



Responding to the increased demand for early voting (chapter 7)

KEY POINTS:

- The trend to early voting (pre-poll and postal voting) continued at the 2007 federal election, with almost one in five votes cast prior to polling day. The additional scrutiny processes conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission on these declaration votes can delay the election result. **(see pages 187–188)**
- The committee has made a number of recommendations to accommodate the growing demand for early voting — but at the same time increasing the proportion of declaration votes counted on election night whilst maintaining existing integrity processes:
 - allow pre-poll votes cast at a pre-poll voting centre in an elector's home division prior to polling day to be cast as ordinary votes, wherever practicable. **(recommendation 22) (see page 196)**
 - to ensure a continuing high standard of integrity applies to votes cast as home division pre-poll votes, electors who cast ordinary votes at pre-poll voting centres should still be required to sign a declaration at the time of voting, indicating that they are entitled to a pre-poll vote. **(recommendation 23) (see page 196)**
 - being absent or expecting to be absent from an elector's home division on polling day should be a valid ground of application for postal or pre-poll voting. **(recommendation 25) (see page 197).**

BACKGROUND:

- Early votes cast as a proportion of total votes cast have increased from 6.1 per cent at the 1993 election (667,880) to almost 13.7 per cent (1,777,893) at the 2007 election. **(see page 178)**
- Factors identified as contributing to the strong ongoing growth in early voting include:
 - changing patterns of work leading to more electors finding it difficult to attend polling places between 8a.m. and 6p.m. on a Saturday
 - increased mobility of electors

- local factors such as major events (eg: ‘schoolies’), embarkation of naval vessels and presence of fly-in fly-out workers. **(see pages 186–187)**
- A decisive move away from ordinary attendance polling has implications for the level of resourcing required to run elections, the speed of counting votes and also impacts on the nature of campaigning. **(see pages 187–188)**
- All major political parties gave broad in-principle support for home division pre-poll votes to be issued as ordinary votes and for the grounds of application for a postal or pre-poll vote to be relaxed. **(see pages 193 and 195)**
- At state and territory elections in Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, pre-poll votes are cast as as votes. In the remaining jurisdictions a pre-poll vote is cast as a declaration vote. **(see page 186)**
- At the 2007 election, home division pre-poll votes issued accounted for around 60 per cent of total pre-poll votes issued. By issuing these votes as ordinary votes, an additional 5 per cent of total votes cast will be counted on election night. **(see page 191)**

For media comment: please contact the Committee Chair, Daryl Melham, on (02) 6277 2054 (Parliament House Office).

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