SUBMISSION TO THE

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Report on the conduct of the 2019 federal election

AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

Contents

SECTION 1

Electoral Commissioner's Overview

Globally, the successful administration of electoral events is an increasingly complex endeavour.

Mounting security concerns, increased scale, changing citizen expectations, and 24-hour social media commentary are amongst some of the factors contributing to a difficult and evolving electoral environment for democracies. Australia is not immune to these trends, and the 2019 federal election was, in many ways, the most complex since Federation.

In addition to the broad areas outlined above, a particularly noteworthy feature of the 2019 election was the condition of the electoral roll. In a genuine piece of unalloyed good news, more Australians were enrolled than ever before — both in terms of raw numbers and as a percentage of the eligible population. Roll "completeness" is a key indicator of democratic health, and the consistent and focused work of AEC staff in this area over the past few electoral cycles produced this stellar result. Further positive features included an increase in turnout from the previous federal election, and the overall level of formality remaining relatively steady.

The election was the culmination of a highly eventful electoral cycle, involving court action, multiple by-elections and the AEC implementing key legislative amendments at short notice. The AEC dealt with each of those matters methodically, whilst simultaneously preparing for the federal election. As a result of those ordered preparations, Australian electors, including eligible overseas electors, had the chance to have their say in a systematic, transparent and high-integrity environment. Of course, it is impossible for such a vast, complex, contested and essentially manual process involving all eligible adult Australians and some 87,000 primarily temporary staff to be "perfect", and the AEC continues to refine and improve processes, and correct issues as they occur. Regardless, it was pleasing to note the majority of electors reported they were very satisfied with their "overall voting experience".

This AEC report to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) outlines the specific circumstances involved in the successful delivery of the federal election, including some of the key elements that contribute to the increasing complexity of election administration.

Increasing complexity, rising expectations

A federal election is, perhaps, the biggest peacetime logistical event in Australia, and the scale and complexity of the task is growing. As the election date is not known until the writs are issued, the AEC must consider demographic and voting trends, find suitable polling staff and venues at short notice, carefully calibrate resources and manage increasing costs. With a record number of 16,424,248 Australians enrolled to vote — and the ability for them to vote through a range of services, from almost anywhere in the world — there was extra pressure on the AEC's approximately 87,000 staff.

Despite this enormous complexity, underpinned by exacting and prescriptive legislation, Australians expect and demand a seamless experience when they vote: there is little tolerance for any delay at the polling place and, understandably, zero tolerance for any errors in the electoral process. The AEC administers a system involving pencils, paper and intensely manual processes. In addition, the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act) is highly prescriptive and does not allow the AEC to lawfully alter or streamline much of the process. We strive to meet "digital" expectations with what is essentially an "analogue" system — a situation exacerbated by the ubiquity, influence and instant judgement of social media.

As is the case with other public- and private-sector organisations delivering high-profile events, social media commentary is not always tethered to the actuality of legislation and regulation, financial restrictions, or the stark reality of preparing for such a large-scale event in a brief period. Occasionally, some of the more, thankfully comparatively small in number, lurid and outlandish criticisms gain wider traction. The AEC manages this situation by patiently pointing out facts, respectfully engaging with critics, and diligently following the demands of the Electoral Act and our philosophy of "right, not rushed".

Implementing change

The lead-up to the 2019 federal election was a busy period for the AEC. Following a series of high-profile eligibility issues involving members and senators, an eligibility qualification checklist was introduced and administered by the AEC. The checklist was initially voluntary, but became mandatory for the 18 May 2019 election. This requirement was complemented by two other sets of legislative amendments:

- new electoral advertising and authorisation measures, aimed primarily at addressing prevailing communications channels (such as social media)
- reforms to funding and disclosure laws — including restrictions on foreign donations — affecting political parties, their associated entities, and other non-party political actors.

The success of the election was underpinned by the AEC's work in the previous three years to improve and protect its systems, create efficiencies and enhance services for voters. Initiatives included the following:

- The AEC created the largest and most complete electoral roll in the nation's history. More than 16.4 million Australians — or 97 per cent of all eligible citizens — were registered when rolls closed on 18 April. There were over 91,000 additions in the week leading up to that deadline and, ultimately, there were 750,000 more people on the roll than at the 2016 election. It was also pleasing to see the youth enrolment rate (people aged 18–24) reach a record 88.8 per cent — higher even than the 88.6 per cent figure at the time of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey.

- A data-driven approach assisted in managing polling place operations, including queues. The AEC worked with Deakin University to simulate polling place activity and identify a range of improvement measures, such as "mini queues". The AEC also tripled the number of electronic certified lists used at polling places to mark off voters. The value of all this work was evidenced by the results of a post-election survey, which found voter satisfaction with "the length of time you had to wait to vote" increased from 78 per cent in 2016 to 91 per cent in 2019.

- For the first time in our history, the AEC established a nationally coordinated system to support the supply, distribution and return of election materials and equipment. This replaced a decentralised supply-chain capability where states and divisions operated according to local requirements, constraints and time pressures. The new approach — supervised by a dedicated logistics manager at each outposted centre — was trialled at by-elections and proved successful during the general election period.

- A groundbreaking public-awareness campaign, called "Stop and Consider", encouraging voters to critically analyse what they see, hear and read to avoid being misled by deliberate disinformation, was launched by the AEC during the election. The campaign — the first of its kind by the AEC and one of the first in the world — was in response to growing global concern about threats to electoral integrity, and was an effort to anticipate possible incidents during the election.

- The AEC adopted a bolder social-media strategy for the election. This involved disseminating a suite of new videos, animations and graphics explaining some of the more complex and misunderstood election processes, including the speed of the count. The strategy also included an almost 24-hour program of monitoring that allowed the AEC to respond immediately to postings that spread disinformation or raised legitimate concerns about election operations. The polite yet firm tone of the AEC responses,

> A federal election is perhaps the biggest peacetime logistical event in Australia, and the scale and complexity of the task is growing.

especially on Twitter and Facebook, helped refute potentially damaging claims and stop them from gaining currency. This approach — somewhat novel for a public sector agency — was applauded by social media users.

- In direct response to global security trends, the AEC procured the services of a supplier of security monitoring services, and cooperated with a range of government partner agencies — including the Australian Cyber Security Centre — to anticipate any malicious cyber activity which may have been designed to interfere with the election. The AEC implemented the Australian Signals Directorate's "Essential 8" strategies during 2018, and the two agencies managed a cybersecurity operation for the 2019 election. Furthermore, the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce (a multi-agency body), in operation for the first time at a federal election, proved an invaluable adjunct to managing our cyber environment.

The AEC administered the election with a high degree of energy and thoroughness. Building on the foundation of the largest electoral roll in history, we met the demands generated by a massive increase in the proportion of electors who cast an early vote either by post or at a pre-polling centre — up from 31 per cent at the 2016 election to almost 41 per cent in 2019. Voter turnout rose to 91.9 per cent for the House of Representatives, almost one percentage point higher than in 2016. Also, we recorded the most expeditious post-election period, with all writs returned within 34 days of polling day — ahead of an already tight writ-return deadline.

The findings of the 2019 Voter Survey clearly demonstrated the success of the event. Following a recent decline in the rate of "satisfaction with the overall voting experience", that measure increased significantly — to 94 per cent from 87 per cent in 2016. There was a big fall in the rate of voter dissatisfaction, from 8 per cent to 4 per cent, and 90 per cent of those surveyed agreed the AEC had conducted the election fairly and impartially.

VOTER SURVEY

94%	Satisfaction with overall voting experience
91%	Satisfaction with assistance provided by AEC staff
91%	Satisfaction with the length of time you had to wait to vote
90%	Agree the AEC conducted the election fairly and impartially
89%	Confident in the AEC's ability to deliver electoral services
90%	Confident their personal information/ privacy kept safe/secure through voting process

Innovation

The AEC is proud of its efforts to administer a fair, open and efficient national electoral event. That said, there are several enhancements that need to be made, and the evolving expectations of electors will need to be accommodated within legislative and resource boundaries. We are well aware that the AEC must continuously improve if it is to keep pace with trends and events, and maintain its reputation. For example, rapid change in voting behaviour and practices — such as the growth in early voting — has major implications for the way the AEC operates. Our agency looks forward to meeting and addressing challenges as they arise.

Our ability to continue to innovate will also depend on the resourcing and legislative environment. As has been highlighted to JSCEM previously, we have reached a critical point — many of the AEC's IT and other systems are old and in need of updating or replacement. Furthermore, the AEC remains of the view that the Electoral Act (and related laws) should be refined to remove unnecessarily prescriptive language and to further streamline processes. The language in the current Electoral Act impedes the AEC's ability to innovate and to deliver services in the most efficient manner possible.

SECTION 2
Election snapshot

Election timetable

Event	Time, date
Announcement of election	Thursday 11 April 2019
Issue of the writs	6pm, Thursday 11 April 2019
Close of rolls	8pm, Thursday 18 April 2019
Close of bulk House of Representatives nominations	12 midday, Sunday 21 April 2019 (Easter Sunday)
Close of candidate nominations	12 midday, Tuesday 23 April 2019
Declaration of candidate nominations	12 midday, Wednesday 24 April 2019
Early voting commenced	Monday 29 April 2019
Mobile polling commenced	Monday 6 May 2019
Close of postal vote applications	6pm, Wednesday 15 May 2019
Election day	8am–6pm, Saturday 18 May 2019
Last day for receipt of declaration votes	Friday 31 May 2019 (13 days after election)
Return of the writs	On or before Friday 28 June 2019

Implementation of legislative change

Nominations

The *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Act 2019* (the Modernisation Act) received Royal Assent on 1 March 2019, six weeks before the issue of writs for the federal election.

The Modernisation Act enshrined in legislation the requirement for candidates to complete a qualification checklist when nominating, with information relating to their eligibility under section 44 of the Australian Constitution. This had previously been an optional component, governed by electoral regulations, for the by-elections held in 2018.

The AEC was not required to assess the accuracy or impact of the information provided, but was required to check that all mandatory questions had been answered and that a document was provided where a candidate contended to have renounced or lost foreign citizenship. If not, the nomination was rejected. The AEC published all qualification checklists and supporting documents on the AEC website.

The federal election story

01 FEDERAL ELECTION ANNOUNCED
Federal election announced and the writs are issued.

02 ELECTION COMMUNICATION
Election information provided to all Australians through a range of mediums and languages.

03 VOTER ENROLMENT
Eligible voters can enrol or update details before Close of Rolls. The certified list of voters is then prepared and distributed.

04 NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES
Close of nominations is followed 24 hours later by random allocation of candidate order on the ballot paper.

05 BALLOT PAPER PRODUCTION
Ballot papers are designed, printed and delivered across Australia following the declaration of nominations in preparation for early voting.

06 VOTING COMMENCES
A range of voting services commences five days after Declaration of Nominations.

07 PREPARING FOR ELECTION DAY
About 7,000 polling places will be open on election day staffed by over 80,000 temporary workers.

08 ELECTION DAY
Polling places are open from 8am to 6pm local time.

09 ELECTION NIGHT
After 6pm on election day, ballot papers are counted, scrutinised, packaged and securely transported to central counting centres.

10 COUNTING HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTES
Votes are counted and verified within each division with candidate appointed scrutineers observing.

11 COUNTING SENATE VOTES
Votes are scanned, counted and verified in a central Senate scrutiny (CSS) centre in each capital city with candidate appointed scrutineers observing.

12 SEATS ARE DECLARED
After polling day, polls are progressively declared as candidates achieve a clear majority of first preference votes.

13 DAY THIRTEEN
To be included in the count, ballot papers must be received by the 13th day after election day.

14 THE WRITS ARE RETURNED
Once all seats are declared and the Senate results finalised, all writs are returned and the new parliament can be formed.

15 ELECTION PACK-UP
All 50 million ballot papers (used and unused) are stored securely and all other material is either stored or recycled.
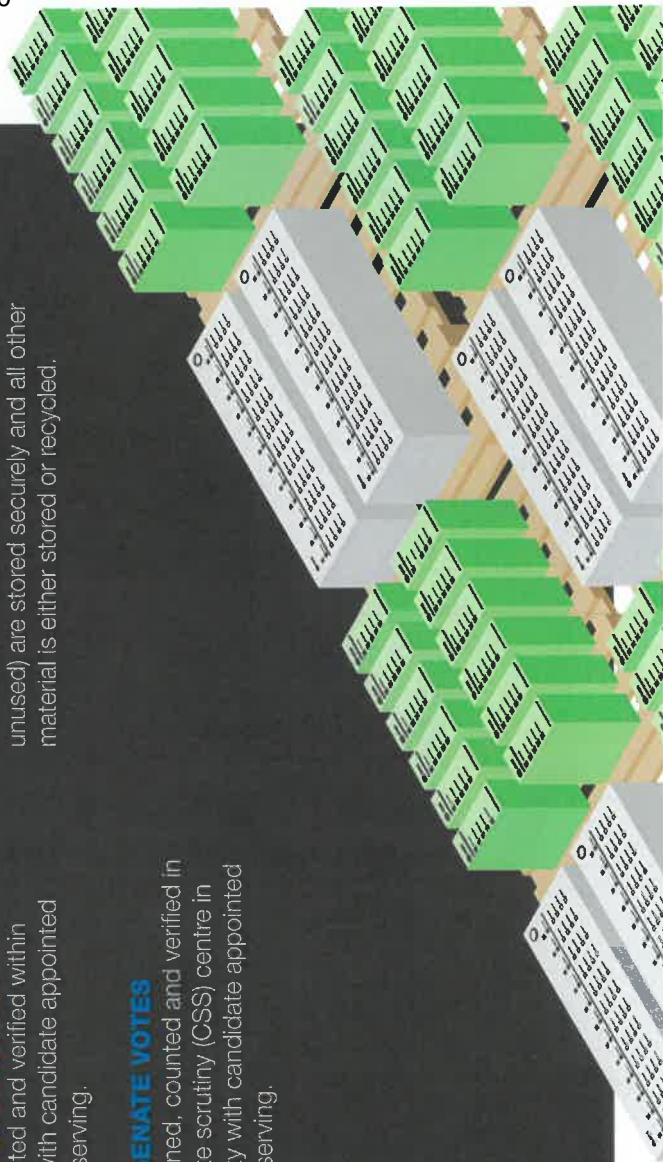
In addition to the qualification checklist, other changes to nominations arrangements included an increase to the nomination deposit for the House of Representatives from $1,000 to $2,000, and removal of the requirement to publicly produce nomination forms at the declaration of nominations (instead, adding certain requirements to the declaration speech).

