

**Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration**

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

**Additional Estimates Hearing – February 2010**

**Department of Finance and Deregulation**

**Finance and Deregulation Portfolio**

**Outcome 2, Program 2.1**

**Topic: Costs of electronically assisted voting**

**Question reference number: F87**

**Type of Question: Written**

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 March 2010**

**Number of Pages: 2**

**Senator Siewert asked:**

The 2007 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) recommendation to discontinue EAV for Australian voters who are blind or vision impaired. If cost is to be the deciding factor on political participation, what is the defining cost and who determines that cost?

**Answer:**

The JSCEM Report on the 2007 federal election voting trials reviewed the conduct of two e-voting trials at the 2007 federal election. JSCEM made five recommendations, including that both trials not be continued due to the high cost per vote of the e-voting trials in comparison to ordinary voting (recommendations 1 and 4).

The Government accepted the JSCEM recommendation not to continue the 2007 trial of electronically assisted voting for voters who are blind or vision impaired. However, the Government's priority is to reform Australia's electoral system to remove barriers that prevent people from casting their vote, including barriers for people who are blind or vision impaired.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has been consulting with peak bodies including the Australian Human Rights Commission, Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia and the Australian Blindness Forum and is working on viable and sustainable options for secret and independent voting arrangements to enable vision impaired voters to participate in the electoral process.

The *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010*, which was passed by the House of Representatives on 10 March 2010, contains amendments to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to enable electronic voting at future federal elections.

If these amendments are agreed by the Senate, electors who are blind or have low vision will have the option of attending an AEC divisional office where they can be

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connected to two trained call centre operators to complete the ballot papers. This interim measure will be reviewed after the election, and the Australian Government will work to improve the system for voters with impaired vision at future elections.