

Submission 9

Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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

Dear Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

I would like to make some brief comments relating to the co-location of AEC divisional offices, in particular the co-location of 4 divisional offices at Chatswood NSW. Firstly though, there are varied definitions of just what 'co-location' of divisional offices might actually now mean.

Many years ago when first introduced, the 'co-location' concept was generally understood to mean the joint location of 2 or more Divisions into common premises *with each Division retaining it's structure and autonomy* but delivering a potential for financial and efficiency advantages such as savings on rental, IT, and other overheads, and the co-operative sharing of workloads e.g. in periods where one division might have a lighter enrolment processing workload than the other division, or someone was off sick, they would help each other out.

Co-locations along these lines were widely supported and in time co-locations occurred at various locations throughout the country, including in NSW at Campbelltown (Macarthur/Werriwa divisions) and a more recent one at Green Hills (Hunter/Paterson divisions). I understand that both of these sites operate successfully and efficiently when adequately staffed and the divisions concerned have fairly much retained their autonomy and identity.

However, procedures and practices being implemented at Chatswood NSW are clearly very different and have resulted in the 4 divisions concerned (Bennelong/Berowra/Bradfield/North Sydney) losing virtually all independence with functions being combined and grouped into the categories of Administration; Enrolment; and Elections & Public Awareness.

Divisional Returning Officers have been appointed as Managers of the abovementioned functional areas while the remaining DRO appears to have the role of 'site manager'. Other staff have each been pigeon-holed into one of the functional areas.

This model does not represent any generally accepted concept of co-location that I am familiar with, but is rather more clearly and indisputably an amalgamation of these divisions and their functions.

There are many aspects of the new arrangements at Chatswood that support an opinion of it as an 'amalgamation' model and I understand some of the people who are directly affected will be providing specific, first hand, detail to the Committee.

Nevertheless it comes as absolutely no surprise to me to learn that almost every current experienced casual (both office and field staff) refuses to any longer work for the divisions at Chatswood because of the conditions now being imposed upon them. Additionally one of the highest rated divisional clerks on the last order of merit for selection as DRO (who is stationed at Chatswood) has now resigned.

A recent example of the impact of the situation relating to casual staff numbers is that an adjoining division had to last week provide people to attend a citizenship ceremony on behalf of the division of Berowra because neither they, nor any of the other Chatswood divisions, had experienced casuals available.

I don't know what the true motivation behind what has been going on at Chatswood is. I don't know what the people instigating and imposing the present conditions are actually seeking to achieve. But it does seem as if anyone likely to have a contrary opinion in relation to the model for Chatswood is being driven out.

One thing I am absolutely certain of is that the AEC in Sydney does not have access to such a wealth of experienced personnel that they can afford to waste so much expertise.

My background is that of a past permanent officer of the Australian Electoral Commission NSW (1969 to 2004). While a permanent officer I was employed initially in Divisional Offices (Divisional Clerk, Divisional Returning Officer) and later in the NSW Head Office (Manager Enrolment Services). Since my retirement in 2004 I have worked for the AEC for varying periods in a non-ongoing capacity as a divisional office (Berowra) casual at the Chatswood site and am currently employed by the AEC National Office as a non-ongoing project officer.

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