

---

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# Review of certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

September 2007  
Canberra

---

© Commonwealth of Australia 2007

ISBN 978-0-642-79015-6 (printed version)

ISBN 978-0-642-79016-3 (HTML version)



## Chair's Foreword

Effective electoral administration is a vital component of a healthy democracy. With a federal election approaching, it has been a timely exercise for the committee to review certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission.

The terms of reference required the committee to direct much of its focus on the staffing arrangements across the AEC's divisional office network. Currently, there are 150 AEC divisional offices in 135 locations across Australia.

The committee received evidence which raised a number of concerns regarding workforce issues in some AEC divisional offices. These concerns related to employment structure, staffing levels, career opportunities for staff, retention issues and the effectiveness of co-located divisional offices.

Specific concerns came from the co-located divisional office in Chatswood, which services four electoral divisions in NSW. The Committee conducted a site visit of the Chatswood office as part of its inquiry, and appreciated the opportunity to speak directly with AEC employees about some of the issues identified in submissions.

Without an extensive body of evidence to draw on, however, it is difficult for the committee to determine whether the concerns raised during the inquiry are symptomatic of widespread issues within the AEC. While the committee is not in a position to draw comprehensive conclusions, it considers the concerns which were raised to be significant enough to warrant further investigation. Therefore the committee has recommended that the Auditor-General examine the issue of workforce planning in the AEC in further detail.

The committee was also asked to consider whether the National Tally Room should be maintained beyond the next federal election. The committee supports the continuation of the tally room and is of the view that the abolition of the tally room would have a negative impact on the perception of the transparency of

elections. Furthermore, the committee notes the value and logic of having a central tally room in the nation's capital which extends beyond any dollar or logistical considerations.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank all those who participated in the inquiry.

Sophie Mirabella MP  
Chair



# Contents

Membership of the Committee .....	viii
Terms of reference .....	ix
List of abbreviations .....	x
List of recommendations .....	xi

## REPORT

<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Role and structure of the AEC.....	1
Background to the inquiry .....	2
Conduct of the inquiry .....	3
Structure of the Report.....	3
<b>2 Adequacy of divisional office employment structure.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Staffing configuration of AEC divisional offices .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Criticisms of 'workload sharing' .....	8
<b>Issues for the AEC .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Career opportunities for divisional office staff.....	10
Appropriateness of staffing levels and APS classifications .....	12
Retention issues.....	14
Committee conclusions .....	15
<b>Staffing requirements for ongoing habitation reviews .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Committee conclusions .....	20

<b>3</b>	<b>Divisional offices with shared premises</b> .....	<b>23</b>
	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>23</b>
	‘Co-located’ versus ‘amalgamated’ divisional offices .....	25
	Amalgamation by any other name: what does co-location really mean?.....	27
	‘Regionalisation’ .....	28
	<b>Financial and social impacts of co-located offices</b> .....	<b>29</b>
	Opportunities for staff and corporate knowledge.....	30
	Roll integrity .....	32
	<b>Accessibility for clients</b> .....	<b>33</b>
	Office closures .....	34
	<b>Case study: Chatswood divisional office</b> .....	<b>35</b>
	The Ringwood ‘Quad’.....	38
	<b>Committee conclusions</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The future of the National Tally Room</b> .....	<b>41</b>
	<b>The National Tally Room</b> .....	<b>41</b>
	How the NTR works .....	42
	The statutory obligations of the AEC.....	43
	<b>The continuing relevance of the national tally room – stakeholder expectations</b> .....	<b>44</b>
	Members of parliament and candidates .....	44
	Media .....	45
	General Public.....	47
	<b>Possible alternatives to the national tally room</b> .....	<b>48</b>
	Virtual Tally Room.....	48
	Media alternatives .....	49
	<b>The logistics, risks and costs associated with the NTR</b> .....	<b>50</b>
	Logistics .....	50
	Risks .....	51
	Costs.....	52
	<b>Committee conclusions</b> .....	<b>53</b>

## APPENDICES

<b>Appendix A - Submissions to the inquiry</b> .....	<b>55</b>
--	-----------

---

Appendix B - List of exhibits.....	57
Appendix C - List of hearings and witnesses.....	59

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 2.1	Divisional office staff (ongoing & non ongoing) – head count at 30 June 2006 ( <i>i</i> ).....	7
Table 2.2	Divisional office ongoing staff age at 30 June 2006.....	11
Table 2.3	Divisional office ongoing staff separations – 2005-2006.....	14
Table 3.1	Divisional offices in shared premises.....	24
Table 3.2	Divisional closures – 2005-2006.....	34



## Membership of the Committee

Chair Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Deputy Chair Senator Glenn Sterle

Members Mr Steven Ciobo MP

Senator Judith Adams

Mr Michael Danby MP

Senator Kim Carr

Mr John Forrest MP

Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells

Mr Alan Griffin MP

Senator Andrew Murray

## Committee Secretariat

Secretary Mr Stephen Boyd

Inquiry Secretary Mr Justin Baker

Research Officer Ms Judith Ireland

Administrative Officers Ms Frances Wilson

Ms Natasha Petrovic





## Terms of reference

- the adequacy of AEC co-location of divisional offices, including both financial and social consequences of co-locations;
- the number of staff and the employment structure of staff in divisional offices;
- whether the current arrangements meet career expectations for AEC officers;
- whether the current arrangements meet community expectations about the appropriate use of staffing resources;
- what any change to these arrangements would mean for the previous two points;
- what level of staffing would be required to meet ongoing habitation reviews;
- whether the current APS staffing levels are appropriate for the actual work of divisional offices; and
- any other issues relating to the staffing of divisional and central offices which may be raised in submission or by the committee;
- the continuing relevance of the National Tally Room to members of parliament, candidates, political parties, the media, and the general public;
- the possible alternatives to the National Tally Room flowing from advances in computer and telecommunications technologies, such as the Australian Electoral Commission's web-based Virtual Tally Room, and;
- the logistics, risks and cost of providing the National Tally room.



## List of abbreviations

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AEO	Australian Electoral Officer
CPSU	Community and Public Sector Union (PSU Group)
CRU	Continuous Roll Update
DOFA	Department of Finance and Administration
DRO	Divisional Returning Officer
ELMS	Election Management System
FTE	full-time equivalent
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
NTR	National Tally Room
VTR	Virtual Tally Room



## List of recommendations

### 2 Adequacy of divisional office employment structure

#### Recommendation 1 (para 2.52)

The committee recommends that the Auditor-General conduct an audit of workforce planning in the Australian Electoral Commission, with a view to determining whether the Commission's workforce planning strategy is supporting effective practices in human resource management for divisional office staff and achieving efficient and effective outcomes.

### 3 Divisional offices with shared premises

#### Recommendation 2 (para 3.80)

The committee recommends that, as part of the audit on workforce planning in the Australian Electoral Commission proposed in Recommendation 1, the Auditor-General also examine the efficiency and effectiveness of working arrangements in co-located divisional offices.

#### Recommendation 3 (para 3.81)

The committee recommends that the Australian Electoral Commission includes an evaluation of the performance of all co-located divisional offices in the upcoming federal election in its submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 federal election.

### 4 The future of the National Tally Room

#### Recommendation 4 (para 4.67)

The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensures that the National Tally Room is retained for future federal elections.