Finally, the Modernisation Act provided greater flexibility to the AEC to determine the manner in which a nomination and deposit are lodged, as well as the other responsibilities for nominations. While there was no practical change for the 2019 federal election, the AEC will now be able to progress its development of a facility for the online submission of nominations and electronic payment of the deposit, and redesign its internal process for handling future federal election nominations.

Efficiencies in electoral process

The Modernisation Act also introduced measures to create efficiencies and consistency in the conduct of electoral processes. These changes were far-reaching, affecting procedures, forms, and materials relating to pre-poll voting operations, count processes, ballot paper packaging and declaration vote management, along with several other administrative changes.

Removing some of the prescription in the Electoral Act allowed the AEC to streamline procedures and implement modern solutions without compromising the intent and integrity of the electoral process. Further reducing the prescriptiveness and complexity of the Electoral Act should be a priority for the future.

Election cost

The cost of delivering the 2019 federal election is expected to be finalised by 31 December 2019. The cost of the 2019 federal election, as at 31 July 2019, is $342.1 million.

Outstanding costs include public funding claims which can be lodged up to 17 November 2019 inclusive, certain property and materials costs, and post-election processes related to non-voters.

The costs of activity in relation to non-voter fines and prosecutions are expected to run into 2020.

Table 1: Cost of conducting the 2019 federal election

	2019 federal election expenses[1,2] $'000
Employee expenses	101,516
Property, office supplies and services (inc. venue/equip hire, security, stationery)	37,133
Election cardboard and supplies (inc. electoral forms, envelopes, ballot papers, screens)	18,114
Contractors and services	69,974
Travel	2,419
Advertising, printing and media services	22,697
ICT costs (including hardwares and ECLs)	6,004
Mailing and freight services	23,481
Other expenses	1,021
Sub total[1]	*282,359*
Public funding[2]	59,740
TOTAL EXPENSES	**342,099**

1   2019 federal election expenditure represents costs as at 31 July 2019 and is subject to change.
2   2019 federal election expenditure includes public funding payments made to eligible political parties, candidates and Senate groups as at 31 July 2019 and is subject to change. Election-related public funding claims can be lodged with the AEC from 7 June 2019 to 17 November 2019 inclusive.

SECTION 3
Enrolment

The electoral roll for the 2019 federal election was the largest and most complete in history.

Figure 1: Size of roll and enrolment rate, election 2010 to election 2019
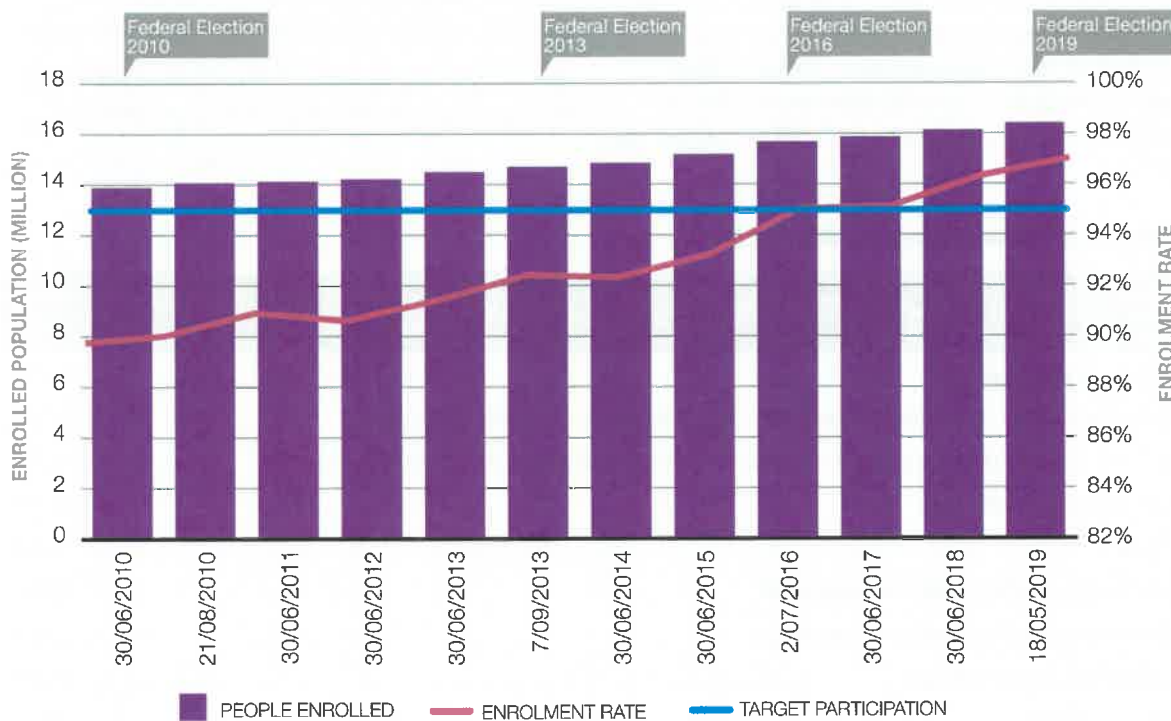
A record 16,424,248 electors were enrolled to vote, from of an estimated eligible population of 16.9 million people, at the close of rolls on 18 April 2019.

This represents an enrolment rate of 97 per cent[3], an increase on previous record rates seen at the 2016 federal election.

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3   Immediately following the roll close the AEC reported a preliminary enrolment rate of 96.8 per cent. This, however, was subsequently revised to 97 per cent following the application of more up-to-date eligible enrolment population estimates.

Figure 2: Enrolment rate for electors aged 18–24, election 2010 to election 2019

The enrolment rate exceeded the target of 95 per cent in all states and territories except the Northern Territory, where it increased from 81.1 per cent at the 2016 election to 83.9 per cent. In the lead-up to the 2019 election, the AEC conducted an enrolment-stimulation exercise, targeting people who were not enrolled, including those in the Northern Territory. This was a significant activity; the AEC contacted more than 410,000 unenrolled electors nationally by email, SMS or letter to encourage them to enrol.

Youth enrolment

The enrolment rate for young people (aged 18–24) is at 88.8 per cent. Like the general population, young people are enrolled at record levels (see Figure 2).

Indigenous enrolment

During 2018, the AEC worked to improve the methodology it used to estimate Indigenous enrolment. Combining data from the AEC, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Human Services has allowed the AEC to better estimate the number of Indigenous people enrolled.

Between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2018, the Indigenous enrolment rate increased by 2.8 per cent, to 76.4 per cent. More information about Indigenous initiatives is contained in section 10.

SECTION 4

Nominations

Number of nominations

For the 2019 federal election, 1,514 candidates nominated, compared with 1,625 at the 2016 election (2016 was a double dissolution election).

The number of candidates for the House of Representatives was 1,056, compared with 994 in 2016. The division with the largest number of candidates was Mallee in Victoria with 13, and the divisions with the smallest number of candidates were Riverina in New South Wales, and Corio, Gellibrand, Holt and Maribyrnong in Victoria (each with four per division).

There were 458 candidates nominated for the Senate in 2019, compared with 631 in 2016 (a double dissolution election).

Stakeholder and candidate information

The AEC significantly expanded its stakeholder outreach to support political participation and reduce uncertainty about candidate nomination requirements and processes:

- In the months leading up to the election, the AEC made contact with state- and territory-level branches of registered political parties, and parliamentarians not endorsed by a registered political party.
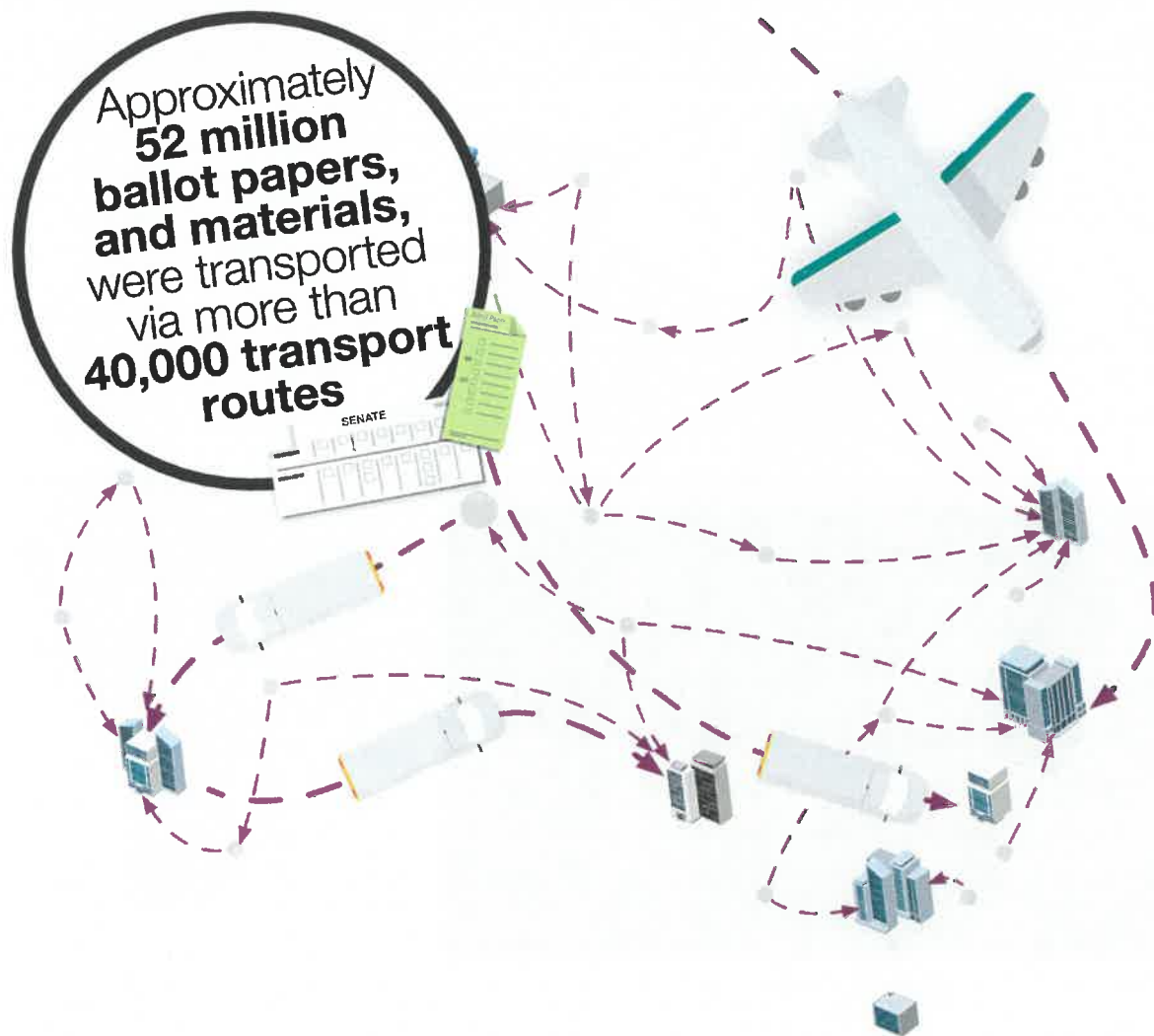
- In the week commencing Monday 15 April, the AEC conducted candidate information sessions for every Senate and divisional contest.

The response to this outreach was mixed. For example, despite expanding the promotion of face-to-face candidate information sessions prior to the close of nominations, about 20 per cent of the face-to-face candidate information sessions had no attendees.

Candidate nominations

To be an eligible candidate for either the Senate or the House of Representatives, a person had to have completed a nomination form and to have paid the deposit to the relevant AEC officer by 12 midday on 23 April 2019, at the close of nominations. Bulk nominations of endorsed House of Representatives candidates of a registered political party were required to be lodged by 12 midday on Sunday 21 April (Easter Sunday).

Following legislative changes, the nomination deposit was $2,000 for both House of Representatives and Senate candidates. Nominations were publicly declared 24 hours after the close of nominations, at 12 midday on 24 April 2019.

Approximately **52 million ballot papers, and materials,** were transported via more than **40,000 transport routes**

The mandatory submission of a qualification checklist introduced additional administrative and procedural processes that were successfully managed. Of the 1,514 candidates, 374 provided additional documents with their checklists. In total, 16,286 pages of checklists and documents were received, checked and published in just a few days as part of the nominations process. This required significant resources at a time of peak activity for the AEC.

Certain questions in the checklist created confusion for a number of candidates, given the way they are worded (which is prescribed in Form DB of the Electoral Act), as they refer to previous questions and do not provide an obvious Yes, No or N/A response. Advice was issued by the AEC during the nomination period regarding this. In addition, privacy concerns regarding information in the documents to be published were raised by the AEC and candidates themselves. Certain document identification numbers were redacted prior to publication, creating an additional administrative overhead, and requests for redaction following the publication were addressed on a case-by-case basis. Several candidates were contacted prior to the close of nominations to remedy issues with the completion of their qualification checklist or nomination form.

The recent legislation has enabled the AEC to start developing an online nomination system, which will help streamline the nominations process for candidates, parties and the AEC.

In a matter of days, 52 million ballot papers were printed and securely transported to more than 500 early-voting locations in Australia and overseas for the start of polling.

After the declaration of nominations

Declare, design, print and deliver

The period between the declaration of candidates at 12 midday on Wednesday 24 April and the start of early voting was one of the largest logistical aspects of the election.

In the hours and days that followed, the AEC — in conjunction with its contracted printers, mail houses, electronic certified list (ECL) builders and transport logistics providers — managed a complex printing and dispatch schedule of 4,500 ECLs and 52 million ballot papers to enable secure transport and delivery to more than 500 early voting locations in Australia and overseas for the start of polling, and lodgement of several hundred thousand postal votes with Australia Post.

The nominations and ballot paper printing period included the Easter and Anzac Day public holidays, which added cost and complexity to the process.

Withdrawal, disendorsement or resignation of candidates

Candidates can withdraw their consent to be nominated at any time until the close of nominations. Part XIV of the Electoral Act makes it clear, however, that no changes can be made to the list of nominated candidates after the close of nominations at a federal election.

If, after the close of nominations, a candidate resigns from their political party or is disendorsed by their political party, the candidate's name will remain on the ballot paper, along with the name of the political party that endorsed that person's nomination.

