

Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings and recommendations of the review by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters ('the Committee') of Audit Report No. 42 of 2001-02, *Integrity of the Electoral Roll*.

The Electoral Roll

- 1.2 The Electoral Roll contains the names and addresses of people entitled to vote in Federal elections.
- 1.3 Part VI of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* ('the Electoral Act') provides for the creation and maintenance of the Electoral Roll, the Roll comprising separate rolls for each Federal Division for the House of Representatives. At the most recent Federal Election on 10 November 2001, more than 12.6 million people were registered on the Roll.
- 1.4 The Roll is maintained by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), an independent statutory authority, which is also responsible for conducting elections and providing electoral information, education programs and related services.
- 1.5 An Electoral Roll with high integrity enables the AEC to manage elections effectively and assists in maintaining the confidence of Australian citizens in their electoral system.

Conduct of the review

- 1.6 The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) routinely examines reports of the Commonwealth Auditor-General tabled in Parliament. There is an established practice whereby committees other than the JCPAA examine reports within their respective areas of interest. This was the case with Audit Report No. 42 of 2001-02, *Integrity of the Electoral Roll*, which was presented to the Parliament on 18 April 2002.
- 1.7 In May 2002, the Committee Chair advised the Chair of the JCPAA that the Committee had an interest in conducting a review of Audit Report No. 42, and the Committee subsequently resolved to conduct a review.
- 1.8 The review included a half-day public hearing on 17 June 2002 at Parliament House, Canberra, and consideration of written submissions from the AEC.

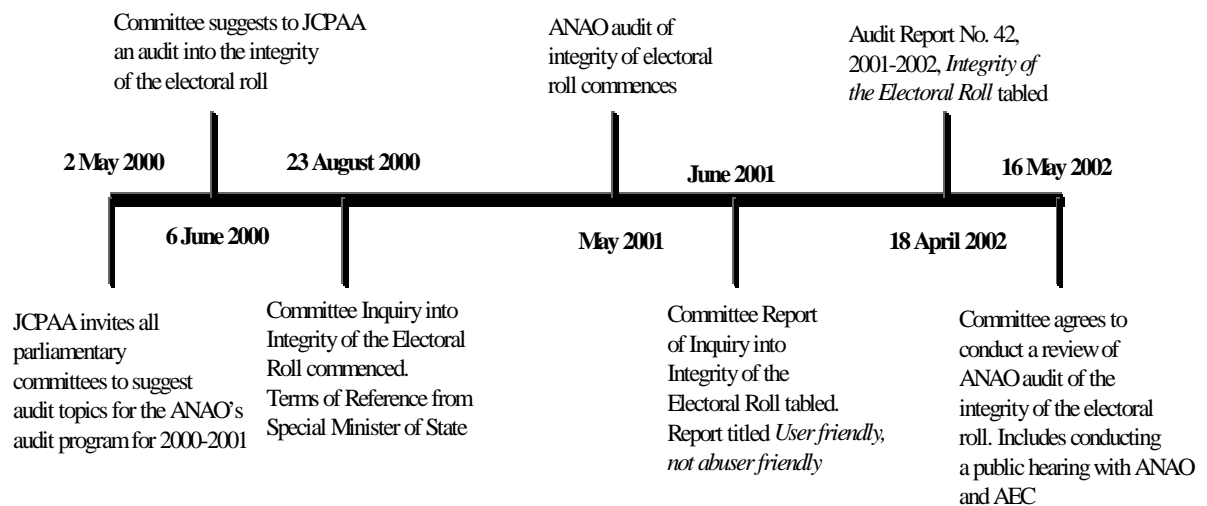
Earlier reviews

- 1.9 Since 1984, various predecessors of the Committee have raised concerns about the quality of the Commonwealth Electoral Roll and the incidence of electoral fraud, and a more recent Committee inquiry had identified the need for examination of the Electoral Roll by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO).
- 1.10 In May 2000, the Chair of the JCPAA wrote to all parliamentary committees, inviting suggestions of audit priorities for the Auditor-General for his 2000-01 audit program.¹
- 1.11 On 6 June 2000, the Committee responded to this invitation, suggesting the Auditor-General conduct an audit into the integrity of the Electoral Roll. The ANAO subsequently decided to conduct a performance audit on the integrity of the Roll, the audit commencing in May 2001.
- 1.12 In August 2000, the then Special Minister of State, Senator the Honourable Chris Ellison, referred to the Committee an inquiry into the integrity of the Electoral Roll. The Inquiry followed allegations of electoral fraud and inquiries conducted by bodies such as the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission and the Queensland Legislative Assembly's Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee.

