

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES 2014-15

Finance Portfolio

Department/Agency: Australian Electoral Commission

Outcome/Program: General

Topic: Failure to vote/voting system

Senator: Xenophon

Question reference number: F50

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: Friday, 10 April 2015

Number of pages: 2

Question:

I raise questions on behalf of a constituent who has been in touch with my office who was taken to court for failing to vote at the 2013 Federal Election.

My constituent has told me he did not vote at the election because he was confused about the present voting system. Prior to the Election he attended to AEC Office in Mt Gambier, South Australia, to ask for some advice about the voting system, particularly for the Senate. He was advised the staff member could not assist. When polling initially opened, he attended a polling centre to ask about voting and again was not able to receive any assistance. He tells me he didn't vote as he was unsure as to how his vote would count.

1. Can the AEC advise of the people who failed to vote in the 2013 Federal Election, how many advised the reason as being they did not understand the voting system and of how their vote would count?
2. What assistance from the AEC is available for people who have difficulty understanding the voting system on, or prior to Election Day?
3. How much did the AEC receive in penalties from people failing to vote in 2013?
4. How many people did the AEC elect to prosecute in the 2013 election for failing to vote? Can you provide a breakdown of the costs and outcomes of these cases?
5. Has the AEC conducted any research on simplifying the voting system? If so, please provide details.
6. Does the AEC believe an optional-preferential system, similar to the one that's been operating in New South Wales for Legislative Council elections since 1999, is clearer for voters to understand how their vote is being counted?

Answer:

1. No, this level of detail on apparent non voters is not captured by the AEC.

Some general information about valid reasons for not voting can be accessed via this link (in particular paragraphs 40 – 47):

http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/backgrounders/compulsory-voting.htm

2. The AEC conducts a number of programs to ensure that electors understand voting systems used in elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate. These include advertising campaigns during federal elections, the distribution of AEC publications to every household in Australia, material available online and assistance available from AEC staff at polling places.

In addition, the AEC publishes translations of its material on its website in 28 languages to assist culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) voters. It also employs bi-lingual polling officials to assist at relevant polling places. Through its Indigenous Electoral Participation Program, the AEC disseminates culturally specific communications and engages directly with communities through its field program.

3. The non voter process for the 2013 Federal Election is still on-going so a final figure is not yet available.
4. Prosecution action was commenced against 3,072 electors for failing to vote at the 2013 Federal Election. Prosecutions are still ongoing, so a breakdown of the costs and outcomes of these cases is not yet available.
5. No.
6. This is a policy matter on which it would not be appropriate for the AEC to comment.