Consequently, although nine candidates reportedly withdrew, were disendorsed, or resigned their candidacy following the declaration of nominations, these candidates remained on their respective ballot papers and their votes were counted as per the ballot paper.

SECTION 5
Voting

The AEC administers a voting service that is one of the fairest, most open and accessible in the world.

Voters have a range of voting options, whether they are at home or away. Most wait 15 minutes or less to vote.

Voting options available on election day include:

- an elector casting a vote at any polling place in the electorate for which they are enrolled
- absent voting at polling places in other electorates in the voter's state or territory of enrolment
- voting interstate at designated pre-poll voting centres (PPVCs) operating on election day
- provisional voting for persons whose names cannot be found, or whose names have already been marked on the certified list of voters at the polling place.

If an elector is unable to make it to a polling place on election day, voting options available to them include:

- pre-poll voting at designated PPVCs, divisional offices and Australian diplomatic posts overseas
- postal voting
- mobile polling in remote areas, hospitals, nursing homes and prisons, where safely accessible.

Alternative voting arrangements are also made available to those who are blind or have low vision, for Australian Defence Force personnel overseas, and for Antarctic-based voters.

Table 2: Overview of voting services

	2016	2019
Polling places – static[4]	6,445	6,751
Polling – mobile teams	557	557
Polling – pre-poll voting centres[5]	436	511
Polling – overseas posts	95	85

Table 3: Summary of votes by type

	2016	2019
Senate		
Ordinary votes	11,819,376	12,558,490
Pre-poll ordinary votes	2,722,701	4,286,607
Absent votes	713,165	659,726
Provisional votes	129,464	99,017
Pre-poll declaration votes	527,173	624,217
Postal votes	1,217,528	1,242,635
TOTAL VOTES	14,406,706	15,184,085
House of Representatives		
Ordinary votes	11,815,908	12,554,366
Pre-poll ordinary votes	2,724,164	4,288,451
Absent votes	658,511	616,682
Provisional votes	55,102	50,018
Pre-poll declaration votes	509,476	620,380
Postal votes	1,223,019	1,247,170
TOTAL VOTES	14,262,016	15,088,616

4   Polling places by location (i.e. counted as one polling place whether an individual or multi-division issuing polling place).
5   PPVCs by location (i.e. counted as one PPVC whether an individual or multi-division issuing PPVC). This does not include divisional office pre-poll or the PPVCs set up to record blind and low vision votes taken by the call centre.

Figure 3: Early voting (House of Representatives) 2010–2019
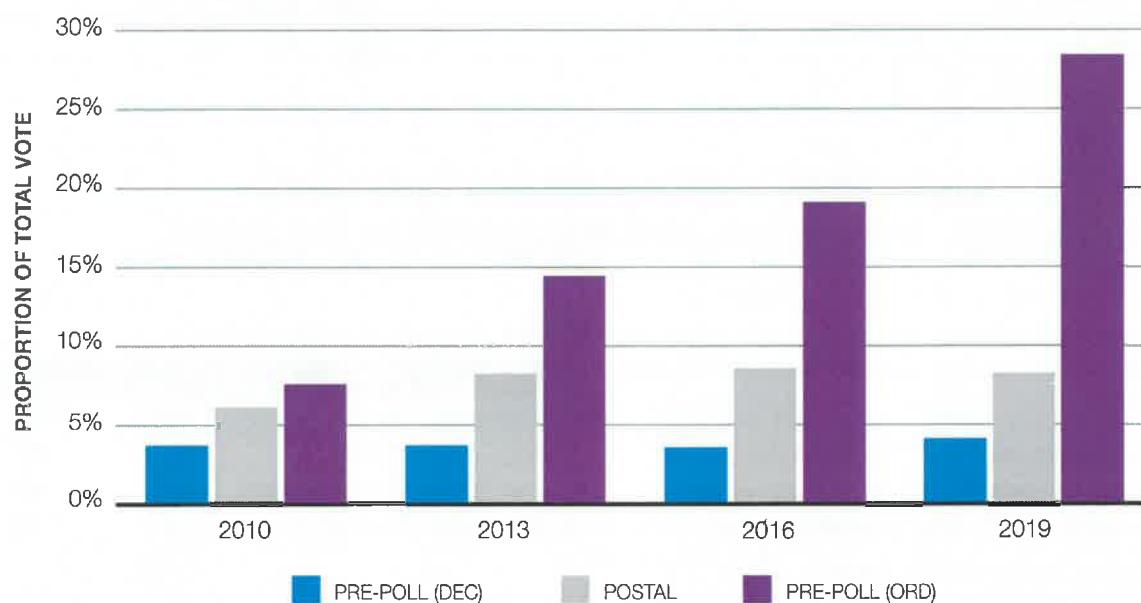
Early voting

Early voting[6] is the term used to describe votes cast prior to polling day. For the purposes of this submission, it includes votes cast at PPVCs and divisional offices, with mobile teams (even when cast on polling day with these teams) and by post. In the context of Australia's compulsory voting framework, early voting methods provide an important component in ensuring accessible and equitable voting services. The AEC requires that those who vote early must self-declare that they are eligible to do so. Early voting for the 2019 federal election started on Monday 29 April 2019.

In accordance with provisions in the Electoral Act, the date of commencement of pre-poll voting is determined by the date of declaration of nominations and the commencement of mobile polling is determined by polling day. That is, they are dependent on dates contained in the official writs for an election.

The 2019 federal election saw the continuing trend of an uptake of early voting services. More than 6 million of the 15 million votes cast were early votes (ordinary and declaration), comprising more than 40 per cent of all votes counted. Postal voting has remained relatively steady as a proportion of total votes counted (see Figure 3), whereas in-person pre-poll voting has risen significantly (see Figures 3 and 4). This has been a notable trend since 2010.

Electoral commissions in every state and territory have also seen a similar pattern of significant rises in early voting, demonstrating the public's expectation to be able to choose their time of voting. The different rules in each jurisdiction also affect voter behaviour.

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6   Early votes includes all pre-poll votes, postal votes and votes cast through hospital, remote or other mobile teams or at overseas voting centres. Some pre-poll declaration votes (for example, received at PPVCs equipped for interstate voting) and mobile votes (for example, received by teams visiting hospitals with emergency departments) are cast on election day. Accordingly, a small proportion of "early" votes are cast on polling day.

Figure 4: Pre-poll votes compared with other votes

Legend:
- PRE-POLL VOTES
- ALL OTHER VOTES
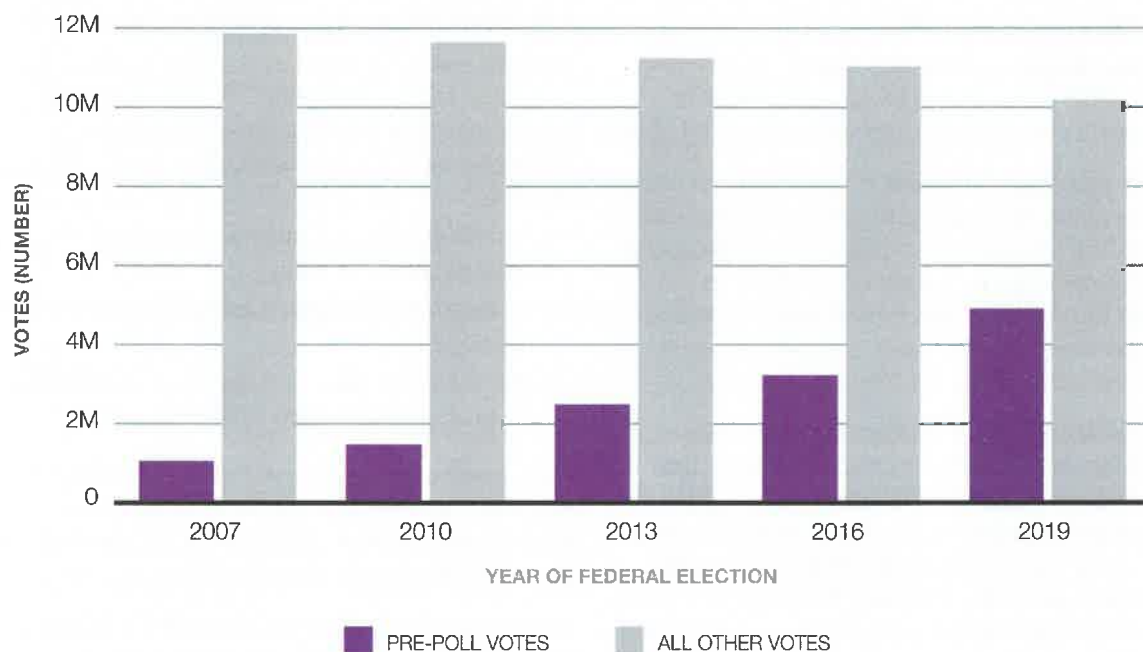
Pre-poll voting

Pre-poll voting is legislated to commence from the fifth day after the declaration of nominations (section 200D of the Electoral Act). The official writs issued by the Governor-General determined the election timetable, which provided for pre-poll voting to be available from Monday 29 April 2019. Pre-poll voting was available for one more day, at the 2019 federal election, than at the 2013 and 2016 federal elections.

The Electoral Act provides specific eligibility criteria for which electors may apply for a pre-poll or postal vote, which is displayed in every pre-poll voting centre. While not required by the Electoral Act, when issuing votes at PPVCs, AEC staff ask each voter whether they are entitled to a pre-poll vote.

Since the 2010 federal election, pre-poll voting has increased from 11.3 per cent of the total vote to 32.5 per cent in 2019 (see Table 4).

Pre-poll ordinary voting for the 2019 federal election was approximately 4.29 million votes — an increase of about 58 per cent on the 2016 figure (which was 2.72 million votes). In comparison, the increase between the 2013 and 2016 elections was approximately 37 per cent.

Table 4: Pre-poll proportion of total House of Representatives votes counted

	2016	2019
Pre-poll ordinary votes	19.1%	**28.4%**
Pre-poll declaration votes	3.6%	**4.1%**
TOTAL PRE-POLL VOTES	**22.7%**	**32.5%**

Pre-poll declaration voting has been consistent as a proportion of the total vote following the introduction of pre-poll ordinary voting in 2010. Change from event to event has been less than one percentage point from 2013 onwards.

The number of pre-poll voting centre locations increased for the 2019 election to 511, from 436 in 2016. This reflected the AEC's policy approach to ensure a consistent service offering was available nationally, based on daytime population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and geographic type (e.g. metropolitan, regional or rural).

Postal voting

Postal voting overview

Postal voting is an important method of providing accessible voting to those who satisfy specific legislative criteria and cannot attend a polling place.

There was a small increase in the number of postal voters at the 2019 federal election compared with 2016. The total number of postal vote applications (PVAs) increased by 1.8 per cent in 2019 to 1,538,139. Of these, electors returned 1,291,564 (84 per cent) of postal votes, a rate comparable with the return rate of 84.2 per cent in 2016.

The timely delivery and return of postal votes — particularly for those located in remote, rural, interstate or overseas locations — remains an ongoing challenge that is outside the AEC's control. Reducing the time period for which postal vote applications can be accepted (currently 6pm on the Wednesday before polling day) would increase the likelihood that an elector will receive their postal vote in time to complete it by polling day.

In 2019, online PVAs represented approximately 44 per cent of all applications. Paper PVAs represented approximately 35 per cent of all applications, with the majority (four out of five) coming from political parties and candidates. Most paper PVAs were scanned under an arrangement with Fuji Xerox Document Management Solutions. The number of general postal voters (GPV) formed approximately 21 per cent of applications.

Section 184AA of the Electoral Act allows political parties and candidates to distribute PVAs with party material attached. The AEC provided print-ready artwork of the approved PVA form to assist candidates and parties. This included instructions on how to comply to maximise efficiency with processing PVAs and dispatch of postal vote packs to electors.

At the 2019 federal election, more than 70,000 paper forms were not able to be scanned and required manual data entry. Party PVAs, particularly those that do not meet the AEC requested design requirements, add an operational complexity outside the AEC's control. The additional handling that paper PVAs require causes delays and increases the risk of a voter not receiving their postal vote package in time.

Return of postal vote certificates

The Electoral Act prescribes that PVCs must be returned to the AEC within 13 days following election day. The following data provides a breakdown of PVCs returned before the 13-day deadline:

- 1,291,564 PVCs were returned before the 13-day deadline. Of these,
  - 1,035,401 PVCs were received prior to election day
  - 256,163 PVCs were received after election day, up to and including the 13-day deadline.

PVCs continue to be received after the 13-day deadline and cannot be admitted to the count. Approximately 50 per cent of those received too late to count are from overseas addresses.

The interaction between the return of PVCs and the speed of the count is discussed further in section 6.

Privacy of elector information

Consistent with previous federal elections, the AEC received privacy complaints arising from postal voting arrangements.

Postal vote applications

The AEC received complaints of privacy breaches related to political parties or candidates sending out PVAs that are then returned to the party or candidate prior to forwarding to the AEC.

The Electoral Act gives "any person or organisation" the power to issue PVAs and to receive completed applications before passing them on to the AEC. As a result, the AEC is not able to control the collection and use of the PVA data (or the manner of its collection).

Postal vote certificates

As at previous elections, there were a number of privacy complaints about paragraph 186(2)(a) of the Electoral Act, which requires the certificate (containing the voter's details and declaration) to be printed on the postal vote envelope. The purpose of this is to be able to check entitlement to vote without revealing the ballot papers therein, thereby protecting the secrecy of the vote. This, however, has led to privacy concerns.

Prior to 2004, the AEC provided a plain outer envelope for postal votes, but this resulted in a significant number of ballot papers not being properly sealed in the postal vote envelope. These votes were not able to be included in the count.

In order to balance privacy concerns with maintaining the franchise and the secrecy of the ballot, consideration could be given to legislative change to allow the AEC to count ballot papers returned outside the postal vote envelope, but within an outer envelope.

Potential for improvement

Following the 2016 federal election, the supply of paper PVA forms was discontinued through Australia Post outlets. Electors who require a paper PVA can contact the AEC directly to have one mailed to them, or visit an AEC office to collect one.

Postal voting relies on the postal system to send and receive votes that must be completed by polling day and received by the AEC within a specified timeframe in order to be included in the count. It is useful in specific circumstances where there is no easy access to polling places or PPVCs.

