

STATEMENT BY THE AEO FOR NSW  
NSW ASPECTS OF THE 2007 FEDERAL ELECTION

Chair,

As the AEO for NSW for the 2007 Election, I can report that the NSW aspects of the election proceeded smoothly, administrative and operational arrangements worked well, and electors enjoyed a largely trouble free day. However, to provide some context for you, the three broad areas in this statement I will cover are: communication/public awareness activities; enrolment; and voting for the 2007 federal election.

### **Communication & Public Awareness**

To promote the overall communication aims of the AEC, particularly to maximise participation by all electors, a wide range of initiatives were implemented in NSW during 2007. I will take this opportunity, though, to highlight just some of the initiatives targeting young people, culturally and linguistically diverse Australians (CALD), and Indigenous Australians.

Please note, though, that these examples do not reflect the significant work undertaken by our divisional offices in undertaking local public awareness activities that also played an important part in the overall communication strategy.

#### **Indigenous Australians**

In New South Wales, three Community Electoral Information Officers (CEIOs) were employed and based in Sydney, the far north coast and the central/far west. They visited close to 100 indigenous organisations to raise awareness of the federal election and distribute information on enrolment and voting. Their activities also included attending indigenous events such as: the Annual Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout; the Indigenous Employment Expo; the National Indigenous Tertiary Education Student Games; and the Croc Festival in Kempsey.

Media promotion was also an important element of this program with articles appearing in the Koori Mail, pre-recorded messages on the National Indigenous Radio Network, and a segment on the SBS indigenous TV program 'Living Black' on how Indigenous Australians were being encouraged to speak up and have their say.

#### **Youth**

Young people were a high-priority audience for the AEC's enrolment promotion and public awareness activities. In addition to national activities, NSW also utilised direct mail campaigns to target young people.

With access to TAFE data for the first time, the AEC conducted a direct mail campaign to approximately 18,000 17 & 18 year old TAFE students just prior to the announcement of the federal election. Student data from the Board of Studies was also utilised in direct mail campaigns throughout the year to encourage eligible 17 and 18 year olds to enrol to vote.

During the federal election, young people were also a focus with Schoolies events occurring during the election period. NSW staff worked with event organisers for Schoolies on the Gold Coast to send a text message on the Tuesday prior to election day to 10,110 schoolies reminding them to vote on election day. Working with our colleagues in the AEC's Queensland Office, information was also placed in information booths at Schoolies, in the accommodation manager's guide and provided to accommodation groups on the far north coast of NSW.

### **CALD**

In NSW, staff attended five multicultural festivals in metropolitan Sydney with the SBS outside broadcast van to promote enrolment at these events in the lead up to the 2007 federal election. These events were held at locations including – Auburn, Cabramatta, Darling Harbour, Fairfield and Lakemba.

### **Media**

Radio news releases were used for the first time in NSW and were particularly successful in achieving significant coverage of the AEC's key election messages. (A radio release involved the pre-recording of radio news grabs to accompany a printed media release or other activity.)

For example: 'Reminder to vote on election day' was reportedly used approximately 315 times across 126 radio stations. In some cases, some stations were still using the grabs on election day as a reminder to people to vote).

Radio news releases were also able to be used to target areas of the state – more specifically, they were used to target radio stations broadcasting in divisions with high numbers of candidates in the lead up to election day with messages about formality.

In New South Wales live to air radio interviews were also particularly successful in communicating the AEC's key election messages. Interviews that included talkback assisting callers with their enrolment and voting problems received positive feedback from radio listeners.

For example, during one interview, a caller to talkback radio was embarking on a cruise before election day and was unsure of how to vote. NSW staff followed up to check the cruise details and identified six cruises in total that would be departing Australian ports either on or before election day, affecting over 9000 passengers.

Cruise passengers were then provided with information on their voting options based on their cruise itinerary through various means including letters, emergency notification to travel agents,

'pillow letters' on the cruise and, in a first, a voice trial was made to 1089 passengers departing on a cruise providing them with brief details on their voting options in a recorded message to their phone.

## **Enrolment**

As at 31 January 2007 there were some 4,320,718 million electors on the NSW electoral roll.

As at 23 October 2007, the date for the close of rolls for the 2007 federal election, there were some 4,495,336 million electors on the New South Wales electoral roll (an addition of 174,618).

As other AEOs have pointed out in their statements, in early 2007, the AEC initiated a number of strategies to attempt to boost roll numbers. In particular, the national Targeted Enrolment Stimulation (TES) program had a significant impact on reversing the decline in the electoral roll.

As part of the NSW program, staff targeted approximately half a million people at approximately 374,000 addresses and were supported by advertising, media and public awareness activities.

As at 7 September 2007, staff had visited 374,299 addresses in person and collected 89,750 enrolment forms at the time of the visit (23.98% of addresses visited).

Overall, 111,555 enrolment forms were received from this program (29.80% of addresses visited). Of this total, 13% were new enrolments, 18% were re-enrolments and 69% were changes of enrolment.

## **Voting**

In NSW a total of 423 candidates nominated for the 2007 federal election, of which 79 candidates nominated for the Senate and 344 for the House of Representatives. Some 4,366,339 million votes were cast at the 2007 election across New South Wales of which the majority of these votes, some 3,449,290 million (approximately 80% of the total vote), were ordinary votes.

The number of declaration votes in NSW increased in line with the general national trend and the changing voting patterns now evident in federal elections (Note – the average nationally was 16%, NSW was approx. 13%).

In looking at figures for the different type of declaration votes, the number of provisional, absent, and postal votes remained more or less stable in NSW, however, the increase was in the number of pre-poll votes which jumped from 241,660 in 2004 to 351,785 in 2007 (an increase of 110,125).

## **Blind and Vision Impaired**

As part of the national trial, seven divisions across NSW (Bradfield, Cowper, Cunningham, Farrer, Lowe, Parkes, Parramatta) provided electronic voting machines for electors who are blind or vision impaired to cast a vote – a total of 168 votes were cast at these centres. NSW staff worked with

the Australian Human Rights Commission to set up media opportunities to promote the location of these voting centres during the election period.

### **Informality**

Unfortunately, informal voting remains at a high level in NSW. In 2007, the overall informality rate for the House of Representatives elections in NSW was approximately 5%: whilst this represents a reduction from 6.1% in 2004, it is still the highest in Australia.

Additionally, there are a number of divisions where the informality rate is well above the national average - for example: Banks 6.4%; Bennelong 6.2%; Blaxland 9.5%; Chifley 8%; Fowler 7.7%; Grayndler 6%; Prospect 7.7%; Reid 7.6%; and Watson 9.1%.

Strategies implemented for the 2007 federal election in an attempt to reduce the levels of informality included:

- an attempt to employ language appropriate staff for selected polling place.
- some polling places played a DVD of translated formality television advertisements;
- the three questions issuing officers are required to ask of electors were translated into 21 languages;
- How to Vote Guides were translated into 21 languages, and
- polling staff in Divisions with the highest 2004 informality levels were provided with extra training.

These strategies were also supported by an advertising campaign and complemented by a program of public awareness activities. The AEC intends to continue to research and analyse the informal voting figures from the 2007 election to understand which mix of the strategies listed above may have had the greatest impact in working to reduce the informality levels at the 2007 federal election.

I am now happy to answer any questions you might have.