

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Australian Electoral Commission

Budget Estimates Hearings 2003-04 – 28 & 29 May 2003

Question: F60

Outcome 2, Output 2.1

Topic: National Tally Room

Hansard page: N/A

Written Question on Notice: 20 June 2003

Senator Faulkner asked:

1. Is the Australian Electoral Commission giving consideration whether to establish the National Tally Room for the next or future elections?
2. Is the Australian Electoral Commission giving consideration to possible changes to the nature or operations of the National Tally Room for the next or future elections, and if so, what changes are being contemplated?
3. Is the Australian Electoral Commission giving consideration to possible changes to the broadcasting arrangements or operations of the National Tally Room for the next or future elections, and if so, what changes are being contemplated?
4. What were the costs of running the National Tally Room at the 1998 and 2001 Federal Elections?
5. What is the expected running costs for operating the National Tally Room at the next Federal Election?
6. In the Australian Electoral Commission's view, what are the benefits of a National Tally Room?

Answer:

The answer provided to me by the Australian Electoral Commission is as follows;

1. The AEC intends to establish a National Tally Room for the next Federal election. No decision has been made on future elections.
2. The AEC is currently considering replacing the existing tally board with a series of screens upon which results will be projected.
3. The AEC is not intending to make, for the next election, changes to broadcasting arrangements or other operations of the National Tally Room. No decision has been made on future elections.
4. The 1998 Federal election National Tally Room cost approximately \$800,000. The 2001 Federal election National Tally Room cost approximately \$720,000. The

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reduction in cost is reflected in operating efficiencies and also a slightly different way in which computer costs were attributed.

5. The estimated cost for the National Tally Room for the next Federal election is approximately \$770,000.

6. The National Tally Room provides a focal point for providing election results to as many Australians as possible on election night. This statement is supported by very high ratings amongst the major broadcasters on election night. Even with the introduction of the Virtual Tally Room, media attendance and coverage at the National Tally Room has increased during recent elections.

In terms of a media centre – the National Tally Room allows the AEC to have immediate face-to-face contact with all the major media outlets – television, radio, and print plus international media organisations that attend. This allows for a very prompt and correct information flow from the AEC's perspective and allows the media to have instant access to AEC staff so that problems and issues can be resolved, questions answered, and generally information provided in a timely manner.

The National Tally Room also serves as the base for the AEC's Manual Backup System that is in place to receive results in the case of a major computer system problem. Manual results are received through a facsimile-based system and then provided to the media in hard copy format. A component of National Tally Room costs is the setting up of this system – which would otherwise have to be set up elsewhere and still incur significant costs.

The National Tally Room also has the ability to provide results to the media (at the National Tally Room) through the election results computer system even if the Virtual Tally Room is off-line.