The AEC needs to receive applications in a timely manner in order to process the applications and issue ballot papers to electors. Where PVAs are received online, the requirements for applying for a postal vote are fulfilled, the application can be processed more efficiently and the information included is accurate. Applications received directly by the AEC enable the most timely processing, and provide maximum opportunity for electors to receive and return their postal votes.

The supply of paper PVAs by political parties and candidates is an established and accepted method of providing party material to electors. A possible approach to improving the timeliness and accuracy of processing these PVAs is for the AEC to provide political parties and candidates with a "personalised" link to the AEC online PVA system. This link could be included in their mailed campaign letters and might assist in reducing any risk of disenfranchisement.

The increasing number of electors completing online PVAs continues the trend of voters choosing to interact electronically with the AEC and further supports this modernisation.

The AEC notes that the current postal vote process for electors overseas is a challenge. This includes the timeliness of when an elector applies for a postal vote, the turnaround times to reach overseas addresses and the reliance on foreign postal-delivery services.

Mobile polling

Mobile polling services may be delivered at any place where the Electoral Commissioner determines they might be needed. Mobile polling may start up to 12 days before election day and be conducted on election day, or on a day to which polling is adjourned.

Polling dates for mobile teams varied in 2019, but spanned the legislated dates beginning on Monday 6 May and concluding on election day.

The places, dates and times for mobile polling visits were published on the AEC website. There were 557 mobile polling teams, and they visited more than 3,000 locations by land, air and sea, including:

- hospitals
- aged-care facilities
- prisons (where safety allowed)
- homelessness service providers
- remote locations.

These teams issued 90,589 ordinary votes and 35,296 declaration votes.

> Remote mobile polling teams travelled more than 3.4 million kilometres by road, air and sea to some of the most isolated parts of the country.

Remote polling

Remote mobile polling teams service isolated communities, town camps and mining sites without practical access to a static polling place and where the likely number of voters in a particular location is 10 or more. Given the transience of many remote electors, the number of likely voters will not always be determined by enrolment numbers alone.

The AEC's offices in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia had 42[7] teams that provided voting services to 381 remote locations across these regions. These teams issued 23,503 ordinary votes and 5,262 declaration votes.

Overseas voting

While voting when living or travelling overseas is not compulsory, the AEC endeavours to provide voting services to eligible Australians wanting to participate in the electoral process. For the 2019 federal election, 85 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade posts operated as overseas voting centres. Popular locations included London, Hong Kong, New York, Paris, Singapore and Shanghai. Alternatively, Australians located overseas were able to apply online for a postal vote to be mailed to their overseas address.

In 2019, overseas voting centres took 61,838 votes, consisting of 60,710 pre-poll votes and 1,128 postal vote certificates (which were received for return to Australia on behalf of overseas postal voters). This was lower than for the 2016 election, where 71,406 votes were taken, consisting of 70,232 pre-poll votes and 1,174 postal votes.

Overseas voters were also able to apply for a postal vote at an overseas voting centre. The number of PVAs received and processed at overseas voting centres has declined steadily from 770 in 2013, to 163 in 2016, to only 85 in 2019. One overseas voting centre accounted for 31 of the 85 postal vote applications received, with only 25 per cent of overseas voting centres processing postal vote applications in 2019.

With such small numbers of postal vote applications being received at overseas voting centres, and given the complex and time-consuming manual processes required to issue postal voting material, continued processing of postal vote applications at overseas voting centres needs further consideration.

Overseas voting services for the 2019 federal election was considered well planned and successfully delivered by stakeholders, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade and DHL.

Electors who are blind or have low vision

The telephone voting service for voters who are blind or have low vision (BLV) involved a two-step process of registration and voting. This service allowed people to cast their vote in secret and with a degree of independence.

Registrations opened on 26 April 2019 and were available until 12 midday on election day. Voting via this service started on 29 April and was available until 6pm on election day.

During this period, 2,214 people registered and 2,044 people used the service to cast their vote. This compares with 2,175 registrations and 1,998 votes cast using this service at the 2016 federal election.

In previous advice to JSCEM, the AEC has noted that:

- Further enhancements are required to provide a higher degree of independence for BLV electors in casting their vote.
- There is potential for the BLV system to be extended to other groups that could benefit from such a service, particularly Antarctic electors, serving Australian Defence Force personnel, and electors with a disability that prevents them from completing their own ballot paper[8].

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7 Including five NT teams that operated in static locations before and on polling day.
8 AEC Submission 20.3, JSCEM Inquiry into the 2013 federal election, p. 61–62.

85os
6,751au [9]

POLLING PLACES
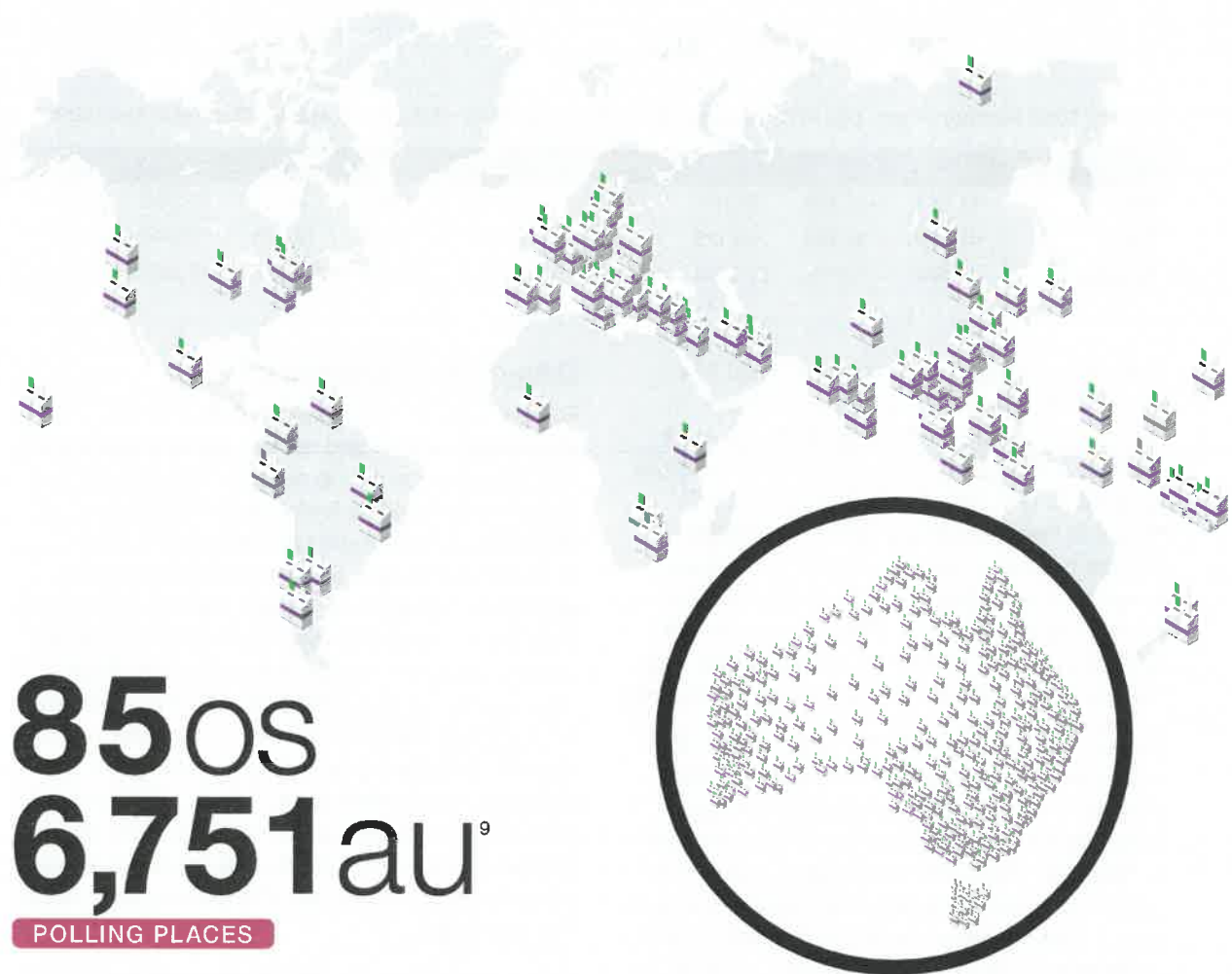
Currently, the provisions in Part XVB of the Electoral Act limit this to "sight-impaired people", and require regulations to be made that provide for this method.

Australian Defence Force

In addition to the normal voting options, deployed Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel are encouraged to use postal voting.

For the 2019 federal election, there were 236 ADF personnel registered as GPVs. If not a registered GPV, personnel were able to apply for a postal vote online. There were 90 ADF personnel postal votes returned from overseas locations.

In addition to postal voting, the AEC provided support to the High Commission in Singapore to enable in-person voting by visiting naval personnel, and provided on-site early voting for military personnel engaged in a defence exercise being undertaken during the election period in the Hervey Range.

Antarctic voting

Voting services for Australians in Antarctic bases were similar to those provided for the 2016 federal election. In total, 51 electors were registered and 49 votes were issued at the four permanent research stations.

The AEC has previously recommended to the JSCEM that the Electoral Act be amended to extend the arrangements used for blind and low vision voting to include Antarctic electors. The AEC continues to support this recommendation.

Election day voting

On election day, votes were taken at 6,751 static polling place locations from 8am to 6pm (note, interstate voting centres are reported separately in the paragraphs that follow), compared with 6,445 in 2016.

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9   Polling places by location (i.e. counted as one polling place whether an individual or multi-division issuing polling place).

Table 5: Total number of pre-poll votes issued to electors from interstate, 2016 and 2019 federal elections

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
2016	44,801	27,350	56,818	22,080	11,967	4,839	9,937	22,758	200,550
2019	41,550	30,499	38,123	18,955	12,092	5,171	12,321	11,979	170,690
Change	-7.26%	11.51%	-32.90%	-14.15%	1.04%	6.86%	23.99%	-47.36%	-14.89%

At these polling places, voters cast 8,151,824 House of Representatives ordinary votes, representing 54.03 per cent of all House votes counted. Other votes cast at static polling places on election day were 616,682 (4.09 per cent) House of Representatives absent votes (cast outside the home division, but within the state or territory), and 50,018 (0.33 per cent) House provisional votes cast by voters who could not be found on the certified list, whose names had already been marked off or who were silent voters.

There were 337 premises that operated as static polling places for more than one division. The majority of those premises operated as "dual" polling places for neighbouring divisions in areas of demand, where otherwise a large number of absent votes for a neighbouring division would be taken. These premises included "superbooths" established in Sydney and Adelaide, which took ordinary votes from every division for the respective state. A premises serving as a polling place for 11 of Victoria's 38 divisions was located in Melbourne, and a premises serving as a polling place for 11 of Queensland's 30 divisions was located in Brisbane. The difficulty in securing suitable premises at short notice for these large booths, as well as the logistical challenges in managing ordinary voting for so many divisions in one location, mean that a more streamlined approach to these offerings will be considered for future events.

Interstate voting

In addition to the static polling places, in 2019 there were 339 PPVCs and remote mobile polling teams advertised to operate on polling day to offer interstate voting services, in comparison with 297 in 2016. The AEC operates at least one PPVC in each division on polling day as an interstate voting centre, with additional PPVCs as required in larger regional locations. PPVCs and remote mobile polling teams also offer interstate votes throughout the pre-poll period.

Data-driven improvements

Following the 2016 federal election, the AEC researched, tested and refined queue management and polling place set-up options. The AEC engaged the Institute for Intelligent Systems Research and Innovation at Deakin University to implement a more scientific and data-driven approach to resourcing various election processes. A series of simulations was conducted in 2017 to capture data that was used to develop a range of computer models. Particular focus was placed on analysing the operation of a polling place, with the aim of improving queueing on polling day and the overall voter experience. Advanced discrete event simulation stochastic modelling of strategic scenarios was completed to determine the average time a process would take and the degree to which this might vary.

From the analysis, the AEC made a number of key changes to resourcing for the 2019 federal election, including:

- increasing the number of issuing staff in each polling place
- increasing the number of voting screens in each polling place, where space permitted
- emphasising key principles for polling place layout and the use of "mini queues" in training materials, including the development of a training video on voter flow and queue management
- the introduction of a maximum estimated vote threshold for polling places and a surge workforce where necessary to assist with counting any larger volumes of votes in a timely manner
- instructing staff sorting House of Representatives ballot papers to operate in smaller groups to improve the efficiency of each individual person.

The overall impact of the AEC's metrics work can be seen in the results of the 2019 Voter Survey. The proportion of people very/fairly satisfied with the length of time they had to wait in a queue

increased from 78 per cent in 2016 to 91 per cent in 2019, while the proportion of people very/ fairly satisfied with their overall voting experience increased from 87 per cent to 94 per cent.

The 2019 federal election provided the first opportunity to capture live data at a combined House of Representatives and Senate event using this modelling, with the intention of verifying and updating the existing models and developing further models for processes occurring after polling day.

The AEC captured data in a number of polling places and outposted centres, focusing on:

- time spent at the ordinary issuing desk
- time spent at the declaration issuing desk
- time spent in the voting screen
- time and number of staff required for various scrutiny processes.

The new and updated models will be used to conduct analysis to further refine the AEC's planning and resourcing for the next federal election and build on the AEC's capacity to make data-driven decisions.

Electronic certified lists

The AEC uses electronic certified lists (ECLs) in vote-issuing and declaration vote scrutiny processes. In the 2019 federal election, the benefits of extended use of ECLs or electronic polling management systems were evident. These systems enabled live electronic mark-off of voters,

and external monitoring of votes issued throughout pre-poll voting centres and mobile teams.

For the 2019 federal election, 4,513 ECLs were deployed for issuing ordinary and declaration votes by various polling teams and voting centres, as shown in Table 6. This meant about one-third of votes issued were from an ECL.

At the 2016 federal election, 1,544 ECLs were deployed. The deployment at the 2019 federal election saw ECL usage across PPVCs, mobile polling teams, interstate voting centres and static large multi-divisional polling places. ECLs were also used at some polling places on election day as a reference roll to assist with declaration voting.

ECLs enabled elector identification and mark-off, and real-time update of a central copy of the certified list, where network connectivity was present. This reduced the risk of official error and multiple voting, and enabled more efficient searching of electors, including by location.

At selected issuing points, ECLs could print House of Representatives ballot papers. Where printing was used, this almost eliminated the risk of providing an incorrect House of Representatives ballot paper to an elector, which in turn reduces the number of partially admitted declaration votes[10]. The use of ECLs for printing ballot papers also simplified ballot paper reconciliation at the close of polls.

