



PBO general election guidance 1 of 4, 2021

How minor parties and independents can opt in to the PBO's election commitments report

Minor parties and independents can be included in an addendum to the election commitments report if they choose to opt in

Section 64MA of the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* requires the Parliamentary Budget Officer to release a report after the election outlining the financial impact of all the election commitments that have a material impact on the budget for all designated parliamentary parties – that is, parties with five or more members. The PBO has a legislative requirement to release this report within 30 days of the end of the caretaker period or seven days prior to the first sitting day of the new parliament, whichever is later.

Since the 2019 election, minor parties (with fewer than five Members or Senators) and independents have had the option of having the financial impact of their election commitments included in the Parliamentary Budget Offices (PBO's) report of election commitments.¹ If any minor parties choose to opt in to the report, we will release a later addendum containing the financial implications of the election commitments of those minor parties as soon as possible after the release of the main report.

This guidance note outlines how we will implement these opt-in arrangements for the next general election. Many of the arrangements applying to designated parties will be replicated, with the resulting report addendum published on a different schedule. [Attachment A](#) summarises the arrangements for designated and minor parties.

For the purposes of this guidance note, 'minor parties' refers to all independent parliamentarians and parliamentary political parties with fewer than five Members or Senators.

¹ The *Parliamentary Budget Office Review 2016–17 – Report of the Independent Review Panel* recommended that the PBO 'should provide parliamentary political parties with fewer than five Members or Senators the option to have the financial impact of their election commitments included in the PBO's post-election report of election commitments'. The PBO agreed with this recommendation and, following the release of a consultation paper and consideration of the submissions received, released PBO Guidance 01/2018, outlining how the PBO would implement the recommendation given its available resources.

Whether or not minor parties choose to opt in to the election commitments report addendum, they may continue to release any policy costings they have sought from the PBO outside the caretaker period, at any time.

Notifying the PBO of a decision to opt in and engaging early with the PBO

Minor parties are required to notify us of their intention to opt in to the election commitments report addendum no later than 14 days prior to polling day. This allows us to plan for the production and release of the addendum.

Ideally, parties seeking to opt in to the election commitments report addendum would submit their major policies to be costed by the PBO either before the caretaker period commences, where the requests can be on a confidential basis, or publicly during the caretaker period. The earlier a party engages with us on a policy costing request, the better placed we are to incorporate it into the election commitments report addendum if it is publicly announced as an election commitment.

Early engagement provides the opportunity for policy specifications to be clarified, if necessary, to cost the election commitment. Early engagement also gives the PBO time to develop the capability to cost more complex election commitments. If there is no engagement with the PBO prior to the making of election commitments, it may be difficult to include the costing of these commitments in the election commitments report addendum without substantially delaying its release.

Providing the Parliamentary Budget Officer with a list of election commitments

Any minor party wishing to opt in to the election commitments report addendum will be required to provide a final and complete list of election commitments to the Parliamentary Budget Officer by 5pm on the day before election polling day. This is consistent with the requirements for designated parliamentary parties. The PBO will publish an election commitments template for parties on its website; while using this template is optional, it is preferred.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer will publicly release the list of election commitments provided by any minor parties on the day after polling day, along with lists from the designated parliamentary parties.

Identifying election commitments that have a material impact on the budget

If a minor party opts in to the election commitments report addendum and provides the Parliamentary Budget Officer with a list of election commitments, the Parliamentary Budget Officer will retain the option to amend the list of election commitments if the PBO is aware of a major publicly announced election commitment by a party that is omitted from their list, or a major election commitment on the list that was never publicly announced. In such a circumstance, the Parliamentary Budget Officer will provide the minor party with a statement explaining the reasons for any amendments. Any comments provided by the minor party on the PBO's statement would be included in the addendum to the election commitments report.

This is broadly consistent with the approach for designated parliamentary parties. Given the resources available to the PBO, however, we would not endeavour to match the legislated timeframe applying to

similar statements for designated parties (to which the Parliamentary Budget Officer provides comments no later the three days after the end of the caretaker period).

Interactions between election commitments

The PBO will endeavour to calculate, document and include the financial impact of significant interactions between election commitments for minor parties in a similar manner to its treatment for designated parties. Where the interactions are expected to be significant but cannot be confidently estimated, this will be clearly stated in the addendum to the report of election commitments.

The combined impact of each minor party's election commitments will be included in the addendum to the report of election commitments, including in circumstances where the financial impact of interactions between election commitments is reported as unquantifiable.

Minor parties no longer represented in the Parliament following the election

If a minor party opts in to the election commitments report addendum and no longer has a representative in the Parliament following the election, their commitments will be excluded from the report addendum on the basis that they will no longer have an ongoing role in budget-related deliberations.

Minor parties newly represented in the Parliament following the election

To ensure the report addendum can be prepared in a timely manner the PBO has decided that the option to be included in the addendum should only be available for parties that have a representative in the Parliament immediately before the election.

Like all parliamentarians, however, newly elected parliamentarians will have the option to submit policy costing requests to the PBO during the new Parliament. This can include a costing of the full suite of their publicly announced election commitments. These can be submitted on either a confidential or non-confidential basis. Responses to these requests will be prepared as part of the PBO's regular and ongoing policy costing work.

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Attachment A: summary of arrangements for the PBO’s election commitments report for designated and minor parties

Table 1: PBO’s election commitments report – summary of designated and minor party arrangements

| | Designated parties | Minor parties and independents |
|---|--|--|
| Participate in election commitments report | Y Legislated | Optional - later addendum to main report If choosing to opt in, advise PBO no later than 14 days before polling day |
| PBO includes interactions between individual party commitments in report | Y | Y, same as designated parties |
| Party provides commitments list to PBO | Legislated, by 5pm on day before polling day | Y, same time as designated parties |
| PBO publishes commitments list | Legislated, day after polling day | Y, same time as designated parties |
| PBO develops own commitments list and gives to parties | Legislated, PBO gives to parties no later than three days after end of caretaker | The PBO may amend the party's list, in which case the PBO will provide the party with a statement. The PBO would not endeavour to match the legislated timeframe applying to similar statements for designated parties |
| Scope of PBO’s commitments lists | Legislated, list is all commitments that Parliamentary Budget Officer judges have a material impact on the Commonwealth budget | PBO amendments could be for 'major' publicly announced commitments not in party’s list, or commitments listed but not actually announced. That is, the PBO retains option to amend a list, but amended lists would not have the same scope as those of designated parties |
| Party gives PBO comments on PBO commitments list | Legislated, 3 days after receiving list | Not required, but parties may comment |
| PBO publishes any party comments in election commitments report | Legislated, 30 days after caretaker or 7 days before first sitting of parliament | Comments included in the addendum to the election commitments report published as soon as possible after main report |

Note: a designated party for the purposes of the election commitments report is one with five or more Members or Senators. A minor party is one with fewer than five Members or Senators. For further details on legislative requirements for the report, see *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*, sections 64MA to 64MC.