

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2012-2013

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Department/Agency: Australian Electoral Commission

Outcome/Program:

Topic: Accessible Voting

Senator: Fifield

Question reference number: F150

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: Friday, 6 July 2012

Number of pages: 2

Question:

- a) The Australian Electoral Commission is working on options to ensure a secret and independent ballot for blind and low vision voters for the next Federal Election. What consultation has been undertaken with stakeholders?
- b) Which organisations has the Australian Electoral Commission consulted with?
- c) What are the options being considered for ballots for blind and low vision Australians?
- d) When will a decision be made about the available form of voting for blind and low vision Australians?
- e) How many blind and low vision Australians will the arrangements cater for?
- f) What is the Australian Electoral Commission's budget for these arrangements?

Answer:

- a) The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) consults with stakeholders via the Blind and Low Vision (BLV) Reference Group. The reference group currently comprises the Disability Discrimination Commissioner and representatives from Blind Citizens Australia, the Royal Society for the Blind (SA) and Vision Australia.
- b) The AEC has consulted with the BLV Reference Group and various state electoral commissions to identify ways to provide secret and independent voting options for BLV electors.

- c) The option being considered for the next election is a telephone call centre. The proposed system is similar to that which was in place for the 2010 election, with the exception that a BLV elector will be able to access the call centre from home. The proposed system is technology assisted, but not an electronic voting solution as call centre operators will manually transcribe each voter's preferences onto hard copy ballot papers. It will supplement, rather than replace, existing voting options available to sight-impaired voters, such as postal voting and assisted voting at a polling place.

Depending on the timing of the next election, the telephone voting will be supported by a pre-registration system that will allow voters to identify themselves by a registration number and PIN, further improving the independence of the process.

- d) The proposed system requires amendments to the *Electoral and Referendum Regulations 1940*. Subject to approval of those amendments, the call centre system described above will be in place for the next election.
- e) The system caters for all enrolled electors whose 'sight is impaired to the extent that he or she is unable to vote without assistance' (*Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, s. 202AA).
- f) The AEC will provide the proposed service for the next election from within existing budget allocations.