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**The Secretary  
 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
 Parliament House  
 Canberra**

**A suggested alternative for managing the Electoral Roll.**

**Factors for consideration.**

1. The Electoral Roll is a list of electors maintained by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and continuously updated for additions and deletions.
2. Changes are made as the information becomes available to the AEC, inevitably with some delay, which can run to many months (see below "How accurate is the Electoral Roll?").
3. Therefore on any election day the Electoral Roll will **never** be 100% accurate.
4. There are other government departments and non-government organizations maintaining databases from which the Electoral Roll could be created at election time.

Medicare	RTAs in the states
Social Security	White Pages
Taxation Department	Energy companies
Immigration Department	

5. Many of these databases by their very functions are required to be more current than the Electoral Roll, so that a roll compiled from them would be at least as current as the Electoral Roll under the present system.

## **Proposition**

1. When an election is called, the Electoral Roll would be produced by one of the above departments tapping all the databases listed above.

*Note: **Every night** in their computers at Belconnen, the Department of Social Security runs a data-matching program across government databases to detect fraudulent claims. This demonstrates that much of **the mechanism** for producing the Electoral Roll from these databases **is already in place.***

2. When the Electoral Roll has been prepared, a nation-wide mail-out of electors would be conducted notifying people that they are on the roll, plus whatever other information needed to be disseminated.
3. It is likely there would be a significant amount of "return to sender" mail. All such names would be flagged and put on a separate provisional roll and would be entitled to vote on proof of identity. These would be normal, not provisional votes.
4. Anyone finding that they are not on the roll, would, on proof of identity and residence, be given a provisional vote (presently referred to as a section vote).
5. Provisional votes would only be counted in close ballots, and then only after a data-matching check, and if necessary a door-knock.
6. Following the election, names on the provisional roll ("return to sender" names from the mail-out) would be checked at the original database(s) and if incorrect, deleted.
7. People who thought they might be missed by such a system, could, on request, obtain a long-term (say 10 years) proof of identity card from the RTA. Being on the RTA database, they would automatically be on the roll.

***Thus the present roll maintenance system of the AEC could be discarded.***

## **How accurate is the Electoral Roll ?**

### **The writer's first-hand experience.**

1. In October 2001 before the Federal Election in November 2001, the writer undertook a review of "return to sender" mail in the Federal Division of Wentworth. The Liberal candidate had conducted an electorate-wide mail-out in July 2001, which resulted in "return to sender" mail of about 1700. The writer went through these "1700" comparing them with the Electoral Roll as of September 2001 (2 months later). The vast majority of the "1700" were still on the roll in September.

2. In February 1999 before the NSW State Election in March 1999, the writer and Mr. Bruce Kirkpatrick examined the roll for the seat of Coogee, based on the roll updated to January 1999. From about half the roll, they door-knocked houses with 3 or more different surnames or 2 couples listed at the same address. Of these there were 22 people who had moved, some 12 months previously.

### **Other instances of inaccuracies of the Electoral Roll.**

3. In the Federal Division of Parramatta, leading up to the 2001 Federal election, the sitting Liberal member conducted a mail-out, with over 800 being returned "not known at this address".

4. In 1998 Jim Lloyd, MP for the Federal Division of Robertson, identified over 4,000 names which were removed from the roll.

5. Following the 1990 Federal election in the Division of Richmond, the National Party challenged many names, and the AEC itself sent out 2,701 letters, of which 474 were returned "not known at this address".

*It is unlikely that these are isolated instances.*

**Peter Brun - July 2002**