

PERRY BALLARD

INQUIRY INTO THE 2001 FEDERAL ELECTION

SUBMISSION

POSTAL ADDRESS

PO Box 63
FRANKSTON VIC 3199

RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Unit 1/4 Maxwell Court
LANGWARRIN VIC 3910

CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Business Hours (until Dec 2002 only) 03 9765 6015
Home-After Hours 03 9789 0307
Mobile-Messagebank 0417335008

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

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	151
Date Received	17/07/02
Secretary	<i>Shah</i>

1.

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: SUBMISSION INTO THE 2001 FEDERAL ELECTION

INTRODUCTION

I am writing this submission based on my background and knowledge as a Polling Place Official, having been employed at every State (Vic) and Federal election since the March 1993 Federal Election. With one exception, I have always been employed at Langwarrin Secondary College; the largest booth in the electorate.

MAIN POINTS OF SUBMISSION

1. CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Advertising Prior to Election day
- Signage at Polling Booths
- General Improvements to Polling Booths on Election Day
- Future Changes to Elections

2. RENUMERATION

- Time Sheets

Customer Service Overview

In the last "Polling Place Procedures" manual, (distributed to staff prior to each election), The paragraph on Customer Service was listed last in the "Introduction" section and was all of four lines. I have reproduced it here, with your permission as follows:

"Every eligible Australian citizen has the democratic right to vote in an election. They are our customers. The AEC Customer Service Charter states that AEC staff will provide a certain level of service to all our customers. As an AEC employee you are required to be professional in your dealings with all your customers and to treat them with respect and courtesy".

2.

In my opinion this is insufficient information for a training manual. During training sessions the Charter has never been discussed or shown in any form. Is it available for perusal at AEC offices and should it be included in future training sessions? The Charter is of no use if no one knows about it.

Another area of note is privacy. Does the AEC now have a privacy policy, have they issued a privacy statement and do they have anyone employed as a Privacy Officer as detailed in the Privacy Commissioner's requirements under the Privacy Act Dec 2001?

How the election is conducted in the eyes of the public is in some cases just as important as the actual voting. Disputes or queries can be resolved much easier if responded to with Customer Service in mind.

Advertising prior to Election day

In my opinion there is sufficient advertising prior to election day with TV & radio commercials, large newspaper advertisements and various mail outs regarding how to vote and postal voting. However, not everyone reads the newspaper and not everyone takes note of this information for such an important day.

One example of improving this would be the case where a new or additional booth has been made available for a forthcoming election. If letter drops are not already carried out to advise nearby residents of this, then all school children, local shops etc should be given some sort of advice forms to pass on to their parents/rest of family. I will give an example of this later in my submission under the heading "Signage" as to why I think this should be looked at.

Signage at Polling Booths

In my opinion there is insufficient Signage on Election Day. Just a couple of signs on the outside fence stating POLLING BOOTH is inadequate. There should be a further sign detailing the next one or two nearest polling booths in the local vicinity to save people having to come in and queue at the enquiry counter just to ask this information. I understand the newspapers usually list all this including the actual AEC offices, etc but not everyone reads the news or is interested in reading these matters. It is only on the day itself that it becomes important. This is more relevant at a larger booth where longer queues are possible.

There also should be a general sign which details information such as the AEC's Privacy Policy and that if the voter is voting absent that they do not need to wait in the general queue and then be told to wait in another queue in order to vote absent.

3.

Inside the actual booth the tables should be clearly numbered so the Queue Controller can direct people easier and quicker than having to say, as an example, "The table at the back with the lady with the yellow top is now free". Multiply this by 5000 voters and you can work out the extra time taken plus it is a lot more professional to have and say a table number. The numbers would need to be of a certain height and size, that is large enough to be easily read from a distance of at least 5 metres. They would need to be firmly connected to the tables like a flag pole with the number being, say 45cms. in length. Once again, this is more relevant in a large booth where there may be 9 or more tables. For example, where I am normally employed, the Polling booth is inside the school sports hall and is probably 50 metres long by 30 metres wide. The actual tables taking up a small section of the total area.

General Improvements to Polling Booths on Election Day

Referring back to some of my previous comments these would include better signage indicating where other booths are located, numbered tables and "Privacy Statement/Policy" notices, very important for electors to know their voting and personal details are kept secure at all times.

Another idea I would like to mention, again for the future and for larger booths, would be to have two queue controllers, one to ask how many are voting today and hand out the relevant voting forms and the other to direct them to the next available desk. On the downside this may lengthen the time in the queue, but this depends entirely on how many people attend the booth on the given day and the voters would need to be watched to ensure they did go to the table to have their names marked off the roll and not straight to the polling booth to complete the form. Perhaps this would only transfer the time factor from the desk back to the queue but it would help with possibly not having to stand in two queues, something which certainly happens at present.

Also, a common problem is running out of enrolment amendment notices and change of details forms. When this occurs, people are loath to have to go to either a post office or AEC office to complete a form, they want to do it on the day. What happens is that they can't be bothered and therefore when the next election happens their details are still incorrect and they have to do another absentee vote, (for instance). I do not know the answer to this, I am just advising you of a common problem at the elections I have been employed at.

4.

Future Changes to elections

I have some ideas on how future elections could be conducted. These include:

Mailing out all the applicable forms to voters in a secure envelope, similar to present day salary slips which are printed in a secure way. This would do away with the booth having to carry, count and balance the forms issued to them prior to the election. Any problems with change of address, wrong details, names, etc could be resolved prior to the election by extending the cut off date for the closure of the electoral roll. This would result in a faster movement of people on polling day but a possible increase in queries/absentee voters on the day due to incorrect information received.

Perhaps Swipe Machines could be installed at booths and medicare cards used to swipe the details, thus avoiding the need to mark off the roll by hand. This would stop the accidental crossing out of someone incorrectly, avoiding the need to send letters, fine people for not voting and confrontations with people who say they voted. Even the actual voting forms could be printed off at the time, including absentee votes, thus eliminating the need to hold, count and balance used and unused forms.

Also, each Polling Place manager could have a laptop computer where all amendment notices, change of detail forms, change of name and even the count and balancing procedures could be entered on line.

Remuneration

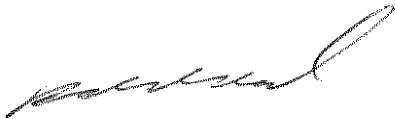
I think the salaries paid to polling staff should be calculated on the time spent working at your booth on the day of the election. It is unfair that you can work at a small booth and be out by 7pm/8pm but at a large booth you can leave at midnight and be paid the same. There should be a minimum base wage for everyone, worked on 7am to 8pm. For every full hour worked after 8pm, additional payment should be made. This does not have to be time and a half or double time, just simply payment for the hours you worked. For example if you are paid \$260- gross for 13 hours work, (\$20- per hour from 7am to 8pm) and you work to midnight, you then receive 4 hours @ \$20- per hour additional payment. A time sheet would need to be completed and signed for by the Polling Place OIC and returned to the AEC returning officer for processing. As it is now, all staff are marked as being employed on the day of the election, prior to payment being authorised.

5.

To finish off, I would like to say that even though some of the above may be irrelevant to the enquiry, especially sections on future elections, I trust the above will be given appropriate consideration. Finally, I do not have a problem with confidentiality and trust part or all of my submission is accepted for inclusion in your enquiry.

I would like to thank you for your consideration and look forward to any feedback regarding the above.

Regards



PERRY EDWIN BALLARD