Ms Margot Kerley
Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Kerley

AEC SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT AND INTEGRITY OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2002 inviting the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to provide a formal written submission to the above inquiry by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA).

Due to commitments relating to the Joint Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) inquiry into the conduct of the 2001 Federal Election and resourcing issues in relation to the preparation of such a submission, the AEC will be providing only a brief overview of the current information management and integrity environment in the AEC.

Notwithstanding this, the AEC intends to cooperate fully with the JCPAA during this inquiry, and will be available to appear at a public hearing to discuss these matters and, if required, the concerns and issues facing a small agency in meeting security requirements. In addition, the AEC will assist in providing advice on electoral matters raised in other submissions.

Two sections administer the information technology environment in the AEC: IT Applications and IT Business Services.

IT Applications provides ongoing maintenance, enhancements and support for the AEC's major in-house developed applications:

- the system that administers the Commonwealth Electoral Roll, the **R**oll **MAN**agement **S**ystem (RMANS);
- the staffing management and payroll application for election casual staff (AECPAY); and
- the federal **EL**ection **M**anagement **S**ystem (ELMS).

In addition, IT Applications assists operational areas of the AEC in developing functional requirements; develops new applications; and provides assistance and technical advice on alternative options for system development.

IT Business Services administers:

- the contract with CSC for the provision of information technology infrastructure including mainframe, mid-range, desktop and help desk (although desktop and help desk is currently being transitioned back in-house);
- the contract with Optus for the provision of voice and data network services;
- the AEC's intranet, and desktop internet access;
- assistance to users with problem resolution of IT related functions that are not covered by the above contracts; and
- the coordination of major IT projects.

The AEC has been the subject of the following recent Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audits into the security of AEC systems and information management:

- *ANAO Report No 42 2001-2002, Integrity of Electoral Roll*; and
- *ANAO Report No 13 2001-2002, Internet Security within Commonwealth Government Agencies.*

Both audits concluded that the AEC was effective in its security of website and electronic data and made a number of recommendations for further improvement. The recommendations are currently being implemented.

The *ANAO Report No 13 2001-2002, Internet Security within Commonwealth Government Agencies* was conducted over the period December 2000 to March 2001. Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) assisted the ANAO in the conduct of the audit. DSD's findings resulting from the audit included the following:

- the AEC website is well protected and well configured;
- appropriate procedures have been applied to ensure risk minimisation and strong security on operating systems;
- the web content is static and considered low risk;
- generally the AEC has a secure website; and
- the AEC's Internet presence requires a closer working relationship between the AEC and CSC.

The following is a summary of the recommendations:

- the AEC revise its IT Security Policy (which was outdated);
- the AEC continue to require CSC to provide regular reports on security related incidents;
- CSC should provide the AEC with current documentation on network diagrams and standard operating systems;
- the AEC will request CSC to improve logging standards; and
- the AEC will request that CSC conduct a review of database drivers on the web publishing platform "Cold Fusion" and remove those identified as unnecessary.

The AEC concurred with the findings and action is in train on all the recommendations contained in the report.

The *ANAO Report No 42 2001-2002, Integrity of Electoral Roll,* tabled on 18 April 2002 found that AEC procedures to ensure roll security and to prevent tampering with roll data were robust and effective (page 95). The recommendation from this audit relating to IT security (Recommendation 12), mentioned the need to "assess and minimise risks to the integrity of the roll arising from new technology and increased access to roll data". The AEC concurs with this recommendation.

The actions taken both independently and as the result of the ANAO audits support the view that the AEC's IT systems, including the website, are robust and secure.

Currently, significant development work is in hand to continue to improve IT security as the AEC IT environment evolves. This work includes: network classification; threat and risk assessments; gap analysis; and an overarching IT security policy. It also includes a project to review our future hosting requirements, both for the Website and AEC Internet Gateway.

In addition, the AEC has purchased tools to facilitate on-line learning for the purposes of continuing education and staff awareness of IT and web security, confidentiality, and privacy issues. This provides the AEC with the capability to provide cost-effective and improved IT security training to our widely dispersed staff.

The AEC's contracts with its IT providers, both for the network and the website, have substantial IT security requirements. The CSC environment, including our Internet firewall, is DSD accredited and ongoing reviews are conducted regularly. For example, a threat and risk analysis of our website was conducted by CSC in October 2001 just prior to the last Federal Election. CSC reports to the AEC monthly on general security issues and progress, and immediately if significant threats or incidents occur.

A significant factor in the security of our website and protection of private information stored in our systems, is that the AEC website has no links with our internal network or data stores.

Please contact Mr Ken Hunter, Assistant Commissioner, Information Technology on (02) 6271-4446 if you have any questions about this matter.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dacey
Deputy Electoral Commissioner

    February 2003