The current application used in ECLs allows for some monitoring of queue times, and ballot paper issue and inventory.

Table 6: ECLs deployed by polling type, 2019 federal election

Polling place type	ECLs
Static large multi-divisional polling places (for on-demand ballot paper printing)	55
PPVC (ordinary votes)	1,798
PPVC (declaration votes)	1,381
PPVC (divisional office)	145
Mobile teams (ability to search for electors by location/establishment and immediate access to marks)	528
Remote mobile teams (e.g. isolated communities)	98
Contingency ECLs to support other polling activity and business continuity	508
TOTAL	4,513

10 A partial admission occurs when an elector has cast a declaration vote, but has declared their enrolment for the wrong division. If they are found to be enrolled for a different division within the same state or territory, their Senate ballot paper is admitted to the count, while the House of Representatives ballot paper is rejected. Partial admissions are the main reason why Senate turnout is consistently higher than House of Representatives turnout.

Divisions had ECLs for use in preliminary scrutiny to mark off absent and pre-poll declaration voters from the certified list. ECLs in preliminary scrutiny:

- simplify look-up and mark-off of voters and speed up envelope processing

- remove the need to pre-sort envelopes

- allow batching of envelopes so they can be located as necessary

- provide multiple- and non-voter input without the need for scanning

- allow real-time monitoring of preliminary scrutiny progress

- prevent mark-off of a second declaration vote

- provide reports that assist monitoring and reconciliation.

Logistics

Outposted centres

The AEC first widely used the concept of outposted centres (OPCs) to deliver election-processing requirements at the 2016 federal election. The OPC has now replaced the divisional office as the centre of election operations for divisions, including election materials storage, preparations and return, declaration-vote processing and the full range of divisional office counting activities.

OPCs provide a location for the management of election processes and security of ballot papers. They also provide the opportunity for co-located and neighbouring divisions to coordinate election processing from the one location, with up to four divisions being able to operate from an OPC. In 2019, nationally there were 78 OPCs. For 2019, enhanced rigour was applied to the sourcing, management and operations within OPCs through nationally led strategy, standards and procedures.

OPCs are set up several months in advance of an expected election. Given the election date is unknown, this does create uncertainty for lead and operation times required for OPCs, with resulting cost implications. In addition, the use of temporary facilities means there are limits to the availability and suitability of locations at the AEC's disposal for any election. For the 2019 election, all OPCs were sourced by January 2019 and physically vacated by 31 July 2019.

Supply-chain enhancements

Following the 2016 federal election, a major review and program of work was undertaken to streamline the way the AEC manages its supply chain, centralising to a large extent the responsibilities and contracts for materials production, preparation and movement. The aim of the changes was to capitalise on opportunities for economies of scale, to utilise the knowledge of third parties to provide specialist services, and to increase national consistency in processes and the application of required standards.

This was a significant shift from the previous local management of materials and logistics. The outcomes for the election were seen in simplified contract management, removal of duplicated work effort, more uniform service delivery and enhanced value for money.

The AEC intends to further develop and improve the logistics function by improving forecasting methods for materials requirements, and by standardising rather than creating bespoke polling place packs wherever possible, to allow their earlier planning, manufacture and preparation and better manage late changes. In addition, enhancing the management of these processes through better enterprise resource planning systems is a priority.

SECTION 6
Counting

Indicative results

By approximately 3am (AEST) on 19 May, 97.4 per cent of all ordinary House of Representatives votes (12.22 million ordinary House of Representatives ballot papers) and 63.7 per cent of all ordinary Senate votes (8.01 million Senate ballot papers) were counted and results published on the AEC tally room, an enormous task following the close of polls at 6pm on election night.

The election-night count involved a count of House of Representatives first preferences, the two-candidate-preferred (TCP) count and Senate first preferences. The Senate votes that were not counted on election night were primarily those taken at PPVCs.

Following the election night count, millions of ballot papers were packaged and transported from 7,000 polling places to OPCs for the required re-check of all ballot papers to occur in the days following election day.
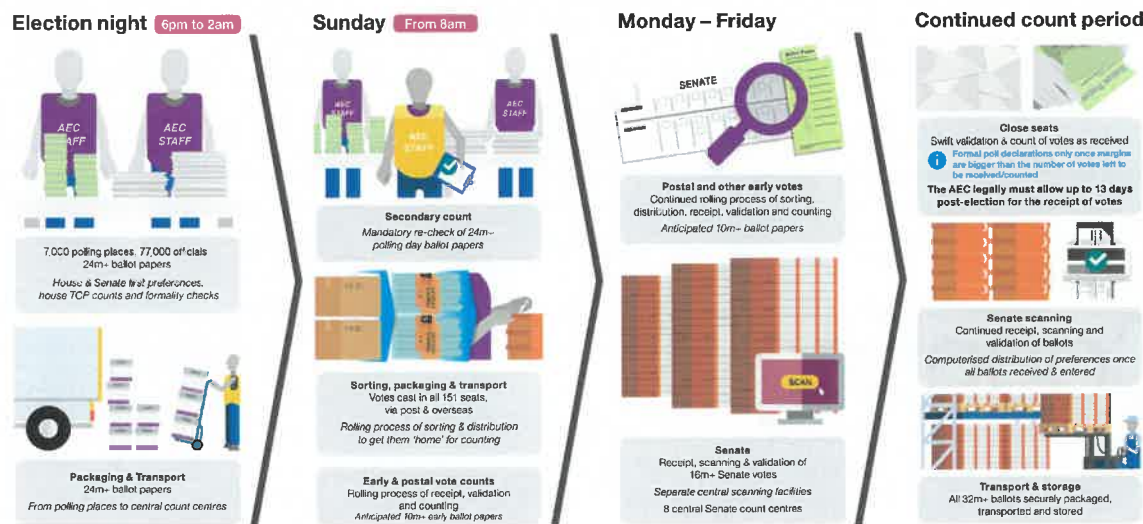
Pre-poll vote counts

The increasing proportion of pre-poll votes has a direct impact on the timing of results on polling night. A pre-poll voting centre takes votes over several consecutive days as opposed to a polling place, which takes votes on election day. Therefore the number of votes to be counted may be significantly larger. These significantly larger vote counts simply take longer to process and count. This is particularly the case on election night

> After 6pm on election day, in polling places and AEC count centres across Australia, more than 20 million ballot papers were counted, delivering an election-night result.

with all of the other myriad activities that need to be taken into account. While large vote counts can be planned for, the complexity is increased with the scale, and substantial additional time is required to reconcile ballot papers and rectify any issues. Data modelling undertaken in conjunction with Deakin University showed that the optimal number of votes to enable the first preferences and TCP counts to be conducted promptly on election night is 1,800 votes. Some divisions had pre-poll counts of up to 25,000 votes, with 149 PPVCs having counts of more than 10,000 votes.

The count

Election night 6pm to 2am

7,000 polling places. 77,000 officials
24m+ ballot papers

House & Senate first preferences,
house TCP counts and formality checks

Packaging & Transport
24m+ ballot papers
From polling places to central count centres

Sunday From 8am

Secondary count
*Mandatory re-check of 24m+
polling day ballot papers*

Sorting, packaging & transport
Votes cast in all 151 seats,
via post & overseas
*Rolling process of sorting & distribution
to get them 'home' for counting*

Early & postal vote counts
Rolling process of receipt, validation
and counting
Anticipated 10m+ early ballot papers

Monday – Friday

SENATE

Postal and other early votes
Continued rolling process of sorting,
distribution, receipt, validation and counting
Anticipated 10m+ ballot papers

Senate
Receipt, scanning & validation of
16m+ Senate votes
Separate central scanning facilities
8 central Senate count centres

Continued count period

Close seats
Swift validation & count of votes as received
ℹ️ *Formal poll declarations only once margins
are bigger than the number of votes left to
be received/counted*
**The AEC legally must allow up to 13 days
post-election for the receipt of votes**

Senate scanning
Continued receipt, scanning and
validation of ballots
*Computerised distribution of preferences once
all ballots received & entered*

Transport & storage
All 32m+ ballots securely packaged,
transported and stored

There are options for improvement for pre-poll vote counts. One possible option may be to enable votes cast prior to election day to be counted on election day prior to 6pm, which would allow the AEC to provide a more comprehensive and earlier indication of election-night results following the close of polls. This process would be open to scrutineers, with appropriate arrangements made to ensure secrecy of votes counted prior to 6pm. A potential model is the method used in New Zealand elections[11].

After election night

The complex task of ensuring all ballot papers are securely packaged and transported back to the outposted centres for each voter's home division takes several days, and involves millions of ballot papers and more than 40,000 transport routes.

After election night, the results of the election night count were fully recounted in the "fresh scrutiny" of House of Representatives ballot papers, and the check of the polling place count of formal and informal Senate ballot papers (called a DRO Senate count).

At the same time, votes from the millions of Australians who cast their votes outside their home division — at early voting centres, interstate voting centres and with mobile polling teams — were sorted, securely packaged and transported back to the home division for preliminary scrutiny. The preliminary scrutiny process

involved checking an elector's entitlement to vote before the declaration envelope was opened and the ballot papers included in the count.

Activities following election night were resourced and managed very closely to meet the need to return the writs by the end of June.

Senate count

Senate counts were undertaken in eight separate central count centres across Australia, located at Fuji Xerox premises. Every Senate ballot paper was scanned with preference data captured and then manually re-entered and cross-compared to the scanned data as part of an established process of verification.

Building on the success of the 2016 federal election, where Senate ballot papers were scanned and processed by a third-party provider for the first time, improvements were made for this event, including:

- increased data security controls, such as a private and encrypted pipeline to the AEC
- enhanced scrutineer experience at scrutiny sites
- improved up-front error checking to reduce subsequent rework
- the use of an internally designed and implemented computerised system to consolidate ballot paper and reconciliation data from multiple AEC and third-party sources. This system provides increased confidence in the completeness and accuracy of Senate results.

11 See *New Zealand Electoral Act 1993* Sections 174C-G. Since 2002, the New Zealand Electoral Act has provided for the preliminary count of ordinary advance votes to be undertaken under secure conditions before close of voting. In 2017, the New Zealand Parliament agreed to the statutory start time for the advance early count to be brought forward from 2pm to 9am on election day, and for the preliminary count to be able to be conducted electronically.

Declaration of the polls

While seats may be claimed or conceded by candidates, the AEC can formally declare a seat result only once the actual numbers make it impossible for an outcome to be otherwise. As soon as the margin is unable to be overtaken, the AEC moves quickly to officially declare the result. This margin is influenced by factors beyond the AEC's control, such as the number of votes for each candidate, the distribution of votes among candidates, and the number of postal votes that have been issued (and, therefore, may be returned) for a division.

To be clear, given the amount of misunderstanding about the rules and legislation the AEC needs to follow, it is the Electoral Act that determines that postal votes have until 13 days after election day to be received by the AEC. It is often the case the AEC has counted every vote it has, but still must wait for votes to arrive before finalising the result. In 2019, in 34 divisions, the AEC was required to wait until the 13th day after polling day to complete a full distribution of preferences to declare the result. This compares with 29 divisions in 2016 and 18 divisions in 2013. The AEC is aware of criticism from some commentators concerning the time taken to declare the results in some seats. This criticism usually does not account for the legislative requirements the AEC must follow.

Once the votes were counted and a successful candidate determined, there was a public declaration of the result. The declaration of the poll for each House of Representatives electorate was conducted publicly by the Divisional Returning Officer (DRO). The declaration of the Senate election for each state and territory was conducted by the respective Australian Electoral Officer.

In general terms, as can be seen in Table 7, the timeliness of declarations improved in 2019. All ballot paper scrutinies and distributions for the House of Representatives and Senate were completed, polls were declared, and writs returned by 21 June, with all House of Representatives seats declared by the end of the fourth week after polling day. This was due to improvements in planning and management of the post-election timetable and influenced also by the shorter timeframe in which the writs were required to be returned.

The speed of the count is restricted by the requirement to wait until 13 days after election day for postal votes to be returned and then transported to the owning division, where necessary. A small proportion of postal votes certificates are returned in the last few days of this period. As Table 8 below illustrates, of the 1.29 million PVCs returned before the 13-day deadline, 22,628 or 1.75 per cent were received in the last seven days.

Table 7: Progressive declarations, 2016 and 2019 House of Representatives elections

2016 House of Representatives elections		2019 House of Representatives elections	
Date	Declarations no.	Date	Declarations no.
02 July 16: Election Day		18 May 19 – Election Day	
Week 1: 03–09 Jul	1	Week 1: 19–25 May	..
Week 2: 10–16 Jul	9	Week 2: 26 May–01 Jun	34
Week 3: 17–23 Jul	59	Week 3: 02–08 Jun	75
Week 4: 24–30 Jul	54	Week 4: 09–15 Jun	42
Week 5: 31 Jul–06 Aug	27		
TOTAL DECLARED	**150**	**TOTAL DECLARED**	**151**[12]

Table 8: Postal vote certificates returned, days 7–13

	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13
	25 May	26 May	27 May	28 May	29 May	30 May	31 May
PVCs received	1,652	48	6,344	4,673	3,618	3,440	2,853

12 The number of members of the House of Representatives to be chosen in each state and territory, as determined on 31 August 2017, was increased by one.
Further information on state/territory entitlement to electoral divisions is available at https://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/Redistributions/calculating-entitlements.htm.

Table 9: Declaration votes issued and counted, 2019 federal election

Vote type	Declaration votes issued 2019	Ballot papers counted[13] 2019	Per cent
Provisional	155,059	99,017	64
Absent	682,725	659,726	97
Pre-poll	648,488	624,217	96
Postal	1,538,139	1,242,635	81[14]
TOTAL	3,024,411	2,625,595	87

Managing declaration votes

Declaration voting allows all eligible electors the opportunity to vote, even if away from their division on election day or otherwise unable to cast an ordinary vote. Originally, declaration votes were intended as an exception to ordinary voting, for use in certain circumstances. The circumstances are limited for each type of declaration vote and are stated in the Electoral Act.

At the 2019 federal election, about 83 per cent of votes counted were ordinary votes cast at polling places or pre-poll voting centres, and 17 per cent were declaration votes.

As Table 9 shows, more than 3 million declaration votes were issued and over 2.5 million were counted. These volumes exceeded the number of declaration votes at the 2007 federal election, where 100 per cent of pre-poll was declaration voting and after which there was significant legislative change to enable pre-poll ordinary voting.