1 This invitation is made on an annual basis.

- 1.13 The resulting report, *User friendly, not abuser friendly*, was tabled in June 2001. That Inquiry found that:
- the existing controls to prevent enrolment fraud could be strengthened; and
 - the AEC could develop a more comprehensive approach to preventing enrolment fraud.
- 1.14 Figure 1 summarises these events.

Figure 1 Timeline of Events leading to Review of Audit Report No. 42



Source: *Committee Analysis*

Audit Report No. 42

- 1.15 The ANAO's audit of the Electoral Roll had two objectives. The first objective was to provide an opinion on the integrity of the Electoral Roll. In addressing this objective, the ANAO defined integrity as having four elements:
- accuracy - the Electoral Roll containing correct and up-to-date information relating to individuals;
 - completeness - the Electoral Roll including all individuals eligible to enrol;
 - validity - the Electoral Roll not including those ineligible to enrol; and
 - security - the Electoral Roll being protected from unauthorised access and tampering.

- 1.16 The second objective was to examine the effectiveness of the AEC's management of the Electoral Roll in ensuring the Roll's integrity. In particular, the ANAO aimed to identify and assess the mechanisms the AEC has in place to provide assurance that:
- the names and addresses on the Electoral Roll are legitimate and valid; and
 - people who are eligible to vote are registered, and registered correctly.
- 1.17 The ANAO reviewed the AEC's policies and procedures for managing the Electoral Roll, and their implementation by the AEC's State and Divisional Offices, paying particular attention to:
- strategic relationships between the AEC and its major stakeholders;
 - the Continuous Roll Update (CRU) process - the AEC's process for ensuring the accuracy, completeness and validity of the Roll; and
 - the adequacy of security and access arrangements to protect Electoral Roll information from tampering and unauthorised use.
- 1.18 The audit commenced in May 2001, with fieldwork conducted between May 2001 and February 2002. In addition to file and document reviews, the ANAO conducted interviews with staff in:
- the AEC Central Office in Canberra;
 - AEC Head Offices in all State and Territory capitals;
 - AEC Divisional Offices in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory;
 - State and Territory electoral authorities in all States and Territories;
 - the secretariat of the Committee; and
 - the secretariat of the Electoral Council of Australia.²
- 1.19 As part of its audit, the ANAO conducted independent data-matching of the Roll with data from other sources, in particular, the Medicare database maintained by the Health Insurance Commission (HIC).

2 ANAO, Audit Report No. 42, 2001-02, *Integrity of the Electoral Roll*. Canberra, p. 34.

- 1.20 The ANAO concluded that the Australian Electoral Roll is one of high integrity and that it can be relied on for electoral purposes.
- 1.21 The ANAO also concluded that the AEC is managing the Electoral Roll effectively. It found that the AEC has mechanisms in place that provide assurance that the names and addresses on the Electoral Roll are legitimate and valid and that people who are eligible to vote are registered properly.
- 1.22 However, the ANAO reported that there were areas of the AEC's management of the Roll that could be improved, in particular by:
- better targeting of, and expansion of the number of data sources used to update the Roll;
 - strengthening strategic relationships with key stakeholders; and
 - better identification and management of risks to the integrity of the Roll.
- 1.23 The Audit Report contained 12 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the AEC.

Structure of the Report

- 1.24 The structure of this report reflects the issues considered by the Committee during its review. They fall into three broad areas:
- analysis of Roll integrity;
 - administration of the Electoral Roll; and
 - AEC management issues.
- 1.25 Chapter 2 addresses the four components of integrity, namely accuracy, completeness, validity and security, and also the related issue of fraudulent enrolments.
- 1.26 Chapter 3 addresses a number of administrative issues relating to the Continuous Roll Update process, including how the Roll is maintained, and the verification and streamlining of the Continuous Roll Update process.
- 1.27 Chapter 4 addresses AEC management issues, including management information systems, the implementation of the Audit Report's recommendations and stakeholder relationships.

- 1.28 Supporting information is provided in Appendices A - D:
- a status report on the AEC's implementation of recommendations from the Audit Report (Appendix A);
 - a list of submissions (Appendix B);
 - a list of exhibits (Appendix C); and
 - details of the public hearing (Appendix D).
- 1.29 A copy of this report is available on the Committee's website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/audit42/index.htm>.