Electoral Commissioner

Mr Daryl Melham MP
Chairman
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Melham

Thank you for your letter of 26 August 2008 requesting further information from the AEC to assist the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) in its inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 election and matters relating thereto.

You requested information about the Indigenous outreach program, known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service (ATSIEIS), conducted by the AEC prior to 1996.

The attached response from the AEC addresses the specific issues outlined in your letter, namely:

1. The aims of the program, including the specific groups it was targeted towards.

2. How the program was structured. Was it a national program with national coordination and funding, or was it state/territory based and funded?

3. How the operations of the program changed between non election and election periods?

4. Whether the program took on a particular state/territory based focus in the lead up to and during state/territory elections and, if so, did state/territory electoral commissions provide any funding to assist with the cost of providing the program?

5. What staffing level was required to conduct the program and how did those levels change between non election and election periods?

6. The actual cost of the program and the estimated cost of providing that same service, now and into the future.

7. How the AEC might structure and resource a program with similar aims, should it be required to do so again. For example, what would the AEC require in terms of resources and funding if it was to design such a program in the modern age, and perform a similar function into the future?

8. Any comment on issues relevant to this matter that you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee."

The AEC has constructed this response based on information provided in old files, publications and reports and by consulting with AEC staff who were involved in the program. However, given that ATSIEIS was discontinued over 12 years ago, some of our responses are based on best estimates or our interpretation of events. Nevertheless, I am happy to elaborate on or clarify the AEC's response if required.

I have also attached for the Committee's interest, 2006 Census data outlining Indigenous population on a divisional level.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dacey
Acting Electoral Commissioner

13 October 2008

AEC RESPONSE TO JSCEM ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS OF 26 AUGUST 2008

Information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service (ATSIEIS) program

From the late 1970's to the early 1980's the then Australian Electoral Office operated the Aboriginal Electoral Education Program (AEEP), which provided remote area electoral education and enrolment services. This program evolved into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service (ATSIEIS), and was administered by the newly formed AEC in 1984.

Objectives of the ATSIEIS program were to:-

1. conduct an effective national electoral education and information program that meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

2. establish, promote and support where practical an information resource network of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Community Electoral Assistants (CEAs)

3. provide electoral information other than through the CEA networks to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

4. undertake electoral education activities in educational institutions with a significant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student population.

5. promote an awareness of and participation in the electoral process through the electronic and print media.

6. enrol Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander electors and check existing enrolment during visits to relevant communities and groups.

ATSIEIS was the key mechanism for the delivery of electoral services to Indigenous Australians until 1996 and covered federal, ATSIC, state/territory and local elections. In 1995/96 the program was managed centrally and consisted of three Canberra-based staff to co-ordinate and develop curriculum resources, 17 field staff mostly of Indigenous background and a further network of Indigenous Community Electoral Assistants.

AEC field officers worked in rural and remote areas throughout North Queensland and the Torres Strait, parts of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. One field officer also worked on a part-time basis throughout Tasmania.

AEC field officers, who were all permanent staff, were responsible for visiting communities and providing electoral education/information and updating and verifying enrolments in those communities. Field staff were also responsible for identifying (through community consultation) appropriate people in each community who could be trained and then act as Community Electoral Assistants. These positions, which were not permanent or AEC staff, were essentially a community resource that people could go to for electoral information. Community Electoral Assistants were paid to attend AEC training and assisted field staff update enrolment within the community. Many Electoral Assistants were deployed during election periods to undertake remote mobile polling.

The 1991 Report of the JSCEM Inquiry on the *Aboriginal and Islander Electoral Information Service* complimented the program's achievements but expressed concern about its focus on remote populations, claiming it was not catering for the majority of the Indigenous population who lived in urban and regional areas. The program was subsequently expanded to cover a broader geographical area, including urban and regional locations, with field officers working in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

Other evaluations of ATSIEIS were supportive of the program but none could assess the effectiveness of the program in terms of improving Indigenous electoral participation and engagement. This was mainly due to a lack of assessment tools and information systems to capture relevant data.

