

# **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: F65**

#### **Outcome 2, Output 2.1.4**

#### **Topic: Public awareness campaign**

#### **Written Question on Notice**

#### **Senator Faulkner asked:**

- (1) Could the AEC outline where the development of the public awareness campaign is up to as a result of the Government's legislation having passed the parliament?
- (2) Can the AEC provide specific details as to how they plan to spend the additional funds provided?
- (3) Can the AEC provide detail on enrolment activity on an electorate basis at the last election for the period following the calling of the election up to the close of the rolls?

#### **Answer:**

(1) The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is preparing a comprehensive communication strategy with some initiatives rolling out from early 2007. The Electoral Commissioner has recently written to the Shadow Special Minister of State and the main political party secretariats in similar terms to the information provided below.

The AEC is basing its communication strategy over a 2006-2010 time period, taking into account the Government's response to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) Inquiry into the 2004 election and the related legislative amendments passed by the Parliament.

The AEC's communication strategy will work to maximise the electoral knowledge and effective participation in the electoral process by current and future eligible electors. While the primary target audience is all eligible Australians, the different communication needs of youth, new citizens, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, indigenous people, movers, Australians overseas, people with disabilities, homeless and people living in rural and remote areas will be addressed with targeted activities. The development of the strategy has been assisted by market research conducted in mid-2006 with key target audiences, and further consultation with various peak bodies, for example a disability reference group, and other government agencies.

## **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

The communication methods deployed in 2007 will include mass advertising, public awareness and education programs and special events, in addition to communication with clients and stakeholders via letter, telephone, face-to-face and the AEC website.

The AEC's communication strategy can be characterised as having three broad components, the first being 'enrolment' which will be ongoing in nature, and also reflect the earlier close of rolls arrangements at election time. It will also have an increased focus on promoting correct enrolment before a federal election is called.

The other two components, 'voter services' and 'formality', will mostly be specific to the election period and inform electors about voting arrangements and how to vote formally. The AEC is also examining what additional targeted activity might be feasible in electorates with the highest informality levels.

In respect of enrolment, the AEC is preparing a number of major activities including a special promotional project called Rock Enrol aimed at youth. This activity is being implemented in conjunction with ABC Triple J Radio and the Big Day Out concerts in early 2007. Rock Enrol is already resulting in increased downloads of enrolment forms from visitors to the special Rock Enrol website operated by Triple J and linked to AEC online enrolment forms. The promotion will feature at each of the Big Day Out concert venues in five States in late January/early February through branded signage, Rock Enrol wristbands issued to concert patrons of 18 years of age or over, and via roving teams promoting enrolment messages on-site. Further activity encouraging enrolment will continue during University orientation weeks.

The AEC's communication to youth and the broader community will be boosted by a substantial national multi-media advertising campaign around May 2007 promoting an 'Enrol Now' message, as well as messages regarding maintaining correct and up to date enrolment. Dependent on election timing and advice from the Commonwealth's contracted media planners and buyers, Universal McCann, this campaign may be reprised closer to the actual election, expected in the second half of the year.

In addition, a new national 'Enrol to Vote' week promotion will run from 28 May to 1 June, aimed at securing enrolments from both 17 year olds (provisional enrolment) and 18 year olds in secondary schools. The Electoral Commissioner is writing to the Principals of all secondary schools and colleges, and other stakeholders to introduce this initiative and seek support. AEC State and divisional staff will support the event.

A further initiative being explored by each State and Territory electoral authority and the AEC is a birthday card program for 17 and/or 18 year olds, building on the successful initiative of the Victorian Electoral Commission. This involves a fair amount of negotiation at the State and Territory levels to obtain necessary student lists and to tailor a birthday program matching each state's needs, hence the start up dates in each state will vary.

## **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

The AEC is also developing a comprehensive electoral education resource for teachers to be distributed to all schools in early 2007. The resource, developed in conjunction with the Curriculum Corporation, will contain materials for four levels of schooling - upper primary, lower secondary, middle secondary and upper secondary, and is an important example of the AEC's longer term priority of embedding an understanding of enrolment and the broader electoral process amongst young people.

New citizens are another very important target group for collecting new enrolments. The AEC attends numerous citizenship ceremonies already but will have an increased presence at Citizenship ceremonies on Australia Day in January 2007 and later in the year during National Citizenship Week. The AEC's advertising and other key written material will be translated in a wide number of languages, to be advised by multicultural consultants working with the AEC's contracted advertising and public relations agencies.

National activity will be complemented by ongoing promotion of enrolment at local events by the AEC's extensive national network of state and divisional staff. A new presentation kit will be in use by Divisional Office staff in 2007 and will enhance delivery of electoral awareness sessions by divisional officers to students and community groups.

(2) The Government has provided the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) with \$18.2 million over five years to publicise changes legislative changes contained in the *Electoral and Referendum (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006*. Of this amount \$17.2 million has been allocated for communication activities in relation to changes to proof of identity requirements and close of rolls arrangements. \$6.1 million is available in 2006-07 and \$5.6 million is available in 2007-08.

A breakdown of expenditure is still being developed mindful that the allocation of resources to different strategy elements will be determined by final AEC decisions at a finer level of detail in coming weeks and months as projects move closer to implementation. Detailed advice from the AEC's consultants and confirmation of a range of supplier costs will assist this task.

By way of example, at the 2004 election the communications budget on pure advertising and public relations was \$10 million in round numbers, not counting significant additional costs for a national household elector leaflet, call centre, website, virtual tally room and a range of other associated costs. Of that amount \$7.5 million covered placement of advertising at election time, split between enrolment advertising (40 per cent), voter services (15 per cent) and formality (45 per cent). A further \$1.2 million plus was spent on AEC State Office newspaper advertising listing pre-poll and polling place listings and other advertising providing information about the election itself.

## **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

Enrolment advertising will certainly increase in 2007, when combining the pre-election spend together with that expended at election time.

The total amount spent on advertising will rise also, reflecting two factors, first the rise in advertising rates since the 2004 campaign, and second, the availability of additional funding in concert with the passage of the legislation.

The AEC began discussion with the Commonwealth's media planner and media buyer, Universal McCann Pty Ltd in November 2006 to obtain advice on the required investment to achieve sufficient coverage of enrolment and election messages across television, press, radio and other mediums. As is the case with other Commonwealth agency campaigns, this will require the careful development of media schedules seeking to maximise effectiveness in terms of coverage and frequency. A bottom line cost of the advertising media buy is therefore not yet available, but the AEC expects to be in a position to finalise a media plan and cost for the first expected May-June 2007 campaign by April 2007 to naturally enable sufficient time for the media buy to be conducted. The value of the May-June campaign alone will be a multi-million campaign, and the AEC is happy to advise the Committee at such time that confirmed costs are available.

(3) See attached table.