

# SUBMISSION 6

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Secretary  
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Parliament House  
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## **Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters – Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education**

This submission centres on one aspect of the current inquiry that is **the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities.**

### My Background

I have worked as a casual employee for both the Western Australian and Australian Electoral Commissions in the conduct of elections since the 1960's.

For the Western Australian Electoral Commission I have conducted early remote polling in the following communities, Yandeyarra, Woodstock-Abydos, Warralong, Warburton, Wingellina, Blackstone, Jameson, Coonana, Tjuntjuntjara, Wanarn, Warakurna, Tjukurla, Patjarr, Tjirrkarli, Kanpa, Burringurrah, Mount Margaret and Cosmo Newberry.

I have also conducted elections for the Shire of Wiluna and the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, as well as having assisted in an electoral roll check in a number of the above mentioned communities.

### Points presented for consideration

During the 2005 State Election early polling process it became clear that members of the communities we visited did not have the knowledge to vote unassisted. Whilst many electors had voted at previous elections their residual memory as to the process was not clear. Indeed this applies to many electors in Australia's metropolitan areas, particularly in the case of new citizens.

In collecting the votes, a conscious effort was made, with the overview of Party scrutineers, to teach Community members how to vote instead of simply assisting them to complete their ballot papers. To explain how this was achieved, it is necessary to provide some background to remote polling. The Returning Officer for the remote area normally constructs a detailed timetable for early polling and then provides copies of this to all Parties and any Independent candidates for the electoral District or Region. When the remote polling team arrive at a location by air, it is normally accompanied by another light aircraft or two containing Party representatives, whose job it is to hand out the 'how to vote' brochures and scrutinise the voting process.

In some locations the remote team will employ a local person to assist in identifying community members on the roll and ensure all within the community have voted. This person normally also advises whether a person has moved to another community or has died. Another situation occurs where, for cultural reasons a person has adopted a different name.

The Party representatives also obtain assistance from respected community members to hand out 'how to vote' and offer encouragement to locals to vote in a certain way.

Once the community member has the ballot papers and moves to the privacy of a polling booth, normally that person has two ballot papers and two or more how to vote brochures in their hands. This is where the confusion commences. The assistance given by my team consisted of initially ensuring the elector knew who he or she wanted to vote for. Once this was established they would remove any other how to vote literature. The elector was then shown the two ballot papers and these were compared with the information on the appropriate how to vote brochure. They were then informed to copy the information onto the respective ballot paper and then fold their papers.

This took longer than simply obtaining the vote, however, the formality of the votes for the remote polling team was high. As mentioned before, this process was observed by the Scrutineers in attendance.

My observations and thoughts from this exercise have been conveyed to the Western Australian Electoral Commission and are detailed hereunder as well as observations that may assist future candidates in remote areas.

1. In a number of Communities, the electors have no idea who their local Member is or what Party he or she represents. Often comment is made that the local Member is only seen just prior to an election.
2. The cost of conducting electoral education is high due to the remote nature of the Communities and the uncertainty of the numbers that would:
  - a. Be in attendance in the Community as cultural events take members out of the Community on a regular basis, and
  - b. The willingness of Community members to attend electoral education.
3. There is a necessity to undertake early polling in remote areas and therefore the high cost of conducting this cannot be avoided. This is the time to conduct electoral education when the matter is relevant to the elector.

4. It appears to have been the practice of Electoral Commissions to employ temporary electoral officials to conduct remote polling. I hold the view that this should cease if electoral education is to be conducted at the same time as polling and trained Commission staff should be used in their place.
5. Community members have a genuine desire to be part of the process and respect the time and courtesy given to them during their uncertainty that confronts them at election time.
6. The role of an electoral official in assisting an elector is to ensure that the elector's intention is transmitted to the ballot paper correctly. In this respect, if there are four candidates on the Legislative Assembly or House of Representatives ballot papers but only two Parties have provided 'how to vote' cards, this almost eliminates those Parties who have not provided 'how to vote' cards from obtaining votes. The practice of posting or forwarding a bundle of cards to the Community generally does not work. Personal representation is respected.
7. Another observation is that a photo of the candidate on the 'how to vote' card assists Community members to arrive at a decision. The practice of inserting a photo of the candidate and also the Party Leader confuses. It raises the question as to why two people are shown when you only vote for one. This, of course, forms part of the electoral education process.
8. I am firmly of the view that electoral education at the relevant time just prior to the election and conducted every election will produce a better result for Communities than specific visits between elections when the relevance is not so obvious.

## General

At the 2005 State Election in Western Australia, the Government decided to conduct a referendum involving two questions dealing with extended shopping hours in the Perth metropolitan area. These questions had to be answered by all electors. Prior to leaving Perth I considered the relevance of these questions to the Communities I was visiting. I was genuinely pleased to see the thought and consideration given by the majority of Community members to these questions and the genuineness of their response although the majority had never been to Perth.

Having conducted a meeting in an attempt to encourage community members to become candidates in a Local Government election, I am not sure that electoral education other than on a 'one to one' basis would be worthwhile.

Brian Moore