ATSIC elections also were an influential mechanism for engaging the interest of Indigenous people in enrolment and for promoting awareness about voting. The elections also enabled the AEC to access additional ATSIC-specific funding to conduct enrolment update and public awareness exercises specifically for Indigenous people.

Around 1990, the AEC first engaged temporary Community Electoral Information Officers (CEIOs) to conduct visits in the months prior to ATSIC elections to provide electoral information and to check and collect enrolments, in regional, remote and some urban Indigenous communities. The role of CEIOs was then expanded to provide these services at the time of federal elections as well.

In 2007 CEIOs visited over 800 Indigenous communities and organisations. CEIOs collected 1409 enrolment forms and confirmed the status of 14,500 electors. Total expenditure on the 2007 CEIO program was $466,994.

As the ATSIEIS program was designed as a continuous one, there was little change between election and non-election periods in terms of staff numbers and resources.

when the majority of education and information resources were produced. Most of the ATSEIS field staff were deployed in operational roles, such as remote mobile polling, during election periods.

The ATSIEIS program was designed to cover the three levels of government. Staff were trained in the differences between federal, state/territory and local government systems and conducted education sessions in communities. During a state election period, the focus of field staff from that state/territory would be on the state election. However, the majority of work had a federal focus.

The ATSIEIS program was entirely funded by the AEC, There was no funding provided by state electoral authorities.

Funding of $2m per annum was discontinued for the ATSIEIS program in the 1996/97 federal budget. Following the abolition of the program, the AEC funded an information officer position in all states, other than Tasmania, and in the Northern Territory. These officers ensured that Indigenous clients were kept informed of electoral matters, undertook field work in conjunction with electoral events (when additional funding would be available) and undertook other duties of an informational/educational nature.

Post- ATSIEIS electoral services for Indigenous Australians.

Since 2003 the AEC's NT office has used two full time field officers to travel throughout the Territory conducting enrolment drives, public awareness and electoral education sessions. In 2006 the AEC NT office in partnership with the NT Electoral Commission (NTEC) began working with various community representatives, organisations and other stakeholders to develop an integrated electoral service for remote communities. This linked polling, voter education and enrolment strategies into one delivery mechanism covering both federal and territory government requirements. The AEC and NTEC now operate a joint local Electoral Office in Alice Springs, which is managed by NTEC staff.

In 2006 the AEC also established a Northern and Central Australia Remote Area Strategy (NACARAS) to coordinate nationally consistent policies and standards for the delivery of AEC electoral services to regional and remote areas across Northern and Central Australia. NACARAS is managed by an internal working group comprising AEC managers from NSW, WA, QLD, SA and the NT. Under the strategy effective AEC services are being delivered through cross border arrangements. The AEC's approach to enrolment updating has also been revised under this strategy to take into account the particular needs of more transient populations in remote communities.

As part of its ongoing public awareness programs the AEC also attends Indigenous events and festivals such as Croc Fests, NAIDOC Week and Career Expos across the country including in urban areas. A special section of the AEC website has also been created for Indigenous electors.

country including in urban areas. A special section of the AEC website has also been created for Indigenous electors.

As part of the national advertising campaign, Indigenous specific advertising was developed and placed in Indigenous press and radio. Radio advertising was also translated in six Indigenous languages, and advertising to promote the availability and timetable for CEIO visits and remote mobile polling was conducted in target areas. The total expenditure for media placement of the Indigenous pre-enrolment and election advertising in 2007 was $403,972, which included advertising to inform the community of changes to enrolment procedures (introduction of POI and new close of rolls deadlines).

The structure and resourcing for a similar future program.

The AEC has given quite a lot of consideration to how a program with similar aims to that of ATSIEIS could be structured and resourced. However, a future program would first require extensive consultation with Indigenous communities and organisations as well as with other Commonwealth agencies providing Indigenous services. So, the AEC's response to this question from JSCEM is based on early thinking ahead of such a formal consultation process.

The AEC acknowledges there are many challenges to improving the enrolment and electoral engagement of the Indigenous population. Indigenous people are not one homogenous community but rather a variety of people from sophisticated, educated urban dwellers, to people living in remote areas for whom English is a second or third language. This means that the type and delivery of electoral information cannot be a "one size fits all".

