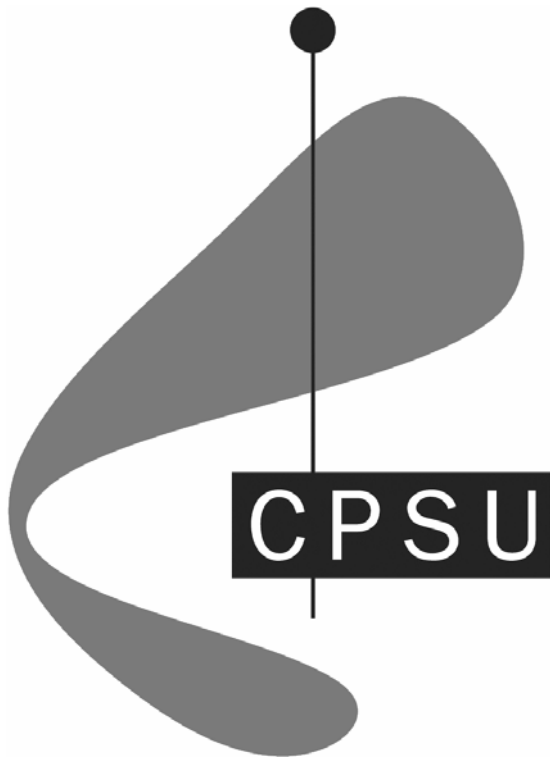


**CPSU, Community and Public Sector Union (PSU Group)**



**submission**

**Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters**

**Inquiry into certain aspects of the administration of the  
Australian Electoral Commission**

**14 May 2007**

## **Inquiry into certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission**

### **Submission Recommendations:**

- A classification review should take place to determine if AEC employees are classified at the right level according to their roles and responsibilities;
- All Divisional Offices should be fully staffed by ongoing officers and when vacancies occur, they should be promptly filled as a matter of priority through advertisement and interview;
- Casual rates should be increased to ensure a wider pool of casual staff is available to divisions.

### **Introduction**

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) represents workers in the Australian Public Service (APS), the ACT Public Service, the Northern Territory Public Service, the telecommunications sector, call centres, employment services and broadcasting.

In the APS, CPSU has coverage and representation of members working in the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and we make this submission on their behalf following consultation with them.

In making this submission, CPSU intends to focus on the Terms of Reference that are most relevant to our members in AEC.

### **Number of staff and the employment structure of staff in divisional offices**

#### AEC Divisional Offices - Employment structure

Divisional Offices are staffed on an average formula of 3.2 staff with a typical structure of one employee at APS 2, one at APS 3 and one APS 6 (Divisional Returning Officer).

The work of the AEC has changed significantly over the past 5 to 10 years. Functions such as enrolment processing have been devolved from state offices to divisional offices. In addition to this there has been a general increase in overall workloads. This has been accompanied by an increase in the range of duties, which has flow on impacts on responsibility and accountability.

Those at the APS 2 and APS 3 level have increasing responsibilities in managing casual employees during election periods. Examples of this supervisory work include managing small teams that deal with tasks such as the postal voting team, enrolment team, pre polling, computer scrutiny and scrutiny of counts.

This increase in workload and responsibilities is most notable during elections with the increasing numbers of declaration envelopes in postal and pre polling as well as changes from manual to computer driven issue of votes and scrutiny.

The APS 6 responsibility for the supervision of two staff has not altered even though the workload and responsibility levels have increased. An example would be that instead of full habitation reviews every 3 years, the Continual Roll Update by mail has increased the overall workload and responsibility for all levels in the division.

Additionally, with the centralisation of Corporate Services many Corporate Services functions have devolved to the Divisional Office.

During the mid 1980s the Divisional Returning Officer position was an APS 5 and as a result of a Classification Review was reclassified to an APS 6. There was planned to be a review of the APS 3 position to determine if there was a justification for a reclassification to an APS 4. This review was not undertaken and we believe it is now long overdue.

Accordingly it is CPSU's position that a classification review is required for the APS 2 and 3 positions to determine, in view of increased workload and responsibilities, the correct classification level for these positions.

