using old data, for example when the program is suspended for an electoral event, unless these data have been checked for currency;
- the data source be included on all CRU-generated enrolment stimulation letters,
- divisional staff be provided with the facility to cull as well as amend records from matched and unmatched batches; and
- any unmatched records remaining after being divisional staff have made corrections to allow mail to be delivered, be discarded..

In addition, consideration will need to be given to the need to continue the background review process should the suspension of the review of addresses under the 2 year rule be adopted.

#### Recommendation 14

Improve the documentation on business rules so that they are clearly documented, comprehensive, accessible, recognisable, correct and relevant. As part of this process, prepare simple checklists for use by Divisional staff.

#### Recommendation 15

Improve business rules management and monitoring involving:

- more effective involvement of operational staff in maintaining business rules;
- introducing a more formal process for instigating and prioritising requests for business rule changes, including approval by an appropriate manager within the Roll Management Branch;
- implementation of a program of systematic review of business rules to ensure they are meeting their intended purpose. This activity to be undertaken jointly by IT programmers and suitably experienced operational staff; and
- allocation of consistent, appropriate resources for scoping, developing and testing of business rules prior to systems being released into production.

#### Recommendation 16

Return some culling abilities to Divisions when investigating unmatched addresses for CRU mailouts but with the strict understanding that State Offices will monitor performance and Divisions will, if required, need to justify their performance. Further, investigate the benefit in continuing to review unmatched addresses at all and abandon this activity if the returns are not commensurate with the time and effort expended.

### Recommendation 17

Progress the current review of correspondence (especially that related to enrolment stimulation activities) as a high priority. Investigate the feasibility of introducing a suitable message on the front CRU-mailout envelopes, especially in the period leading up to electoral events.

### Recommendation 18

Introduce a continuing program of public awareness into the basic requirements for enrolment, with the aim in the long-term of increasing the number of people taking responsibility for maintaining their own enrolment information without the need for continual active prompting by electoral authorities.

### Recommendation 19

Align enrolment stimulation activities closely with the electoral cycle and increase efforts in the months preceding an electoral event. In the case of state/territory events, these efforts should be determined and implemented in consultation with, and complement efforts by, the relevant State or Territory Electoral Authority.

### Recommendation 20

Undertake some form of fieldwork continuously and consider allowing Divisions to engage a small number of full time Review Officers to undertake this work. To contain costs and provide better continuity of work for staff it might be possible to share permanent Review Offices amongst adjoining Divisions.

### Recommendation 21

State Offices and Divisions have the flexibility to determine what follow-up activities will occur within their areas of responsibility, with the ability to substitute reviews of growth areas in lieu of Non-Response Fieldwork, if better outcomes are achievable.

Promulgate instructions that activities other than Non-Response Fieldwork must be based on identified target characteristics, whether these are non-response addresses or areas of high turnover and/or growth, and achieve identified outcomes.

### Recommendation 22

Review the policy and procedures with respect to enforcement of compulsory enrolment provisions, particularly with respect to the true recalcitrants.

### Recommendation 23

Investigate replacing the existing PDF Internet enrolment forms with a smart form, modelled on the Australian Taxation Office's *eTax* program; this form be have the option of the elector printing, completing and returning or nominating to receive a pre-populated form from the AEC.

**Recommendation 24**

Explore with Government the possibility and feasibility of linking updates of client information (name, residential and postal address and date of birth) under the “smart card” system to updates of the electoral enrolment.