Indigenous communities are also very diverse – by geographical location, languages spoken, skin group and in relation to their access to government programs and services and their levels of interest in participating in the electoral process. English language proficiency also decreases the more a community is marginalised (irrespective of whether they are urban or rural based).

Other factors include:

Lower school retention rates and below national average literacy and numeracy levels
Cultural activities
Health and social conditions
The general remoteness of many Indigenous communities and the transient nature of their inhabitants
Limited knowledge and apathy – there can be a perception that "it's all white man's business" and not relevant to Indigenous people
Suspicion, fear of change and confusion – indigenous communities can be suspicious of government motivations when undertaking information programs. There is confusion

about the differences between levels of government, and voting systems. Indigenous people tend to be more engaged in local council elections, which involve known candidates and local issues

The oral tradition in Indigenous culture and language – making face-to-face communication and the building of trusted personal relationships important in communication.

Given such challenges, the AEC considers that the core component of its activities to increase enrolment and electoral engagement of Indigenous Australians, must continue to involve regular contact with, and visits to, Indigenous communities in remote, regional and urban areas and the engagement of Indigenous staff in delivery of electoral services and education.

Electoral education can cover a spectrum of activities from basic electoral information to promote correct enrolment and voting, to delivery of more substantial electoral and civics education aimed at engendering longer term interest and involvement in Australia's democratic system.

Whilst the primary responsibility for providing civics education in Australia lies with state and territory education authorities, the AEC and state and territory electoral bodies have an important role in providing electoral information and education to the community. Section 7 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* outlines the functions of the AEC including "(c) to promote public awareness of electoral and Parliamentary matters by means of the conduct of education and information programs and by other means".

If the AEC were to design and structure a new program to improve participation and electoral engagement of Indigenous Australians, the AEC would seek to:

- Improve the AEC's capacity and capability for communication and engagement with Indigenous Australians including establishment of more formal national, state and local consultation processes

- Undertake dedicated research to gain a better evidence base to improve targeting of Indigenous communication and identify enrolment and voting issues for Indigenous people

- Develop a tailored new curriculum involving Indigenous Australians for delivery through CEIO and school based electoral education programs

- Conduct an expanded ongoing CEIO program engaging Indigenous staff, with regular visits to regional and remote and urban communities, not just in the lead up to an election

- Develop a bank of communication products and resources specifically for Indigenous audiences

- Develop and maintain an information system to support, plan and monitor the effectiveness of electoral services and education particularly in regional and remote communities

- Build partnerships with Indigenous organisations and networks, including Indigenous Co-ordination Centres, and other agencies to further promote enrolment and electoral education (this could involve trialling new initiatives or establishing joint service delivery arrangements)

- Undertake more public awareness and advertising for Indigenous audiences, including through use of newer communication channels such as the Koori Network, WARU website, and other Indigenous radio and television, and internet network, and

- Engage more local Indigenous people to work in Remote Mobile Polling teams and as polling officials, including in regional and urban areas.

It is recommended that the priority of any expanded activity should continue to be on Indigenous Australians residing in remote and regional communities where enrolment and voter turnout is lower but where informality appears to be higher. Activities should also be undertaken to better understand and address the gaps in electoral participation and engagement of Indigenous Australians in urban areas.

The JSCEM Inquiry and the Government's Green Paper process on Electoral Reform may also identify possible legislative changes that may remove some barriers to electoral engagement for marginalised groups including Indigenous Australians (e.g. Proof of Identity for enrolment, provisions for no fixed address enrolment, automatic roll updating and more flexible mobile polling). Any legislative changes that were to result would also need to be effectively communicated to the community, including to Indigenous Australians and other special groups through additional public awareness and electoral education programs.

Costing

It is not possible at this time for the AEC to provide a detailed costing to undertake all of the activities listed above. However the resources required would be expected to be in the order of $5 million in the start-up year and $3.5 million per annum thereafter. Major costs would be for:

- engagement of some additional permanent and temporary staff to plan and deliver electoral education and enrolment drives to Indigenous communities

across Australia – this would include undertaking consultation processes, building partnerships with other agencies and groups who deliver services to Indigenous Australians.