The primary reason for declaration votes being issued but not counted is that the elector is not correctly enrolled. Other reasons include that a postal vote has not been completed before the close of polling or has not been returned, or that the declaration has not been properly made (for example, a signature was not provided).

A review of the legislative requirements for declaration voting needs to take place to streamline this process for the voter and the AEC. It takes significantly longer to process declaration votes as they must undergo eligibility checks before the ballot papers can be removed from the envelopes and counted, and there is inherent and unnecessary complexity in handling the different types of declaration votes. In both PPVCs and polling places, declaration votes are issued to people within and outside the "owning" division under the same criteria. However, the requirements for these votes are treated differently under the Electoral Act in each type of voting centre and use two different types of declaration envelopes. In polling places, for example, a provisional voter is required to read a provisional voting statement that is not required in PPVCs, and in PPVCs a number is required to be allocated to the record and certificate that is not required in a polling place.

The Electoral Act requires that a record be made of the declaration vote. This record is obtained through a non-carbon copy paper inside the envelope that is removed and filed after the envelope has been completed. The production of these specialist envelopes limits the AEC to only one manufacturer, which has limited access to specialist materials from overseas. This creates significant cost and risk in the process. This process is not sustainable. An alternative method for the record to be made must be sought, or the requirements for the record should be changed.

The complexity is significant. The AEC moves all declaration votes to the "home" division at a cost of several million dollars. The management of this task is one of the largest in the election, taking effort away from important post-polling day counts and other activities. Schedule 3 of the Electoral Act, regarding the preliminary scrutiny of declaration votes, is highly prescriptive and complex.

With the introduction of ECLs into PPVCs and mobile teams, and possibly expanding to polling places, a voter is often looked up on the certified list for all divisions nationally, or within the state as relevant, at a declaration issuing point. While this has other benefits, the look-up process is repeated during the preliminary scrutiny in the home division, when the elector is then marked off. These voters could already be marked off, eliminating the need for preliminary scrutiny for the majority of absent and pre-poll declaration votes.

13 Senate.
14 Reflects postal votes counted based on postal votes issued. Just over 96 per cent of postal votes returned were counted.

Court of Disputed Returns

Under the Electoral Act the validity of any election or return may be disputed only by a petition addressed to the Court of Disputed Returns. The AEC is aware that three petitions were filed with the Court of Disputed returns:

- Oliver Tennant Yates v. Joshua Anthony Frydenberg in respect of the election of a member for the House of Representatives for the Division of Kooyong [S237 of 2019]

- Michael Robert Staindl v. Joshua Anthony Frydenberg in respect of the election of a member for the House of Representatives for the Division of Kooyong [M96 of 2019]

- Naomi Leslie Hall v. Gladys Liu in respect of the election of a member for the House of Representatives for the Division of Chisholm [M98 of 2019].

Multiple-voter and non-voter processing, and voter-advice letters

Action on possible multiple voting

The Electoral Act provides that a person is guilty of an offence if the person votes more than once in the same election.

The AEC does not have authority to prosecute multiple voting offences, but works with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) on cases of apparent multiple voting.

The AEC has comprehensive administrative mechanisms to identify apparent multiple voters, which include an initial check to identify administrative or polling official error.

The AEC has sent enquiry letters to 2,102 electors who had multiple marks recorded beside their names at the 2019 election. These are marks only and **may not** be the result of multiple voting. Multiple marks can, in some instances, be the result of administrative error. Replies to the letters are currently being processed. The AEC will provide further information to JSCEM as the process continues.

There were no prosecutions for multiple voting following the 2016 federal election. The AEC and AFP provided a joint submission to JSCEM, in February 2017, in which the difficulties of successfully prosecuting cases of apparent multiple voting under current legislation were outlined.

In July 2017, the CDPP provided a discussion paper outlining significant evidentiary issues relating to prosecuting offences of apparent multiple voting under section 339(1C) of the Electoral Act. There have been no changes to the relevant provisions since the discussion paper.

Action on apparent non-voters

The Electoral Act provides that a person is guilty of an offence if the person fails to vote at an election without a valid and sufficient reason. After each federal election, the AEC issues "apparent failure to vote" notices to electors whose names have not been marked off the electoral roll. Those sent a notice are given the opportunity to provide the AEC with a valid and sufficient reason for failing to vote (for example, an unforeseen medical emergency), pay a $20 administrative penalty, or, if they claim that they did vote, to provide information on the time and location of voting.

This activity is underway and the AEC will provide further information to JSCEM as the process continues.

Post-election voter-advice letters

In July 2019, 225,171 voter-advice letters for the 2019 federal election were posted to voters advising that their declaration vote had been either rejected or only partially admitted for a range of possible reasons, such as incomplete or incorrect completion of the declaration vote envelope, the voter was not enrolled or the vote was received too late.

SECTION 7
Participation

Enrolment, turnout and formality

The overall rates of enrolment, turnout and formality, illustrated in Figure 5, are used across electoral commissions in Australia as measures or indicators of public participation in an election event. Historically, these have been used to illustrate — at a high level — delivery of the franchise.

The enrolment rate compares the number of enrolments to the estimated eligible population. The enrolment rate for 2019 was the highest since 2001, which is the earliest election for which the AEC has rigorous data.

Turnout, or voter turnout, refers to the proportion of electors who cast a vote that is admitted to the scrutiny. The turnout for the 2019 federal election was 91.9 per cent, which exceeded the turnout of 91.01 per cent at the 2016 federal election. In absolute terms, over 800,000 more Australians voted in 2019 compared with 2016.

Formality is a measure of the number of ballot papers that are filled out in accordance with the Electoral Act. Formality, or informality, is measured because informal ballot papers cannot contribute to the count — noting that some people will deliberately vote informally. Formality for House of Representatives votes increased in 2016, but decreased slightly in 2019 (although it was still above recent trends). Formality for the Senate increased (i.e. improved) in 2019, but had decreased in 2016. Both House of Representatives and Senate formality appear to have been affected by confusion over Senate voting processes[15].

Using estimated eligible population as the denominator

By looking at each of these measures over time as a proportion of the estimated eligible population, a more nuanced picture of participation emerges.

As illustrated by Figure 6, turnout and formality, when compared with the estimated eligible population, have been improving since the 2013 federal election. Overall participation for the 2016 federal election was better than 2013 and 2010, and 2019 participation was better than 2016, 2013, 2010 and 2004.

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15 Voters are affected by different state and territory formality rules. For example, the NSW state election was held in close proximity to the federal election and requires a first preference only for the lower house.
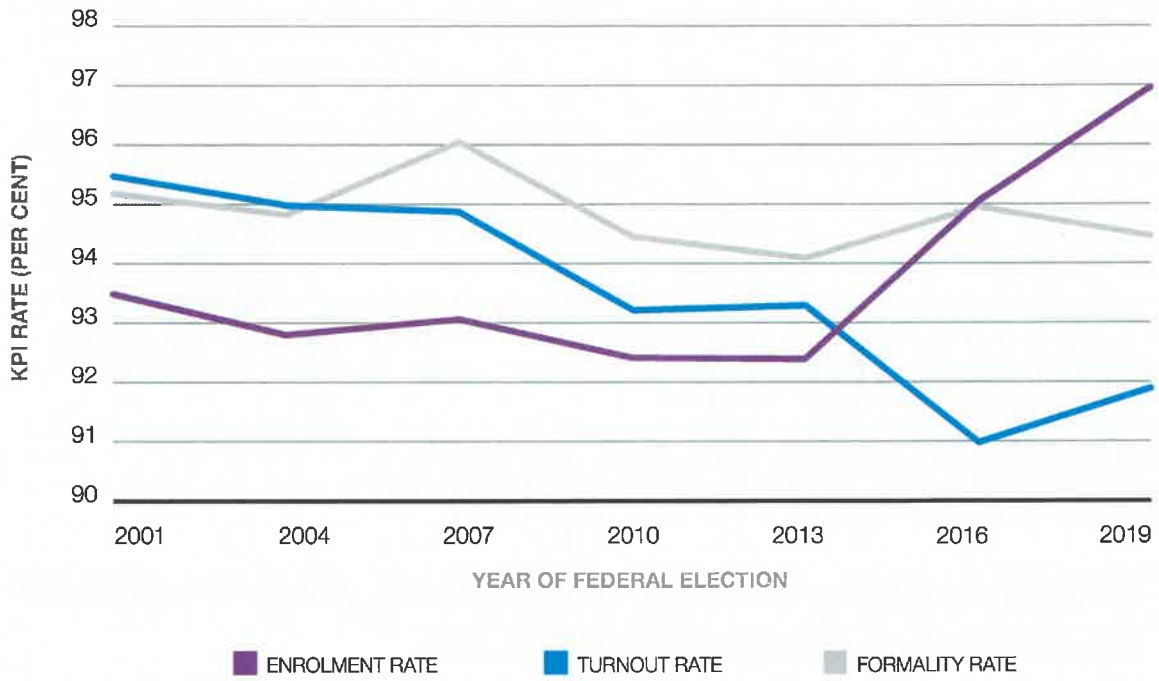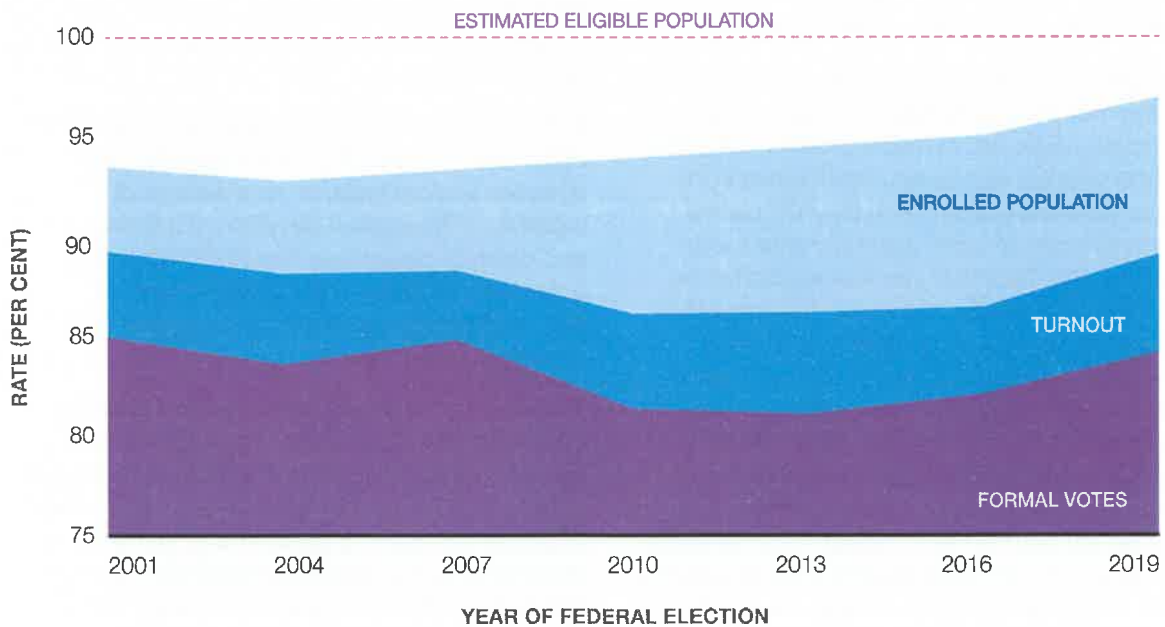
Figure 5: Participation rates, 2001–2019

Figure 6: Participation of estimated eligible population, 2001–2019

SECTION 8

Protecting electoral integrity

In a rapidly evolving electoral environment, public confidence in the conduct of electoral events is vital.

There is a range of fraudulent and threatening actions that have the potential to damage that confidence. The AEC is committed to ensuring Australia's elections are conducted in a manner that inspires and sustains public confidence.

It is recognised globally that foreign and domestic actors may seek to interfere and undermine electoral processes. In response to the emerging threats of cyber and foreign interference in the global electoral environment, the AEC placed a strong focus on cyber security matters, and the Electoral Commissioner was supported by the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce (the Taskforce), which was governed by a board co-chaired by the AEC and the Department of Finance. While the Taskforce worked behind the scenes to ensure the integrity of electoral processes, the Stop and Consider social media campaign was launched to raise public awareness of potential disinformation during the 2019 federal election. The campaign, the first of its kind by the AEC, encouraged voters to check the source of material they consumed to avoid being misled by potential disinformation.

Cyber security

In the lead-up to the 2019 federal election, the AEC internally funded a project to implement the Australian Cyber Security Centre's (ACSC) "Essential 8" strategies to mitigate against cyber security incidents.

The AEC and the ACSC managed a cooperative cyber security operation for the election. The agencies worked together on a number of initiatives to strengthen proactive monitoring and defence capabilities. The ACSC dedicated a number of staff to work closely on site with AEC staff during the election to manage these enhanced capabilities.

The AEC also engaged a private cyber security monitoring firm, TSS cyber, to provide a "24/7" security operations centre. The work of TSS cyber and the ACSC were complementary, with all three organisations working together with agreed lines of communication, problem identification and escalation paths. TSS cyber also placed staff on site at the AEC during critical periods of the election, in addition to normal staffing at its security operations centre.

Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce

The Taskforce was a network of Federal Government agencies that enabled efficient and effective communication and coordination on matters relating to the integrity of the 2019 federal election.

The Taskforce comprised the following agencies, and was supported, as needed, by the national intelligence community:

- Australian Electoral Commission
- Department of Finance
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Department of Communications and the Arts
- Attorney-General's Department
- Department of Home Affairs
- Australian Federal Police
- Australian Signals Directorate.

Agencies represented on the Taskforce provided guidance and expertise on a broad range of issues within the Australian electoral environment, including on electoral policy and matters of electoral integrity. Given the scale and sensitivities of a federal election, agencies represented on the Taskforce were co-located, and they provided timely guidance and expertise on a broad range of issues. The Taskforce allowed for a collective agreement of responsibilities and effectively harnessed individual agency capabilities.

The AEC also worked closely with government cyber security experts to ensure the integrity of the AEC's cyber environment.

As part of the successful operation of the Taskforce, the 2019 federal election saw marked improvement in engagement undertaken with major online and social media organisations.

The Taskforce was not involved in the delivery of election activities, such as vote counting or scrutinising, and was not in a position to affect election results.

During its operation, neither the Taskforce nor any of its member agencies had any role in determining whether or not political messages published or broadcast by political parties and candidates in relation to the federal election were true.

