

# SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION NO.116

## Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

### Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education

#### ANSWERS TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Received 12 Sept 2006

In his letter to the Electoral Commissioner of 12 September 2006, Mr Lindsay asked:

#### Questions:

- 1. Does the AEC agree that its Electoral Education Centre could feasibly be expanded at Old Parliament House to fully meet the very significant demand that is not currently met?**
- 2. Can the AEC provide an estimate of how much it would cost to duplicate the three rooms currently used in the Centre, including staff and running costs?**
- 3. How many students could such an expanded Centre accommodate?**
- 4. How many schools are “turned away” from Electoral Education Centres each year?**

#### Answer:

(1) It is the AEC's understanding that it is unlikely the Electoral Education Centre (EEC) in Canberra can be expanded at Old Parliament House. Old Parliament House management advises that there is little uncommitted space that would be suitable for an expansion of the EEC. This relates to the fact that Old Parliament House has an approved accommodation plan in place and there are some heritage issues that restrict building works. In addition, the government provided \$31.5 million in the 2006-07 Budget to create a *Gallery of Australian Democracy* including an Australian Prime Ministers Centre at Old Parliament House. The creation of this new gallery means that the AEC's current public exhibition space on the main floor will have to be handed back to Old Parliament House early in 2007. This will not affect the current EEC in any way.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and Old Parliament House are exploring opportunities for a future electoral public exhibition as part of the *Gallery of Australian Democracy*. While this will not be an educational centre per se, it will provide an opportunity for the visitors to learn about the history of voting and Australia's electoral system.

(2) The capital cost of establishing and maintaining a duplicated Canberra EEC outside Old Parliament House would depend on the location. The AEC is investigating whether a new, or expanded ECC, could be established at another site within the parliamentary triangle. However, there is no funding for this in the AEC's current budget.

The AEC estimates the annual running cost of an additional EEC would be \$720,000. This includes:

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- \$420,000 for staffing
- \$100,000 for educational resources and
- \$200,000 for leasing and outgoings.

(3) Currently there are close to 70,000 visitors per year to the Canberra EEC and the maximum annual capacity is estimated at around 80,000. The centre has recently expanded its hours of operation in an effort to increase the number of groups who can visit.

(4) Some groups are not able to book into the centre for their preferred day and time. In 2005/6 there were 79 groups, constituting about 4,500 participants that were not able to visit the Canberra EEC. As at 1 October 2006, there were 515 participants from 11 schools still on the waitlist for the remainder of 2006.

It should be noted that tour operators (who make the vast majority of EEC Canberra bookings) make bookings well in advance, often one to two years ahead. As at 5 October 2006, the Canberra EEC has 982 sessions, comprising 35,103 participants, booked already for 2007 and 22 sessions comprising 731 participants booked for 2008.

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The JSCEM asked the Australian Electoral Officer and State Manager for South Australia, Dr Chris Drury, the following questions during the its visit to the Adelaide Electoral Education Centre (EEC) on 22 September 2006.

#### Questions

5. **Can you advise whether your AEC National Office people responsible for development of EEC educational content consult with State education authorities when developing that content and/or products and materials?**
6. **How would the AEC respond to comments heard by the Committee about 50,000 visitors being unable to attend the Canberra Electoral Education Centre?**
7. **What percentage of local schools visited Canberra?**

#### Answers

(5) The AEC does not directly consult with individual State/Territory education departments about the content of educational products or resources. Rather, AEC education staff monitor trends and developments across State/Territory curricula relevant to electoral issues and take account of these when developing products or resources. In the last five years or so, the AEC has commissioned curriculum experts, including lecturers in Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) at Sydney University and the Curriculum Corporation, to develop significant educational products and resources.

AEC staff have provided expert electoral education advice during the development of "Discovering Democracy" materials for the Department of Education Science and Training. Staff were also involved in the development of the NSW Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) curriculum in 1997 and are currently involved with the consultancy group for the Civics and Citizenship project -- a suite of assessment instruments for national testing of achievements in civics and citizenship.

**(6) Please refer to the answer to Question 4 asked by Mr Lindsay on 12 September 2006. The AEC is aware that the number of students who visited the Canberra EEC last year was around 70,000 and the number of students visiting the national capital was approximately 122,000 (according to Source>>>). What we don't know is whether the difference relates a lack of EEC session vacancies at their preferred times or other reasons including lack of interest in visiting the EEC.**

(7) Local schools in the Canberra region come from the divisions of Canberra, Fraser, Eden-Monaro and Hume. During 2005-06, 5.3% of schools visiting the Canberra EEC were from these divisions. These represent 58 of the 1,085 different schools that visited the Canberra EEC over that period.