- Travel costs including provision of equipment and vehicles to support field staff visits

- Staff training

- Strategic research to inform program targeting, priorities and assess program effectiveness

- Development and production of appropriate electoral information and education materials

- Development and media buy of appropriate supporting Indigenous communications –(eg advertising of upcoming field visits, Koori communications channels)

- IT costs for development and maintenance of a system to capture program activity and local information to monitor program performance

Indigenous persons as a percentage of the total population for each division (in descending order)

Division	State	Total population all ages	Total Indigenous Population (all ages)	Indigenous %
Lingiari	NT	101304	44102	43.53%
Kalgoorlie	WA	142105	25962	18.27%
Leichhardt	QLD	153578	24324	15.84%
Kennedy	QLD	144527	18004	12.46%
Parkes	NSW	134126	15201	11.33%
Solomon	NT	91518	9409	10.28%
Calare	NSW	127639	10407	8.15%
Herbert	QLD	135466	9300	6.87%
New England	NSW	130806	8454	6.46%
Grey	SA	140526	9018	6.42%
Braddon	TAS	95366	4897	5.13%
Cowper	NSW	129430	6541	5.05%
O'Connor	WA	124069	5990	4.83%
Maranoa	QLD	126595	5968	4.71%
Capricornia	QLD	140786	6426	4.56%
Page	NSW	130611	5927	4.54%
Dawson	QLD	133087	5786	4.35%
Franklin	TAS	98613	4139	4.20%
Riverina	NSW	134401	5484	4.08%
Flynn	QLD	134263	5274	3.93%
Gilmore	NSW	116953	4144	3.54%
Chifley	NSW	153307	5376	3.51%
Lyne	NSW	117145	3832	3.27%
Hunter	NSW	127980	4148	3.24%
Farrer	NSW	134249	4310	3.21%
Lyons	TAS	92970	2888	3.11%
Blair	QLD	135234	4102	3.03%
Groom	QLD	131428	3896	2.96%
Wide Bay	QLD	126694	3734	2.95%
Oxley	QLD	142901	4150	2.90%
Hasluck	WA	122032	3468	2.84%

Paterson	NSW	121704	3440	2.83%
Hinkler	QLD	124690	3434	2.75%
Bass	TAS	94243	2560	2.72%
Eden-Monaro	NSW	127534	3383	2.65%
Pearce	WA	145124	3699	2.55%
Rankin	QLD	146520	3704	2.53%
Lindsay	NSW	135633	3418	2.52%
Charlton	NSW	124201	3110	2.50%
Richmond	NSW	126469	3073	2.43%
Shortland	NSW	123936	2964	2.39%
Dobell	NSW	128460	3053	2.38%
Denison	TAS	94324	2237	2.37%
Throsby	NSW	123024	2831	2.30%
Longman	QLD	134157	3064	2.28%
Murray	VIC	126114	2837	2.25%
Forde	QLD	135234	3021	2.23%
Macarthur	NSW	126600	2795	2.21%
Mallee	VIC	128542	2805	2.18%
Newcastle	NSW	129093	2800	2.17%
Macquarie	NSW	133178	2870	2.16%
Wakefield	SA	141075	2871	2.04%
Swan	WA	127709	2592	2.03%
Barker	SA	145401	2935	2.02%
Brand	WA	139200	2716	1.95%
Forrest	WA	133250	2588	1.94%
Port Adelaide	SA	146003	2808	1.92%
Hume	NSW	125895	2335	1.85%
Werriwa	NSW	143804	2625	1.83%
Lilley	QLD	129446	2283	1.76%
Greenway	NSW	134928	2347	1.74%
Robertson	NSW	131822	2278	1.73%
Canning	WA	140131	2380	1.70%
Gippsland	VIC	131465	2211	1.68%
Fremantle	WA	126083	1982	1.57%
Petrie	QLD	124968	1938	1.55%
Bonner	QLD	129485	1990	1.54%
Bowman	QLD	128895	1942	1.51%
Perth	WA	127147	1896	1.49%
Fisher	QLD	123830	1777	1.44%