Future of the Taskforce

The Taskforce has proven a viable model for agencies across government working together to support the integrity of Australian elections. Taskforce members will continue to work together on electoral integrity matters as required. Options to extend support to state electoral commissions are currently under discussion.

The AEC is also exploring future improvements and applications of the Stop and Consider campaign. Overseas electoral commissions, such as Elections Canada and the UK Electoral Commission, have indicated a desire to run similar campaigns.

Stop and Consider campaign

The Stop and Consider campaign, the first of its kind run by the AEC, encouraged voters to check the source of material they consumed to avoid being misled by potential disinformation.

A media placement spend of approximately $500,000 across social media channels Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google yielded 56,404,717 impressions and more than 100,000 clicks through to the AEC website.

The advertising placement was supported by dedicated content on the AEC website, including information available in 29 languages (which was downloaded more than 1,700 times) and community outreach activities.

The AEC does not have a legislated role in regulating truth in advertising of political claims or counterclaims, and the campaign sought only to encourage voters to check the source of information before sharing or acting upon it.

Independent tracking research showed that the campaign was generally well received, with two in five (40 per cent) of those recognising the campaign claiming that they would take action on account of seeing the campaign. They gave the campaign an average rating of 7.2 on a scale of 1 to 10 for "tells you something important".

SECTION 9

Legal issues and complaints

Alleged breaches of Part XXA or XXI of the Electoral Act

The AEC investigated complaints relating to potential breaches of the following offences in Parts XXA and XXI of the Electoral Act:

- improper authorisation of electoral communications — section 321D
- bribery — section 326
- interference with political liberty — section 327
- electoral communications that mislead or deceive an elector in relation to the casting of a vote — section 329
- prohibited behaviour in or near polling booths and pre-poll voting places — section 340.

In overall terms, there was an increase in the number of complaints the AEC investigated compared with the 2016 federal election. However, this may be because of several issues, including that:

- in 2018, the authorisation requirements applying to electoral communications were broadened to cover social media
- an extensive text-message campaign by one party caused a large number of complaints
- there were a number of complaints about matters that were outside the AEC's jurisdiction, such as truth in electoral advertising.

The AEC considered complaints about potential breaches of offences in Part XXA or XXI of the Electoral Act in accordance with the complaint escalation protocol published in the *Electoral Backgrounder: Electoral communications and authorisation requirements.*

Offences investigated

Election period – 11 April 2019 (issue of writs) to 21 June 2019 (return of writs)

During the 2019 federal election period, the AEC received 1,072 enquiries and complaints relating to electoral communications. The AEC provided advice in relation to 544 of these enquiries and complaints, and investigated 528 electoral communications. Following investigations, the AEC determined 439 communications did not breach the Electoral Act and required no further action, and 89 communications did breach the Act and required further action. The particular breaches of the Electoral Act identified fell under:

- improper authorisation of electoral communications (section 321D)
- misleading or deceptive publications (section 329).

Table 10: Electoral communications investigated

	Communications investigated	No breach	Breach s321D	Breach s329
Social media	109	81	25	3
Signs and print	233	183	47	3
Other communications	186	175	10	1
TOTAL	**528**	**439**	**82**	**7**

AEC actions where breach identified

In summary, the AEC:

- issued 78 warnings — request to rectify or remove illegal electoral communication where the person or entity responsible for the communication could be identified

- took further action on 11 matters — where the infringement was not addressed following the warning notice. In all these further actions, the AEC asked the social media company on which the communication was published to remove the illegal communication.

The AEC has a range of other actions available under the Electoral Act that were not required. These include:

- seeking an injunction under section 383 of the Electoral Act to remove the illegal communication

- seeking a court order to impose a civil penalty under section 321D of the Electoral Act

- working with other government agencies (e.g. Australian Federal Police, Attorney-General's Department or Commonwealth Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions) to impose penalties under other Commonwealth legislation (e.g. the Criminal Code).

Privacy issues

The AEC notified the Privacy Commissioner of several privacy breaches that occurred during the conduct of the May 2019 federal election.

The AEC takes it obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988* extremely seriously and is concerned with any action that results in our obligations not being met.

Two privacy breaches involved AEC staff sending emails to multiple persons with the recipients email addresses being disclosed to all recipients.

The third privacy breach notified to the Privacy Commissioner concerned the contact details for some 938 candidates that were placed in a document on the AEC website for some 15 hours before it was removed.

Each of the 938 candidates affected by the privacy breach was notified by letter and in some cases by telephone.

SECTION 10

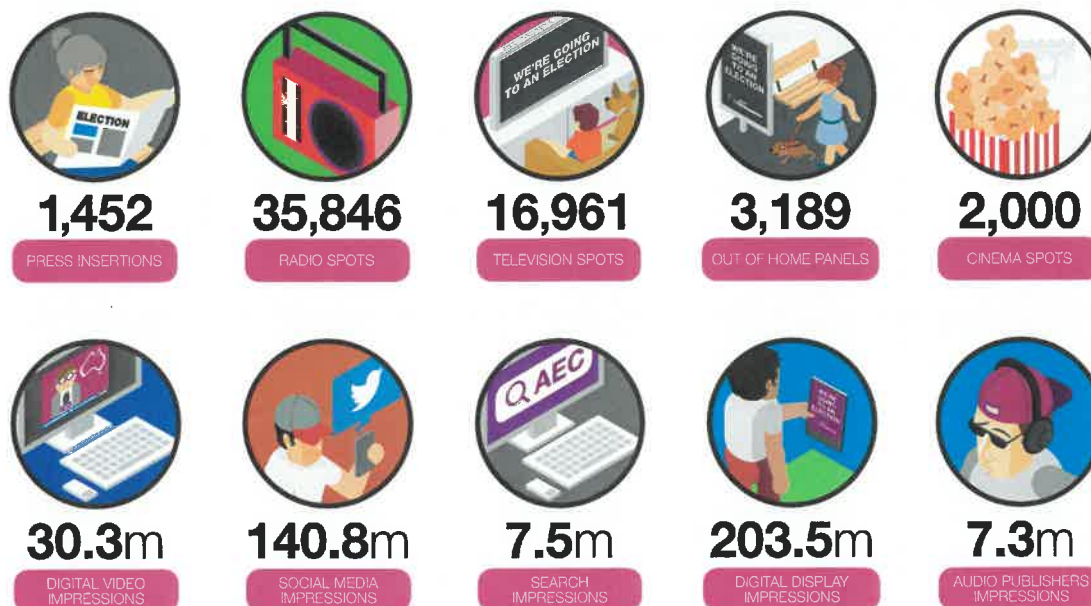# Communication

Participation campaign

At the 2019 federal election, the AEC conducted a comprehensive communication campaign designed to provide information to electors on their rights and responsibilities in relation to enrolling and voting.

The campaign was targeted at all Australian citizens aged 18 and older, with the goal of helping the AEC to maximise enrolment and participation in the election.

Implemented in multiple phases across the election period, the campaign supported Australians needing to enrol or update their details on the electoral roll, provided information on early voting services for those unable to attend a polling place on election day, and provided instructions on how to correctly complete House of Representatives and Senate ballot papers.

Figure 7: Metrics of media channel placement

2019 FEDERAL ELECTION
CAMPAIGN MEDIA PLACEMENT RESULTS AT A GLANCE

1,452	**35,846**	**16,961**	**3,189**	**2,000**
PRESS INSERTIONS	RADIO SPOTS	TELEVISION SPOTS	OUT OF HOME PANELS	CINEMA SPOTS
30.3m	**140.8**m	**7.5**m	**203.5**m	**7.3**m
DIGITAL VIDEO IMPRESSIONS	SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS	SEARCH IMPRESSIONS	DIGITAL DISPLAY IMPRESSIONS	AUDIO PUBLISHERS IMPRESSIONS

The campaign also provided information in targeted areas on the availability of remote mobile polling, as well as providing information to voters following election day on the results and the counting process.

The campaign used a number of channels to provide information to electors.

Mass media advertising

Advertising was placed nationally in television, online TV, print, radio, out-of-home, cinema and digital channels.

Public relations

A range of public relations activities supported the advertising campaign to promote participation in the federal election:

- the conduct of dedicated media briefings in each capital city prior to the election
- the distribution of a series of national and localised media releases
- a significant volume of other proactive and reactive media engagement through the election period
- use of engaging educational graphics and animations across AEC channels
- outreach to unpaid intermediaries to carry AEC messages
- engagement of prominent organisations to further promote AEC messages on its behalf.

Direct communication

Information posters were placed in polling places and AEC offices, brochures and fact sheets were made available, and a national mail-out of the *Official Guide to the 2019 Federal Election* to about 10.6 million households took place in the weeks leading up to election day.

Social media and online channels

Significant paid and unpaid social media activity was implemented as part of the campaign, and included advertising on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. The AEC website was a central source of information throughout the campaign, and it provided up-to-date and timely information to support each campaign phase.
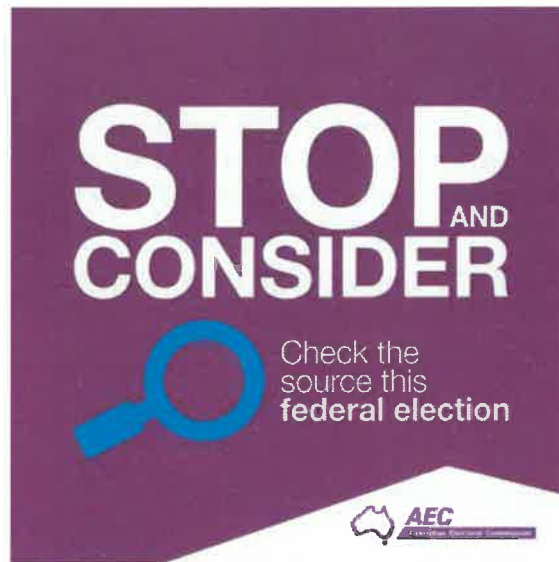
The use and management and the AEC's digital media presence was of particular importance for the 2019 federal election. The following aspects were central to the AEC's approach to social media for the 2019 federal election:

- the Stop and Consider campaign encouraging voters to "check the source" of the information they read
- raising awareness of the scale, complexity and scope of AEC operations — proactively and reactively
- swiftly and firmly correcting disinformation relating to electoral administration.

The use of simple, explanatory infographics and animations provided information regarding election processes in an easily consumable format suited to digital media. The firmer approach to correcting electoral disinformation was a deliberate departure from more common practices of public engagement used across government. This style of engagement was suited to the electoral environment and successful in providing people with assurance about the conduct electoral processes.

Special audience groups

The AEC developed a number of community engagement resources and initiatives to support electoral participation of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Indigenous Australians, people with disability, homeless people and youth.

The AEC worked in partnership with: community organisations; Commonwealth, state and local government entities; and other service providers to implement and promote the pilot initiatives and distribute electoral information, including recruitment opportunities.

Advertising, media and public relations activities provided further reach and support, including advertising in up to 30 languages for CALD audiences.

Electronic communications were sent to 500+ key organisations that service CALD communities, to provide and promote the availability of a range of election information products translated into 29 languages. On behalf of the AEC, Vision Australia emailed approximately 13,900 clients of organisations that support people who are blind or have low vision, with information on how to obtain accessible formats of the official guide and candidate lists.

Specific communication for Indigenous voters

The AEC communicated with Indigenous voters via various channels, including: the AEC website (Indigenous-specific homepage); AEC social media (Indigenous-specific Facebook page); Indigenous and other relevant community organisations; Commonwealth, state and local government entities; and Indigenous media.

The AEC also developed a number of videos in 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that included English captioning. The videos aimed to support and increase electoral participation. The videos were promoted via the channels mentioned above, and through national sporting organisations and sporting clubs participating in national competitions.

Advertising was placed across Indigenous television, radio, press, digital and social media channels, including radio advertisements recorded and broadcast in 18 Indigenous languages to help raise awareness of the AEC's remote area mobile polling service.

Contact channels

During the election, people could contact, or obtain information from, the AEC through its network of local offices, the AEC website, by telephone or through social media channels.

The AEC maintained full public services from 83 divisional office locations during the election period.

The AEC website allowed visitors to check their enrolment, search for candidates, and obtain information on where and when to vote. After election day, a dedicated section of the home page updated progress of the count, with specific focus on close seats.

The AEC again partnered with the Department of Human Services to deliver election contact centre services to answer telephone queries and enquiries lodged via the contact form on the AEC website. Services commenced on 3 April and continued to use an AEC-developed call centre application, supported by hundreds of telephone and email scripts to provide accurate information during the election period.

At the 2019 federal election, the call centre service received 379,141 calls and 27,607 emails, and it sent out 56,242 products. At the 2016 federal election, the contact centre received 648,814 calls and 62,733 emails, and it sent out 52,161 products. The decrease in the total number of enquiries at this election may be attributed to the shortened election period and heightened enquiries received at the 2016 election following changes to the Senate voting process.

SECTION 11

Workforce

The AEC's regular Australian Public Service (APS) workforce combined with its temporary election workforce (TEW) to deliver the 2019 federal election.

APS staff and those employed under the Electoral Act contributed to a total of more than 87,000 Australians being engaged during the election. This compares with the AEC's regular APS staffing of 788. The workforce included staff seconded from state government agencies, and it was supplemented by labour hire where required.

The AEC continued work commenced prior the 2016 federal election in a number of areas relating to its workforce for the 2019 federal election. These areas include:

- continued review and refinement of the operational workforce planning model for the election
- further review of training content and delivery for temporary staff and regular APS staff.

Election work is arduous and involves extended hours. As a result, following the 2016 federal election, the AEC convened a Safe Working Hours Working Group. The scope of the working group covered both the AEC's regular APS workforce and TEW staff, with a focus on election day workflow and organisation, and maximum working hours. Operational and staffing changes were made for the 2019 federal election in response to recommendations from the working group's report.

Workforce planning

The AEC's Election Ready Road Map included a number of activities covering workforce planning. These activities complemented election delivery planning, and contributed to election staffing plans for divisional, state and national offices. The work built upon the workforce planning framework put in place prior to the 2016 federal election. The framework recognises workforce planning challenges particular to the AEC:

- complexity arising from various employment arrangements
- the scale and timing to employ and train a large temporary workforce
- the relatively short lead time to develop and implement plans
- the time required to establish effective workforce planning processes.

