

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

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Department/Agency: Australian Electoral Commission

Outcome/Program:

Topic: AEC Party Registration Process

Senator: Rhiannon

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Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator RHIANNON: But I imagine you would acknowledge that some members would not be expecting a phone call from the AEC.

Mr Pirani: I think we have done some work—I will take that on notice—to put in the revised party registration handbook that we make sure that the secretaries who lodge the application with us and the proposed registered officers make their members aware that they can expect contact from the AEC to confirm that the person has been registered.

Answer:

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) publishes a *Party Registration Guide* on its website, which sets out the requirement for the AEC to contact a sample of party members to confirm that the members agree with the party secretary that they are members of the party.

The Guide states on page 14:

“The AEC will test for evidence that ... the members confirm when approached by the AEC that they are members of the party. The AEC contacts a random sample of about 45 members and expects at least 40 of those members to confirm their membership of the party. The exact sample size and permitted number of denials of membership are as recommended by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to provide the AEC with confidence that the party has the members required by the Electoral Act. A table of random sample sizes for different numbers of members is at the back of this Guide.”

Under ss.4 and 123 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, eligible parties need to be organisations with at least 500 members. Such an organisation is expected to inform its members about major activities, including the likelihood of contact by the AEC during the registration process. From the results of membership testing, it is clear that those parties which keep their members informed return the best membership test results. When the AEC

rings those members, they know the background to the call immediately because the party has kept them informed.

On the other hand, those parties who do not seem to be in regular contact with their members seem to have more responses that show confusion as to the reason for the AEC's phone call. Often there is also doubt about whether the member is still a member if the party has not contacted them, perhaps since the last federal election.