

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES 2013-2014

Finance Portfolio

Department/Agency: Australian Electoral Commission

Outcome/Program: General

Topic: Divisional Returning Officer

Senator: Rhiannon

Question reference number: F43

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: Friday, 17 January 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

1. Could you please outline the budget implications involved in removing the positions of Divisional Returning Officers?
2. If these positions were removed where would the resources freed up be reallocated?
3. Who would do the work currently being done by Divisional Returning Officers if the positions were wound up?
4. Has the AEC found any problems with inconsistent applications of rules and differing processes due to decentralised offices?

Answer:

The position of Divisional Returning Officer (DRO) is authorised by virtue of Section 32 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act). DRO functions are described throughout the Electoral Act, and the position is a fundamental component in delivering an election. In the absence of substantial legislative change there is no capacity to remove the position of DRO, and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has no plans to propose such legislative change.

1. No budget savings accrue from the removal of DRO positions. The functions that are performed by each DRO, including managing an election roll close; the hire and training of election staff; securing and set-up of voting and scrutiny premises; taking and declaring nominations; arranging voting services; issuing and counting votes; and declaring the result, are required for an election regardless of how the position itself is titled.
2. See 1.
3. There are no plans to wind up the position of DRO.
4. Achieving the consistent application of Electoral Act processes across a decentralised organisation is an ongoing challenge for the AEC, and particularly challenging in the context of election delivery where the number of decentralised locations can be up to 9,000 voting sites across Australia and across the world.

Improved consistency in business process and service delivery has been achieved through a number of office co-locations and the aggregation of resources. Experience from the 2013 Federal Election points to fewer variations in process arising from the consolidated work units.

To minimise the risk of inconsistencies, the AEC provides comprehensive instructional and guidance materials to staff. Training programs for ongoing staff are updated to reflect new legislation, policies and procedures and staff training is delivered to ensure that staff are prepared to conduct an election at any point in the election cycle.

Training programs for polling staff are similarly comprehensive and as a matter of policy, all senior polling staff must complete relevant training as a condition of their employment.