Staffing

Enhancements — safer working hours

Following the 2016 federal election, the Electoral Commissioner identified long working hours of both APS and TEW staff during electoral events as an area of concern, primarily because of the risk associated with fatigue. In conjunction with the metrics work undertaken with Deakin University, a number of changes were made for the 2019 federal election as part of the AEC's ongoing commitment to the health and safety of staff. Strategies included:

- changes to the scrutiny assistant role. Where available, a new scrutiny assistant for return of materials was employed in each polling place from 5pm to assist with counting, packing and then be responsible for return of the polling place materials on behalf of the Officer-in-Charge (OIC), reducing the hours worked by the OIC.

- adjustments to the ordinary issuing staffing formula. This resulted in more staff conducting the count of ballot papers after 6pm, with the aim of all staff in the polling place finishing earlier.

- the introduction of a surge workforce for larger polling places to assist with finalising larger counts in a timely manner.

- the Second-in-Charge, or another polling official, was required to help the OIC set up the polling place on polling eve.

Legislative changes prior to the 2019 federal election also assisted in minor reductions of workload for staff in those outposted centres conducting processes such as the declaration vote exchange and the DRO Senate count.

Recruitment initiative

The AEC conducted a TEW recruitment initiative during 2018 and 2019 to attract registrations of interest for election work. This included: digital display advertising; Facebook advertising; radio; promotion on GP surgery TV; a media and public relations program; and a national intermediary and partnership outreach program.

To complement the TEW recruitment initiative, the AEC provided a revamped set of Working at Elections pages on the AEC website. This provided a streamlined provision of information about all election roles, and access to enable registrations of interest to be submitted and updated.

Employment offers

At the issue of the writs on 11 April 2019, the AEC commenced sending 144,658 offers of employment. Of these, 99,213 were accepted, 29,626 were declined and 15,819 were cancelled by the AEC.

Table 11: Total number of staff and positions, 2016 and 2019 federal elections

	Staff			Positions		
	2016	**2019**	Increase	2016	**2019**	Increase
Total	74,893	**85,688**	14.41%	86,938	**99,213**	14.12%
Election day only	67,576	**77,080**	14.06%	67,588	**77,080**	14.04%

Most statistics referred to in this section are based upon positions, rather than staff numbers, to reflect the work undertaken and best present the analysis of the service delivered during the 2019 federal election. Table 11 shows the number of temporary staff employed for the election — 85,688. Of these, 10,476 worked in more than one position.

Targeted recruitment

Promotion of election-time job opportunities to Indigenous Australians was supported by the AEC's Indigenous Electoral Participation Program. The Indigenous recruitment campaign included promotion through existing networks and at Indigenous events, tailored recruitment advertising and materials.

The Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland state offices contracted staff from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to deliver remote mobile polling in Indigenous communities. DHS and AEC staff also hired temporary staff with language skills and/or community contacts in local areas.

Of the 99,213 polling official positions at the 2019 federal election, 1,922 were filled by persons identifying as Indigenous (1.94 per cent). This was an increase of 0.17 per cent from 2016.

Character checks

Applicants for specified TEW roles — including supervisors, staff with access to electronic certified lists and staff conducting early voting — were required to undertake a police check as part of a character check for suitability of employment.

The aim was to ensure applicants possessed and demonstrated an appropriate level of integrity so that the AEC had confidence in an applicant's ability to protect AEC assets and information. A total of 28,155 applicants were checked, and 11 (0.03 per cent) did not meet the AEC character check requirements and were not engaged.
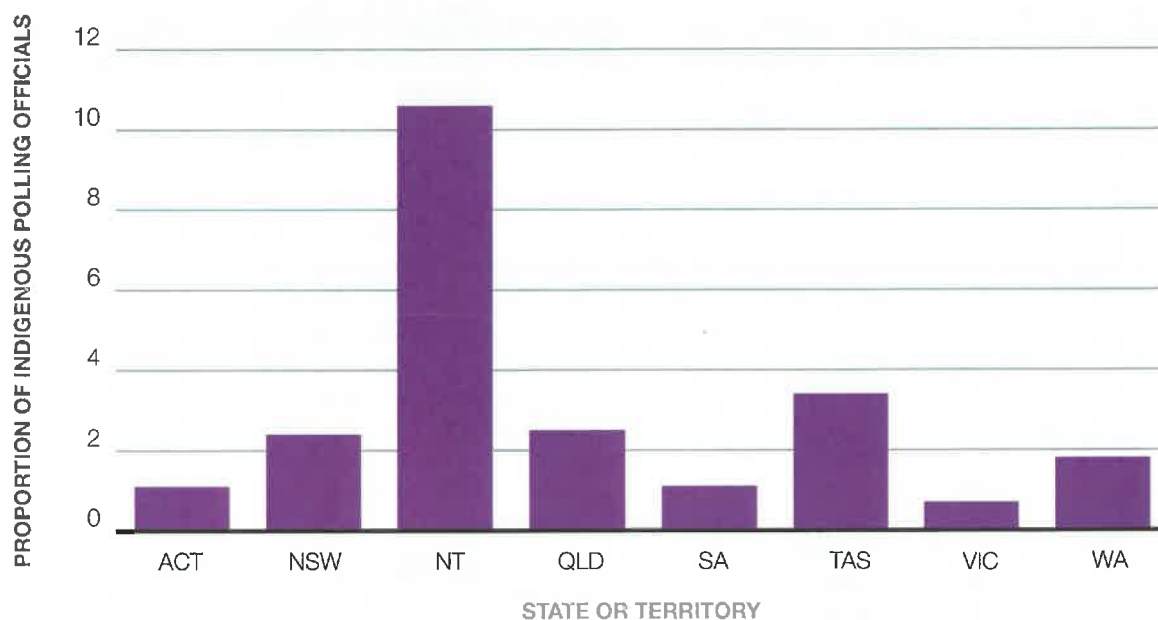
Training

In preparation for the 2019 federal election, the AEC carried out critical work to further professionalise and enhance the overall quality and consistency of the training for APS and TEW staff.

The training packages and supporting materials were reviewed and expanded to provide regular APS and TEW staff with training designed to better support them in performing their role during the election:

- **election readiness program** — this was the AEC's flagship professional development program for APS staff and formed a critical part of the agency's learning and development curriculum. The election readiness program was a significant investment for the AEC in providing a modern and contemporary approach to staff training and development, with more than one-third of APS staff participating during 2018–19.

- **online training** — this was redeveloped, expanded and thoroughly tested. The online training was delivered through the same platform for both APS and TEW staff, with the majority of staff completing the required training.

Figure 8: Proportion of Indigenous polling official positions, 2019 federal election

- **face-to-face training packages for identified polling roles** — these were redeveloped and thoroughly tested to be more role-specific and to complement online training.

- **election training videos** — in a new initiative for this election, 23 professional videos were produced and made available through the AEC website and the AEC's YouTube channel to support TEW and APS staff with performing the tasks assigned to their role. The videos also reinforced learning and provided excellent support for just-in-time training. These pages were viewed 287,529 times prior to the election.

- **briefings for non-polling supervisor roles** — a new initiative for this election that guided DROs in briefing staff working as non-polling supervisors primarily in the outposted centres.

Of the 99,213[16] positions, 45,254[17] were required to complete training that consisted of online and/or face-to-face training. Online training was completed for 97.5 per cent of positions that required it.

16 This figure represents the total number of polling and non-polling positions filled at the 2019 federal election through the AEC's employment system, AEC Employment.
17 This figure represents the total number of individuals employed through AEC Employment who were required to complete online training as at 6pm on 16 May 2019. If an individual was employed in multiple roles that required the same online training to be completed, they enrolled in and were required to complete this online training only once.

Appendices

Abbreviations and acronyms

Term	Description
ACSC	Australian Cyber Security Centre
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AEST	Australian Eastern Standard Time
APS	Australian Public Service
BLV	Blind and low vision
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CDPP	Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions
DRO	Divisional Returning Officer
ECL	Electronic certified list
GPV	General postal voter
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OIC	Officer-in-Charge
OPC	Outposted centre
PPVC	Pre-poll voting centre
PVA	Postal vote application
PVC	Postal vote certificate
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
TCP	Two-candidate-preferred
TEW	Temporary election workforce
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Glossary

Term	Description
Absent vote	A declaration vote cast at a polling place located outside a voter's division, but still within their state or territory.
Certified list of voters	The official electoral roll used to mark off electors' names. Polling officials place a mark against an elector's name when the elector is issued with a ballot paper at a polling place, or where appropriate during early voting, to indicate that the elector has voted.
Close of nominations	The date specified in the writ for the close of nominations for candidates at a federal election. It must be at least 10 days but not more than 27 days after the date of issue of the writs. Nominations close at 12 midday on this day.
Close of rolls	The date specified in the writ that the electoral roll closes for the federal election, which is 8pm local Australian time on the seventh calendar day after the writs are issued. Once applications received before the close of rolls have been processed a snapshot of the electoral roll will be taken, which becomes the certified list of voters.
Declaration vote	A declaration vote is recorded by a voter whose entitlement to vote cannot be confirmed at the place of voting. The voter makes a signed declaration on an envelope and then puts their completed ballot paper inside. These votes are counted after election day if the voter's entitlement to vote is verified using the information provided on the declaration envelope.
Declaration of nominations	Formal announcement of registered candidates whose names will appear on a ballot paper in an election.
Distribution of preferences	The process used to determine the elected candidate when no candidate obtains an absolute majority (that is, 50 per cent plus one) of the formal first preference votes.
Divisional Returning Officer (DRO)	The AEC officer responsible for maintaining the electoral roll and conducting the election in each division. Divisional Returning Officers are the returning officers for the House of Representatives elections in their divisions.
DRO Senate Count	The DRO Senate count is a: • check of the ballot papers counted in polling places on election night, or • a first (initial) count of any Senate ballot papers received by the DRO in a ballot box or securely fastened container.
Early vote	A postal vote or a vote cast at a pre-poll voting centre, an AEC divisional office or via a mobile polling team appointed for the purposes of early voting in the lead-up to election day. They are cast by electors who will not be able to attend a polling place on election day.
Electoral roll	The list of people entitled to vote in an election.
Electors	All those people entitled to vote at an election.
Enrolment rate	The proportion of the eligible population who are enrolled to vote
Formal	Ballot papers in the scrutiny are assessed for formality. A ballot paper is considered formal if it has been filled out correctly, in accordance with the Electoral Act. A ballot paper that has been incorrectly marked is considered informal.
Formality rate	The proportion of ballot papers marked according to the rules of the election (and can therefore be counted towards the election results). The *informality rate* is the proportion of ballot papers not marked according to the rules of the election (and cannot therefore be counted towards the election).
Fresh scrutiny	A re-check of votes cast in a House of Representatives election, conducted by the Divisional Returning Officer in the days following election day.

Term	Description
General postal voter	A voter who is registered to have postal ballot papers sent to them automatically by post.
Home division	The division for which an eligible elector is enrolled.
Nomination	Candidates must be nominated before they can be elected to the Senate or House of Representatives. Qualifications for nomination are set out in the Electoral Act and the Constitution. Nominations can be made once the writ for an election has been issued and before the time and date specified as the close of nominations. For each nomination a financial deposit must be lodged.
Ordinary vote	A vote cast on or before election day within the electoral division in which the voter is enrolled and where their name is marked off on a certified list of voters at the time of voting.
Outposted centre (OPC)	Premises leased separate to the divisional office to undertake critical election activities during election periods, such as materials management and counting of votes.
Partial admissions / partially admitted declaration votes	A partial admission occurs when an elector has cast a declaration vote, but has declared their enrolment for the wrong division. If they are found to be enrolled for a different division within the same state or territory, their Senate ballot paper is admitted to the count, while the House of Representatives ballot paper is rejected. Partial admissions are the main reason why Senate turnout is consistently higher than House of Representatives turnout.
Political party	An organisation representing a group of people with similar ideas or aims. Parties registered with the AEC are eligible to have the party affiliation of their endorsed candidates printed on ballot papers.
Polling day (election day)	The day specified in the writ on which the election is held. It must be a Saturday and at least 33 days, but not more than 58 days, after the issue of the writs.
Postal vote	A declaration vote where ballot papers are sent to a voter and generally returned to the AEC through the postal system.
Postal vote certificate	The declaration vote envelope specific to postal voting on which the voter declares their entitlement to vote.
Pre-poll vote	A vote cast at an early voting centre or an AEC divisional office before election day.
Preliminary scrutiny	Preliminary scrutiny involves checking the declaration vote was cast prior to the close of polls, the envelope is signed by the voter and that the voter is eligible to vote in the Division. The voter's name is then marked off the electoral roll and the envelopes are placed in a ballot box until they can be opened after the close of polls for further scrutiny (i.e. counting the votes).
Provisional vote	A vote cast at a polling place where the elector claims to be enrolled in the division but their name cannot be found on the certified list, their name has been marked off the certified list as having voted, the elector has silent enrolment, or where, after questioning, the elector has failed to satisfy the officer in charge that they are a particular person on the certified list.
Qualification checklist	A compulsory component of the candidate nomination process to demonstrate eligibility to be elected to Parliament under section 44 of the Constitution. The qualification checklist and any additional documentation supplied by the candidate in relation to this, is published on the AEC website following the declaration of nominations until a petition disputing the election can no longer be filed.
Return of writs	After all candidates have been declared and the results of an election have been determined, the writs are returned to the Governor-General or state governors advising the names of elected candidates.
Roll	The list of voters eligible to vote at an election.

Term	Description
Scrutineers	People appointed by candidates to be their representatives at polling places, or at any place at which the scrutiny of votes is being conducted. Scrutineers have the right to be present when the ballot boxes are sealed and opened and when the votes are sorted and counted so that they may check any possible irregularities, but they may not touch any ballot paper.
Scrutiny	The counting of votes, which leads to the election result.
Seat	Another term for division or electorate.
Silent elector	An elector who has applied to have their address not appear on the roll for reasons of personal safety or safety of their family members.
Tally room	A website election results system, which provides election information and results in a user-friendly format.
Turnout	The proportion of the eligible population that has cast a vote. This is measured as the total number of ballot papers entering scrutiny divided by the final enrolment figure, expressed as a percentage.
Two-candidate-preferred (TCP)	These figures show where preferences have been distributed to the likely final two candidates in a House of Representatives election.
Writ	In an election context, a writ is a document which commands an electoral officer to hold an election and contains dates for the close of rolls, the close of nominations, the day of the election and the return of the writ. The issue of the writ triggers the election process.