Kingsford Smith	NSW	150839	2094	1.39%
Stirling	WA	128601	1775	1.38%
Griffith	QLD	128920	1776	1.38%
Cunningham	NSW	128983	1776	1.38%
Dickson	QLD	129118	1744	1.35%
Canberra	ACT	165057	2183	1.32%
Fairfax	QLD	128598	1645	1.28%
Cowan	WA	136562	1743	1.28%
Fowler	NSW	134500	1700	1.26%
Sydney	NSW	151986	1908	1.26%
Fraser	ACT	158638	1871	1.18%
Brisbane	QLD	133324	1555	1.17%
Kingston	SA	139026	1609	1.16%
Grayndler	NSW	137481	1583	1.15%
Fadden	QLD	144528	1663	1.15%
Makin	SA	132776	1450	1.09%
Wannon	VIC	125356	1307	1.04%
McPherson	QLD	138045	1435	1.04%
Adelaide	SA	140196	1419	1.01%
Bendigo	VIC	131901	1312	0.99%
Parramatta	NSW	143469	1393	0.97%
Moncrieff	QLD	142394	1371	0.96%
Indi	VIC	123925	1143	0.92%
Moreton	QLD	132945	1209	0.91%
Ballarat	VIC	129220	1144	0.89%
Batman	VIC	128069	1108	0.87%
Corio	VIC	126172	1055	0.84%
Prospect	NSW	135545	1122	0.83%
McEwen	VIC	147219	1143	0.78%
McMillan	VIC	118244	904	0.76%
Reid	NSW	161855	1183	0.73%
Hughes	NSW	130152	942	0.72%
Lalor	VIC	158141	1125	0.71%
Hindmarsh	SA	132492	927	0.70%
Banks	NSW	129477	894	0.69%
Mayo	SA	130298	878	0.67%
Scullin	VIC	126788	830	0.65%
Blaxland	NSW	143317	936	0.65%
Holt	VIC	161347	1010	0.63%

Cook	NSW	124622	777	0.62%
Sturt	SA	135269	841	0.62%
Calwell	VIC	147782	892	0.60%
Tangney	WA	120816	677	0.56%
Boothby	SA	128643	719	0.56%
Corangamite	VIC	127829	674	0.53%
Dunkley	VIC	132957	700	0.53%
Flinders	VIC	130688	686	0.52%
Moore	WA	114592	528	0.46%
Watson	NSW	147817	674	0.46%
Wills	VIC	139073	625	0.45%
Barton	NSW	136093	592	0.43%
Ryan	QLD	131978	558	0.42%
Jagajaga	VIC	127992	517	0.40%
Curtin	WA	125346	486	0.39%
La Trobe	VIC	132800	506	0.38%
Casey	VIC	125804	475	0.38%
Gellibrand	VIC	138286	519	0.38%
Wentworth	NSW	150612	560	0.37%
Melbourne	VIC	155826	568	0.36%
Bruce	VIC	129161	445	0.34%
Isaacs	VIC	141304	472	0.33%
Lowe	NSW	131892	439	0.33%
Gorton	VIC	157366	514	0.33%
Mackellar	NSW	129194	419	0.32%
Maribyrnong	VIC	123648	371	0.30%
Berowra	NSW	128781	380	0.30%
Mitchell	NSW	124898	352	0.28%
Deakin	VIC	120643	332	0.28%
Bennelong	NSW	139774	384	0.27%
Warringah	NSW	135224	323	0.24%
Aston	VIC	129449	305	0.24%
Chisholm	VIC	131539	304	0.23%
Melbourne Ports	VIC	141808	311	0.22%
North Sydney	NSW	136660	296	0.22%
Hotham	VIC	127068	217	0.17%
Higgins	VIC	127346	206	0.16%
Goldstein	VIC	128406	200	0.16%
Bradfield	NSW	132861	193	0.15%

Menzies	VIC	121096	135	0.11%
Kooyong	VIC	125600	137	0.11%

Source: ABS 2006 Census

.