

Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Australian Electoral Commission

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing – October 2006

Question: F3

Outcome F1, Output 1.1.1

Topic: Electoral Roll in Torres Strait

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Senator Faulkner asked:

Specifically, I was going to ask you about the electoral roll in the Torres Strait. I read an article in a local newspaper about major concerns there during the recent state election in Queensland. I wanted to know whether there were particular problems and whether that had been identified by the AEC? The divisional returning officer for Leichhardt is publicly quoted as saying that there seems to be a higher than usual number of incidents involving voters not on the rolls. Is anyone from the AEC able to confirm whether the particular problem here has been identified? If so, is any remedial action being taken to try to address this situation?.....

I would be interested in understanding the outcomes of the review; what if any, follow-up action has been taken; and if this is just a small sample of broader problems or there are issues specific to the Torres Strait and Thursday Island, where they have been identified.

Answer:

Reports appeared in the *Torres News* 13-19 September 2006 that an unusual number of electors on Thursday Island were not on the Certified List of electors for the Queensland State election. The DRO for the Division of Leichhardt investigated and found that in two polling places there were 117 electors, comprising 65 at Port Kennedy and 52 at Tamwoy, who voted by declaration vote and were subsequently found to not be enrolled. The media reports alleged that a similar situation occurred during Mobile Polling in the Outer Torres Strait Islands. These claims were not supported when investigated by the DRO.

Polling place procedures require that each elector issued with an unenrolled declaration certificate also complete an enrolment form. Analysis of enrolment forms from these two polling places show that 86 of the 117 voters concerned had been removed from the electoral roll by objection action during 2005.

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Analysis of the 172 enrolment forms received from the two polling places is shown below:

No previous enrolment history in Qld	31
No change – same as enrolled address at CoR (possible polling place issue error)	6
New elector to Thursday Island from another Local Government Area (LGA)	38
New/Changed residential/postal address details from Thursday Is electors	97
Total	172

Review of elector addresses on Thursday Island

A review of the AEC roll management system address register for Thursday Island commenced in May 2005 to ensure electors were enrolled for an identifiable and recognised address according to the Torres Shire LGA property numbering system. The address register for Thursday Island was then updated to accurately reflect valid residential addresses with action commenced to remove all the electors from questionable addresses.

Electors, whose names were removed from the electoral roll by objection, were posted four letters – two Review letters and two Objection notices - prior to their name being removed from the roll.

All of the affected electors should have received some or all of the review/objection mail relating to their enrolment during 2005. As there is no street postal delivery on Thursday Island, long-term Australia Post staff are very proficient in sorting and delivering mail to the appropriate addressee even though the mail article may be incorrectly addressed.

Investigation by the DRO Leichhardt shows that there is a direct correlation between the 71 electors removed by objection action following the roll review and those requiring an unenrolled declaration vote on the polling day. Some of the unenrolled voters on polling day were long-term residents of Thursday Island who had not updated their details for some time even though they have moved residence and/or changed postal addresses.

Following this major review, there is now an accurate address register on Thursday Island. Enrolment activity following the State election has resulted in many of the electors who were removed from the electoral roll after the review, being re-enrolled. To ensure that enrolment activity is maintained, the AEC will continue the ongoing program of review by mail using data from Centrelink and Australia Post about young people and those moving addresses. Targeted door knocking will also be undertaken when there is no response to mail.