#### Staffing Levels

Each Divisional Office is allocated an average of 3.2 staff with one APS 2, one APS 3 and one APS 6. Whilst this may be adequate in theory, the reality is that the inconsistency of application of this formula provides very different outcomes in terms of ability to complete work and staff morale.

Some offices are fully staffed with a full complement of ongoing staff. However there are other offices which have functioned for long periods of time without either an APS 6 or vacant APS 2 positions. These positions are often not filled in non-election years or else filled by a mixture of part time and casual staff. The use of part time and casual staff in these instances has an impact on the capacity and stability of a Divisional Office.

It is CPSU's view that all Divisional Offices should be fully staffed by ongoing officers and when vacancies occur, they should be filled as a matter of priority through advertisement and interview.

Where this cannot be achieved, higher duties should be provided to staff acting in higher classified positions during the selection processes. It should not be a long term strategy to avoid filling positions in non-election years.

#### **Whether the current arrangements meet career expectations for AEC officers**

The current structural arrangements of one APS 2, one APS 3 and one APS 6 per Divisional Office are an impediment to career development within the AEC.

Whilst those employed at the APS 2 level have the opportunity to progress to APS 3, for the APS 3 level employee the only option for career progression is by leaving the AEC to gain a promotion. This regular loss of experienced and skilled staff at the APS 3 level has a major impact on the capacity of the AEC.

A structural loss of corporate knowledge and expertise also adds an unnecessary recruitment and training costs and a consequent loss of productivity.

Despite the fact that many at the APS 3 level act from time to time in the APS 6 position and in the long term APS 3s can effectively undertake the duties of the APS 6, they are generally precluded from career progression.

The practice in AEC offices is for the APS 6 employee to be recruited from outside the AEC, instead of encouraging the progression and skills development of APS 3 officers. This is largely because of a perception that there is a large skills leap from APS 3 to APS 6, despite the fact that many at the APS 3 level spend considerable periods acting at the APS 6 level but are rarely able to gain promotion to APS 6.

It is CPSU's view that a classification review is required for the APS 2 and 3 positions to determine, in view of increased workload and responsibilities, the correct classification level. This is not only based on the AEC experience it is also by comparison to other departments.

Some of the anomalies that could be addressed by the classification review include that the existing APS 2 position deals with enrolment and public contact whereas in many other departments public contact is handled by an APS 3.

Similarly, under the existing structure the APS is the Collector of Public Monies, whereas in other agencies this role is done by an APS 4 level employee.

If as a result of a Classification Review, the existing levels were revised to be at APS 3 & 4, there would be a smaller leap in progression from APS 4 to APS 6 than is currently the case. This would have many advantages for career progression and advancement in the AEC.

Consideration should also be given to providing a career structure for APS 2 and APS 3 officers.

### **What level of staffing would be required to meet ongoing habitation reviews?**

CPSU members consider the current staffing level of three fulltime ongoing staff per division is considered adequate for habitation reviews providing all the positions are filled and divisions have access to an adequate number of casual staff to cover field work and additional related duties.

### **Whether the current APS staffing levels are appropriate for the actual work of divisional offices**

The current staffing formula of 3.2 staff per divisional office is considered by CPSU members to be adequate during non-election years providing all positions are filled and vacancies are filled in a timely manner. The staffing levels for election years are adequate providing all positions are filled and the division has access to the number of casuals required to undertake the extra duties of an election year.

**Other issues relating to the staffing of divisional and central offices which may be raised in submission or by the committee**

Casual Staff

It is becoming increasingly difficult for divisions to recruit casual staff and CPSU considers that this is chiefly due to low hourly rates AEC pays casuals (Level 1 \$16.90 and Level 2 \$19.02 per hour).

State Electoral Commissions pay their casual staff at a higher rate (eg VEC pays \$17.76 and \$20.90 per hour). Private sector companies pay administrative casuals significantly more.

In a tight labour market with a shortage of skilled workers, without a competitive rate the AEC is not able to attract the best people for the job or to promptly fill casual vacancies as needed.

CPSU considers that casual rates should be increased to ensure a wider pool of casual staff is available to divisions.

For the purposes of this inquiry, CPSU recommends to the Committee that they investigate casual rates of pay in State Electoral Commissions and undertakes a comparison between these and the rates paid by the AEC.